

Live from Cinequest: Festival closes on strong note

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Cinequest closed what many people have called one of its strongest years Saturday night with a gala closing ceremony at the California Theatre.

"We've had a record attendance," festival director and cofounder Halfdan Hussey said. "But that's not how I measure the success of Cinequest. It all comes down to the connections people make, and I see a whole lot of happy faces."

The audience was treated to a song by "Bummer Summer" actress Julia McAlee. If you saw the movie, you know it was filmed in black-and-white, so it was great to see her in a red dress with short cowboy boots. Another fine performance followed, this one from San Jose's Panthelion. The band that describes itself as "Nu Class," which stands for Neo Urban Classical Music. It's pretty difficult to describe the sound, but I'd say if you're a jazz fan, you'll probably get a kick out of it.

Of course, all that led up to the closing movie, "Mother," directed by Joon-ho Bong. Following the film, a lot of the audience trekked down to South First Billiards for the closing night party, which didn't get started until 11 p.m. (the movie let out just a few minutes after that).

There was a lot of congratulations and hugging among Cinequest staff members (including Darnisha Bishop, Edita Rodriguez, Mike Rabehl and Halfdan Hussey). Also in attendance were brothers Obin and Amariah Olson, who gave a workshop earlier in the day about digital filmmaking and working on a small budget.

Their seminar was sponsored by Adobe, which prompted one filmmaker to refer to them as "The Adobe Olson Twins". I spent some time talking to Obin Olson at the evening soiree, held at the Institute of Contemporary Art, and while a lot of the technical filmmaking process he was talking about went over my head, he was definitely passionate about his art and making a going business of it.

MAVERICK WINNER: Kathy Wolfe, CEO of Wolfe Video in San Jose, was presented with the Maverick Spirit Award during the closing event. Wolfe Video is the largest distributor of LGBT movies in the nation and is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

"I can't tell you how happy and proud I am to be receiving this award," Wolfe said. —When I look at Wolfe, and how it all began. Where we were, and what it has achieved, I am so proud."

TRIBUTE: Jens Hussey, who spent nine years as Cinequest's public relations director, returned to the festival this weekend to help honor a very special woman.

Hussey appeared on stage at the closing event to pay tribute to Genevieve Torresola, a longtime Cinequest volunteer and retired San Jose State University staff member who passed away in December at age 76.

She was known as the "Cinequest Mama," Hussey said, noting that while she stood only 4-foot-9, she

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"had the personality of a giant."

SPECIAL EVENT: The morning began at a nearly packed Camera 12 auditorium for the Adobe Youth Voices screening. The audience got to see eight short films — ranging from 2 to 7 minutes in length — created by teams of students who spent three Saturdays producing their movies.

The movie styles included documentary, stop-motion animation, music video and Flash animation (well, it was sponsored by Adobe). The 30-plus student filmmakers also were asked questions from the audience, and based on their answers, it sounds like they learned as much about collaboration at the minicamp as they did about the technical side of shooting and editing a movie.

For more information on the program, go to www.youthvoices.adobe.com.

JUST ONE MORE THING: The festival isn't quite over yet. Sunday is a full day of encores of Cinequest's award winning movies, which were announced at Saturday night's closing event.

Here's the schedule: "Starring Maja" (11 a.m., Audience Award contender); "Lost Persons Area" (11:15 a.m., Best First Feature); "Professor" (11:30 a.m., Audience Award contender); "Applause" (1:30 p.m., Maverick Spirit winner); "Buried Prayers" (1:45 p.m.; Best Documentary Feature); "Solitary" (2 p.m., New Visions winner); "Prima Primavera" (4 p.m., Audience Award contender); Cleanflix (4:15 p.m., Audience Award contender); "Cost of a Soul" (4:30 p.m., Audience Award contender); The Orange Girl (6:30 p.m., Audience Award contender); "The Escape" (6:45 p.m., Global Landscapes winner); and "The Real Revolutionaries" (7 p.m., Audience Award contender).

All the films are showing at Camera 12 and are open to passholders. If you're interested in buying a ticket to a particular movie, some "rush" tickets will be available at the box office before the showings, but they're not available online.

And there's also the Academy Awards party at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown San Jose for VIP passholders. It starts at 4 p.m.

THAT'S A WRAP: It's been a long but fun couple of weeks covering Cinequest. Look for a wrap-up article in Monday's Mercury News (also available online at www.mercurynews.com/sal-pizarro).

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