

# A REEL COMEDY FESTIVAL

BY BARRY DOUGHERTY

Lights! Cameras! Action! Comedy! The Friars added a new event to their forward-thinking traditions this past year—the Friars Club Comedy Film Festival. It was only a matter of time for the Friars to present their own film festival since one focusing on comedy is virtually non-existent. And who better than the Friars to showcase celluloid laughs?



**A Serious Man: Richard Kind, Amy Landecker, Friar Joel Coen, Michael Stuhlbarg, Fred Melamed, Friar Ethan Coen**

Friar Charlie Prince is the Executive Director of the festival and Friar Susannah Gora the Director. Both work in the film and entertainment industry with a passion for movies. They came up with the idea for the Friars to host the festival to fill the comedy void among the many film festivals out there.

According to Friars Executive Director Michael Gyure, "Many of our Friars have starred in some of the world's classic comedy movies from the Marx Brothers to Sinatra and the Rat Pack to Billy Crystal and Whoopi Goldberg. This festival showcased both classic comedies and gave new comedy films an arena to find an audience."

At a time when the Friars are grooming younger talent to helm entertainment in the future the idea of a festival that would showcase burgeoning new talent on the cusp of their own success was exactly in step with the Friars mission.

A Board of Advisors was created to assist in the planning and development of the festival and to offer their creative services when needed. These creative and talented mentors included Friars Danny Aiello, Chris Albers, Michael Barker, Chuck Barris, Joy Behar, Richard Belzer, Tom Bernard, Marty Bregman, Lorenzo Carcaterra, Gil Cates, Dick Cavett, Dominic Chianese, Tom Fontana, Robert Ben Garant, Judy Gold, Anita Jaffe, Victor Kubicek, Lisa Lampanelli, Nathan Lane, Thomas Lennon, Samm Levine, Jerry Lewis, Susan Lucci, Michael Lynne, Mace Neufeld, Rick Newman, Vincent Pastore, Joe Piscopo, Paul Provenza, Al Roker, Freddie Roman, Rory Rosegarten, Jeffrey Ross, and Alan Zweibel.

The Paley Center for Media was selected as the venue to show the films that were submitted by filmmakers during the four-day festival. There were also special screenings held at the Monastery along with several panels that members and the public were invited to attend.

The Coen brothers recent release, *A Serious Man*, was chosen to launch the festival. The talented brothers who brought us *No Country for Old Men*, *Fargo*, *Raising Arizona*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Burn After Reading*, and *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, among others, were more than happy to kick off the Friars festival with their film.

This was also the U.S. premiere so the Friars and Focus Features made sure it was done up

right with the screening held at the Ziegfeld Theater complete with red carpet, press, paparazzi and stars. Dean Freddie Roman intro-



**Jeff Goldblum on the red carpet**

duced Ethan and Joel Coen, bestowing upon them honorary memberships. Freddie joked, "Two Jewish boys who grew up in a hotbed of Judaism—St. Louis Park, Minnesota. In their synagogue the cantor was Norwegian."

The after-party at the Monastery went on all night long with friends, fans and celebs toasting the film's success. This is probably a good place to drop in some of the bold-faced names who attended the premiere and party: Adam Arkin, Bob Balaban, Michael Boatman, Tom Cavanagh, Fyvush Finkel, Jeff Goldblum, Richard Kind, Amy Landecker, Fred Melamed, Francis McDormand,



**Friar Susan Lucci is interviewed by the press along with young actor Aaron Wolff, one of the stars of A Serious Man**

Michael Stuhlbarg, and Rachel York along with the celebs on the Board of Advisors.

Maintaining the high caliber of first run features that ran during the festival, organizers kept the quality going by showcasing Uma Thurman's film *Motherhood*, also starring Anthony Edwards and Minnie Driver, as the closing film of the festival.

The festival received hundreds of submissions that were screened by a panel of savvy and in-the-cinema-know Friars to whittle them down to about thirty that made the cut to be part of the festival. Divided into features, shorts and documentaries the film topics ran the gamut from a man waging war with water to expired milk to feces resembling the Virgin Mary.

The films that won in each category were *Holy Water* (feature), *Nemesis* (short) and *The Last Resort* (documentary). *Souled Out Comedy* (documentary) won the Audience Award but every film was a winner with those who came for the screenings.

Along with the screenings were various panels that were held at the Monastery. After a

screening of the Friars Club's documentary, *Let Me In, I Hear Laughter*, Friar Mark Simone led a panel with Dean Freddie Roman, Friars historian Barry Dougherty and the film's producers Friar Dean Ward and Dolores Gavin. They gave the inside scoop on the making of the film as well as fun tidbits about the Friars own wacky road to laughs.

Film critics got their due as well when Friar Neil Rosen moderated a panel with fellow critics Glenn Kenny and Ben Mankiewicz. The ECNY presented a panel on Why You Shouldn't Post on YouTube and Show Me The Money was hosted by Professor Robert Nickson of NYU,



**Friars Thomas Lennon and Robert Ben Garant prove why they're successful comedy film writers during their panel on screenwriting**

who has worked on such films as *Do The Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever*.

Screenwriters Robert Ben Garant and Thomas Lennon, who brought us the *Night At The Museum* series, among others, had an SRO crowd in the Milton Berle Room to hear their lessons on how to break into screenwriting and stay there—perhaps while losing your sanity along the way. The panel was engaging and informative not to mention hilariously funny.

Along with the panels and screenings there were luncheons and parties that allowed the new filmmakers to meet, greet and network. These events also introduced the Friars Club and all its amenities to these up-and-coming creative artists from all over the world.



**Festival Directors Friars Sue Constantine, Charlie Prince, Susannah Gora**

For the first foray into film festival-dom the Friars Comedy Film Festival was an enormous success with the filmmakers, audiences and in the press. Once again the Friars have thought outside the box and come up with a winning event that will continue each year. Log onto [www.friarsclub.com/film](http://www.friarsclub.com/film) for information about the festival and next year's festival of funny flicks.