

Film Fest emerges as a focused event

BY MICHAEL H. PRICE

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A return to a film-for-the-sake-of-film film festival marks the recent conclusion of Fort Worth's Lone Star International Film Festival. If star power was conspicuously lacking in the mid-November event – well, then, all to the better.

For the lack of celebrity-gawking distractions allowed a deeper concentration upon some well-chosen and provocative motion pictures.

An awards ceremony at last week's wrap-up event singled out several attractions. The narrative-feature nod went to a Russian entry called Nirvana, director Igor Voloshin's severe and dreamlike tale of a nurse who finds herself in desperate circumstances. Andrei Zvyagintsev's The Banishment was named best foreign-language film.

The documentary award was given to Eric Bricker's Visual Acoustics: The Modernism of Julius Shulman. The short-film prize went to Clay Liford's "My Mom Smokes Weed."

Nirvana and The Banishment appeared as part of a selection of Russian productions, as selected by the Moscow-based American Film Festival in collaboration with the Lone Star International Fest.

Overall a low-key event, the festival achieved a significant gate-buster on Nov. 15 with Joel Hopkins' Last Chance Harvey, screening at the Palace showplace downtown. The film stars Dustin Hoffman as a hard-luck sort at large in England – one of Hoffman's more engaging roles of recent years.

The festival had anticipated an appearance by name-brand filmmaker Sidney Lumet, 84, whose Before the Devil Knows You're Dead had served as a centerpiece of the 2007 Lone Star exposition. Lumet's late cancellation left the festival without such in-person appeal (screenings included Lumet's 1957 gem 12 Angry Men). But the absence also

cleared the way in turn for the various films themselves – and a number of working filmmakers and talents associated with the selections – to command a fuller attention. The occasion came across as a film-buff tournament of concise and purposeful focus.

Even so, various factions are bound to press for a higher star-quality presence next year, and more power to 'em. This year's event proved less flashy and more readily navigable than last year's, and festival honcho Dennis Bishop is due some grateful recognition for his graceful overall administration, highlighted by an adventurous and often challenging selection of films. Many of the films, for that matter, as a rule are unlikely to play Fort Worth under any other circumstances.

“The success of the second year of a film festival traditionally is looked upon as a key to how well it will proceed for the coming years,” Bishop said in appraising the outcome. “By that standard, and as evidenced by the level of filmmaking talent we enjoyed this year, the enthusiasm of our sponsors, and the strength of our support within the Fort Worth community, the Lone Star International Film Festival will have a long and exciting life ahead of it.”

Other awards include a special jury prize for Tom Quinn's *The New Year Parade*, and a special jury prize for Alex Beh's *Sugar*. The festival's jury members included filmmaker and television director Rod Hardy, producer Orian Williams, independent filmmaker James M. Johnson, film educator Carolyn Pfeiffer, writer-producer Bryan Poyser, writer-director-producer Blake Calhoun, critic and art curator Charles Dee Mitchell and Austin Film Festival programmer Kelly Williams.