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The AFI DOCS Interview: RESURRECTING HASSAN Director Carlo Guillermo Proto

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

RESURRECTING HASSAN follows a family of blind street musicians in Montreal as they cope with the death of their youngest member. As their lives begin to slowly fall apart, the family make a desperate attempt to overcome their tragedy by trying to find a way to bring their fallen kin back from the dead.

RESURRECTING HASSAN screens at AFI DOCS on Thursday, June 15. AFI spoke with director Carlo Guillermo Proto about the film.

AFI: What led you to pursue documentary filmmaking?

CGP: Canada has always held a long tradition with documentary filmmaking. Itâ??s that lineage that made me start telling stories with this particular tool. The immediacy that documentary gives a storyteller is infectious and almost addictive. You donâ??t have sit in front of a blank screen or typewriter, trying to find a story from nothing like you do with fiction filmmaking. You can just go out into the world and mine something profound from what life produces.

AFI: What inspired you to tell this story?

CGP: The familyâ??s tenacity and how they almost seamlessly maneuver themselves in a slighted world through such adversity was a big inspiration. When telling this story, it was important for me to capture the familyâ??s fragility, their dreams and deepest fears, but at the same time create a framework within the story where the audience actually not only feels sympathy, but empathy, for the characters.

AFI: How did you find the subjects in your film?

CGP: When I was in film school at Concordia University in Montreal, I heard a family sing in a way that Iâ??ve never heard since. The father would hit these high falsetto notes that Iâ??d only heard Minnie Riperton or Mariah Carey sing. Mesmerized by their presence, every time I took the metro, I would miss

countless rides as I stared in awe at this blind family of three. After a year of trying to work up the courage to speak to these incredible people, I asked them if they wanted to collaborate and we immediately began work on my second-year film, where I gave each member of the family a Super 8 camera and asked them to show us what they wanted us to see. It was during this time that I first heard the story of Hassan.

Resurrecting_Hassan_2

AFI: What was a particular obstacle you faced while making the film?

CGP: Although the idea to tell this story and capture their journey to try and resurrect Hassan was the familyâ??s idea, the moment the story shifted, the family wanted to go into another direction. A massive discussion ensued. Finally, I had to remind them that they were the ones who wanted me to tell their story and we eventually came to an agreement that, if there was public interest after the film was done, that we would tell the second part of the their story in another documentary.

AFI: What do you want audiences to walk away with after screening your film?

CGP: I think initially, people read the synopsis and theyâ??re not prepared or willing to go on this journey. This film does not let you hide from your fears but confront them with an intensity that isnâ??t very popular. Those who have ventured into the cinemas to experience this familyâ??s life will come out as different people. Theyâ??ll have experienced moments that may echo their own pain and misgivings, forcing them to face something more universal than they initially suspected from a blind family of three.

AFI: Why is DC a valuable location to screen your film?

CGP: Honestly? Three words. Fugazi and Dischord Records. I was raised on the ethics of the hardcore punk scene of North America. Having gone to a Catholic School all my life, it was my only real religion. Ian MacKaye â?? who should be knighted or whatever they do to honor their local DC heroes â?? is someone whoâ??s had a big impact on me. The DC hardcore punk rock community has fueled my urge to tell difficult and socially challenging stories with respect and empathy. The bands of Dischord Records gave my art practice and storytelling a purpose. Presenting RESURRECTING HASSAN close to the Dischord headquarters is something that excites me tremendously.

AFI: What are your thoughts on what documentaries mean today in 2017?

North American audiences like their documentaries sexy. Itâ??s hard to present compelling stories that make audiences confront their deepest fears and really challenge them emotionally. I think todayâ??s audiences desperately need to be challenged to feel empathy, and not just sympathy, in order for documentaries to have a true impact.

We have to educate and advocate for difficult documentaries â?? to promote them and entice our audiences to feel and have an open dialogue about those emotions, so our communities can better themselves not just with momentary sympathy but true empathy. Films that make us feel empathy are the films that matter, the films that make us feel things that we may not be ready to feel, which can lead to real constructive change.

(Source: afi.com)

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