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May 6, 2004

Fest of the West

Rock-star filmmakers bookend a provocative program at the Santa Cruz Film Festival

By **WALLACE BAINÉ**

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Bernard Shakey isn't the kind of name that's going to drag you away from the NBA Playoffs and down to the local theater. But there's something you should know about the enigmatic Mr. Shakey before you write off the Santa Cruz Film Festival as only something film geeks do: He's had quite a career in another field where he answered to the name Neil Young.

Rock's most brilliant iconoclast is now a pseudonymed director and his new film, "Greendale," opens the third annual Santa Cruz Film Festival on May 13.

And like a good three-minute rock song, the opening riff returns at the end when another famous rock 'n' roll hall-of-famer, Doors keyboard master Ray Manzarek, comes to town with his most recent film, the thriller "Love Her Madly," based on a short story by another former film student who did OK in the music industry, Jim Morrison.

In between the two marquee-name films will be more than 70 others, shorts and feature-lengths, documentaries and dramas, familiar stories and experimental studies, social indictments and spiritual explorations.

"This one is all about art and how it makes us feel," said the festival's director Jane Sullivan, introducing the festival's theme as "Moving Pictures."

The creation of art and the boundaries that art both draws and erases are themes that run throughout the 25 programs that make up the festival. Many of the films are the kind of creative explorations that mainstream Hollywood and even the independent film industry often ignore. "Proteus," for example, seeks to retrace the artistic imagination of the 19th century by exploring the deep seas, the kind of boundless realm of wonder that space is today.

Yet the festival is not all exercises in intellectual exploration. "Never Been Done," part of the festival's "Surf Night" on May 16 documents a professional skateboarder who skates on a prosthetic leg. The pioneering all-female punk band the Runaways is the subject of the documentary "Edgeplay." Christopher Coppola's "The Creature from the Sunny Side Up Trailer Park" pits two separated-at-birth twin brothers — one black, one white — in a tragicomic take on racism.

The tone is set immediately by "Greendale," Neil Young's film version of the theme album he released last year. Shot in and around Half Moon Bay — Young makes his home in the hills near La Honda — "Greendale," through songs performed by Young and his band Crazy Horse, tells the story of the Green family and their spirited eco-warrior daughter Sun Green.

"I suggest everybody get the CD first," said Sullivan. "It's really a rock opera, and if you don't know the material, you might be a little lost. It's an organic, rough-hewn thing, not at all your typical Hollywood fare."

An opening-night party at the Museum of Art and History in Santa Cruz will feature the art of Jim Mazzeo, a Santa Cruz artist and co-star of "Greendale." Mazzeo, who has created album covers for Young in the past, will display his art work. Also at the opening-night bash will be a screening of "Light My Fire — A Return to the Whisky A Go Go," produced by Manzarek.

Sullivan is also working to secure a special guest at the party, fella by the name of Bernard Shakey.

Sullivan has made changes from last year's festival, most notably cutting back on the sheer number of films being screened (though the number of screenings is roughly the same). From 154 titles last year, the festival is showing only 74 this year, but repeating many of them in an effort to give audiences more flexibility in seeing what they want to see. "We're getting to know our audience better," said Sullivan, still fine-tuning the festival in its third season.

The SCFF is also spreading out to several movie theaters and venues across Santa Cruz from the downtown Del Mar and Riverfront Twin to UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College to the Rio Theatre and the first-ever visit of the festival to the Skyview Drive-In.

The festival's commitment to local filmmakers continues with contributions from 22 local filmmakers. UCSC professor Chip Lord presents "Ant Farm," the story of the radical art collective of which he was a part in the 1960s and '70s. Santa Cruzans Cam Archer and Aaron Platt, both of whom had shorts accepted at the Sundance Film Festival this year, are also part of the festival.

Santa Cruz-based writer and provocateur Robert Anton Wilson is the subject of local filmmaker Lance Bauscher's "Maybe Logic."

As in past years, the SCFF is divided into programs, discrete groupings of films centered on a theme or subject. The programs range from "God Is in the Details," which centers on spiritual subjects, to "Rave On," films about party culture.

Other highlights include the penetrating documentary about women working in independent film "In the Company of Women" that showed at Sundance, and "Awful Normal," a documentary about a young woman confronting the man who molested her as a child 25 years earlier, all as the camera rolls.

Another documentary, "Farmingville" brings dimension to the thorny issue of undocumented workers and "At the First Breath of Wind," from Italian filmmaker Franco Pavoli, is a cinematic tone poem that witnesses the wonder of a day in rural Italy.

The Sentinel will present daily updates on what's screening at the Santa Cruz Film Festival, beginning May 13.

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If You Go

WHAT: The Santa Cruz Film Festival.

WHEN: May 13-21.

WHERE: Various venues throughout Santa Cruz County.

TICKETS: Admission per program is \$6; \$5 for students and seniors. Opening Night benefit and Closing Night tickets are \$15. Festival all-access passes are \$100. Tickets are available at www.santacruzfilmfestival.com, the Santa Cruz Civic at 420-5240 and www.ticketweb.com.

DETAILS: 459-7676.

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