

the little red truck

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Cal Poly Grad Is Force Behind the Little Film That Could

Award-Winning Documentary Film Follows World's Largest Touring Children's Theatre into Five Communities, Capturing Kids Doing the Near-Impossible

(March 6, 2008) Missoula, Montana — “The Little Red Truck,” a documentary film chronicling the world’s largest touring children’s theater and the youth it impacts, rolls into San Luis Obispo for the city’s International Film Festival on Saturday, March 8. The 1 p.m. screening takes place at the Palm Theatre, 817 Palm Street in downtown SLO.

Tagged “Spellbound” meets “Waiting for Guffman” by one newspaper, “The Little Red Truck” records the emotional highs, lows and in-betweens of more than 250 kids in five communities when Missoula Children’s Theatre (MCT), via its signature truck, comes to their towns. Packed with pretty much everything necessary for staging a full-scale musical, the truck comes seeking the missing element: 50 to 60 ambitious youth, grades K through 12, to serve as cast members.

The film was written, directed and produced by Cal Poly graduate and award-winning filmmaker Rob Whitehair and his Tree & Sky Media Arts production company. It was voted “Best Feature Documentary” by the International Family Film Festival in Hollywood last weekend.

While the truck is the film’s focal point, the real story is the children who do the improbable: learn a show’s dialogue, songs, dance moves, and staging in just six days (six days!). It’s magic and mayhem captured through the lens as the kids, under the direction of the two professional tour actor/directors who come with the truck, audition, rehearse, mess up, have the occasional meltdown, overcome personal obstacles, jump for joy, don costumes, and eventually grace the stage for a one-hour performance.

Woven throughout the one-week tour are life lessons in teamwork, trust, self-confidence, the ability to see a project through to the end, and acceptance. Bringing it all to light are the personal stories captured on high-definition video. For example:

The young girl who experiences such stage fright she considers bowing out just moments before the curtain rises.

The young boy who asserts that MCT helped him break free of gangs.

The blind girl who memorizes not only her lines, but those of her cast mates, feeding lines to one lost actor on stage with her.

www.thelittleredtruck.com

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Whitehair, who made a name for himself capturing wildlife on film for National Geographic, Discovery and PBS productions, says, “This film restored my faith in humanity. It forced me to look at things in a different light and ask myself, **‘At what point do we lose the ability to say anything is possible.’ These kids still believe.**”

He credits his alma mater with launching his film career and is absolutely thrilled to return “home” with a much-hyped film in tow. “I was a wildlife ecology major working on the California Condor Project in 1995,” he says. “They needed a public relations piece and, while I had absolutely no idea what I was doing, I was so wowed by the stories behind the project that I said I would and could do it.” Flash-forward seven months, and Whitehair had a 60-minute film in the can, produced for just \$500.

“Cal Poly’s motto is ‘learn by doing,’ and that’s exactly what I did,” he says. “There were days when the condors were literally flying overhead, and I was below, reading the camera’s user manual while trying to capture footage.”

That film went on to win numerous awards at the International Wildlife Film Festival in Missoula, Montana, (Whitehair’s current home) and set him off on a career path of capturing wildlife worldwide on film. And now, he returns with a film of a different kind. Or is it?

According to Whitehair’s wife and producing partner, Pam Voth, the decision to turn the company’s cameras on kids, rather than the usual wild animals, was easier than one might expect. “For us to venture beyond wildlife filmmaking, the story had to be extremely compelling and entertaining,” she says. “This project promised that and more. **Over the course of six days, you see kids blossom and grow, and you get to witness personal triumphs they’ll carry into adulthood.** Add in the amazing tour actor/directors who hold it all together and you have a truly powerful story, no matter what angle you approach it from.”

Whitehair and Voth spent nearly a year shadowing the tour in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, Canada; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Hollywood, California; Americus, Georgia; and Somerton, Arizona. Although these communities are geographically and demographically distinct, they share one common thread: the need for fully accessible performing arts programs.

“The Little Red Truck” premiered at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival in Missoula, Montana, on February 16 and screens at the International Family Film Festival in Hollywood on February 29 and March 1.

To learn more about “The Little Red Truck,” Tree & Sky Media Arts, the filmmakers, and **view a film trailer**, visit **HYPERLINK** "<http://www.thelittleredtruck.com>" www.thelittleredtruck.com.

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