

# On the other side of the lens

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## BIO

**Age:** 28  
**Position:** Director of shorts programming for the Newport Beach Film Festival  
**Occupation:** Filmmaker; teaches at OCC, Art Institute of Orange County and Art Institute of California, Los Angeles  
**Education:** Bachelor's in interdisciplinary visual art from University of Washington; master's in animation from California Institute of the Arts in Valencia  
**Residence:** Huntington Beach for a year and a half  
**Family:** Father in Midwest; mother in Seattle; family in Midwest, mostly Iowa  
**Hobbies:** Filmmaking — animation; science fiction; dancing

## FESTIVAL'S FUTURE

*'I really think we want to become one of the preeminent film festivals . . . . People know about the film festival and, in turn, know about Newport Beach and Orange County and that brings a lot of focus on this area not only as a cultural center but also as a great place for someone to debut their film or bring business.'*

Lance Winkel brought his five-minute short to the Newport Beach Film Festival last year and is now directing the event's shorts programming.

**T**he Newport Beach Film Festival, set for Thursday through April 11, now enters its fourth year of leadership under executive director Gregg Schwenk. The event has grown since he took it over in 2000 and this year continues that trend.

Over a course of nine days, about 300 films will show — more than ever.

On Thursday, the festival's director of shorts programming, **Lance Winkel**, visited City Editor **James Meier** at the Daily Pilot office to discuss this year's festival and his experiences as a filmmaker at last year's festival and his new job running part of the show.

**What does your job for film festival entail?**

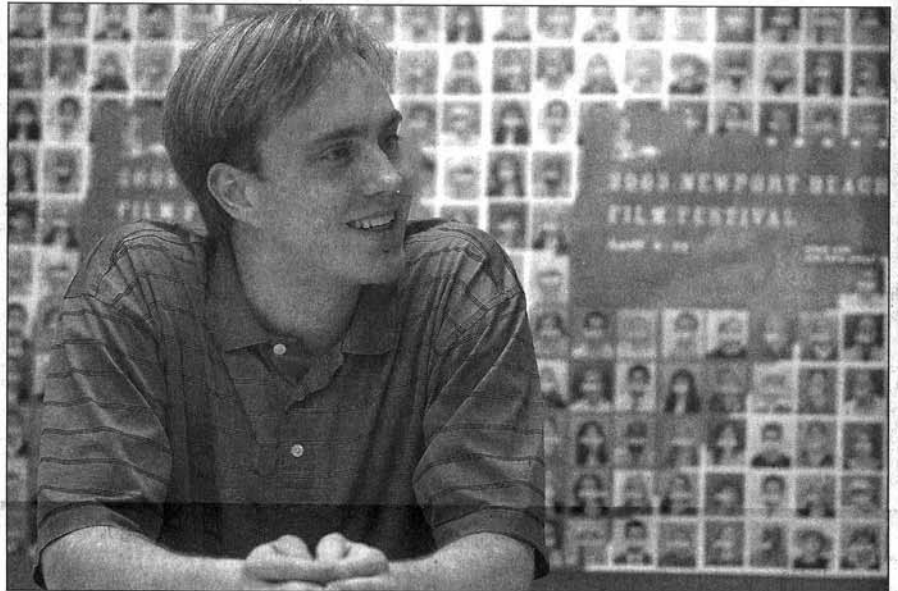
As director of shorts, it entails a lot of film watching to start off with. It also involves going to a lot of other film festivals during the year — other festivals will get different people submitting to them — so to get an idea what's out there, to keep a pulse going of what the independent filmmaking market is like.

Then, as we get closer to the festival, just watching films, and eventually deciding, out of how many great films, how many are suitable for an audience. I've seen many great films, but I know an audience wouldn't get them. At those times, you have to make tough decisions. "Is an audience going to get this? I can see where this is going, but I've had five years of filmmaking experience so I can see what they're getting at."

But once the films have been decided, putting them to programs is really just a matter of orchestrating. Then, the last two months is all filmmaker relations, making sure they know what time they need to be there, making sure they're comfortable.

I know, compared to every other festival I've been in, Newport Beach has a fantastic sense of how to keep filmmakers involved. It was just the most fun festival I went to. With "Within an Endless Sky," which was the film I made and submitted last year, I went to about 15 other festivals in Japan, Barcelona, San Antonio and a lot of places here in Southern California [Long Beach among them] and I had more fun at this festival. The award at the end was like icing on the cake; I wasn't expecting it.

But while I was here, I just constantly found great films, little treasures and



STEVE McCRANK / DAILY PILOT

then had great after parties.

**Tell me a little about your film.**

It was a five-minute short that took 2½ years to make. It was the first short computer-animated piece made in a program called Maya, which if you watched the Oscars, Alias/Wavefront, who makes Maya, got an award just for the software because it's changed the industry so much. I went through four story revisions. It's what I teach my students, how to focus on story. If you're not going to touch the audience, it doesn't matter what effects you use, what medium you use. So it took me 2½ years, but I think it was worth it.

**Are you working on anything now?**

I am writing now, but I've need a year break just to decompress. There's a business side to film that a lot of filmmakers forget about it. Unless you're lucky enough to have a name or reputation behind you that can propel it, you really have to focus on getting it to the right places and right hands at the right time.

So along with the festival and teaching, it's been a lot just making sure the film's getting seen by the right people, to try to keep it having a life expectancy and have it move on.

For right now, I'm just working on the writing and making sure it's a story I want to say.

**What can we expect at this year's film festival?**

Three hundred films. That's huge. Last year, we had 120 shorts. This year, we're up to 170. It's incredible. I believe last year was up 30%, too. Features is up to about 120. So many films, great films, Oscar-nominated films, fantastic films

that have won awards at numerous festivals, like Sundance.

Close to my heart, I think we have about 30 animated films this year. In fact, we have "Castle in the Sky," which is one of the classic films of Hayao Miyazaki. His film "Spirited Away" just won the Academy Award [for best animated film]. It's going to be the first time it's released on the West Coast on 35-millimeter with an expanded soundtrack and Mark Hamill and other big name voice talent are added to it. That's beautiful because it's great for the families.

A great Romanian film I saw at the Palm Springs International Film Festival originally, "Filantropica," is a very interesting look at politics, philanthropy and society. It's humorous, wonderful, romantic. . . .

There's a French film called "Sweat" that's really gritty, but so well shot. An action movie. It's got trucks driving through jeeps.

**What will be different at this year's festival?**

Quantity of films, quality of films. I think in terms of events and presentation, we are so far ahead of where we've been any other year. A month ago, we were where we normally would be today, but just the fact that we've had more time to develop events and get things planned out really well. That's been really ahead of the game.

We've got great sponsors this year. VV came on. Absolut as always. Sponsorship has been nice to keep the progress moving.

Gregg [Schwenk], at our first meeting, sat us down and said the modus operandi this year is to continue the process, to build momentum as we go. In three years, we've gone from something dying to something that's

suddenly — we're kind of the West Coast almost. We have a great location, a community that comes out in the Cinema Guild and embraces this film festival.

And Orange County didn't have a film festival. L.A. has a lot of film festivals, but I don't see the turnout and the people constantly asking five months ahead of time, "What's happening at the festival this year?" There's a real interest on what's happening in their background.

**What are some of the festival's longer term goals?**

I really think we want to become one of the preeminent film festivals. We have the community to support us. We have a very good presence on the Web and it's growing internationally. People know about the film festival and, in turn, know about Newport Beach and Orange County and that brings a lot of focus on this area not only as a cultural center but also as a great place for someone to debut their film or bring business.

So that's one of the long-term goals, to use this to springboard the community around the festival.

My goal as a programmer is to bring the best films to the film festival. We had twice as many entries this year as last year. We had 700 just in shorts. I think, overall, just to keep building on we have here. . . .

We see that a film festival isn't just a means for a filmmaker to show film to an audience. . . . These people spend years of their lives, sell their houses, take out second mortgages just to bring these ideas to people. . . .

There were hundreds of great films, but we just didn't have the screening time. If we had 10 more theaters, we'd probably be able to fit them all in.