

# San Francisco Chronicle

## SFIFF 50TH ANNIVERSARY Bay Area directors star in 'Fog'

Delfin Vigil  
Sunday, April 22, 2007



Sometimes a little small talk can go a long way.

Take, for example, a recent airport run-in with one George Lucas and a random dude who decided to strike up a conversation with the famed filmmaker.

It went a little something like this:

"So. George. Where ya headed?" the fan asks.

"Oh. Hi. I'm going back to Skywalker Ranch," Lucas answers.

"Aha. Headed back to Hollywood, are ya?"

Now if that were a "Star Wars" scene, Lucas could have easily just choked the guy with one of those deadly Darth Vader stares and the problem would've been solved. But the misguided assumption that Lucas' film career and headquarters have more to do with Hollywood than the San Francisco Bay Area is not science fiction.

"A lot of people around the world don't have any sense that George Lucas or Francis Ford Coppola, for instance, are San Francisco-based filmmakers," says Gary Leva, to whom Lucas recounted that annoying conversation. Although it isn't clear whether Lucas delivered a witty comeback to the clueless question that day, he did come up with an answer for the future.

"George said he wanted to make sure that if archaeologists look back at San Francisco in hundreds and hundreds of years from now that there would be some record of their having been a film community here," says Leva, whom Lucas asked to become the raider of the potentially lost art.

The result: "Fog City Mavericks," a two-hour Leva-directed documentary that takes on nearly 130 years of San Francisco film history, with spotlights on names that should be synonymous with San Francisco -- Clint Eastwood, Chris Columbus, Saul Zaentz, Philip Kaufman, Carroll Ballard, Francis and Sofia Coppola

and Lucas.

" 'Fog City Mavericks' is easily the most challenging film I've ever taken on," says Leva, a longtime friend and colleague of Lucas, whose film career credits include making DVD special-edition documentaries for "Malcolm X," "The Maltese Falcon," "Star Wars Trilogy" and "All the President's Men," among others. "In documentaries, there's usually a central story you can hang the film on. That isn't the case here. This is a portrait of many filmmakers covering many years."

The story line for "Fog City Mavericks" begins a long time ago in a galaxy not far away. In 1855 an Englishman named Eadweard Muybridge arrived in San Francisco to open a bookstore. But within about 20 years, Muybridge would be credited with setting the wheels of film in motion with the "zoopraxiscope," -- a zany contraption that projected pictures of a horse in rapid succession to give the impression of the animal in motion.

"Muybridge more or less invented the technology that would become the foundation for modern cinema," Leva says. "It was before the French did it. Before Thomas Edison did it. And Muybridge did it in San Francisco in the late 1870s, roughly 100 years before 'Star Wars.' "

It's not the only parallel Leva draws between Lucas and Muybridge. In focusing on Lucas' early life growing up in Modesto, the film tells the well-known story of when a bored teenage Lucas, who had little direction in life, narrowly survived a serious car accident.

When the police saw the extent of the car's damage they told Lucas they were amazed that he wasn't killed.

"That changed his life," Leva says. "From that point forward George always felt there must be something he is supposed to do with life."

About a hundred years before, Muybridge, a successful bookstore owner, was on a business trip to New York via stagecoach when one of the horses ran out of control and caused a major crash. Muybridge was almost killed.

"When he came out of it, he was a different man," explains Leva. "He was no longer interested in being a businessman. He decided to dedicate his life to being an artist. That was the key creative touchstone for me in 'Fog City Mavericks' -- to show each of these individual's struggles."

Along with Lucas, Coppola is covered extensively in the film, which is narrated by Peter Coyote. That's what happens when you have a career that includes running a magazine, a radio station, a theater, a restaurant and a winery and happen to make some of the most sophisticated American films, like "Apocalypse Now" and "The Godfather," Leva says.

"Coppola saw San Francisco as a kind of Paris, where all the arts could be shared by the artists, while the studio itself should be far away from Hollywood," says Leva, who in the film also emphasizes the

significance of Coppola being the first film school graduate to break into the movie business.

"Fog City Mavericks" is also loaded with tons of new film trivia fodder and exclusive behind-the-scenes stories, according to San Francisco Film Society director Graham Leggat.

"It's such a revelation to hear these stories of all the trials and tribulations involved with making movies like 'The Godfather' and 'Apocalypse Now,' " says Leggat, who was particularly pleased to be gifted with a documentary on the prominent tip of the San Francisco filmmaking iceberg in time for the festival's 50th anniversary. "These were among the most brilliant American films of all time -- and yet they were hardly a sure bet to even be made."

Some things never change, as the film shows similar stories of Clint "How many Oscars do I have to win before Warner Bros. will trust that I know what I'm doing?" Eastwood and Saul "Guess I wasn't so cuckoo to risk my music career to make that movie after all" Zaentz.

"Some friends of mine in Sweden once told me that when you make a picture, there's no you and there's no me," says Zaentz, putting everyone's egos in check during a recent phone interview. "In a way you're praying that you can just do your work as an artist. If nobody's name was on it, everybody would still be happy. If there was no money, everybody would still be happy. Of course you've got to keep score somehow."

Their struggles for independence are all part of the DNA of San Francisco and the Bay Area, Leva says.

"San Francisco has always attracted pioneers and rebels. From the Barbary Coast and Gold Rush days right up through Silicon Valley and Pixar. It's that 'let's try anything' spirit of innovation and creativity that they all have in common."

The world premiere for "Fog City Mavericks" will be at 7:30 p.m. April 29 at the Castro Theatre. Among the guests expected to attend are Lucas, Leva, Zaentz, Coyote, Kaufman, Ballard and Robin Williams. While Sophia and Francis Coppola won't be able to make it, a lamp shade is bound to end up on someone's head.

Fog City Mavericks: 7:30 p.m. April 29. \$20-\$25. Castro Theatre, 429 Castro St., S.F. (925) 866-9559. [www.sffs.org](http://www.sffs.org).

E-mail Delfin Vigil at [dvigil@sfnchronicle.com](mailto:dvigil@sfnchronicle.com).

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/22/PKGCCP9JRJ1.DTL>

This article appeared on page **PK - 19** of the San Francisco Chronicle

San Francisco Chronicle Sections



Go