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Features

“Bomb” Leads Winners at Heavily Attended Cleveland Fest

by Peter Knegt (Updated 21 hours, 48 minutes ago)

Amidst 300 films from 84 different countries, the Midwest honored itself last night as the Cleveland International Film Festival came to a close. Priding itself more on the remarkable devotion of its patrons than anything else, it was quite the moment as hundreds of said patrons gathered in the Tower City Center to watch Jon Siskel and Greg Jacobs’ “Louder Than a Bomb” take both the Greg Gund Memorial Standing Up Film Competition (which honors movies about social justice and activism), and the Roxanne T. Mueller Audience Choice Award for overall best film.

“Bomb” had world premiered at the fest, and both Siskel and Jacobs were on hand at the ceremony to emotionally accept their awards, admitting they had completed post-production on the film just a week prior to its premiere at the festival. The film is a documentary about the inspiring teens of a poetry slam in Chicago.



A scene from Jon Siskel and Greg Jacobs’ “Louder Than a Bomb.”

Emotions actually ran quite high throughout the awards ceremony. The staff of the fest - led by executive director Marcie Goodman and artistic director Bill Guentzler - proudly huddled together on stage to announce to the audience that attendance for the festival had reached 71,000 - up 7% from last year, and more than double what it was just seven years ago. The rapturous response from the audience at the ceremony made it quite clear the spike was no fluke: After 34 years, the festival had obviously managed to find a passionate following in the community. It was exemplified throughout the 11 day event, where screenings of everything from obscure Central and Eastern European films to tiny documentaries found people lined up for standby tickets.

“It becomes clearer every year that we are doing something good when our festival attendance continues to grow,” Guentzler told *indieWIRE*. “Year after year of growing attendance and increased community partnership shows us that our festival is made for and by Cleveland as a whole. We truly are an audience festival and love every aspect of that term, our audience makes us more than we make the audience, and we just hope to continue that for years to come.”

Other winners at the festival included Jeff Malmberg’s “Marwencol,” which - coming off a win at its SXSW premiere just a few weeks ago - won the festival’s juried Nesnadny and Schwartz Documentary Film Competition (which comes with a \$5,000 prize), while the festival’s Central and Eastern European Film Competition saw its \$10,000 prize split between two films: Valeriy Todorovskiy’s musical “Hipsters,” from Russia, and Goran Paskaljevic’s “Honeymoons,” a Serbian-Albanian co-production about two couples attempting to emigrate out of each of those countries.

The best American Independent film award (and \$2,500) went to Marc Meyers’ “Harvest,” while the festival - which works as a qualifier for the shorts nominees of the Academy Awards - also named its two films for Oscar consideration: The live-action “Ana’s Playground,” directed by Eric D. Howell, and the animated “Lost and Found,” directed by Philip Hunt.

[DISCLAIMER: Peter Knegt served on this year’s Central and Eastern European Film Competition jury at the Cleveland International Film Festival]

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