

Getting Reel

We frequently hear video is the medium of youth communication; equipment is cheap and accessible, throwing stuff on the web is quick and kids practically emerge from the womb able to program electronic devices. But how often do we truly see the visions of youth on the big screen? Sure, any kid can upload their personal stories to YouTube, but there's something empowering about seeing your work displayed publicly—and knowing your voice is being heard—regardless of how old you are.

"To pop in that shiny disc and have the things that come up on screen be their thoughts, images and ideas . . . that's powerful," says Mike Sheehan, the director of Beatboard, a local youth leadership organization.

The Reel Youth Film Festival gives local and global perspectives

It's this idea of empowerment that led Beatboard to host the Reel Youth Film Festival in Victoria this week. The festival, which is touring 24 communities in Canada and the U.S., consists of films made by youth aged 19 and under. The night's program was culled from over 300 submissions from all over the world by a youth jury; topics tackled by the filmmakers include racism, food production, beauty and poverty. There is also a screening of *Goonda*, a film the Vancouver-based Reel Youth organization made during a visit to India, where they gave cameras to kids living on the streets of Mysore in order to document their lives—plus a question and answer period with local filmmakers, live music and a chance for the audience to vote for their favourites to help filmmakers win prizes and scholarships. "It's really about getting youth voices out to the world and showcasing young peoples' ideas about how to make the world better," says Sheehan.

The Reel Youth program changes depending on which city it is visiting, as each screening has 25 percent local content, something Sheehan says is "a way to bolster enthusiasm for the show, keep its integrity and honour the communities it's shown in." Six films by Victoria youth will be shown, including two by local filmmaker Otilie Short: a fictional piece called *How Do You Spell Karma* ("It was the first film I'd ever made by myself," she says) and a one-minute documentary on meat production entitled *Our Meat*. The 17-year-old, who hopes to study creative writing and film at Concordia University next year, says she's excited to see her stuff on the big screen.

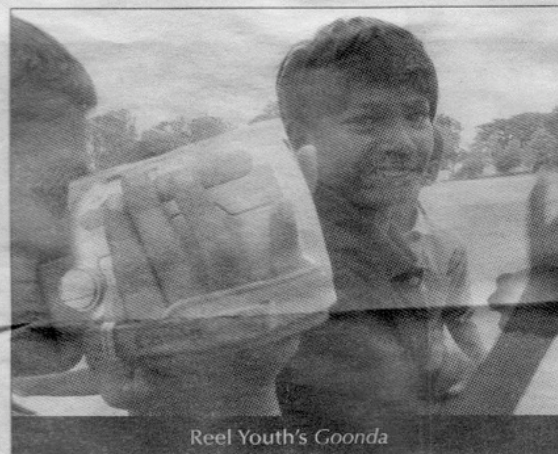
"I think it's a really cool thing to have local submissions and have high school films shown, because it's rare that you get to see your stuff in the cinema," says Short, who got into filmmaking because her dad was an editor for NBC and they had equipment around the house. "It gives you a lot of confidence."

But for Sheehan, it's about more than giving youth confidence; it's about showing the world a different perspective—often a more frank, honest one. "I think youth have a superpower when they get behind a camera that adults don't have," he says. "Because they're young, adults are inclined to be more supportive. Any adult or youth will give a more genuine and honest answer and it allows the youth to be more bold."

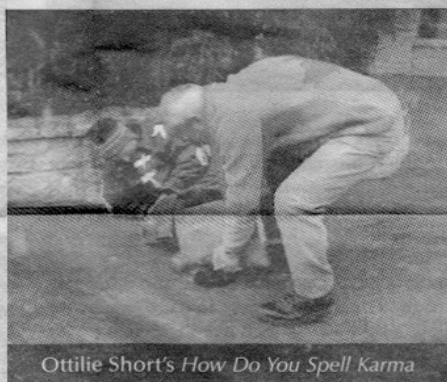
Hosting the Reel Youth Film Festival is just one of the initiatives Beatboard has taken on. The four-year-old group, which describes itself as "a youth leadership, new media and contemporary arts education organization," was born from Sheehan's ambition to "align my livelihood and my values." Sheehan has been involved in youth education programs for the last 14 years, ranging from his time with the Nova Scotia Secondary School Students' Association during his teens to representing the Earth Charter Youth Initiative at the UN's Commission on Sustainable Development. Other projects the local group is involved in include hosting a youth dance in Duncan featuring Vancouver MC Curtis Clearsky on November 24, plus working with groups like the City of Victoria Youth Council and Challenge Day, a North America-wide program designed to make positive change within high school cultures. Sheehan says the idea to create Beatboard partially came from frustrations he had while in school. "It was hard for me to sit still in school. Classes were really designed for visual learners. Kinetic learners had a hard time succeeding," he recalls. "I set out on a path to really explore experiential learning both within and outside of school."

With programs like Beatboard and the Reel Youth Film Festival, it looks like other kids will have a chance to go down that path, too.

—Amanda Farrell



Reel Youth's *Goonda*

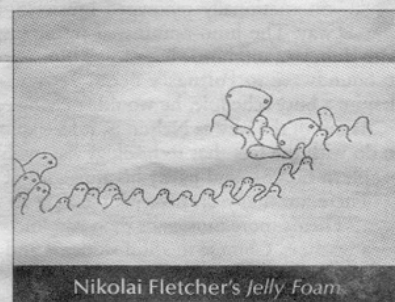


Otilie Short's *How Do You Spell Karma*



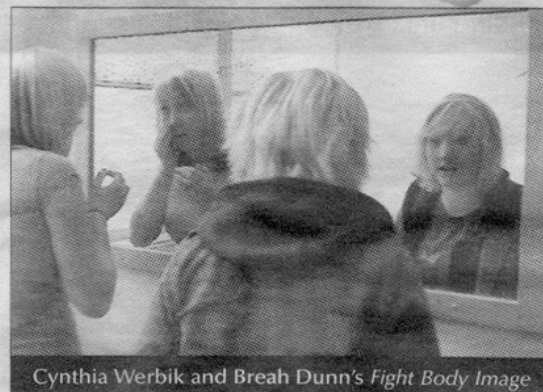
Phoebe Nezil's *Napoleon & Josephine*

Arts



Nikolai Fletcher's *Jelly Foam*

Reel Youth Film Festival
7pm Tuesday, November 27
Victoria Event Centre, 1415 Broad
Tickets \$5 youth, \$10 adult
Beatboard.org • Reelyouth.ca



Cynthia Werbik and Breah Dunn's *Fight Body Image*