

CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY

Documakers find strength in shared indie vision, battle

By VICKY FUNARI and JENNIFER MAYTORENA TAYLOR

We've been on the road a lot lately, traveling the international festival circuit with our nonfiction feature film "Paulina." Like true San Francisco transplants, once all the schmoozing and boozing's done and our print has made it more or less unscathed through the screenings, one of us arrives home desperate to paint her kitchen purple and the other itching to tend to the backyard compost bin.

It seems to be part of the documentarian's work ethic in San Francisco: 18-hour production days should be balanced against equal amounts of time refinishing your floors or swimming across the bay. The only problem is when to sleep.

Then again, maybe it's the time spent out of the editing room or away from writing endless grant applications that helps us ground our film work in reality. After all, isn't that what documentary filmmakers are supposed to do?

"Paulina" tells the story of a contemporary Mexican servant who returns to her provincial village to confront her family about the painful events of her childhood: Her parents traded her away for land, the town boss raped her and she became the town rebel.

The film presented a singular challenge to produce. Shot on location in Veracruz and Mexico City, "Paulina" is in Spanish with English subtitles. It is a documentary, but it's a genre-bender. Differing versions of the same events are told by Paulina and the people in her past and present life, and the film draws those contradictions out by mixing docu and dramatic styles.

A film like this — if it is going to be born in the USA at all — couldn't ask for a better hometown



TAYLOR

than San Francisco, simply the quirkiest, most vibrant, truly independent filmmaking "community" in the country. It's also no accident that, after traveling the world, we've found a theatrical distributor for our film at home, in San Francisco-based Turbulent Arts.

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SOUL SEARCH: In Vicki Funari's "Paulina," a Mexican servant explores the painful truths of her childhood. S.F. documakers include Oscar winners Rob Epstein and Debra Chasnoff, as well as Terry Zwigoff ("Crumb") and Mark Mitchell ("Berkeley in the '60s").

film as politics, film as social change and film as *fun*. Because of this, it often doesn't mean film as income; but most of us find pretty acceptable ways to make the rent. One question that always comes up in our Q&A sessions after screenings is, "How long did it take to make the film?"

The answer invariably draws a group gasp: 10 years from the time we shot the first interview to the time we got the first print out of the lab. Most of that time was spent fundraising, while we supported ourselves by wearing lots of hats on other productions.



FUNARI

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The Bay Area's history as an enclave of social and political "multi-culting" is reflected today in the sheer number of documentarians working here and in the style of work produced. Bay Area documentaries often are infused with the passion of a cause, and even more often with a sophistication of approach regarding questions of cultural identity and of representation.

This was a fertile atmosphere for the making of "Paulina," since the film explores how the politics of identity and the subjectivity of truth have very real implications for people on the "wrong" side of a society's truth.

San Francisco boasts a wide range of support organizations for film and video makers: the Film Arts Foundation, the Bay Area Video Coalition, Cine Accion, the National Asian Ameri-

can Telecommunications Assn. and Frameline, to name a few. We're also lucky to have a Foundation Center library here, a crucial resource when a producer begins to put together a strategy for fundraising through grants. Together, these organizations provide an infrastructure within which documentary makers can function effectively, whether working on maverick, outsider topics or doing commissioned work for TV.

For "Paulina," we cobbled the budget together from grants, personal savings, private donations, family philanthropy and those infamous credit cards. We also learned that TV was going to be key to finishing the film, even though we made it at feature-length for theatrical play. Ultimately we secured a co-production agreement with Canada's Banff Centre for the Arts, which provided most of our final post-production needs. We had to leave San Francisco for long stretches, but we always knew we had a supportive home base.

Beyond the organizational infrastructure, what ultimately keeps the Bay Area churning out some of the nation's best documentaries are the filmmakers themselves, and the wonderful spirit of cooperation and encouragement we foster in each other.

We get our films made because we trade services, advice and labor. And when we venture out of our arguably rarefied environment, you often can see us clustered with our colleagues from home, as we were at this year's Sundance, eagerly discussing each other's work and watching the rest of the "independent" film world shout into their cell phones.

