

Great Plains has advantages over larger film festivals

FILM from page 1

festivals, where attention is put on the art itself rather than its marketability.

And no one is quicker at rolling out the welcome mat than director of the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater and coordinator of the Great Plains Film Festival, Danny Lee Ladely.

"Filmmakers pretty much enter every film festival they can possibly enter," Ladely said. "There are a lot of films out there that aren't shown anywhere other than at festivals so it's a great way to get that exposure."

"The Great Plains Film Festival is important especially to those living and working in the great plains because it's really hard for them to get the recognition they deserve."

Robert Byington, director of "Olympia," a play entered as a dramatic feature, is a Lincoln native who currently resides in Hollywood, California. Two years ago he won the Best Dramatic Feature award for his film "Shameless" and has shown it and other films all over the world.

Still the saying holds true, there's no place like home.

"I had such a great experience with the festival last time," Byington said. "The better festival experiences tend to be the smaller regional ones because it's less about money and more about general curiosity about film."

That integrity was a big factor in prompting Rand Benson, director of "Man and Dog, a documentary short" to enter his film in this year's festival.

"The regional festivals are a lot more important than people might think because even though the big festivals carry a lot of prestige, that prestige is forgotten quickly and it's really hard to have an independent film to be seen by anyone," Benson said. "If you actually want people to see your film and talk to people about your film, you have to enter a regional festival, like the Great Plains."

Not only does the festival allow for films to be shown, it allows for films to be shown to a variety of people generally unreachable.

Xachary Irving, director of "American Chain Gang," a film entered as a documentary feature, said that entering festivals in New York, where he currently lives, offers only a specific kind of audience, so festivals

like the Great Plains are a welcomed invitation.

"First and foremost it allows an audience a chance to see it ("American Chain Gang") who may never have. This is the first time this film has played in the midwest and it's certainly important for me to have the film played before a variety of audiences."

Aside from the immediate allure of the basic visibility offered at the Great Plains Film Festival there is also a personal interaction between director and viewer that many say doesn't happen at festivals where the primary focus is put on securing Hollywood deals.

For Benson, that is a valuable aspect.

"The hardest thing to get is hardcore criticism, you know, that unbiased talking about the craft and talking about the audiences and when you can get it, like here, it's great," Benson said. "Here they're more able to spend more time with individual filmmakers and getting that hardcore criticism is the only way to get better as a

filmmaker."

Not only that, but as Byington realized, this event is, after all, a festival and at festivals people relax and have fun.

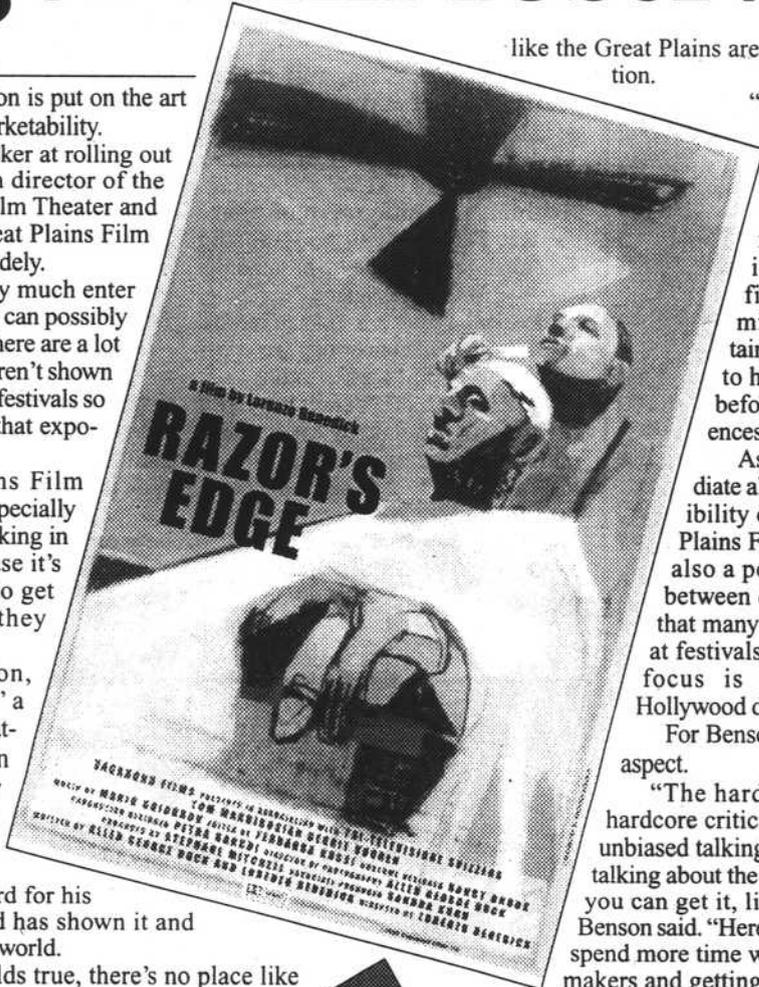
"I met someone at one of the screenings for my first film here and now he's a buddy of mine that is working three blocks away," Byington said. "He basically just came up to me and said 'hey, I liked your film, wanna have a beer?'"

"At festivals like Sundance it just seems less likely that that sort of stuff can happen."

One thing remains imperative for the survival of festivals like the Great Plains Film Festival, and that is for the people of the great plains to continue making films, regardless of if they're a 15 year old high school student or a 33 year old Oklahoma native.

"I think promoting regional filmmaking is obviously important, because then you can encourage someone in Nebraska or Oklahoma that they have just as much a right to make a film as someone in Los Angeles. In that sense regional film festivals are vital."

And as long as the people of the great plains continue making films, Ladely will continue rolling out the welcome mats.



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