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Art deco Orinda theatre featured in award-winning short

By Diane Clayton



Award-winning "Lets Go to the Movies" producer Julia Anderson (right) and her assistant producer, Ksenia Firsova. Photo provided

Not every person who's passionate about movies longs to walk the red carpet or find themselves in the pages of People magazine. Many, like Moraga resident and movie lover Julia Anderson, want to work behind the scenes. In fact, Anderson describes herself as "definitely a behind-the-camera type of person" who "loves the process" of developing and producing a video.

So, last year, when she spotted a poster promoting the Lamorinda Arts Council's ShortDocs competition, Anderson figured it was a natural project for her to take on. At the time, she was working part-time at the Orinda Theatre, a movie house she loved and believed to be an important part of the community. It made sense to her to showcase this art-deco style theatre in her ShortDocs entry.

"I love that experience of going to the movies," Anderson noted, "experiencing something in a room full of people sharing the very same emotions."

Anderson remembered a class field trip when she was a student at Campolindo: a film festival at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco. "The Castro was one of those old gorgeous movie theater palaces, and the Orinda Theatre is in that same category," she said.

Reaching out to some fellow filmmakers who agreed to help her, the recent San Francisco State Fiction Filmmaking graduate began creating her documentary, which, according to the Lamorinda Arts Council rules, could not exceed six minutes in length.

She interviewed Derek Zemrak, co-owner of the theatre, as well as theatregoers and a longtime projectionist at the theatre.

The original concept for her award-winning documentary, "Let's Go To The Movies," was focusing on the history of this beautiful Orinda treasure, built by movie fanatic Donald Rheem between 1937-1941. (In 1982, the Orinda Theatre was designated one of the National Register of Historic Places).

"As I reviewed the footage," Anderson explained, "I realized how significant the theatre is to the community. That totally stood out for me more than the historical facts. So the focal point changed from what the theatre once was to what it is today - and at the same time reminding viewers that independent movie theaters are struggling ... and this is a serious problem, especially in smaller communities."

"Let's Go To The Movies" received a 2018 Lamorinda Arts Council Best Short Documentary Film by an Adult award, a prize that means a lot to the young budding filmmaker.

Anderson has always loved going to the movies. As a child, she'd go with her family and fondly remembers summers when her grandfather would take her. "I've always liked writing and telling stories, as well as all the visual arts," she said. "I also love to draw and make costumes." She soon realized that film production was a culmination of all those skills and hobbies, "everything I loved the most."

Currently, Anderson is working as a production assistant on a pilot for a potential TV show; it's a two-month job and has her living in Santa Cruz. Before she left, she met with the Moraga Community Foundation to discuss producing a video promoting the newly reopened Rheem Theatre. As Anderson sees it, it would be more of a public service announcement, she said, with the purpose of encouraging the community to support this historic and beautiful movie house.

To see Anderson's winning documentary, "Let's Go To The Movies," go to <https://vimeo.com/251086048>.

2018 Lamorinda Arts Council's ShortDocs winners

Best Short Documentary Film by an Elementary School Student: "Search & Rescue Dogs," by Brooke Parker

Best Short Documentary Film by a Middle School Student: "The Homeless Project," by Neve Abcari

Best Short Documentary Film by a High School Student: "No Limits Collaborative," by Caroline Rupert & Julia Hatfield

Best Short Documentary Film by an Adult - two winners: "Let's Go to the Movies," by Julia Anderson; and "Notes," by Tina Elliot

Audience Award for Best Short Documentary Film by a Student: "Search & Rescue Dogs," by Brooke Parker

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