

# VINEYARD GAZETTE

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**Current Edition: Friday, July 10, 2009**

## See Those Flickers from the Tabernacle?

By MEGAN DOOLEY

As filmmaker Roman Polanski once said: “Cinema should make you forget you are sitting in a theatre.” He clearly never saw a film screened at the Tabernacle. As riveting as the movie may be, it would be next to impossible not to appreciate the open-air theatre in which it was shown.

The Martha’s Vineyard Film Society holds its summer film series at the Tabernacle on Tuesday nights through July and August, with special screenings at the Farm Institute in Katama and the Capawock theatre in Vineyard Haven. The series opens on July 14 with a screening of *Mine*, a documentary that chronicles the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the effect on the thousands of family pets that were left behind in initial rescue efforts. Richard Paradise, founder and executive director of the film society, is responsible for handpicking the selections that are shown during the summer season at the Tabernacle, and during the off-season at the Katharine Cornell Theatre in Vineyard Haven.



Vineyard Film Society founder Richard Paradise makes selections.

His love of cinema dates back to his early childhood. “I’ve been a film buff since I was like nine years old,” he said in an interview this week. “At college, I did film programming for three years. So that’s sort of where I caught the bug of being an exhibitor of films.”

Mr. Paradise began to screen films on the Island in 1999. For the first few years, he reserved film screenings for the summer season. Then in 2003, he incorporated the Martha’s Vineyard Film Society as a nonprofit organization and began to search for a location to show films year-round.

“[The Film Society] pretty much predates all the other film programs that are on the Island,” he said. “It’s really the only program that runs movies all yearlong. [The summer series] is a continuation of my year-round program. What I try to do is provide an eclectic grouping of films in the summer that are appropriate for

families.” He does not recommend the films for young children, but is confident that all material is appropriate for kids over 12.

Mr. Paradise has no specific process for selecting films. “The process is sort of ongoing. It’s very liquid. I don’t get to a certain date and say ‘I’ve got to choose six films for the summer.’ I’m always looking for films that I think would be interesting to the Vineyard audience. I try to be eclectic, so it’s not just documentaries, it’s not just foreign language films, it’s not just independent films. It’s everything. It’s animation, it’s shorts. I’m constantly collecting ideas, and information on films. I keep a running chart. And I keep going back to that chart. So I just look through my list when I’m planning. I try not to stick to any one type of theme or subject. I really believe that [the films] should attract the broadest group of people over the series.”

He continued: “I find out about [films] from friends, I read a lot of magazines, I subscribe to a lot of blogs. Occasionally I go to film festivals, when I can get away from work. People recommend films to me. And I go and just search it out, check it out, do the appropriate searching on the Internet. It’s almost like putting a puzzle together.”

Mr. Paradise watches all the films before deciding what to include in the series. His decisions are based on his personal tastes, and an instinct for understanding what his audience would enjoy. “I think because I’ve been doing this such a long time I sort of know what people like. I know what I like. And luckily my audiences tend to like what I like,” he said.

The Tabernacle allows a larger than usual audience for screening. While the Katharine Cornell Theatre holds only 125 people, the Tabernacle can seat up to 350. “Sometimes these films can attract a fairly large audience,” he said of his summer selections. “Each movie is its own little event. Every week it’s a different audience, a different group of people that are attracted to the subject matter,” he added.

Mr. Paradise also incorporates local nonprofit organizations into his film events. “I try to work with nonprofits to give them a voice and some visibility,” he said. “[I try to] give them an opportunity to promote their own mission in the context of the film that I’m showing, if there is a connection.” At the screening of *Mine*, he hopes to help promote the new Animal Shelter of Martha’s Vineyard.

At many events, Mr. Paradise invites the film director, or another person involved in the filmmaking process, to speak. The summer film series culminates in September with a four-day international film festival, which Mr. Paradise started in 2006.

“The festival is another way for the film society to further that mission of

showing quality films, entertaining films, but hopefully films that also inspire and educate us on the world around us,” he said.

Does he have any all-time favorite films?

“People always ask me that, and I don’t, really. The last film I watched is my favorite,” he said.

*Films screen Tuesdays at 8 p.m. in July and August at the Tabernacle in Oak Bluffs. First up is Mine on July 14, with the director/producer as special guest.*

*See [myfilmsociety.com](http://myfilmsociety.com).*