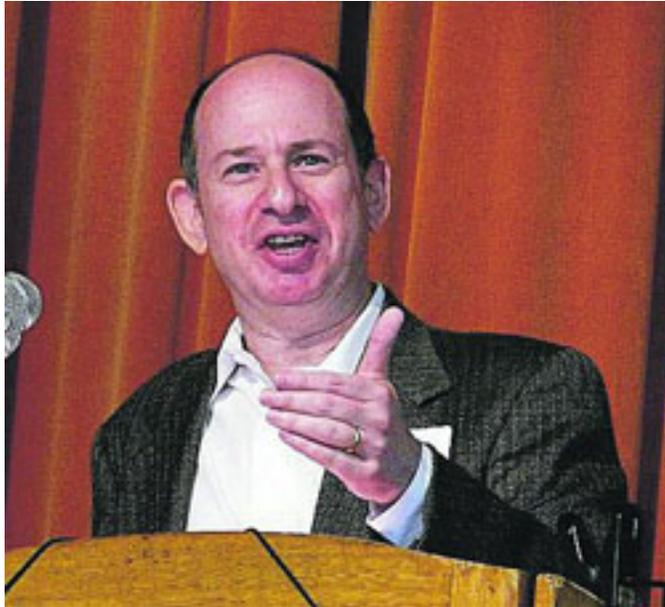


Published September 24th, 2014

Noted Film Critic Screens Top Docs in Lafayette

By Franette Armstrong



Michael Fox lecturing last semester. Photo provided

Whenever Michael Fox comes to town, movies are bound to follow and that will be the case in October as he once again brings the Academy Award nominees for Best Documentary to Osher Lifelong Learning Institute students at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Each week beginning Oct. 2, participants will watch, and then discuss one of the five 2014 "top doc" finalists - "The Square," "Cutie and the Boxer," "20 Feet from Stardom," "The Act of Killing," and "Dirty Wars."

Wherever Michael Fox teaches, he screens to full classes, which begs the question: Why take a film course when we can just wait for the movies to come out on streaming video?

"There's great power in viewing films with others you know you'll be discussing them with," he said. "We all bring our own experiences and that can help others see aspects of a film that we might not notice on our own."

"Documentaries let us see how a message can be delivered via the felt presence of the camera or lack of it, the music, the point of view, and the editing - what is left out visually and factually and what's included," Fox said. "Every film uses different techniques. The director might begin with an intention, but once the film is in the cutting room, that can fall away and the only thing that matters is the storytelling - the need to balance information, emotion, and entertainment." Some films are so powerful the content can't help but drive the discussion, Fox said. "We try to get past that and look at what the filmmaker did to provoke us, how the way the story is told affects how we react to it."

It's perhaps unsurprising that Fox focuses on "reality" films - he has a degree in finance and a master's in business administration. "When I was in college I fell in love with foreign films and eventually it became clear to me that my career would somehow involve movies."

Fox began writing reviews for a free paper when he first moved to San Francisco from Chicago, and now he can look back over 25 years as a film critic for more than 50 regional and national media outlets including KQED, The San Francisco Chronicle, and Variety. He juries film festivals and is a member of the San Francisco Film Critics Circle. He lives in San Francisco with his wife and their film-savvy cat and, in addition to reviewing movies, teaches OLLI film classes around the Bay.

For more information about the Top Docs class, go to olli.berkeley.edu or call (510) 642-9934. Fall 2014 OLLI Classes in Lafayette

Three new courses from UC Berkeley's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute begin Sept. 30 at Lafayette Library and Learning Center, 3491 Mount Diablo Blvd., Lafayette. For more information, go to olli.berkeley.edu or call (510) 642-9934.

History of the Symphony, Part 2 continues John Prescott's popular course in classical music exploring composers from Mozart to Sibelius. Part 1 not a prerequisite. Tuesdays, 1 to 3 p.m., Sept. 30-Nov. 4.

The Good Fight-The Spanish Civil War examines the influence of the war from 1939 to present through literature, art, film, and historical record with UC Berkeley's Alex Saragoza. Thursdays, 10 a.m. to noon, Oct. 2-Nov. 6.

Top Docs: The 2014 Academy Award Nominees. Film Critic Michael Fox screens the top five documentary films of 2014 and leads class discussion. Thursdays, 1 to 3 p.m., Oct. 2-30.

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