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Fog City Mavericks

How the Bay Area inspired Coppola, Lucas and other pioneers to change movie history.

The Bay Area's achievements in special effects and digital animation in movies over the past 30 years are well documented. Think Lucasfilm, Industrial Light and Magic, and Pixar. Less known, however, is the impact Northern California has always had on movies in general.

That's the focus of Fog City Mavericks, a compelling two-hour documentary by Gary Leva that shows how the independent spirit of the Bay Area fueled some of the greatest accomplishments in film history. The program, which premiered last month on the Starz premium cable channel, airs twice during Thanksgiving weekend.

From 19th-century San Francisco photographer Eadweard Muybridge – whose revolutionary invention, the zoopraxiscope, projected images from rotating glass disks in rapid succession, forming the basis of motion picture technology – to the establishment of the first “anti-studio” production company, American Zoetrope (founded in San Francisco by Francis Ford Coppola in 1969), the Bay Area has always been at the forefront of the movie industry. “Everything we’ve done,” says Pixar producer/director John Lasseter of his local film brethren, “no one’s ever done before.”

Lasseter is among the many filmmakers interviewed in Fog City, which traces the rise of the independent film movement to Coppola's *The Godfather* and George Lucas' *American Graffiti* – films that flew in the face of traditional Hollywood moviemaking while speaking to a new generation. *Godfather* dared to humanize mob life long before *The Sopranos*, while *Graffiti* built its entire story around rock ‘n’ roll music, paving the way for contemporary movie soundtracks.

Buoyed by the success of Coppola and Lucas, not to mention the maverick nature of the Bay Area itself, other filmmakers pursued their visions in Northern California, free from Hollywood interference. Berkeley-based producer Saul Zaentz, for example, gambled his fortune twice to make movies no other studio would touch, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Amadeus* – both of which won multiple Oscars while also cleaning up at the box office. Then there's San Francisco native, Carmel resident and Hollywood superstar Clint Eastwood, who uses his clout to get studio backing while still making movies his way, from *Play Misty for Me* to *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*.

Leva packs a lot into *Fog City*, weaving in commentary from Eastwood, Zaentz, Chris Columbus, Sofia Coppola, Brad Bird, Steve Jobs and other local luminaries with clips from their iconic films. But the story always comes back to Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas, from the former's epic *Apocalypse Now* to the latter's *Star Wars* legacy. Leva even draws parallels between the two trailblazers and “father of filmmaking” Muybridge: all three overcame great personal tragedy early in their careers to leave their mark on motion pictures.

Fog City Mavericks airs Nov. 23 at 5:15pm, with an encore Nov. 24 at 1:45am, on Starz. The program will also be shown throughout December; visit www.starz.com for more information.

