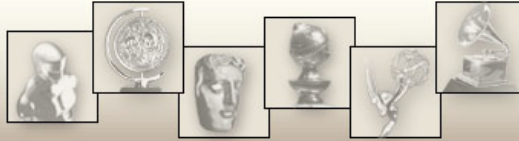


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## news

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### Spirited cash dash

The noms for the Producers, Someone to Watch, Truer Than Fiction Awards are...

Film Independent also hands out awards that come with a \$25,000 unrestricted grant. Nominees for the Producers Award, Someone to Watch Award and Truer Than Fiction Award are selected by three different committees and tap rising stars in their respective fields.

#### Producers Award

The three nominees up for the Spirit AMC/American Express Producers Award may have walked very different paths, but what they share is an enormous arsenal of patience and passion for the labors of love they shepherd against tremendous odds.

"Films like this require incredible perseverance, time and commitment," says producer [Caroline Baron](#) ("Capote," "[Monsoon Wedding](#)"). "As opposed to a studio producer, we can't develop 20 projects and hope one flies -- we have to commit to one or two projects."

After spending three years making "Capote" -- a year and a half of that in development without any financing -- "All you're left to rely on is sweat equity," says Baron. "There wasn't a day during that period that I wasn't on the phone trying to get someone to back us -- convincing people it wasn't just a small biopic and that its themes were relevant today."

"Making these kind of movies takes enormous patience. I only take that on for original filmmakers and scripts," says producer Ram Bergman, also a nominee.

"I don't spend five minutes thinking about the money part of it," he adds. "If I get excited about the script and the director, I believe you can make a movie at any budget."

Both of Bergman's latest films, "Brick" and "Conversations With Other Women," were made for less than \$500,000 with deferred fees for the writer, director and producer with the hopes they'd see something on the backend.

All of the producer nominees agree that figuring out a way to retain any ownership on these films is the trickiest part of all.

"More than a passion for the movie industry, per se, is my passion for making cutting-edge films," says the third nominee, Mike S. Ryan. "I don't necessarily look to these films for income, I look toward commercials and other sources for income."

"The standard theatrical distribution model for low-budget film is not really working anymore," he says. "We need new models of how producers like me can distribute and reap more of the benefits."

-- Kim Snyder

#### Someone to Watch Award

Low budgets are the mother of invention. For the directors nominated for this year's IFC/Acura Someone to Watch Award, cash limitations didn't hinder the projects so much as they helped cultivate their purity of vision. "The great thing about making a film under these conditions and making it away from New York or Los Angeles with nobody involved from institutions," says "Police Beat" director Robinson Devor, "is the goal becomes not about making money, but about making the most original thing you can."

Devor's second film after 1999's "The Woman Chaser," the Seattle-set "Police Beat" is an unconventional procedural centered on a West African bicycle cop that cost \$170,000.

"Being away from filmmaking norms made us a little bit mad and ambitious," continues Devor, who cobbled together the 35mm production over 7½ weeks with intermittent donations ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 each week.

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Fortunately, the film's most stellar special effect cost nothing at all. "The greatest gift that was given to us was the city itself," says Devor.

Co-directors Neill Dela Llana and Ian Gamazon also took advantage of no-cost locations to help the intensity and uniqueness of their handheld debut "Cavite," a kidnapping thriller set in the poverty-stricken Philippines. "We stole a lot, if not all our shots, so it gave our film a heightened sense of realism," says Dela Llana. "You can't get production value like that for free anywhere else in the world."

Conceived, written, shot and edited over about nine months, Jay Duplass' \$15,000 road-trip comedy "The Puffy Chair" also benefited from its intimate, no-frills production values.

"Good acting and a good story, they're not things you have to pay a lot of money for," says Duplass. (His brother Mark Duplass scripted and co-starred.) "There were no major obstacles and more importantly no real options," he adds. "I'm not really good with options. They just make me crazy and feel like I missed something better."

-- Anthony Kaufman

#### **Truer Than Fiction Award**

It is a small world after all, according to this year's Truer Than Fiction nominees. Although widely different in style and subject matter, each of the directors' documentaries explores the surprising collisions that take place when people from the U.S. venture to countries ranging from Bolivia to Iraq to Mexico to South Africa.

"Occupation: Dreamland" filmmakers Garrett Scott and Ian Olds, for example, traveled to Iraq in 2003 (fueled by "this desire to know what the fuck was going on," says Olds) and embedded themselves with a platoon from the 82nd Airborne Division near Fallujah. "It's about fantasies and illusions and what happens to them when they're forced to interact with reality," says Scott. "What happens to the personal when it collides with the geopolitical? I think this is a bridge that we're going to see more."

Indeed, Rachel Boynton's "Our Brand Is Crisis" takes up similar themes with its portrait of idealistic Washington strategists working to elect the next president of Bolivia, and the unforeseen realities that intervene.

"There has been a lot of talk about spreading democracy around the world," says Boynton. "And I think it's important that people realize what we actually mean when we're 'spreading democracy' overseas."

"Romantico" director Mark Becker views the clash between the U.S. and abroad via the journey of his primary subject, a San Francisco mariachi street performer who returns to his native Mexico. "What's strange and amazing to me," says Becker, "is how often cultures can come so close to each other without truly intersecting in a meaningful way. The film serves, in a way, as that moment of intersection."

For Thomas Allen Harris, director of "Twelve Disciples of Nelson Mandela," the divide was deeply personal. When Harris traveled from San Diego to South Africa for the funeral of the stepfather he had always rejected, "What I experienced was not at all what I had expected," he says. "I felt as if I had come home." Harris used the film to reconnect with his "father," he says, a founding member of the African National Congress, "by way of the men who were bonded to him through a common political, historical and emotional journey."

-- Anthony Kaufman

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