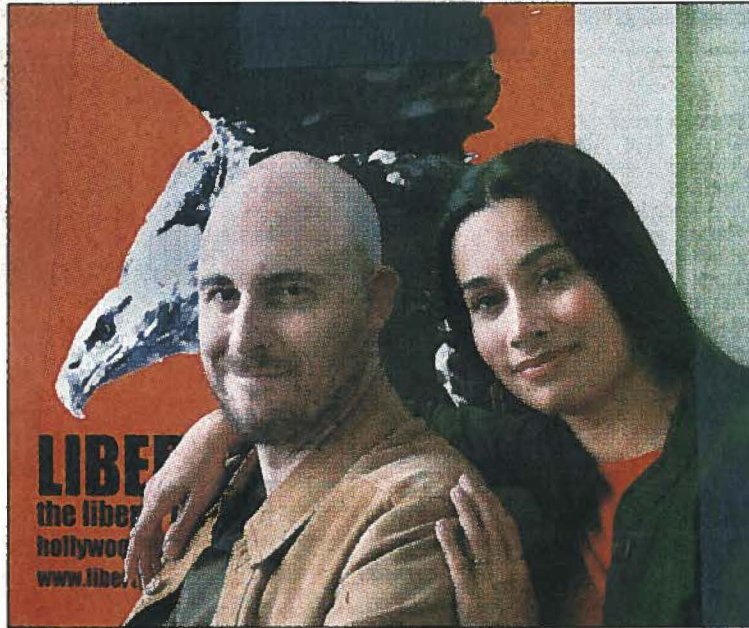


Daily Breeze

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LOCAL NEWS



BRAD GRAVERSON/DAILY BREEZE

San Pedro residents Jason Apuzzo and his wife, Govindini Murty, are the primary organizers of the Liberty Film Festival. Beginning Friday, the festival will show films such as "We the Living," which is based on an Ayn Rand book.

SP filmmakers showcase conservative Hollywood

ARTS: Mostly unknown movies are on the bill for this weekend's Liberty Film Festival in West Hollywood.

By Nick Green

DAILY BREEZE

"We the Living," a rarely seen 1942 Italian black-and-white film based on a book by teen-favorite novelist Ayn Rand, tells the tale of two young lovers who fight against conformity in communist Russia.

A series of Kurdish shorts from the inaugural Iraqi Film Festival — film production was virtually banned under the tyranny of former president Saddam Hus-

sein — explores the rejection of violence and terrorism.

And "Brainwashing 201: The Second Semester" is billed as a hilarious account of "political correctness run amok on college campuses."

These are among more than a dozen politically provocative films on tap at the second annual Liberty Film Festival, organized by a pair of young San Pedro filmmakers, that begins Friday in West Hollywood.

Their goal: To provide a forum in famously liberal Hollywood for the exploration of conservative themes and values.

Many people felt that Hollywood was putting out a lot of

FESTIVAL/A13

FESTIVAL: SP couple provides 'forum' for conservative films

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films that were very left-wing, in particular films like Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9-11," said co-organizer Jason Apuzzo, a 1988 graduate of Palos Verdes High School. "A lot of conservatives in Hollywood felt we weren't doing anything to respond."

"We're providing a forum for these films so the public has a choice."

A group of young filmmakers, including the event's primary organizers, Apuzzo and his wife, Govindini Murty, believed a film festival with a conservative theme would create a bigger splash than individual movies.

They put together last year's inaugural festival in six to eight weeks in what was a true grassroots effort, Murty said.

To their surprise, about 3,000 people showed up, selling out almost half of the 13 screenings.

"People are hungry for an alternative they usually don't have," Apuzzo said. "This town's gotten really boring and anything that can juice it up and provide a variety of visions is a good thing."

A lot of people in mainstream Hollywood agree.

About one-third of last year's

audience were from major studios.

This year more than 30 film industry professionals will introduce films or speak at several planned panel discussions, including one on the infamous blacklist titled "Was Communism a Threat to Hollywood?"

They include Joel Surnow, executive producer of the television hit "24," *Time* magazine film critic Richard Schickel and Steve McEveety, co-producer of the Mel Gibson blockbuster "The Passion of the Christ."

Still, the organizers are cognizant of not just trotting out such familiar film industry conservatives as Gibson, Tom Selleck or Arnold Schwarzenegger.

"It's not about hanging on to people who've done X, Y and Z," Apuzzo said. "It's about the masses of new people who feel unconstrained about what they can say."

Indeed, many of the films are from young filmmakers who use relatively inexpensive digital technology to produce movies such as the little-seen "Terminal Island." The Apuzzo-directed suspense thriller, shot on a \$9,000 budget, had Murty chased around the harbor by a terrorist. It was screened at

last year's festival.

That democratization of the industry is allowing independent filmmakers to produce movies with a relatively unconventional point of view compared with those ground out by studios controlled by large corporations.

The result is movies like "Emancipation, Revelation, Revolution," a documentary that argues the Republican Party was created to abolish slavery and that early civil rights laws were created and passed largely by GOP legislators.

"One of the mottoes of our film festival is we believe in free speech," Murty said. "We care about film a great deal, we're not just political hacks."

Still, to help create buzz among conservatives, the couple recruited a board of directors that includes Rolling Hills resident Shawn Steel, the outspoken former chairman of the state Republican Party.

"When they approached me I said, 'That sounds very nice, but I don't know what you're talking about: All filmmakers are communists and hate America,'" he said with a laugh. "They proved me wrong—I'm so happy to be proven wrong."

"Something is definitely changing in the film schools and the

■ **What:** The Liberty Film Festival, devoted to movies with conservative themes.

Want to go?

■ **When:** Friday through Sunday.

■ **Where:** Silverscreen Theater at the Pacific Design Center, 8687 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood.

■ **Cost:** Tickets are \$8-\$10, with most screenings priced at \$10. Parking is \$6. Tickets may only be purchased online.

■ **More information and ticket purchases:** www.libertyfilmfestival.com.

industry," he added. "There's a vigorous debate and I would argue it's generational: The smarter filmmakers tend to be younger and more conservative."

So unusual is the festival it has received coverage in *The New York Times*, in the *Wall Street Journal* and on CNN.

"One slightly peculiar phenomenon is we've gotten more coverage in the liberal media than the conservative media," Apuzzo said. "I think it's a function of sheer boredom. We're doing something new."