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## Movies



Story Tools:

### SXSW film fest is the stuff of dreams

Web Posted: 03/10/2004 12:00 AM CST

**Joe O'Connell**  
Special to the Express-News

AUSTIN — The South by Southwest Film Festival is a dream factory for Jeffrey Travis and thousands like him.

Last year, SXSW showed a two-minute film, "What's Wrong With This Picture?" that Travis shot on a camcorder in his kitchen with his 3-year-old son, Aidan, starring alongside an animated stick figure. And filmmaker Robert Rodriguez pulled Travis from a crowd to see rough scenes of then-in-production "Spy Kids 3D: Game Over."

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- SXSW Film Festival highlights

Fast-forward to 2004: While the SXSW Film Festival, which runs Friday through March 20, gets into full swing, Travis will be shooting sample scenes for a potential Fox television pilot, "Except for Danny," based on that very stick-figure story. What a difference a year makes.

Now consider Travis' story: Mexico-born, Argentina-raised guy with a pair of engineering degrees and two published books about software gets laid off by an Austin high-tech company and decides to follow his dream to make movies. Asks questions. Buys Rodriguez's how-to book. Gets together with like-minded friends and makes shorts as a personal film school.

Then one of those films makes it into SXSW.

"It gave a lot of validity to the short," said Travis, who four years ago watched the short-film showcase thinking "that could be me." "It played last and it was good to hear people laugh."

Atomfilms.com scoops the short up for its Web site. A Fox development exec sees it and is soon on the line with an offer. Seth Kaplan, a guy Travis sat next to at one of the ubiquitous SXSW barbecues, is on board as a producer.

"You always hear the hype about the Internet changing the world — blah, blah, blah — but in this case it really happened," said Travis, 32, a descendant of Alamo hero William B. Travis and the son of missionaries.

Credit it to the SXSW film schmooze-fest and some good advice from San Antonio native Rodriguez.

"I got from him the idea that you don't need a lot of money to get started," Travis said "You just need good attitude and a vision."

The Film Festival, like its music counterpart, thrives on that attitude as it showcases independent films that may never make it to the local megaplex while allowing the wannabes to mingle with the already-ares.

A concurrent SXSW Film Conference runs March 12 to 16 at the Austin Convention Center and allows the newbies to hear directly from their idols in a string of panels — more than 50 this year — and parties.

This year's highlights include one-on-one conversations with filmmakers Richard Linklater and Jim Jarmusch, and appearances by "Seabiscuit" director Gary Ross, "Animal House" director John Landis and "Silence of the Lambs" director Jonathan Demme.

Even with the film gods in attendance, the real draw of the SXSW Film Festival is the array of films. This year they number more than 170 and include a sneak peek at Kevin Smith's "Jersey Girl," Lars Von Trier's "Dogville," spaghetti Western legend Sergio Leone's "Duck You Sucker" and Landis' "Slasher."

Politics is a special emphasis this year for documentaries at SXSW, with the talked-about "Bush's Brain," which examines political strategist Karl Rove and is based on the book by Wayne Slater and James Moore.

And, as busy as he'll be, Travis has another short film showing. It's called "Elegy" and features something you'll only see at SXSW: a rhyming clown that Travis refers to as "Dr. Seuss' nightmare."

*Tickets can be purchased at the door for individual film screenings. For a full schedule of both the film festival and conference, go to [sxsx.com](http://sxsx.com).*

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