



IPOD SHUFFLE



Indie-Director Olaf de Fleur

By Williams Cole



Olaf de Fleur with Ladyboys from *Queen Raquela*

With more than 20 long and short films to his credit, and two to three projects in production at any given time, you'd assume Olaf de Fleur, president of Poppoli Pictures, is a flashy Hollywood type. Instead, de Fleur is a young Icelander with a slick Web site and a workaholic can-do attitude. And it's paid off.

He's just signed three U.S. actors for his next Icelandic feature "*Higher Force*": Michael Imperioli (*Sopranos*), Robert Thosi Chan (*The Departed*) and Lu Yu (*Hollywood Ending*). Not bad for a guy who says he realized early in his filmmaking career that "most people with money are not interested in what you are doing," says de Fleur. "Therefore, you have to behave like a big studio, do everything to imitate the big shots – and perhaps you'll become one."

What he became was established.

Shining Star won the "Best Documentary" in the Icelandic Film Awards in 2004, and *Africa United* won the same prize in 2005. Olaf and his team are currently working on two international documentaries and his first feature, *Queen Raquela* – a film about Filipino "Ladyboys" that has shot worldwide. de Fleur dubs his style—feature film meets documentary—as "visiomentary."

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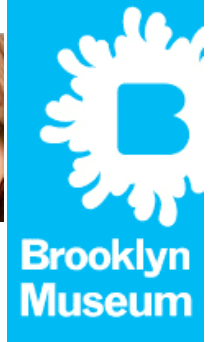


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It's one method of separating himself from the pack. Another is his Web site — www.poppoli.com. His work boasts professional-looking posters, slick trailers, behind-the-scenes tidbits, photos and a link to a store that sells his DVDs. He also has an extensive Web presence on Myspace, Youtube, IMBD and other sites. "The Internet is very good to get the word out to people," he says, "but it's a less effective way to get investors or distribution for your films."

Yet de Fleur didn't even go to film school. He took a loan to create his company, which is based partly in Iceland, with co-producers and based located in Europe, New York and Asia.

That international flavor is evident in *Queen Raquela*. "I produce documentaries in a way I call "film style," he says. "Why not make narratives with real people and have them "act" themselves and the stories from their lives? Then, label the film as a drama, because that's what it is." Part of his reasoning is logistical. Films are marketed by specific genres—drama, comedy, Western, action—so he tailors his documentaries into these categories. "It's better than a deal with a distribution system that doesn't get docs."

His gamble worked.

Aside from documentary awards, he's been funded by most major Scandinavian film and TV foundations and had his films broadcast on television and small theatrical releases throughout Europe. His films have also been seen in festivals from Cinequest in California to Bangkok and Buenos Aires. "I'm reluctant to give a film to a distributor, unless I'm sure that it will be treated respectfully," says de Fleur. "I'd rather do it myself, even though it will be hard."

How does de Fleur deal with the challenges of sustaining a life as a filmmaker? "Results have to be beside the point," he says, "Otherwise, you'll just get the Filmmaking Bitterness, which is the widest spread disease among filmmakers. It will break you down. You've got to keep going, like winning the game is the most important thing, but knowing that there may be no award."

Still, he admits he works hard to keep his company and his vision alive. "I only do my gym thing, meditation and kiss my mom on Sundays. Apart from that, it's film life."

His philosophy? "Do many films, make tons of mistakes. "Early on, quantity is always better than quality. So what if your film is only 80%? Do it, get it out, it will be dead in few years anyway. Eventually, you will develop into quality stuff."

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