

Tim Ryan Discusses Local Independent Film Industry

BY GARY MICHAEL SMITH
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According to “All the King’s Men” executive producer Michael Hausman, one big challenge of shooting in New Orleans is the lack of trained crew. Tim Ryan, executive director of New Orleans Video Access Center (NOVAC), wants to fill the void of locally trained crew by launching the Digital Filmmaking Institute in New Orleans. I asked Mr. Ryan, to introduce the new institute, and to impart his vision of the future of independent filmmaking.

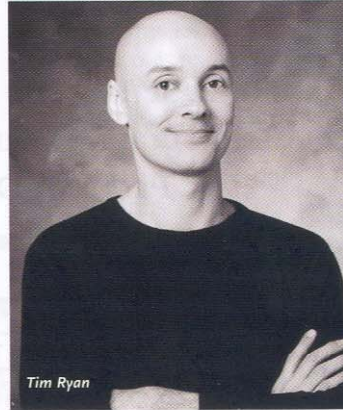
Gary Michael Smith: Do you agree that independent filmmaking has flourished in

Louisiana in recent years? If so, what do you feel has contributed to this growth?

Tim Ryan: I’m blown away by the quantity and quality of independent work that has come out of New Orleans. I think a few things contribute to the increase in local independent filmmaking. First, Hurricane Katrina was an unfortunate catalyst that inspired many of us to capture an important part of our local history. Filmmakers from around the world have come to New Orleans to document Katrina, but in my opinion, no one can tell the stories better than locals who lived through the hurricane and continue to live here.

Second, digital filmmaking and distribution technology have become more affordable and more accessible. We can now produce our own stories and quickly make them available for screenings and

alternative distribution through outlets such as YouTube or CustomFlix. Finally, there’s a new spirit of collaboration in New



Orleans that has encouraged local filmmakers to share their time and equipment to collectively produce projects. Perhaps this comes from a bond formed by those of us who have committed to living, working, and making

post-Katrina New Orleans home, despite the day-to-day challenges.

GMS: What do you see as NOVAC’s greatest contributions to the local filmmaking industry?

TR: By the time this article is published, NOVAC will have presented the 16th Annual Louisiana Shorts Festival (October 21–22, 2006) for which we received more than 300 submissions. One of our goals with the festival is to encourage locally produced work, and NOVAC supports workforce development by providing affordable, hands-on training to new and experienced filmmakers.

With the launch of the NOVAC Digital Filmmaking Institute, we hope to offer a series of hands-on digital filmmaking workshops so that new and experienced filmmakers can not only learn the language of filmmaking, but also

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walk away with tangible—and marketable—skills. NOVAC also teaches digital filmmaking and animation to hundreds of New Orleans Public School children. Our goal with the youth outreach program is to help build a new generation of local filmmakers by introducing kids to camera techniques, story development and basic editing.

GMS: What was the impetus behind the Digital Filmmaking Institute?

TR: I wanted to enhance my own filmmaking skills. I didn't have the time or money to go to film school and was searching for a local training program that offered affordable and hands-on training in lighting, sound, camera techniques, editing, etc.

In 2005, we approached the National Endowment for the Arts for funding to create a digital filmmaking program, and they loved the idea. They provided some initial funding to get the program started and we are in the process of matching their funds. Another huge development is

our partnership with LIFT Productions. They have generously offered to provide NOVAC with training facility space within their production offices.

GMS: What are future goals of NOVAC?

TR: Through our after-school program and the Digital Filmmaking Institute, we continue to offer training opportunities for youth and adults to learn basic skills to express themselves through digital filmmaking. We also hope that the Digital Filmmaking Institute will play a significant role in creating a locally trained workforce ready for work in the film industry. Furthermore, we will continue to serve as a resource to the local independent filmmaking community through public screenings, events, job postings and commissioned projects. Eventually, we hope to offer editing suites and equipment for rental.

NOVAC also hopes to continue to produce community-based projects like the series of short documentaries on post-Katrina New Orleans. Within this series, we paid local filmmakers to produce short documentaries on

the people, places and things that make New Orleans such an amazing city. The project has been screened throughout the nation, has been nominated for the American Library Association Notable Videos for Adults list, and has had more than 700,000 viewers on YouTube, Google Video and IFC Media Lab.

GMS: What are some of your success stories of NOVAC-trained locals?

TR: In 2005 and 2006, local professional extreme sports athlete Michael Gaidos participated in two NOVAC editing workshops. He has gone on to produce and direct some great extreme event videos and is consistently working on film and TV projects. Brent Joseph is a local filmmaker who started learning about filmmaking through NOVAC in the 1990s. Today, he works on a variety of feature film, TV and commercial projects, and has produced his own award-winning films. Paul Heiman learned how to edit through NOVAC in the 80s and is now a professional editor in Santa Monica, CA. Stephanie Dupuy,

Director of the New Orleans Office of Film and Video, got her start in the industry by taking NOVAC workshops. Burwell Ware started with NOVAC in the 70s and owns his own video production company in North Carolina. Many of our students have gone on to film school, have earned awards in festivals including Sundance, and currently work in the TV and film industry throughout the nation.

GMS: How do you envision independent filmmaking to evolve in the future?

TR: I think that within the next few years, there will be a huge increase in youth-made movies and 3-D animation. Kids will grow up into the next generation of insanely tech-savvy (and DIY experienced) filmmakers. Also, as bandwidth continues to grow, more and more digital films will be available online. I envision an unprecedented amount of independent films being created.

For more information on NOVAC and the Digital Filmmaking Institute, visit novacvideo.org. Gary Michael Smith can be reached at ChatgrisPress@ChatgrisPress.com.