

Filmmakers of the future filming, fun, and friendship

Ruth Earley

COUNTY LEITRIM is no stranger to the silver screen. Numerous filmic depictions of Leitrim's landscape and people have been captured on celluloid since the medium entered into popular consciousness and with the film community in the North West now at its most active, Leitrim's reputation as a hub of visual arts and film continues to develop.

However, it is the younger generation who will drive the future of film culture in Leitrim and never before has this future looked so promising. Children and teens from Leitrim, the North West and surrounding areas, have been flocking to North West Film School since youth filmmaking courses began in 2009.

Initially a project running over four weeks during that summer, courses were held in Carrick-on-Shannon and Sligo that were designed to instruct and encourage young people to produce short film. The results were astonishing. A number of the films produced by students during that first summer were officially selected for screening at prestigious national and international film festivals, with 'HouseTrap' scooping not only the top award at Ireland's Fresh Film Festival 2010, but also the 'golden clip', or first

PHOTOS: NWFS



Martha shoots

prize, at the Berlin International Youth Media Festival 2010.

And so, North West Film School was born, launching the motion picture careers of aspiring film-

makers throughout the region. Since those initial awards, the standard of films made on the courses has continued to grow and the achievements have continued to excite students



and management of the school. 2011 was a thrilling year for all involved as films made by the students continued to sweep the international festival circuit, resulting in very shiny and sparkling shelves in the North West Film School offices.

Gracing those shelves are awards, special mentions, audience awards, certificates and mementos from numerous national and international film festivals including the leading Irish award for youth film at the Fresh Film Festival for two consecutive years, The Olympia International Film Festival for Children and Young People (Greece), Youki International Film Festival (Austria), the Seoul International Youth Film Festival (Korea), Southern Youth Film Festival (South Africa), the Berlin International Youth Media Festival 2010 and 2011 and the Four Rivers Film Festival (Croatia).

The highlight of the film school to date, however, came in September 2011 when two of the films produced by North West Film School students, 'Love Emily' and 'Saints and Sinners' were officially selected for the Chicago International Children's Film Festival. Not only is the festival recognised as the leading event of its kind in the world, but it is also the only youth film festival in the world endorsed by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is an Academy Award qualifying festival.

Based in the Cineplex in Carrick-



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on-Shannon, the film school operates summer camps that run for two week periods each July and August in centres throughout six counties of the North West and surrounding areas. Two types of courses are offered; the 'Zoom' camp for 10-12 year olds and the 'Focus' course for 13-18 year olds. North West Film School also facilitates filmmaking programmes to schools, clubs and organisations during the school term. Every piece of technology used on courses is portable, ensuring that courses are fully mobile rather than depending on studio based operations. This brings the full film school experience directly to the classroom, community or arts centre.

Projects undertaken by school groups and Transition Years with North West Film School have

also resulted in international successes. In particular, the Ursuline College, Sligo received a United Nations award for their film on the theme of sustainable energy. The film was furthermore included in two UN international conferences on sustainable living in Istanbul and Cologne during 2011.

Awards aside, students of North West Film School have realised a number of personal achievements through their filmmaking experience. Some have written articles and been featured in teen magazines, reporting on their experience of making a film and travelling to international film festivals. A number have appeared on television discussing their projects and their achievements. Some have continued to develop their interest in film production by establish-



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ing their very own film production company and pursuing their interests in writing and directing short films independently.

2011 was also a very successful year for the past students whose ambitions led to third level education. Arts subjects dominated the chosen paths of the college-bound, with media and film in particular a preferred discipline. Alumni of North West Film School are currently studying in the National Film School, Dun Laoghaire, UCD, DIT, UCG, GMIT, Carlow Institute of Technology and Trinity College, Dublin. In January 2012, North West

Film School are taking their commitment to film education global when Ruth Earley, director of North West Film School and tutor Mark Noonan plan to travel to Grenada, off the coast of Venezuela, to work on a voluntary project where they will be responsible for developing and implementing a media training programme for young people with no access to jobs or training.

And with filmmaking at its most popular as a youth activity in Ireland, it's Lights, Cameras,

Action for the future Spielbergs and Scorseses of Leitrim.

More information about North West Film School, can be found at: www.northwestfilmschool.ie or by calling 071 9650837.

