

The Other Venice Film Festival's Abbot Awards Announced!

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Director, Producer and Writer Craig Serling screens his first feature film at The Other Venice Film Festival

Below, IFA catches up with Oscar Winner Tony Bill after receiving his Local Maverick Spotlight Award.



Above, IFA Correspondent Aurelia Schepers chats with Abbot Winner Kevin Keresey. Below, Camryn Manheim gives her take on The Other Venice Film Festival.

The Other Venice Film Festival's Abbot Awards Announced!

Written By: Naomi Wiggins



With a huge crowd and a sense of nervous anticipation permeating the building, the 4th Annual The Other Venice Film Festival came to an impressive and tearful close Sunday

night with the festive and celebratory Abbot Awards ceremony.

Beginning the end was the staged reading of *Riding the Pine*, a screenplay by Gary Ellenberg, festival producer and coordinator. Giving the festival their support, Camryn Manheim, Steven Weber, Chris Mulkey, Paul Johannson, Will Wallace, Ben Parrillo, Sean Fenton, Zachary Kinter and other noted actors ran through the script before an audience in the upstairs theater of the Electric Lodge. Upon completion of the reading, actors and audience gave their thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of the "Riding the Pine" script. Here's to hoping writer Gary Ellenberg has a thick skin!

Following the reading was a cocktail hour during which the anxious filmmakers began to arrive. The Modeens took to the stage to dazzle with their musical innovation but the shiny trophies glistening persistently on the side of the stage continuously reminded the crowd of the award ceremony to come.

Before diving into the awards, previous Local Maverick Spotlight Award winner Chris Mulkey stepped up to the mic to deliver this year's Local Maverick Award. After a brief introduction, Tony Bill came to the stage, followed closely by his two young daughters. This Oscar-winning Hollywood Maverick (producer of 1973's *The Sting*) gave a hearty thank you to the town that had long given him inspiration and graciously accepted his award.

As Bill took his seat, Festival Producer AJ Petrala took over the microphone and the awards began.

Winning for Best Short was *A Better Life*. Executive Producer Louie Fazzari, Writer/Director Luis Fernandez Reneo and Producer Alex Bovicelli accepted the award with loud shouts and humble tears. Executive Producer Louie Fazzari choked up, professing how honored and happy he was to simply be able to make this poignant and meaningful short.

Best Short Audience Choice went to *Available Men*. Writer/Director David Dean Bottrell didn't make the ceremony but caught up with IFA afterwards. This marked the 13th festival award for *Available Men*, a successful run by any standard.

The award for Best Documentary Short went to *Downwinders: The People of Parowan*. Director Jake White took the issue of nuclear weapons testing to the courts. With the money he received from the government, White then made a documentary chronicling the lasting and fatal ramifications of nuclear testing on the town of Parowan in Southern Utah.

Best Documentary Feature went to *Behind the Mask*. Director Shannon Keith came to the stage and made an impassioned plea for the awareness of the sensitive issue around which her film revolves – animal rights.



Below, Abbot Award Winners Jethro Rothe-Kushel and Spawn MD of The Libra Project give an impromptu beat-box performance.



Movie Stills from Craig Serling's feature debut, Jam



A story of star-crossed love and the hullaballu surrounding big weddings, *Cake: A Wedding Comedy* proved to be an audience favorite on Sunday night, winning for Best Feature Audience Choice. Writer/Director Will Wallace accepted the award, an infectious grin splashed across his face.

Writer/Director Kevin Keresey had passed on several offers for his screenplay, *The Rat Thing*, choosing instead to make the movie himself, to make the movie he wanted to make. It seems sticking to your gut can pay off for *The Rat Thing* won for Best Feature overall.

The final award of the night, Best Music Video Audience Choice, The Libra Project - "Bridge". An excited and eclectic group, The Libra Project poured onto the stage with passion, gratitude and joy quipping that it pays to have all your friends come and vote for you.

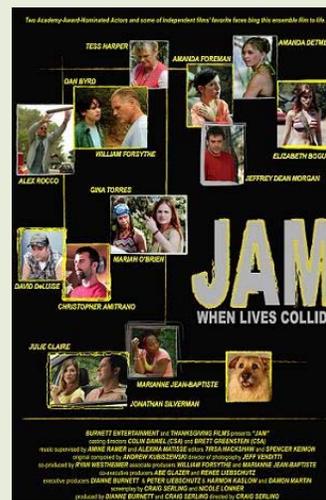
Thus ended the 4th annual The Other Venice Film Festival. IFA extends a hearty congratulations to all the winning filmmakers and other entries. Good luck in all your future endeavors!

For more on the winners, visit www.othervenicefilmfest.com.

The Other Venice Film Festival

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After logging near fifteen years in the editing world and garnering three Emmy nominations for the non-fiction editing of reality show giants *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race*, Craig Serling was ready to get his hands dirty in the feature world.

Paid to create and fashion stories in the editing bay, Serling had learned what it took to weave together diverse segments of story and character, to create a compelling and tightly knit tale of the human condition. Multiple characters, multiple storylines, multiple emotions? Not a problem for Craig Serling.

But since the filming of a documentary in the early stages of his career, the

dream of filmmaking had been swirling around Serling's editorial brain. Continuing his "day job," Serling wrote several scripts in his "spare time." Unsure which script would be the best vehicle for his journey into features, Serling outlined his filmmaking necessities. Wanting something that could be done on a low budget, could be shot quickly and would draw some considerable acting talent to its character driven story line and ensemble cast, *Jam*, which Serling co-wrote with Nicole Lonner, bubbled to the top of the list.

Starting as a kernel of an idea – people who get stuck in a traffic jam and are forced to connect with complete strangers – *Jam* managed to blossom with beautiful ease into so much more. *Jam* is the story of fifteen strangers who meet on a rural interstate after a dog dashes across the road and causes a road-blocking accident. With nowhere to go, these travelers connect with each other and themselves. A father reconnects with his son, a baby is born and love flourishes anew. In essence, life is altered.

The script for *Jam* was finished in May of 2003 and while finishing a script is difficult in and of itself, the battle for this feature had just begun. Without a previous feature under his belt, Serling's attempts to get a studio to pick up *Jam* proved relatively fruitless. Refusing to give up, Serling managed to finance a short version of the script in September of 2004. It was shot in two and a half days and debuted at *The Other Venice Film Festival* in 2005. And, according to Serling, filming a short before a feature is the way to go for within the small confines of a short, the filmmaker is forced to connect with the film, with the script, with the words in a much deeper and sincere way. After a short, you will know whether or not the script has the potential to hold up to the demands of a feature.

Serling discovered that *Jam* did indeed have feature potential. Two years



Above, Director Craig Serling making magic on the Jam set. Below, some intense on-set action!



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later, after successfully playing the financial game and getting cast and crew together, *Jam* was shot in 2006 and finished in 2007. With one location and just fifteen shooting days, Serling was able to shoot out actors in 3 to 4 days . . . which meant bigger name actors (Oscar Nominees Tess Harper and Marianne Jean Baptise, Jonathan Silverman, William Forsythe, Jefferey Dean Morgan, Gina Toress and Amanda Detmer) were more willing to step up to the plate and take on the project . . . which meant investors and distributors were more interested in financing the project . . . which meant . . . You get the picture. With a few small choices, Serling created a domino effect which resulted in the successful production of *Jam*.

Jam proved to be an excellent first film. There are some things Serling would change - hindsight is always 20/20 - but the bottom line is that the film was made. According to Serling, in the pursuit of a dream, discouragement must be banned and persistence is key. Keep a deadline in the back of your head, keep your budget simple and make it happen. And beware! Making something from nothing is a very addicting feeling.

Jam can be seen in early summer as it was picked up for distribution by Starz. To find out more in the meantime, visit www.jammovie.com.

[Jam Website](http://www.jammovie.com)

Jam photos courtesy of www.jammovie.com.

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