

## Interviews: Short Film Directors at the 50th Chicago International Film Festival

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CHICAGO – The opportunity to sample new filmmakers is one of the true pleasures of the 50th Chicago International Film Festival, and this year's crop of City & State short films, made in either Chicago or Illinois, was no exception. Directors Lonnie Edwards, Joel Benjamin, Meghann Artes and Robert Carnilius represented the area.



**Lonnie Edwards, Director of "Parietal Guidance"**



Parietal Guidance

*Photo credit: Chicago International Film Festival*

"Parietal Guidance" was a shot across the bow of the difficulties facing certain neighborhoods in Chicago told through the filter of a young girl just trying to walk home without harassment.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What was the incident, or series of incidences, that inspired your film?

**Lonnie Edwards:** I'm a single father, and take my kids to school every morning. I just started to observe interactions between them and other kids. And while my kids and I are close, there are some things I know they don't tell me – just like I didn't tell everything to my parents. I imagined following the girl [Edward's daughter portrayed the character] as she experienced things individually. The question becomes, who will know any of this, and how is she feeling inside about it?

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What's the best advice someone gave you about directing, and how do you use that advice in your filmmaking?



Lonnie Edwards &amp; daughter Alinah of 'Parietal Guidance'

*Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com*

**Edwards:** I got some great insight from a really good friend of mine, who lives in Los Angeles, and he told me the best thing to do as a director is not to listen to anything. Do what you're going to do, allow people to give counsel while you're shooting, but do what you're going to do first.

This is my first film, and we've gotten into 18 national and international film festivals, and have won eight awards. When I first started it, I was looking at director's blogs, panels and advice forums, and they all specifically told me things about the filmmaking process, and how hard it was to get into festivals. You just need to make a good film. You put the work in, and it just works out.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What's the first thing you talk about when you talk about your love for film and filmmaking?

**Edwards:** Perception. My connection to film as art is about perception, because art in all forms is about that. Just being able to do that, and show my film to the masses, is a great thing. I'm blessed and happy to be able to do that. My love for film allows me to get everything out of my head, like going to a shrink. [laughs]



**Meghann Artes, Director of "Speed Dating"**





Speed Dating

*Photo credit: Chicago International Film Festival*

“Speed Dating” is a true original as a film, through the concept of coupling at a speed dating session. Live action actors are used as stop motion puppets, and the director mines new visual territory.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What was the visionary inspiration for the look of ‘Speed Dating’?

**Meghann Artes:** It’s hard to say because so many things came together at the same time. I experienced speed dating ten years ago, and pitched the idea to my husband, and it came out totally different than what I remembered. He told me to go and write it, and had the opportunity to use the facilities of the DePaul University Film School, where I teach film and animation. They have amazing grants, opportunities, and the timing was perfect to create what I envisioned. It all came together from there, it became an amazing collaboration between the staff, faculty and students.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you are an academic and artist, what do you think the role of academia is in the creation of art?

**Artes:** In the instance of filmmaking, it’s very supportive. In my role as an instructor, I get the opportunity to actually make a film – the administration expects it, so I really need to do it to keep my job. I love that. The support was amazing and I’m in the best filmmaking atmosphere at DePaul.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Which screenplay in the history of cinema would you like to direct, and why?

**Artes:** It would have to be something visual, like ‘The Wizard of Oz’ or ‘Alice in Wonderland.’ That type of film lends itself to an imaginary, behind-the-curtain element that makes you want to dig deeper.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is the first thing you talk about when you talk about your love for film and filmmaking?

**Artes:** Making the impossible possible. Stop motion is my baby, and pixellation is the technical term for it, there is a whole new world of possibilities. And it gets me excited for the future.



**Joel Benjamin, Director of “Drifting”**



Drifting

*Photo credit: Chicago International Film Festival*

“Drifting” is an unforgettable piece of animation, combining cartoon animal archetypes with a horrific plane crash, and a sense of emotional longing.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is your fascination with plane crashes, since the crash in ‘Drifting’ was so specific?

**Joel Benjamin:** [Laughs] This is more than you probably need. I got a school assignment when I was 15 years old, in which I had to write about a fake vacation. So instead of using a fake car, I imagined a fake airplane. I called a local airport for research, and the proprietor said I could come down and take a lesson. I went up in the air in a tiny Cessna with the guy, and afterward my Dad and I started taking flying lessons. I got all the way to the point where I would solo, but I was 16 years old and thought, “why am I getting my pilot’s license?”



Joel Benjamin &amp; Meghann Artes

*Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com*

It was always terrifying, when I was in these small planes and would shake around. I guess it always stuck with me. I'm also interested in the power of water. When I was growing up in Iowa, and the farmlands would flood, I was fascinated with those fields underwater.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What were the animation influences of the design of the cartoon animals in your film?

**Benjamin:** British animator Julia Pott – I love her character design. She did 'Belly' and 'The Event.' I used animals because they were easier to animate than people, and they fit in the context of the story.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Which screenplay in the history of cinema would you like to direct, and why?

**Benjamin:** Maybe because I was just talking about it, but Chris Sullivan's 'Consuming Spirits.' His dialogue is fantastic, but his version is so good I can't imagine directing it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is the first thing you talk about when you talk about your love for film and filmmaking?

**Benjamin:** That's easy, storytelling. I just want to tell stories. It's a stock answer, but for me it's really true.



**Robert Carnilius, Director of "Jaspa' Jenkins"**



Jaspa' Jenkins



Photo credit: Chicago International Film Festival

“Jaspa’ Jenkins” is a surreal dream, commenting on racial stereotypes over the years, through the filter of another time and space.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is the core layer of your piece, the truth that everything emulates from in the film?



Robert Carnilius of ‘Jaspa’ Jenkins’  
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

**Robert Carnilius:** You have to be really critical of what is being sold to you in the media. Personally, I dealt with internalizing those messages, such as African-American characteristics like frizzy hair, dark skin, wide nose and lips are bad. They’re not, but the media has always portrayed it in that way. I took those messages that I had to work hard to get rid of, and turned them into this film.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Which screenplay in the history of cinema would you like to direct, and why?

**Carnilius:** I love ‘Imitation of Life,’ the Douglas Sirk remake. I can’t say I’d do it justice, but I’m so passionate about that film it’s the first answer that comes to mind.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is the first thing you talk about when you talk about your love for film and filmmaking?

**Carnilius:** Social issues are my passion, and I’m very emotional about it. It’s hard to me to get involved in something if I’m not passionate about it, so all my previous and future films have a special place in my heart. So passion is the first thing I talk about, and that involves dealing with social issues.

The final regular screening night of the 50th Chicago International Film Festival is on October 22nd, 2014, and features the “Best of the Fest” – the award winners of the overall event. [Click here](#) [17] for films, information and to purchase tickets.



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