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ON FILM FESTIVALS, CRAZY IDEAS AND ASSDANCE

By **Courtney Sell** in **News**
on Wednesday, May 16th, 2012

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With less than twenty-four hours to reach my set goal on my Indiegogo campaign, it seems that every passing minute without a tiny donation is a strike against my project and a personal slap to my face. It's hard not to take personally the fact that your idea is most likely a failure that generated little to no interest with the public. At the time of writing this, I have only acquired \$140 dollars of my \$1,000 final goal and it is quickly becoming evident that my project will end up under-funded, unless, of course, some patron from the heavens randomly decides that it would be in their best interest to donate the remaining funds necessary in order for me to feel like a success and move on without funding the project out of my empty pockets. While many people, and I mean the reasonable ones, of course, would throw their hands up in the air, consider their project a failure, curse out the Gods before praying for a miracle, and down a pint of whiskey to wallow in their self-pity, I, on the other hand, view this situation as just another, slightly expected, hurdle in my career of being an independent filmmaker. Though, I must admit, I am sipping a whiskey right now.

The campaign was/is for a film festival that a few months earlier I decided to launch with my dear friends Reverend Jen (pictured here with me), Robert Prichard, and Tom Tenney called Assdance Film Festival. Now, before I go any further, let me briefly explain myself, as I know what you're thinking:

"Of course you're not gonna make any money on something called Assdance, Courtney! How could you be so stupid into believing you would?"

To be honest, I knew I couldn't. Yet, I have never steered away from pursuing even the craziest of my ideas; and believe me, I have quite a few of them. Also, don't let the title fool you; this is not nor was it intended to be a porn film festival! The "Ass" in "Assdance" is actually an acronym for "Art Star Scene" and is based around the name of my underground film production company "Ass Studios," which I founded with my girlfriend, Reverend Jen, and actor Faceboy this past summer. Listen, I understand if you are still in the weeds about this one, but I assure you, we have the best intentions. Allow me to explain.

In January I had the wonderful opportunity to fly out to Park City and finally check out the Sundance Film Festival. While I have been a very open and at times slightly radical proponent against this specific festival due to their "commercial in independent film clothing," I surprisingly had a magnificent time finally seeing what all the hype was about and even viewing some outstanding films. I can hear you now: "Hypocrite!"

I guess I will just have to accept it. Though, I must admit, I did spend a little more time attending premieres at the Slamdance Film Festival, which I enjoyed immensely. While I had little patience waiting in line for a seat opening at the Eccles, I loved the fact that I could simply walk into Slamdance, buy a ticket then and there, and view some truly remarkable independent movies. Please don't mind this plug; but if you haven't seen *I am John Wayne*, *People Parade* or *Danland*, try your hardest to do so!

Upon attending the two festivals, something began to dawn on me. If these festivals are only showing a handful of accepted movies, most likely out of thousands of submissions, imagine the work that was rejected! My mind began to race with thoughts of the films that "slipped through the cracks" or were just rejected flat-out by the submissions department. Therefore, what could I be missing? A zombie soccer mom romantic comedy? A film about nuns seeking revenge on a drug dealer who killed their priest? Or perhaps even a science-fiction softcore porn in the vein of *Flesh Gordon*? Who knew? The possibilities were endless and as I know many filmmakers who have been rejected from both festivals, it only sparked my curiosity further.

"God," I thought, "if only I could get my hands on some of those rejects!"

I arrived back home to my Lower East Side apartment just in time for a surprise birthday/welcome home party

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Reverend Jen had decided to throw for me. I was hungover, down from the end-of-festival blues, and extremely tired after getting little-to-no-sleep while crashing on the floor of a condo up in the canyons that the owner refused to turn the heat on in. I used my jacket as a blanket and spent most of my time in the Sundance HQ warming up over free coffee and sandwiches thanks to Chase Sapphire. Needless to say, I was in no mood for a party, yet after drinking three bottles of fancy champagne and spending time seeing my friends who I missed with all my heart while in Utah, I was soon filled with joy and enthusiasm and spent most of the night telling everyone about some of the great films I had seen. Sometime during the early morning hours, in a drunken slur, I began explaining my thoughts about all the rejected films from the festival to my friend Robert Prichard, an actor himself who has starred in many of my own films and is most likely recognized from his performances in Troma's *Toxic Avenger* and *Class of Nuke Em' High*.

"Rob, did you know that there were over 10,000 submissions to the festival this year and they only screened about a hundred or so films, if that?! I wonder what was being left out."

"Geez, Courtney, that really does sound interesting," he replied, lighting a cigarette. "Maybe you should start your own film festival to show those reject films. After all, you're like the Roger Corman of no-budget filmmaking." He spoke through a cloud of smoke.

My eyes lit up. Rob immediately realized that he had sparked up a monumental idea and could tell simply from my facial expression that something special had just occurred. I was also flattered by his comparison to myself and Corman, whom I have always admired, but must say, I have nothing on Roger's work. Either way, enough ego-boosting for now. Sorry, sometimes I just get on a kick when I'm drinking. Now back to the story.

Rob continued, "It should only feature the films rejected by other film festivals! And maybe each filmmaker could even read their rejection letters out loud to the audience before their own screening!"

My body began stumbling back and fourth as I searched for something to hold on to. Turns out it was the arm of my friend artist Tom Tenney. Not only was my mind blown by Rob's idea, but the excessive alcohol intake was finally making my legs limp.

"Tom," I said, "did you hear this?"

Tom turned to me cautiously, as I explained Rob's idea to him. His eyes lit up as mine had down moments earlier. Just then, Reverend Jen entered the room with my birthday cake, candles lit and flickering, while the other party goers sang "Happy Birthday" out of tune and out-of-sync.

"Everybody shut up!" I screamed. The crowd went silent. Jen nearly dropped the cake on the floor out of shock.

"What the hell is the matter?" she asked, as everyone looked on curiously and slightly fearful that I was about the projectile vomit across the room.

"We have an idea!" The crowd still unsure as to how to react to my announcement.

"We are starting our own film festival."

"You're what?" Jen asked in a confused manner. "You're just drunk. Now, quick blow out your candles before they burn the whole fuckin' place down".

"No, really, we are. I swear." As the crowd seemed more and more bored and disappointed by my announcement, Jen set the cake down and approached me, curious as to what her drop-dead-rip-roaring drunk boyfriend was saying. When I explained the idea to her, her eyes lit up wide as well. It was as if the idea was a contagious airborne virus. Everyone who heard it was immediately infected. But, uh, in the most positive way, of course.

"It should be called Assdance!" she hollered, now fueled with the same excitement and inspiration that had struck Rob, Tom and I moments earlier. She swung around.

"Everybody take some cake and go the fuck home! We got some work to do!"

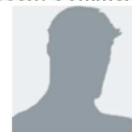
The next morning, in my perpetual hung-over state, I began writing a proposal for Assdance Film Festival. Jen sat next to me, feeding me ideas and further thoughts as to how we could make it the best film festival in the Lower East Side, if not all of New York, if not the entire world! My body was sweating and my hands shaking. It was hard to tell whether this was due to an adrenaline rush or the booze shakes, which have now become a common occurrence. Either way, the ideas rolled from our minds to our tongues to the paper.

"OK, so here it goes!" I read the outline out loud while lighting a smoke. "The Assdance Film Festival will cater specifically to the films and filmmakers who have been rejected by other film festivals. Assdance will promote, screen, and shine light on these films in order to both inspire and encourage rejected filmmakers to continue making work and not to be discouraged by the thousands of soul-crippling rejection letters they have received in the past. Assdance plans to compensate each filmmaker who screens with us, with as much money in our possession in order to help them make back what they may have lost in previous entry fees."

"I think we got something," Jen said with a huge smile wrapped across her face. I immediately logged onto Indiegogo in order to launch our campaign, with hopes to raise the funds we felt necessary for publicity, promotion fees, and other festival necessities. Which brings us to today.

The clock continues ticking. No more donations have been submitted and as of now, we are still shy nearly nine hundred dollars of our goal. When I checked the updates this morning, hoping we would miraculously find our campaign successfully funded, I bowed my head in disappointment, yet not completely discouraged. It would be oxymoronic for us to just give up our plans to launch our own film festival due to lack of funds. After all, I have been working as an independent filmmaker for ten years without any money and never before felt held back from any possibilities or opportunities. Hell, with the \$140 we have made thus far, it is still something! We could divide it up fairly and use it to compensate all the filmmakers involved. I know it's not much, but we're also not Sundance! We're Assdance! Not to mention since the announcement of Assdance Film Festival, we have received so many incredible submissions of films that I may have never seen. With some of them even being rejects of this year's Sundance and Slamdance film festivals, my dream, as I saw it, was accomplished! I was successfully able to see some of the work which piqued my curiosity in the first place while in Park City, and for that I am extremely grateful.

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Matt

Thank you so much for The Blue Velvet Project! Blue Velvet is my favorite movie of all time and I love reading your analyses!

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So, as the clock continues to tick down, and our chance of reaching our rather unrealistic goal gets slimmer and slimmer, I still feel like a success, strangely enough. We had followed through with another one of our craziest and most ambitious ideas and the film festival will still go on, no matter what! In closing, it seems to me that an idea can only be a failure if you make it one in your mind. So what if we didn't reach our goal? That wasn't the main point in the first place. We wanted to start a film festival and will continue to do so. To any filmmakers who may be discouraged if their campaign doesn't succeed, please continue on. To me, an online fundraising campaign should simply be used as additional leverage instead of being the make or break of your project. Remember, you are as much of a success as you hope to be. And thankfully, my success includes viewing some of the best, never-before-seen films I could ever imagine. Living the dream! Now, if you don't mind, I will finish the rest of my whiskey, light another smoke, and continue sifting through some of our recent submissions that are sure to be mind-blowing in some way or another. I cannot wait!

The first official Assdance Film Festival will take place beginning tomorrow, May 17th, and continue through May 22nd at various venues around the Lower East Side including the Bowery Poetry Club and Cake Shop. The closing night ceremony will be held at the Bowery Poetry Club on May 22nd and feature an award ceremony, live performances, and much more! The official selection will be announced April 15th as well as a list of Bands, Presenters, and Performers. For a detailed line-up and further information on Assdance, [please click here](#).

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