

Voicings

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America.

made up of many. governed by few.

The right to be heard is a cornerstone of our way of life in the United States, but what happens when all those voices are saying something different? Can they coexist?

That is the focus of this year's Voicings Festival: Democracy.

The annual festival, which starts at 7 p.m. Monday at the Paramount Theatre, takes a look at, and a listen to, people documenting change and seeking answers through visuals and discussions.

It's an election year, but that's not the reason the festival is focusing on democracy, festival organizer Mark Eden said. It goes much deeper than that.

"This is timely in any year," Eden said.

Small-town girl speaks out on sex ed

The Dixie Chicks song "Lubbock or Leave It" depicts Lubbock, Texas, as a place where Buddy Holly is praised only in death and "The Holy Bible" reigns over life and education.

According to the documentary film "The Education of Shelby Knox," that's not far from the truth.

"The Education of Shelby Knox" tells the story of abstinence-only education in the small Texas town, and the mission of 15-year-old Shelby Knox and a mayor's Youth Commission to buck the system.

"There were 36 kids, about 10 or 12 of them were active, and about three days in to shooting, Shelby joined the Youth Commission actively," filmmaker Rose Rosenblatt said. "She was a good voice to represent the face of the Youth Commission."

It started as a movie about an issue. It became a story about the coming of age of Knox, who continues to speak on the side of comprehensive sex education.

Abstinence only

The school system's abstinence-only education policy was fueled largely by morality and little by hard science, according to Rosenblatt and fellow filmmaker Marion Lipschutz.

Despite its abstinence-only approach, Lubbock had one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancies of the cities they looked at filming in; Osseo was one such city.

Both filmmakers are parents and had concerns with the abstinence-only approach.

"The answer I'm supposed to give is, 'Well, I was completely open-minded about it and then I discovered,'" Lipschutz said. "The truth is, I think it's a rare journalist, filmmaker, writer who doesn't have an opinion. Abstinence-only is not the way that I'd want to educate my kids." She said abstinence-only is based on the notion that if young people know about sex, they will practice it more often.

Despite her predisposition to the system, the filmmaker said she didn't let it sway the way they told the story.

Educating youths

The residents of Lubbock tended to base the high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancies on stereotypes.

Shelby Knox saw through the stereotypes.

Knox, like many other young people in Lubbock, took a pledge to abstain from sex until marriage.

"She came to understand very, very quickly that there was a problem and that somehow taking this pledge wasn't going to solve the problem," Rosenblatt said.

With their own children still on their minds, Rosenblatt and Lipschutz are working on a film about the political education of three Lakota youths on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

"We both have kids, so our tendency is to work in and think in that direction," Rosenblatt said. "After all, this is the next generation coming up, and you want to impart ... what you've learned to them."

If you go...

What: "The Education of Shelby Knox" screening and discussion with directors Marion Lipschutz and Rose Rosenblatt.

When: 7 p.m. Monday.

Where: Paramount Theatre, 913 St. Germain St.

Cost: Free.

Details: www.stcloudstate.edu/voicings or www.shelbyknox.org.

Couple is out to save New Jersey

Riotous voices screamed for a change in race relations in Newark, N.J., in 1967 after police beat black taxi driver John Smith.

Forty-one years later, there is still unrest, say husband-and-wife team Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno and Jerome Bongiorno, who created



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"Revolution '67," a documentary film
"We see problems here daily," said Tibaldo-Bongiorno, a longtime Newark resident. "We wanted to understand why the city is still suffering 40 years after 1967."

Riots in Newark from July 12-17 resulted in the most deaths per capita of any of the race-related riots in 1967.

Riots fueled by race broke out across the country in about 150 communities that year, including in Minneapolis and Detroit.

Tibaldo-Bongiorno was a child living in a ward of Newark in 1967 and doesn't remember the six days of rioting that killed 26, injured 725 and resulted in almost 1,500 people arrested.

But she did have questions.

"The riots happened because of decades of problems and issues," Bongiorno said. "Whether Newark had riots or not, it would still be in the same condition."

Making the film

The duo combined archived footage of the riots with interviews with activists and historians who were there when it all went down.

The result is an almost textbook retelling that seeks to give insight to questions that still remain.

Were there really snipers that were responsible for a majority of the deaths?

Did the riots happen all because of the police beating of taxi driver John Smith?

Many people in Newark say it was the riots that brought the city to its current state of high poverty rates and joblessness, but the filmmakers of "Revolution '67" disagree.

"It was really a revelation to us to really understand all the factors that have been surrounding us for decades," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said.

America's problem

Their mission with making the film wasn't to point fingers but to find a way to make living conditions better in Newark and other communities facing similar issues.

"This is America's problem," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said.

The filmmaking pair has been screening the film across the country and have stopped in many cities with stories and issues similar to what's going on in Newark.

They say major issues of unrest are not so much about race any more than they are about poverty.

"I don't think you can end poverty, but you can bring it down significantly in this city or anywhere else," Bongiorno said.

Times are troubling and the people they talk to around the country say they are getting fed up with a lack of good jobs and dialogue that is necessary for change. But the filmmakers say change doesn't come without work.

"We wouldn't stay here if we didn't feel a sense of hope," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said. "We translate hope into work. It's a lot of work."

"We are the light at the end of the tunnel as individuals," Bongiorno said.

Next steps

Tibaldo-Bongiorno and Bongiorno are working with director Spike Lee on a fictional adaptation of "Revolution '67" with the hope of bringing their story to more people.

"You stick a love story in it, and all of a sudden my mother will watch it and she'll get wind of the riots and what really caused them,"

Bongiorno said.

They hope to bring the story of their city and the issues facing poverty and unrest in America to the tips of everyone's tongues before it's too late.

"How much will people take before they do what they did in Newark in 1967 and just start to leave? But it's not localized anymore, it's happening in communities large and small," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said.

"This dialogue needs to be ongoing because it's not going to rest on the president or whoever that person may be."

If you go...

What: "Revolution '67" screening and discussion with director Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno and film editor Jerome Bongiorno.

When: 7 p.m. April 2.

Where: Paramount Theatre, 913 St. Germain St.

Cost: Free.

Details: www.stcloudstate.edu/

voicings or www.revolution67.com.

More to come

The Voicings Festival continues at 7 p.m. April 8 at the Paramount Theatre with a screening of the film "Licensed to Kill" and a discussion with director Arthur Dong.

Dong, a gay man who was attacked in 1977 on the streets of San Francisco, depicts a portrait of America in which homophobia is deeply ingrained.

The film includes interviews with seven convicted killers behind bars for crimes against gay people, including Jay Johnson, who served part of his prison term for two murders at Minnesota Correctional Facility-St. Cloud. He is now serving his life sentence at the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Stillwater.

Johnson was convicted of murdering Joel Larson, 21, on July 31, 1991, and former State Sen. John Chenoweth on Aug. 10, 1991, in Minneapolis.

Nelson Mandela's and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's official photographer George Hallett lead a discussion at 7 p.m. April 9. Hallett documented Mandela's rise to power in South Africa in the '90s.