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# Woody Allen's hilarious comedy Play It Again, Sam



directed by Søren Oliver  
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## LAC's First Short Documentary Competition a Rousing Success

By Sophie Braccini



Josh Silva

Photo Sophie Braccini

The Lafayette Library and Learning Center auditorium was jam-packed with a buzzing crowd excitedly anticipating the presentation of the first Lamorinda Arts Council short documentary competition. That Sunday afternoon saw the crowning of four amateur videographers age 8 to adults. The quality of the work presented is a harbinger of LAC offering the competition again next year.

The short films presented on May 15 could not have been more different, ranging from vacation movies to political satire, from two to 15 minutes in length, from serious and analytical to poetic or humorous.

The 17 movies were competing in four different categories: elementary school, middle school, high school and adults. From an early age, the mastery of the media was impressive.

The youngest contestant Jason Friedman, a third grader at Glorietta Elementary School in Orinda, had shot a movie about Miwok Indians. His mother, Meredith Friedman, said that the result was truly her son's creation, even if she supported him along the way.

"My biggest work was to keep him on track," she said. Like most contestants, Jason filmed with his iPhone and edited using iMovie. His mother says she was very surprised at how quickly her son took to the technology.

The elementary group was one of the most prolific, presenting a trip to the zoo, explaining fitness, and talking about books or art. Del Rey Elementary fifth grader Jack Nixon won in that category with his movie "Pub-

lic Art Everywhere." When he announced the results, judge Joel Patterson said how impressed all of the judges had been by the maturity of the young talents. Not an empty compliment coming from someone who is a veteran producer on shows such as "60 Minutes."

The middle school competitors were a big hit with the judges and the crowd. Using an app for instant voting, LAC asked viewers at the end of the festival to select their favorite, and it was the winner of the middle school category, Josh Silva's "ABC World News: The Journalism Formula" that was selected as the public award. The satirical documentary aimed at demonstrating that this station's news is just based on an empty formula designed more to draw crowds than inform. A very well edited opinion piece, the documentary used apropos derision.

The high school group with six films from four different local high schools went from spoof to very elaborate pieces. One film talked about social justice, another about a class, a unique film called "Burgers: an Odyssey" by Acalanes' Karl-Erik Mills, made a wonderful use of close-ups, music and silence. But this curious and unique ode to the national culinary delight did not win first place. The judges preferred "Eating Through the South" a travel documentary by Miramonte 9th grader Jack Lewis. The well-constructed and interesting film included a lot of animations that gave it a very professional feel.

Graham Roberts won the adult competition with an artistic and poignant movie about a homeless person who has built a makeshift castle made of scraps and jetsam on a beach. That category also proposed an analytical movie about the power of women, and a unique documentary by local photographer Lewis Giles using series of snapshots to magnify the work of steel construction workers.

Julie Rubio, a local film maker of such films as "East Side Sushi" and "One," said that everyone should be very proud of himself or herself, and that she had been very impressed by the quality of both the direction and editing of the amateur film makers. For Rubio, film is the strongest medium for provoking thoughts and sparking discussions. Lawrence Khol, LAC president, confirmed that with the festival that had been proposed by Meredith Friedman and Kahl Dutch, the non-profit was at the core of its mission of inspiring artistic creation of all types.

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## Later-in-Life Painter is the Cat's Meow

By Lou Fancher



Joanne Taeuffer with her art.

Photo provided

Confronted in the year 2000 with the turn of the century and hovering close to age 50, Joanne Taeuffer sought culture.

"I decided I was going to learn to paint and learn to speak French. And I did both," she says, rattling off a few phrases en français to demonstrate. "Learning to paint and learning the language have been a gift to me."

The "gifts" are intrinsic, far surpassing the external "who I know/what I've done" rewards of other success, says Taeuffer. After working in internet publishing and journalism, the Berkeley-based painter has been invigorated by "mucking around in paint" and the quirky mannerisms of an elegant, indulged black cat named Oscar.

An exhibit, "Oscar's Excellent Year," features Taeuffer's 12 acrylic paintings of the family's pet feline on display in the Homework Center at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center now through June.

Growing up on her great, great grandfather's prune farm near Healdsburg in Sonoma County, the now 65-year-old Taeuffer told stories in pictures. With a roll of plain paper and her favorite Christmas present — the all-familiar big box of 64 Crayolas — Taeuffer made animated movies. "I drew a lot of people and animals, just like I do now. I drew comic strips; series of scenes that I'd put in a shoe box, with a hole cut out for a viewer. You'd turn the pencils and see the images go by."

Earning a psychology degree at UC Berkeley, led to work as a journalist. Attending graduate school at USC in new media — what became the internet — captured her interest. She worked for tech companies and founded a company, Blackberry Creek, an online creative community offering digital content created entirely by middle school age kids, combining words and pictures.

So it's not a stretch to imagine that her quest for a significant accomplishment led to more of the same.

"I started with drawing, then turned to paint," she says, describing a process that sounds a bit like Goldilocks testing chairs in a fairy tale. "Watercolor was too precious. Oil paints turned into mud. But someone put acrylic paint into my hand and it was just right."

She took classes with Marcy Wheeler, a Walnut Creek-based artist who offers group courses, and provided valuable lessons. "Marcy told me that if you do something that's really working in one part of a painting, don't do it all across the painting because then it becomes boring. And blocking in light and dark without worrying about color is the way to create good bones for a painting."

The latter discipline, delaying color application for an artist who's fond of layering thick, intensely pigmented paint like frosting with a palette knife, has been a struggle. "I've had many teachers who've told me light and dark matter and

I'm not abandoning color, but it's hard to resist."

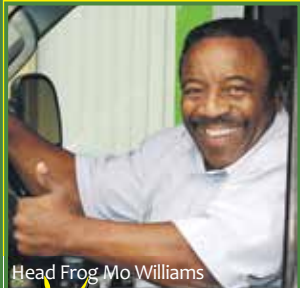
The "Oscar" paintings show the benefits of repeatedly painting one form. Crusty edges and straightforward realism reminiscent of the work of American artist Wayne Thiebaud are at play in "Meet Oscar." A painting titled "What the Mouse Saw" references Bay Area Figurative Painter David Park. "Once you understand a subject — I paint lots of cats — you're free to try it in different styles," she says.

In her studio, a "granny cottage" tucked behind her second home in Healdsburg, Taeuffer works surrounded by paintings. "I have a tiny house in Berkeley and you can't put a 40-by-60 canvas anywhere in that house. Here, I paint in the kitchen and have things on walls, leaning against doorways, spread out throughout the house."

Taeuffer keeps several paintings going in various stages at one time. "I can never finish one unless there are three more I want to get on with, or I'd not be motivated to finish any of them." Unless she's at a weekly painting session with fellow members of the Bay Area Studio Artists, a longtime group of artists who've become fast friends, Taeuffer prefers painting alone. Classic rock like The Beatles often accompanies her "dance and paint" approach. "I'm always standing. You get your whole body into it. I'd rather not paint a lot of detail. My favorite paintings are kind of blocky and if you sit down, you get into the picky part."

Her most-loved subjects, animals and people, send her up ladders — to shoot a photo from which to paint Oscar, sprawled among the dishes on the breakfast table — or outdoors, to catch a shopper dashing for cover in the rain on a city street. But you won't find Taeuffer outdoors with the plein air crowd: The controlled atmosphere and comfort of air conditioning and heating, she says, were invented for good reason.

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