

March, 2000 Edition: IMAGINE

Monika Mitchell and Night Deposit Goes to Slamdance

An interview with on-the-scene reporter, Vinca Liane Jarrett

I had the great pleasure of viewing Monika Mitchell's film short, *Night Deposit*, last month, January 15, at the home of Christy Scott-Cashman at the 60th birthday celebration of noted Boston film celebrity and guru, David Kleiler. Later in the month, Monika and I schmoozed with the national and international film crowd attending the Sundance Festival in Park City, Utah. During the festival, it turned out that Monika's first picture had won a coveted award at the Slamdance Festival. The following are Monika's thoughts on her experiences at the festival and winning the Sparky Audience Award this year.

VLJ: Was this your first time to Sundance?

MM: No, I've gone 4 times before.

VLJ: Was this your first film there?

MM: Yes. But it was at Slamdance festival – the Anarchy On-line competition.

VLJ: What is that?

MM: A selection of 21 short films at Sundance that are particularly suited in topic or length to the festival.

VLJ: What does particularly suited?

MM: For the web, films have to be short due to public's attention span and the limitations of the technology.

VLJ: Who decides what film get into the competition?

MM: There's a committee at Slamdance.

VLJ: How did you find out about the shorts competition?

MM: This is the first year. They choose which will be on line and which will be screened.

VLJ: Did *Night Deposit* play at Park City?

MM: Yes. It screened on January 29.

VLJ: How many people attended the screening?

MM: It was packed. About 90 in total.

VLJ: I hear you actually won a prize, can you tell us about that.

MM: The prizes are determined by the internet audience who voted on internet based on a scale of 1 to 10.

VLJ: How many votes?

MM: Not sure, but more than 1,000,000 hits the week of competition.

VLJ: I voted for you. And what was your exact award?

MM: The Coveted Sparky Statuette.

VLJ: And was there a ceremony involved?

MM: Absolutely. Dwight Yocum played. And the organizers of Slamdance hosted. About 350 in attendance on Friday night (the day before the Sundance Awards). I got 10 hours of digital film for my next movie. Also a choice between a painful body piercing or a tattoo.

VLJ: And which did you choose?

MM: I want to have "Anarchy" tattooed on my butt, but only if the founder of Slamdance, Shane Kuhn, administers it himself.

VLJ: I'm sure that won't be a problem. Did you find management?

MM: After I won, there was a deluge of attention, and the first order of business was to find a creative partner/manager to help sort through the offers.

VLJ: And how many offers such help have you received?

MM: There are four that I'm seriously considering.

VLJ: Any in Boston?

MM: All the offers were L.A. based.

VLJ: What was the number one thing you came from the experience of having a film in the festival?

MM: Film doesn't have to be cutthroat and competitive. There's plenty of room for everyone to achieve plenty of recognition and achieve their cinematic goals.

VLJ: While I was there I was stunned by how many Boston film people were at the festival this year.

MM: The Boston community was hugely represented. There were a few excellent events sponsored that were very helpful. The producers of my film hosted a party on Sunday, January 23. Plus there was a Mass Film Office party on Thursday January 27. And then Brighton Avenue pictures also hosted one Saturday night, the last night of the festival.

VLJ: What was the benefit of these parties?

MM: It gave the Boston community an opportunity to download, reconvene and then reemerge as a team pursuing their projects.

VLJ: Do you think the Boston film community fared well at this year's events?

MM: Yes. Everyone seemed to do well at this year's event. Andrew Mudge had a great experience with Chicken Pox Pal and sold his film. Zach Stratus and Mary Chiochios were the rage with It Could be Worse. Johnathan Bekemeier's Titler got an honorable mention at Sundance. Sarah Green's Girl Fight got the Grand Prize at Sundance which is huge. Bill Haney's Blessed Art Thou was very well received. Also at Slamdance were Swimming (feature) and Relevio (short), which are both Boston based.

VLJ: What was your most important tool while at Sundance?

MM: My Get out of Utah Free Card.

VLJ: Where can people pick those up?

MM: They've all been distributed to my knowledge, but Geoff Hargdron is rumored to have a few left.

VLJ: So I guess you're going to make the move to L.A. now, huh?

MM: L.A. has its allure, but the Boston film community makes me feel supported, and so much like I'm part of something larger. One of the great things about seeing other Boston film makers at the festivals is you know someone's always got your back.

VLJ: And for us unhipsters, that means?

MM: Someones always looking out for you in a good way.

VLJ: What are your plans, Monika?

MM: My plans are to do the feature version of Night Deposit.

VLJ: Have you gotten a good response to that idea?

MM: Quite a bit. It's already in the works. First draft completed.

VLJ: Have you spoken to Christy Scott-Cashman, the star of your film, since you received the award?

MM: She's thrilled.

VLJ: Any plans for another showing in Boston.

MM: It's still playing on the Slamdance web site (www.slamdance.com/Anarchy). It will also be screened at N.E. Film festival at the end of March.

Monika Mitchell is a rising young film maker whose first film short Night Deposit was given the audience award at Slam Dance last week during Sundance 2000. She is a writer/director whose ambitions are destined to bring us feature length films of the highest caliber. Vinca Liane Jarrett is an attorney of counsel to the firm of Shames & Litwin in Boston focusing on film and entertainment industry issues, and a writer whose company Skriptease has consulted on dozens of films and television works around the country. You can contact Vinca by e-mail at Skriptease@aol.com or by phone at (617) 821-6772.