

NURTURING NATURE

SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH RECEIVES THE NATURE FILMMAKER AWARD

BY LISA ANGLE

You might think of Sir David Attenborough as actor Richard's brother, but David has even more prestige as a nature filmmaker than his brother has in the feature business. When renowned wildlife cinematographer and Santa Barbaran Mike deGruy agreed to curate Reel Ocean, the Film Festival's first Nature Films sidebar, he immediately decided Sir Attenborough's name should adorn the SBIFF's award for the nature category. DeGruy then thought, who better to receive the award than its namesake? Sir David Attenborough accepted deGruy's invitation to the Film Festival and will be presented with the award during a tribute and gala at the Museum of Natural History on January 31 (7 p.m.), presented by fellow Brit, S.B. resident John Cleese.

The two filmmakers have worked together many times and deGruy speaks highly about Attenborough, a world-renowned BBC icon. "He's a charming man. He's not the kind of guy who has his fancy hotel room and says, 'Call me when you need me.' He sits around and has a beer with the crew, talks to people, and spends time with everyone."

Nature cinematography is not all fun and games.

DeGruy recalls one disastrous moment in particular: "We were in the Bahamas . . . and David was diving, and he somehow managed to get underneath the swim-step of the boat," he said. "The boat went up on a swell and David went underneath and the swim-step came down and cracked his head while he was in the water. He was bleeding but said, 'Ah, it's fine.' And we're all going 'Oh, my gosh. We can't kill David Attenborough.' It was cleaned up and a big Band-Aid put on his head, and he carried on. That's the kind of guy he is."

His pleasant disposition isn't the reason deGruy chose Sir David to receive the Nature Filmmaker Award. "David Attenborough is the father of natural history filmmaking," he said. "This man is in his 70s, and he's been around a long time. He's the guy who put this genre on the map."

SBIFF Artistic Director Roger Durling concurs. "I'll never forget sitting through 13 hours of [Attenborough's] *Life on Earth* when it first aired in 1979," said Durling. "I couldn't believe that nature filmmaking could be so thrilling. Sir Attenborough is more than the best nature filmmaker ever, he's one of the greatest filmmakers period."

"The Museum of Natural History and SBIFF plan to continue honoring nature filmmakers in the future, and it is quite an honor that Sir [David] has accepted to be the first recipient of an award named after him."

This year's series includes three other films, and each of the filmmakers will be present for a Q&A session following the screening. On Wednesday, February 2, 7:30 p.m., deGruy will present his *Blue Planet: The Deep* and tell about his experience filming parts of this popular series. The only conservation-oriented selection is the premiere of *Strange Days on Planet Earth: Troubled Waters*,

shown on Thursday, February 3 (7:30 p.m.). On Saturday, February 5 (1:30 p.m.), filmmakers Howard and Michelle Hall will be here with their piece, *Shark Mountain*. A panel of well-seasoned cinematographers will discuss *The Future of Nature Filmmaking* later that day (4 p.m.) to conclude the *Reel Ocean* sidebar.

The Natural History Museum has developed a program just for kids, too. Live musicians will show the significance of soundtracks, an editor will demonstrate some aquatic



Sir David Attenborough

computer magic, and a cameraman will roll out cranes and dollies. While planning the sidebar deGruy said he wasn't thinking of the educational aspects of the program. "As long as they come away with something and they've laughed and enjoyed themselves."

This philosophy expands to deGruy's general view of natural history cinematography as entertainment, and cites Attenborough's *Life on Earth* as a film series that influenced a great number of viewers with its pure beauty. "I think David, while he has the capacity to be the best spokesperson I know of for the environment, has chosen to do it in a way I appreciate, which is: 'Let's get people in the seats. Let's get people to see the planet for what it is and let them figure out for themselves how they might help preserve it.'"

Call 682-4711 or visit sbnature.org for more info.



Keith English

GRAPHIC CONTENT

SANTA BARBARA KEITH ENGLISH HELPED DESIGN THE FACE OF THE FEST

BY LISA ANGLE

It's only a minute long, but it took four solid months to create. You'll see it before every film and presentation at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. It's the festival's computer-generated promotional trailer, produced by Keith English and Bob Engelsiepen.

The sequence English and Engelsiepen made for the 2003 Film Festival—which showed close-up views of an old-fashioned Bolex camera, crank and all—took about half the time to produce, and received much acclaim. The piece garnered such praise that the SBIFF used it again last year. English, whose S.B. studio is called Screaming Pixels, added color to the 2004 version of it to highlight some of the subtler nuances of the graphics. The Milan International Film Festival has even

approached English and Engelsiepen about using it. "They said it was the best one they'd seen anywhere in the world," English boasted.

For the 2005 festival, Roger Durling asked English and Engelsiepen to do a special promo to commemorate the 20th anniversary. The new piece will be unveiled on opening night (Friday, January 28), but until then it's under wraps. Even Durling hasn't seen it yet.

Keith English declined to say much about the top-secret project. It has a 1940s flavor in remembrance of

the heyday of the movie industry, and it's in color. You won't see words, but shots of people and places. "In this you'll see Santa Barbara like you will never see Santa Barbara," he said. "Bob Engelsiepen, an amazing artist (and owner of View Studio in Carpinteria), has

retouched some of the shots to look just stunning." For the production the pair used live action, animation, 3D, and stills, sometimes combining all four into one image. "The very opening shot and the very closing shot," English said, "in those scenes there's nothing that's real; although they might look it, they're all computer-generated."

The background music, composed by Christopher James Thomas, will sound familiar because it's also used on the SBIFF television commercials. Besides English, Engelsiepen, and Thomas, nineteen other Santa Barbara professionals worked on the project. "We've got little tiny things hidden in there all the way through it," English said. "You may or may not notice, but if you watch it enough times you're going to start to pick up on them." □



One of Keith English's digital creations.

EXTRA CREDITS

STUDENT DIGITAL FILMMAKING COMPETITION SCREENS THIS SATURDAY

BY LISA ANGLE

WHAT are those kids doing with that camera?," you may ask, if you see one of the 10 teams shooting around town during the Film Fest. For the third year SBIFF is holding a competition for local students. A panel of judges chose the teams—five from high schools and five from colleges—from a whopping 96 entrants. Thanks to sponsorship from Sotheby's International Reality, the prize will be substantial this year. Winners in the college and high school division will each receive a \$3,000 gift certificate to the photo store of their choice, awarded this Saturday, February 5, 6:30 p.m., at Victoria Hall.

But winning won't be easy. Not only do the 10 crews have a mere 10 days to produce concise 10 minute films—hence the competition title *10-10-10*—they have several other stipulations to meet. Because Sotheby's is a commercial enterprise, the films must include them in some way (giving the student filmmakers a lesson in product placement). The films must also include a Santa Barbara landmark, a Film Festival pass holder, the line "cutie honey," and the number 20 (in honor of the SBIFF's 20th anniversary). With all those requirements to fulfill, SBIFF thought the students could use some help, so they set up a workshop for the groups to learn from top movie industry professionals Jeff Arch, Joe Johnston, and Richard Harris.

S.B. City College film production instructor Michael Stinson assisted in screening the entrants, and he thinks the boundaries of the competition are great. "By giving filmmakers limitations it actually forces them to be more creative," he said. "If you let them have carte blanche it's much harder to get started." To present a story with a beginning, middle, and end in 10 minutes takes a lot of imagination. Other future filmmakers, and fest-goers with education in mind, will be excited to see what these crews came up with. The winning film in each division will be screened at the closing-night ceremony (Sunday, February 6, 7:30 p.m., Arlington Theatre). □