

Local Action
LOREN KING

First Night festival celebrates cinema

The Film at First Night festival, one of the highlights of the annual New Year's Eve arts celebration, expands the film/video program it offered last year to seven screens across the city.

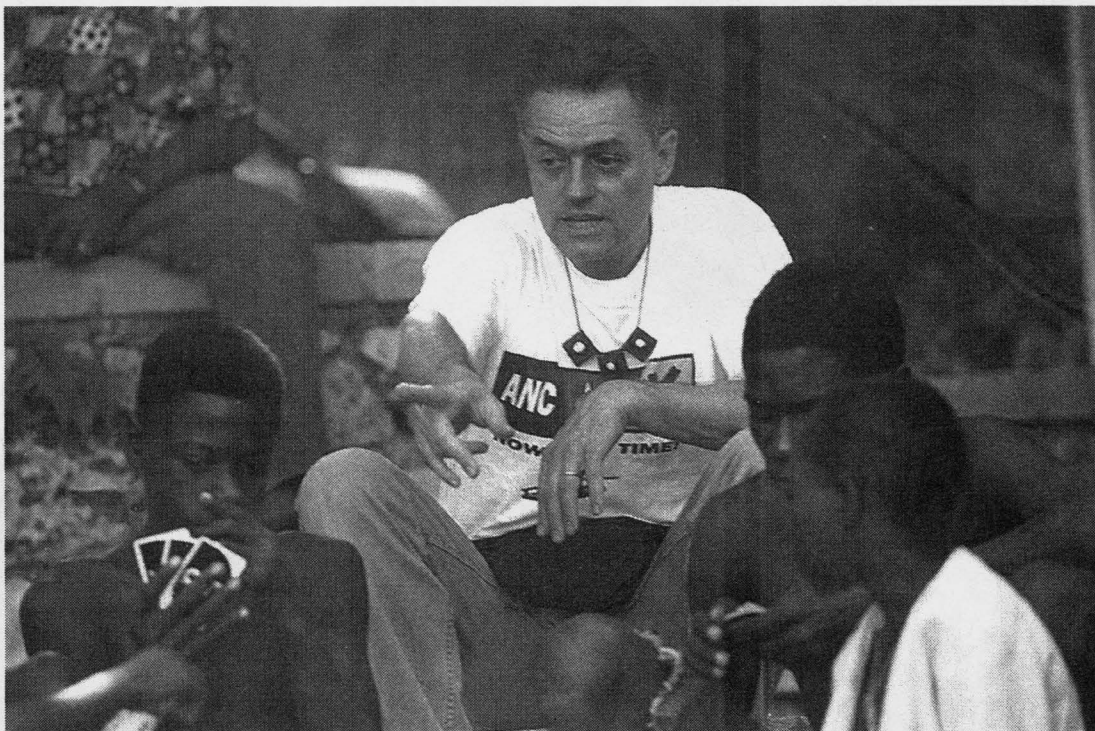
A sneak preview of **Robert Altman's** "The Company," starring **Neve Campbell**, is one of the day's highlights, along with independent features, Japanese animation, and work by local teenagers. Film at First Night is curated by longtime local art house programmer **Connie White**, whose Balcony Booking & Releasing programs the Coolidge Corner Theatre and the Pleasant Street Theatre in Northampton.

Beginning at noon on Jan. 31, the Coolidge Corner Theatre will present family-friendly films on the big screen, including "The Adventures of Robin Hood," the 65th-anniversary restored version of the Errol Flynn classic; "Tom Dowd and the Language of Music," a documentary about the life of the innovative recording engineer; "Nosey Parker," by Vermont filmmaker **John O'Brien**; and "The Story of the Weeping Camel," a Mongolian film about a family of camel herders that has to contend with a mother camel that rejects her newborn. "The Company," about the Joffrey Ballet, screens at 9 p.m.

Meanwhile, the Coolidge's screening room will show a batch of noteworthy films on DVD starting at noon and including **Jonathan Demme's** "The Agronomist," a portrait of Haiti's **Jean Dominique**, a journalist, broadcaster, and human-rights activist, and "Rana's Wedding," a romantic drama about a Palestinian girl who has to contend with the barriers of occupation in the search for her true love.

Films and video selections will screen all day at the Hynes Convention Center. "Mid-Winter Repeats," curated by the Roxbury Film Festival, presents shorts and features by filmmakers of color in Room 200, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Another room will offer Japanese anime, curated by the New England Anime Society. It begins at 1 p.m. with "Astro Boy and Kimba the White Lion" and runs until 10 p.m.

"Flippin' the Lid: Live Rock Music in Boston 25 Years Ago" will



As part of the First Night festivities, the Coolidge Corner's screening room will show noteworthy films on DVD, including "The Agronomist," by Jonathan Demme (above).

screen in Hynes Room 112. The film is made up of footage, some never before seen, taken by **Jan Crocker** of live performances of local bands and national acts visiting Boston in the '70s and '80s. The first show, at 1 p.m., will be introduced by **Tom White** of *Unnatural Axe*. The 45-minute show will screen continuously from 1 to 6 p.m. and 7:30 to 11:30 p.m.

MFA film director **Bo Smith's** "Festival of International Short Films" again screens at the Museum of Fine Arts for First Night. Programs run at 12:15, 1:30, 2:45, and 4 p.m. Screening rooms are expected to fill up quickly, and seating is first come, first served.

For more information about First Night Boston 2004, call 617-542-1399 or go to www.firstnight.org.

HONORING OUR OWN: Filmmaker **Andrew Bujalski**, whose locally shot "Funny Ha Ha" has garnered awards on the indie film festival circuit this year, has been nominated for the "Someone to Watch Award" from the Independent Film Channel's prestigious Independent Spirit Awards. Also nominated are **Ben Coccio**, director of "Zero Day," and **Ryan Eslinger**, for "Madness and Genius."

The awards will take place on Feb. 28 and will air on Bravo.

Local filmmaker **Laurel Chiten's** documentary "Touched," about Harvard psychiatrist-turned-philosopher **John Mack** and "experiencers" of alien contact, won best documentary at the Female Eye Film Festival in Toronto to earlier this month. This was the film's first festival and first award. Chiten is still in New Mexico, where her film screened at the Santa Fe Film Festival. "Touched" played earlier this year at the Museum of Fine Arts.

CHANGE OF VENUE: Local programmer **Garen Daly** has announced that the venerable Boston Science Fiction Film Festival this year will move from the Coolidge Corner Theatre to the Dedham Community Theatre in Dedham Square. Daly has produced the annual extravaganza for 12 years.

In a press release, Daly said that the Coolidge had "requested significant changes" in the festival's structure, so the decision was made to move the festival. The Boston Science Fiction Film Festival is a continuous 24-hour affair that begins on Sunday of the Presidents' Day holiday and runs

through the following Monday. This year the event will start at noon on Feb. 15 and run until noon on Feb. 16. This will be the 29th installment.

For more information, visit www.bostonsci-fi.com.

SCREENS AROUND TOWN: A weekend celebrating Chinese Cinema takes place at the MFA Jan. 9, 10, and 11 and features three epic films that capture the splendor and divergent themes of Chinese cinema: "The Accused" on Jan. 9, "Song of Youth" on Jan. 10, and "Journey to the Western Xia Empire" on Jan. 11. In late February, the MFA will present a four-show engagement of **Li Yang's** new feature, "Blind Shaft."

The MFA Film Program and the Boston Jewish Film Festival present a screening of the documentary "Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary" on Sunday, Dec. 21, at 10:30 a.m. This film replaces "The Tramp and the Dictator," which was originally scheduled in this slot in conjunction with Charlie Chaplin's "The Great Dictator," showing at the MFA from Wednesday to Dec. 26.

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