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Fog City Mavericks

Bottom Line: With Starz holding the TV rights, "Fog" will have an extended life on cable.

By Sura Wood

May 22, 2007

San Francisco International Film Festival

SAN FRANCISCO -- Gary Leva's entertaining if overly reverent celebration of Northern California filmmakers, "Fog City Mavericks," had its world premiere here as it played to an enthusiastic hometown crowd. The documentary is more a catalogue of admiring portraits and reminiscences than a structured, objective documentary. Leva, the man behind numerous film-related docs, surveys more than 130 years of San Francisco film history from Eadweard Muybridge to Sofia Coppola, favoring inclusiveness over depth.

Although some of the personal and professional backstories likely will be familiar to film buffs -- especially those concerning Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas -- the old photographs, behind-the-scenes footage, pristine film clips and amusing stories -- not to mention an impressive lineup of talking heads -- should give the docu a long run on the festival circuit. With Starz holding the TV rights, "Fog" will have an extended life on cable.

Lucas, Coppola, Saul Zaentz, Robin Williams, Philip Kaufman, Clint Eastwood and Walter Murch, among 30 others, trade anecdotes and volunteer nary a negative word about one another, reserving their ridicule and disdain instead for Hollywood. (Milos Forman's puckish humor is one of the film's delights.) They point out that working at home keeps them a safe distance away from the long arms of studio hacks.



The scenic footage shot by Ron Fricke makes the case for the seductiveness of the Bay Area, which has been a magnet for iconoclasts and creative renegades. It should be said that these mavericks, all of them male with the notable exception of Ms. Coppola, have had enough success to afford the option of living outside of Los Angeles, and most arrived in San Francisco when the city and its environs were still affordable for artists.

The film might have worked better if it had concentrated on the 1970s; Leva's material on this period is particularly strong. The main

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problem is that the film, attempting to cover a lot of ground, is overstuffed. Bronco Billy, Charles Chaplin, Bruce Conner, Pixar and "The Black Stallion" are a lot to pour into a single movie.

Some of Leva's choices are downright puzzling. Maverick is not the first word that comes to mind when thinking of Chris Columbus. It would have been interesting to hear more from the reclusive Carroll Ballard, the brilliant sound designer Ben Burt or indie pioneer John Korty. Williams is brought in for comic relief and delivers, but his career is left unexplored.

Coppola's home movies of his parents are a treat, but Lucas' car accident when he was a teenager and Coppola's bout with childhood polio are recounted with undue gravity. This grave tone often finds its way into the script. The lofty narration, voiced by the dependable Peter Coyote, is by turns inordinately solemn or effusive and with music swelling on the soundtrack contributes to an inadvertent self-congratulatory air that permeates this project. "Fog" is most engaging when Leva lets the filmmakers speak for themselves.

FOG CITY MAVERICKS

Lucasfilm Ltd./Starz Originals, Leva Filmworks, Inc., Handcrafted Entertainment

Credits: Director-writer-producer-editor: Gary Leva

Running time -- 120 minutes


No MPAA rating

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