

LOCAL AND STATE NEWS

Democracy in motion

Filmmakers show "How Ohio Pulled it Off" in 2004 presidential elections

By KRISTIN HEINICHEN
Messenger staff writer

Controversy continues over Ohio's role in the outcome of the 2004 presidential election, and three Ohio University filmmakers have documented more than two years of this public outcry.

"How Ohio Pulled It Off," is a feature-length film by graduate students Charla Barker, Matthew Kraus and Mariana Quiroga that chronicles the aftermath of the election in Ohio. The film had two special screenings at this year's Athens International Film and Video Festival — in total over 400 people attended. Certain scenes in the film roused a ruckus as audience members were reminded of the election's mismanagement.

"They were yelling and screaming and hissing. It was so interactive," Quiroga said.

"We saw it with fresh eyes. Their energy was amazing," Barker added.

The three made the film as their thesis project. However, the account they gave of the "theft of the presidency," became personally more significant than receiving their degree.

"The film is the education," Barker said.

"I feel like the film is a real diploma," Quiroga added.

They settled on the subject matter by way of a challenge from their professor Rajko Grlic. He advised them to consider a battleground — of sorts. The subject was Ohio — where the presiden-



Messenger photo by Kristin Heinichen

From left, Mariana Quiroga, Matthew Kraus and Charla Barker stand in front of a poster for their movie, "How Ohio Pulled It Off," which had two special screenings at this year's Athens International Film and Video Festival.

tial decision came down to this one state among 50.

The state held enough electoral votes to determine George Bush the winner of the presidency over John Kerry. However, if exit polls were accurate and people voted how they said they voted, Bush lost by 500,000 votes. The winner was not determined until the following day when Kerry decided not to dispute Bush's narrow win in the state of Ohio.

"He (Grlic) said 'you know you're in Ohio and there was a

very important election,'" Quiroga said.

"We assumed the election was fine. Then we went to Nelsonville and working class neighborhoods and asked why people voted the way they did ... they said 'I don't know how Bush won,'" Barker recalled.

Kraus happened upon the "What Went Wrong In Ohio" — The Conyers Report on the 2004 Presidential Election by Congressman John Conyers. Barker explained that "it was a

Personal connections with the '04 election

The filmmakers labored up to 12 hours a day on researching, gathering sources, interviewing, filming and editing. While they presented a neutral view on the issue, each had individual reasons for feeling a connection to the 2004 election.

Kraus hails from Canton. He and his family experienced first hand the irregularities that emerged during and after the vote of not only the 2004 election but the 2000 election.

Barker is from Pennsylvania. Once doing her graduate work in Athens she began receiving e-mails from family and friends who were thrown by the 2004 election.

Quiroga was born in Argentina but became a citizen of Venezuela. When she was 3 years old, her family was forced into exile due to political chaos.

"I lived in Argentina at a time of violent dictatorship. It was the most horrible period of Argentina's history. My parents were progressive people. They were persecuted for thinking," she said. "For me talking about democracy is very important. I know what it is to lose your freedom."

turning point" for them — launching them into the world of how to cheat an election. Kraus explained that the information in the book

coincides with the footage they received.

The film contains archival footage from the Free Press in Columbus and various individuals as well as interviews they shot themselves. It shows urban voters, campaign workers, and poll workers giving testimonials about those conditions that disenfranchised thousands of voters. It documented the removal of voting machines from minority districts — only one registered voters in lower income areas, while affluent areas had a ratio of 1 to 100. Evidence of ballot tampering and the disregard for 1,090,729 provisional ballots nationwide that were never counted was presented, and mathematical analysis demonstrated the statistical impossibility of voting totals when compared to exit polls.

"Experts are saying glitches can happen, but when they are so consistent we need to start looking at that," Quiroga said. "The intention of our movie is to change consciousness and bring up a debate."

Quiroga went on to explain that although the film was about participating in the democratic process,

they were not speaking for a specific party.

"We presented a good case ... tried to be balanced and fair as we could to include many different voices in the footage," she said. "We are not pro-Bush or pro-Kerry. There's a problem in the system, so let's address it."

"Everything put in the film, we were sure could be backed up. It wasn't speculation," Kraus added.

According to the film, professionals extend concern that there is still no reliable way to monitor these electronic voting machines where the computer codes are deemed private property so there are no audit trails. As these very machines are slated to be used in the 2008 election, the filmmakers hinted that this story is not finished.

"This is not a Democrat issue or a Republican issue. It's about the people. Democracy belongs to the people. That's our stand," Quiroga said.

So what gives in Ohio? The verdict is not yet in. And the filmmakers endeavor to keep the dialogue going by screening their film in other states.

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The Athens Messenger

A DIVISION OF BROWN PUBLISHING CO.

9300 Johnson Road, Athens, Ohio 45701
(740) 592-6612 Fax: (740) 592-4647

E-mail: info@athensmessenger.com

Rates:
Published seven days a week.
Weekday and Saturday single copy 50 cents. Sunday single copy \$1.25.

Delivered by carrier:
Daily-Saturday Weekends D&S
One week \$1.80 \$1.25 \$2.75

Delivered by motor route:
Daily-Saturday Weekends D&S
One week \$1.85 \$1.25 \$2.80

By mail in Ohio:
Daily and Sunday: 4 weeks \$14.75
weeks \$47.25; 26 weeks \$94.00; 52 weeks \$182.00. By mail elsewhere in U.S. and possessions: Daily and Sunday: 4 weeks \$16.25; 13 weeks \$52.00; 26 weeks \$103.00; 52 weeks \$200.00.

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By walking carrier — Daily-Saturday-Sunday, \$12 a month; \$35.40 for 13 weeks, \$70.10 for 26

weeks, \$138.75 a year; daily and Saturday, \$23.20 for 13 weeks, \$45.90 for 26 weeks, \$90.80 for one year; weekend only, \$16.10 for 13 weeks, \$31.85 for 26 weeks, \$63.05 for one year.

By motor route — Daily-Saturday-Sunday, \$12.50 a month; \$36.05 for 13 weeks, \$71.35 for 26 weeks, \$141.25 a year; daily and Saturday, \$23.80 for 13 weeks, \$47.15 for 26 weeks, \$93.90 for one year; weekend only, \$16.10 for 13 weeks, \$31.85 for 26 weeks, \$63.05 for one year.

Second class postage paid, Athens, Ohio, Post Office. Postmaster: Send change of address to The Messenger Publishing Co., P.O. Box 4210 Athens, Ohio 45701 (USPS 035-620)

Member The Associated Press
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The Messenger is printed on 80 percent recycled paper.

Police arrest Lancaster man in conjunction with fire

A 29-year old Lancaster man was arrested in relation to a Friday morning fire at Christ the King University Parish.

Benjamin DiPietro, 29, of Lancaster, was arrested after he made statement about his involvement with the fire which occurred at approximately 2:10 a.m. Friday at the parish at 141 Mill St.

DiPietro was charged with one felony count

of arson. The Athens Police Department learned that DiPietro had been an Ohio University student but is not currently registered.

On Friday, Athens Police Officer Destry Flick responded to a report of a fire alarm at the church. Officer Flick found multiple points of origin inside and used a portable fire extinguisher to put out the main source of the fire

before it had a chance to spread. The Athens Fire Department arrived shortly thereafter and finished extinguishing the blaze. Estimated damage is unknown.

The investigation of the incident was conducted by the State Fire Marshal, in conjunction with the Athens Police Department, Athens Fire Department and Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Identification.

Singer experienced 'Idol,' plans to try out again

By MATT GALLAGHER
Messenger staff writer

Sharell Andrews, an informational technology specialist at Ohio University, has some big dreams.

She has "American Idol" in her blood, having competed on the show in its third season in 2003, making it all the way to the Hollywood edition. She's experienced the bright lights and the judgmental scrutiny of "American Idol" judges. And while she didn't make the final cut, she has had her taste, and she wants more.

She recently won a contest to be on a Columbus produced show "Give Me the Mic," a regional show in the spirit of "American Idol." She was selected with 19 other people out of the 500 performers who auditioned. Her performance is being filmed today, and will air on Tuesday nights in June on ABC 6 and Fox 28.

But making it onto "American Idol" is quite an accomplishment, Andrews admits. It's given her life plenty of experiences.

She won an "American Idol" competition in Savannah, Ga., where she lived before relocating to the Athens area. Winning the competition allowed her to audition for the next stage of "American Idol" without having to stand in line. She went through three auditions, per-



Sharrell Andrews

forming in front of "Idol" judges Randy Jackson, Paula Abdul and Simon Cowell. She performed an a cappella version of Aretha Franklin's "Don't Play That Song."

"They liked it, and they sent me on to Hollywood," Andrews remembered.

In the Hollywood edition of the show, she made it through three rounds. She had to write her own song and perform it in the space of a few hours. But she didn't make the final cut.

"Simon said that I had a great voice, but that it sounded more adult contemporary than pop, and they were looking for pop," Andrews said. "But it was still a great experience and a free trip to L.A. I got to meet a lot of interesting people, and I got to see the entertainment business from an insider's perspective. It was really fun, and I'd do it all over in a heartbeat."

But it isn't the bright lights

that excite her. She just loves to sing. She has been a singer since early childhood, and she grew up singing in the Pentecostal Church in Georgia.

"I would love to be famous someday, but that's not why I sing," Andrews said. "I could sing at a fair or I could sing in front of thousands of people. Either way, as long as I am singing, I would be just as happy."

Andrews is relatively new to town, having moved to Albany in January after getting the informational technology specialist job at OU. She sings at Sunday morning mass in the choir at the Saint Paul's Catholic Church in Athens. She'd also like to sing in a local band.

"I love performing in shows, at local restaurants, wherever," Andrews said. "I just like singing in front of people."

Andrews was drawn to the Athens-area because her husband Emmanuel Archo is from Albany. He is currently on his third tour in Iraq. He plans on attending Ohio University to major in political science after his enlistment ends in 2009. He hopes to get on leave this summer, when the two will take a short vacation.

Andrews said that he is stationed in a pretty bad area where the fighting can get severe. She communicates with him by e-mail every day.

"He doesn't tell me too many details about what he sees over there because he doesn't want me to get worried," Andrews said.

Andrews plans to try out for "American Idol" again in August.

"You never know what could happen," Andrews said. "If you never try and put yourself and putting yourself out there to do something different, you never really live. I am all about the experience. Then I can say, 'I did that. I was on American Idol.'"

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