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FESTED: A Journey To Fest 7

Interview with Reese Lester (Director)

By Lisa Schaeffer

For director Reese Lester, the Fest began as a getaway with some friends and as an opportunity to check out more than 200 bands at the annual Gainesville, FL punk rock festival. Being the type of person that films it all, Lester's end result was a documentary film capturing every extreme aspect of the colossal festival titled *FESTED: A Journey To Fest 7*. Primarily following local punk rock band SPANISH GAMBLE, the documentary takes viewers inside every venue, right up to every stage and captures the performances and ensuing mayhem that make this particular event so intense. Filmed in 2008, the documentary captures numerous bands in action, including AMERICAN STEEL, 10-4 ELEANOR, THE FLATLINERS, LASALLE, NEW MEXICAN DISEASTER SQUAD, OK PILOT, THE LAWRENCE ARMS and STATIC RADIO NJ. Lester recently discussed how his own journey to the Fest began and how it felt to be right in the middle of one of the nation's most notorious music events.

Why did you choose this particular festival to document?

It wasn't really a deliberate choice or something I put a lot of planning into. The short story is that a lot of my friends had been going to The Fest and they convinced me to go that year. Being sort of like the creepy kid in *American Beauty* who films everything, I brought my camera to document our trip. The day before Fest I ran into Mackenzie from National Underground who had a team of people with the same gear as me, so he hooked it up big time with an all-access media pass (I didn't even have a ticket prior to that) and we agreed to share footage. From there it turned into a way bigger project than I'd originally planned for and the idea to turn the whole thing into a big documentary of our journey came about.

What makes The Fest stand out compared to other festivals?

I think pretty much anyone who's been to The Fest just knows there's something completely different and special about it. One of the main things is that it's so huge... like an entire town. It's not just thousands of people herded out to a field where everyone has more or less the same experience. I've heard someone describe it as a microcosm, which I think is a good description. That, and just all of the genuinely awesome bands and people who come every year.

What made you want to primarily follow SPANISH GAMBLE throughout the documentary?

This wasn't a deliberate choice either, but if I could do the whole thing again I'd still follow them. Those guys are some of my best friends and they have a reputation for partying hard. They're also really well connected to the scene there so that was a huge benefit.

What do you hope viewers will take away from your film?

1: That The Fest is a lot of fun and they should go, 2: That getting wasted with your friends on a punk rock vacation is awesome, and 3: That they'll get turned on to a few bands they haven't heard of before.

What do you think were the benefits of incorporating your friends into the film?

It made it a lot more personal. Some parts you keep watching like a train wreck, which adds to it and gives the movie an effect you wouldn't get if it was just your standard talking-heads-and-concert-footage type documentary. I've heard some complaints about it though, like that some of it is a little too personal and more like an inside joke. Screw you, go make your own movie.

How did you come up with the title?

The original title was just "THE FEST", but the Fest organizers weren't big fans of that (understandably) and wanted to keep it at a distance so people didn't think it's any sort of official Fest documentary. They haven't really wanted to have much to do with it. Tony helped with a few suggestions for the name and we eventually came up with the current one. At one point in the movie (the first scene in the trailer), our friend J is completely wasted... Someone says he's "Festing" and another person says "Nah, he's Fest-ed."

What was the highlight of the filming process for you?

The entire thing was just so awesome and such a blur. Being right in the middle of everything and catching it all from the big main stage shows to the packed warehouse shows. The low point was that I'd partied myself out in the week leading up to it, so by the time the weekend came around I felt like I was on the verge of death the whole time.

How were you influenced by *The Decline of Western Civilization* series?

Funny story, the first time I saw any of the *Decline* films was about a year before that Fest. Tyler and I were on a road trip and stayed with the SPANISH GAMBLE guys, and the two of us ended up eating mushrooms. Someone put that movie on and left us to ourselves, so I guess you could say it had a pretty big effect on me. A year later I found myself there at the Fest filming it all and realized it's the same scene, just 20 years later and everything had changed. I tried to incorporate some of the elements of the *Decline* movies into it, like the interviews with random punks who will probably watch the movie again in 20 years and facepalm.

What's next for you as a director?

Right now I'm trying to find time in between my other jobs to finish up a tour doc I shot of DEAD TO ME on tour with them back home from Fest last year. I work full-time for an indie horror film distro company and at night I do web development, so it's hard to make time for these big projects... It coming soon though!

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