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## **NJ FROG CROAKS OUT LOVE SONG; MICRO-BUDGET FILM SHINES IN ASBURY PARK**

Against all odds, Jersey-Bred Guerilla Filmmakers Find Spotlight at Garden State Film Festival.

At this year's annual Garden State Film Festival (March 25-28<sup>th</sup>), the coveted Saturday evening slot at The Paramount Theater in Asbury Park will be occupied by an unlikely gem: *Motel Americana: Vol. II*, an anthology of gritty, surprising motel stories made by three New Jersey Filmmakers.

Made with no budget to speak of, the shorts in the collection, all set in one dubious room off the Turnpike, run the gamut of film genres—horror, noir, gangster, comedy, surrealism, and love story—to weave a tale of mangy and sordid characters clinging to the underbelly of society.

Far from throwing their line into the mainstream, filmmakers Joseph Christiana, William Bourassa Jr. and Benjamin Valentine pull their ideas from the most oblique and disparate corners of the human spectacle: bullet-proof glass, fully loaded clown shoes, Mike Hammer nightmares, disembodied New Jersey knees, arch conservative doppelgangers, long beards long gone, and *that strange sound coming from the motel room next door*. All that, all that and more, went into the kiln.

The film that emerged is a triumph of micro-budget filmmaking, defying the viewer to figure out how something so "cheap" could look so good . . . how so many old references, mixed together, could expose such freshness. The truth is, these films feel like rough, sparkling life in all its elbow-throwing, slap-in-the-kisser power—because they were made on weekends and weeknights, after the kids went to bed or before the kids woke up, before and during and after jobs, before and during and after "life."

So what's a no-budget film, literally torn from life, doing on the dance floor at the big ball on a Saturday night? What makes this Cinderella so pretty in her tattered clothes? Well, an account from A.O. Cloud, the film's accountant, might offer some insight. He offers these words at the end of the notes included in the limited edition version of the DVD (which also includes original artwork from Joe Christiana):

These filmmakers, like all passionate individuals, paid the proverbial blood, sweat, and tears for the privilege of living alongside their imagined worlds. Then, when they walked off the set and back into their lives, they reaped the reward of a lifetime: wakefulness . . . being fully open to participation in the entire human affair. You become what you do, what you are. As you practice the art of making film with no money, you work the basic mines, extracting pure minerals. You tend to dialogue, making sure it says what it has to and no more. You look at faces, really tending to them. You paint on walls and bodies. You straighten the light. You think deeply about exactly how long a lover should mourn the loss of her loved one . . . and what this might actually look like and sound like.

From this doing, this making of free and passionate films, you bring new existential skills to your own free life. You learn to tend to story—your own and others'. You learn to act with grace when that's called for or to perfect anger, which is also sometimes called for. When you practice over and over again crying over loss or kissing under wildest gain . . . when you coach someone to punch more honestly, to love the rough edge of a curse word, to hold another body better . . . you yourself get better. You can't help it. Making low budget films is making life, inch by everloving inch. Or at least that's what I learned when I spent a little time in the Motel Americana.

For more information or to schedule an interview with the filmmakers, please email A.O. Cloud at [cloudassistant@gmail.com](mailto:cloudassistant@gmail.com) or visit [www.christianaproductions.com](http://www.christianaproductions.com).