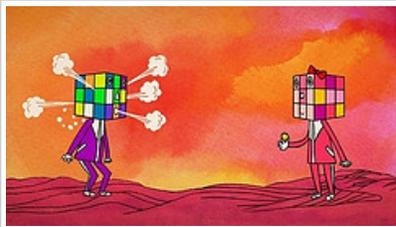



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SUNDAY, MARCH 28, 2010

Saturday's Kid's Program!



In his onstage introduction, Fest Director Donald Harrison emphasized that, program

title notwithstanding, "[The Kids Are Alright](#)" was designed to entertain audience members of all ages, not just children.

He was spot-on with that assertion, as the eight selections clearly held the attention of adults, many of whom arrived at the Michigan Theater without little ones in tow--a visible affirmation of Harrison's statement.

I've never programmed a film festival. Where to begin? First up was Rebecca Sugar's [Singles](#), at once playful and existential. The main character is trying to build himself a sandwich, typically a mundane undertaking, but which here requires intense self-examination. I'm not certain if any kids grasped its deeper meaning, but they loved Sugar's inviting animation.

[Magic Cube and Ping-Pong](#) explored the cityscape, a frequent theme, intentional or not, of [The Kids Are Alright](#). In this animation from Beijing filmmaker Lei Lei, colors flow and shapes shift, while an instrumental version of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall" underpins the onscreen movement, a not so subtle jab at the human impact of China's rapid metamorphosis.



Earlier this year, my six-year old daughter Zoë and I had a sneak peek of Yvette Ebery's [Jillian Dillon](#), the tale of a lovely being who is part hippo, part platypus. But as a hippoplatypus, Jillian doesn't fit in, until that unique pedigree allows her to rescue some animal pals from a watery demise. Brilliant sets and scene transitions, a marvelous original song, and a message that being different is OK made this well-choreographed puppetry a big hit with the youngsters.

In Debra Sea's experimental [balance](#), we see the world through the "eyes" of a bicycle tire, which spins along in ever-changing conditions. Given its unusual perspective, some adult film-goers wondered aloud if what they were seeing was real. Sea described in the after-program Q&A how she used a sport mount and gaffer's tape to hold a Flip camera snugly on the bike. Vibrant and decidedly original.

One young audience member sitting close by me said of Aaron Wendel's [bric-a-brac](#): "This is really freaky!" Freaky good, I agreed, due to the crayon rubbings Wendel generated from what he later explained in the Q&A were thousands of two-layer drawing that seamlessly mesh together images of objects like cassette tapes, keys, and coins into a delicious, three-minute animated dance.

"Eerie" describes [The Zoo](#). Set in a long-abandoned Los Angeles zoo, the documentary from Katherin McInnis follows people as they explore what today is a picnicking space. Now we know how captive animals must see us from inside their cages. It was unlike anything else in the program.

It has a silly-sounding name, but Danielle Ash's [Pickles for Nickels](#) is serious business, possibly this program's most "adult" film. Weaving cardboard figures, animation, and other techniques – along with potent music – it traces changes within an urban space and the resulting effect on its inhabitants. I'd enjoy watching this one again because it merits further study.

When I saw Wladyslaw Starewicz's 1934 epic [The Mascot](#) online some time ago, I was stunned. Technically advanced for its era and with a multi-layered storyline of a stuffed animal brought to life and sent forth into – here's that theme again – the fearsome big city. My daughter sought reassurance during the frightening parts, but the film contained humorous scenes, too. Michigan's own [Little Bang Theory](#) – featuring [Frank Pahl](#) – accompanied this black-and-white masterwork with the live world premiere of a dazzling original score fashioned out of ukulele, melodica, glockenspiel, and other instruments.

As we stood up to leave, I saw many smiles.

-Tim Pulice

He's a University of Michigan alumnus, and has worked as a professional writer since 2000. Tim covers U-M for [Examiner.com](#), writes about the state of Michigan in his blog, [The Pulice Report](#), and is the founder of the social media network [Michigan Creatives](#). Pulice has been an on-air music host at [WDET-FM](#) (Detroit Public Radio), and helped [AAFF](#) as a pre-screener the last two years.

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