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No Cannes do

Zombiedance, Canned offer other options to SXSW fest

By By Brian Clark (Daily Texan Staff)

The letter has finally arrived. After months of labor and compromise, three maxed-out credit cards and a \$30 entry fee, this is the moment of truth. A second of nervous anticipation, a few swift tears and the verdict appears in black and white: We greatly appreciate your submission to the South by Southwest film festival, however we have received a record number ...



[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

By now the letter is already a crumpled heap in the trash. The crushed producer accepts his defeat and prepares to move on, hoping he will have better luck next year. But filmmakers Chuck Trend, Scott Calonico, Chad Duerksen and Gill Hebert were not ready to take this path.

Rejected by SXSW and dissatisfied with the selection process at many major film festivals, they decided to start their own. While still relatively new, Zombiedance - a festival focusing on the undead - and Canned, which shows films rejected by SXSW, are both gaining momentum as alternatives that provide filmmakers worldwide a chance to showcase work that just would not fit into SXSW.

"All we're really trying to do is supply really good movies a place to be shown," Canned co-founder Hebert said. "Last year, we got a lot of entries with low budgets that had great scripts. Just because they can't afford the high production values doesn't mean they shouldn't be shown."

Both festivals started after their founders' films were rejected from SXSW. Zombiedance co-founders Calonico and Trend made a Super 8 film called The Collegians are Go! to promote their punk band. After SXSW rejected it, the duo created Zombiedance, using the punk scene and local record shops to promote their festival. After their film went on to win awards at national festivals, including the United States Super 8 film festival and MicroCinefest, the festival started to gather national recognition. However, Trend said the real exposure came when SXSW threatened legal action against the festival, which was originally called ZXZW, for using their name.

"Anything that has First Amendment implications becomes a much bigger deal - and essentially, they were trying to 'censor' the idea of us poking fun at them, while at the same time competing with them, by claiming 'ZXZW' was somehow their intellectual property," Trend said. "It was annoying to us personally, but as far as casting us as the 'underdog' in terms of public opinion, it helped."

Herbert and Duerksen encountered the same problem with Canned, originally called Canned by Southwest, and ended up spending three hours a day on the phone with lawyers the first year of the festival. The lawsuit threats were a nuisance to both festivals; however SXSW co-founder Louis Black said the action was necessary

"Legally, we own the name South by Southwest, and if people start using variants on that name, we risk

losing it," Black said. "We have nothing against the festivals, but in choosing to own the name, there are certain things that we have to do to maintain that ownership."

After some resistance, both festivals changed their names accordingly and have been running smoothly since. Zombiedance, currently in its fourth year, is a three-hour festival devoted to short films whose subject is the undead.

Despite the growing level of competition and mainstream submissions, Black said that SXSW is just as independent as when it started, still judging its 2,300 hundred entries based solely on merit.

"The bigger a festival gets, the more people want to be in it, and the level of quality changes," Black said. "However, I'm personally offended by the notion that we don't support independent film. We look at the films, and we pick what we like; it doesn't matter if it's Hollywood or independent. Questions about budget are never asked."

Either way, Zombiedance and Canned hope to continue to provide an outlet for the films that get lost in the heated competition of SXSW. However, while the festivals get entries from around the world, both said they want to see more work from Austin filmmakers.

"Our heart lies with the local people," Duerksen said. "We actually got less locally this year than we did from California, which was disappointing."

Both festivals are expected to draw even bigger crowds this year, a trend Calonico said he thinks will continue as more people become disillusioned with major film festivals.

"The wheels are turning," Calonico said. "As what used to be alternative becomes more and more mainstream, people will start looking for the new alternative."

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