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Independent Thinkers
Fall film series at ETSU School of Arts has issues

For four out of its first five years, the ETSU Mary B. Martin School of the Arts has brought the South Arts Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers’ series of six films and its filmmakers to ETSU. The 2014-15 season will include another series of thought-provoking films and perhaps, says the School of the Arts director, the most issue-oriented and timely films yet.

“The subjects of the films this year address a number of difficult, well-timed topics,” says Director Anita DeAngelis. “I think it’s important that we have opportunities – especially as a university – to come together and discuss topics that may polarize people. Some of the films, in particular, do this. But also I think it’s an opportunity to understand other people, as well, and other opinions, and I think the ability to have discourse is severely lacking in our culture today.”

The filmmakers travel to each of the Southern Circuit screenings, at 18 sites across Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Kentucky and the Carolinas, and each film is followed by a question-and-answer session and catered reception with one of its filmmakers. At ETSU, admission is free to these screenings and receptions, because of the support of benefactor Jim Martin in memory of his wife, Mary. Screenings are scheduled in the Martha Street Culp Auditorium, beginning at 7 p.m.

This fall’s three films will be My Toxic Backyard about the residual effects of the CTS Superfund site in south Asheville, N.C.; Valentine Road, a look back at a teen’s murder by a classmate and the individual and community repercussions; and Good Ol’ Freda, the story of The Beatles’ loyal secretary’s long-secret decade of adventures with the legendary band. Three more documentaries will be screened at ETSU during spring semester.

The 2014-15 series premieres Monday, Sept. 22, with My Toxic Backyard by Emmy award-winning writer and director Katie Damien. Her documentary focuses on the residents of a small community as they fight for clean drinking water in an area in Buncombe County, N.C., contaminated by an old electronic component plant that continues leaking dangerous toxins into the ground. The health and environmental ramifications continue to mount more than two decades after the threat was first reported to the Environmental Protection Agency.

“Just a couple weeks ago, I heard a story on WETS about the evacuations of families from this particular site after the detection of high levels of TCE (trichloroethylene),” DeAngelis says, “so
this film is very timely. The CTS site in our neighborhood, and I think it’s an important topic for us to discuss. These kinds of things can happen anywhere and do happen in a lot of communities.”

The Southern Circuit film for October is Valentine Road, an HBO documentary unraveling the story of the 2008 point-blank shooting of Oxnard, Calif., eighth-grader Larry King by one of his classmates. The 15-year-old died on Valentine’s Day and the film covers the heartbreaking circumstances and startling aftermath of the murder. Valentine Road – which also explores the effects of the event on the students, teachers and community and underlying issues of race, gender identity, troubled youth, bullying and the justice system – has been nominated for an Emmy for news and documentary filmmaking.

“The result is quite possibly one of the best documentaries I've ever seen … a remarkable debut by Marta Cunningham,” says reviewer Alice Lytton on Indiewire.com. “Cunningham is not content to tell a binary story of good and evil, she is too smart for that. Instead her film is a nuanced investigation into the question of how children become the adults they do.”

The ETSU screening of Valentine Road is set for Monday, Oct. 20, during National Bullying Prevention Month.

Mary B. Martin School of the Arts and South Arts will conclude the fall season’s films on a lighter yet equally in-depth note, with Good Ol’ Freda on Monday, Nov. 10. Producer Kathy McCabe, an award-winning photographer and Beatles expert, will be the visiting filmmaker, bringing her own inside stories.

Good Ol’ Freda tells the story of Freda Kelly, a shy Liverpudliian teenager asked to work for a young local band hoping to make it big: The Beatles. As The Beatles’ fame multiplies, Kelly bears witness to music and cultural history, but never exploits her insider access. Their loyal secretary from beginning to end, Kelly tells her tales for the first time in 50 years.

Reviewers from around the country have called Freda “incredibly fun and charming,” “delightful,” “engrossing, entertaining,” “slyly humorous,” “insightful” and “Oscar-worthy.”

Southern Circuit Tour films for spring at ETSU include The New Black, Old South and A Kind of Order.

South Arts, a nonprofit regional arts organization was founded in 1975 to build on the South’s unique heritage and enhance the public value of the arts. South Arts’ work responds to the arts environment and cultural trends with a regional perspective. South Arts offers an annual portfolio of activities designed to address the role of the arts in impacting the issues important to our region, and to link the South with the nation and the world through the arts. For more information, visit www.southarts.org.

“Southern Circuit was developed to connect audiences with new, independent films that they normally wouldn’t have an opportunity to experience,” said Teresa Hollingsworth, senior program director at South Arts. “We send directors into communities for screenings and
audience discussions about their work and the filmmaking process. It creates a deeper, richer and more engaging film experience for audiences and for the artists.”

For information about the ETSU Mary B. Martin School of the Arts or the South Arts film series at ETSU, call 423-439-TKTS (8587) or visit www.etsu.edu/martin. Please “Like” ETSU Mary B. Martin School of the Arts on Facebook and follow it on Twitter and Instagram @ArtsAtETSU.