

# Judson film fest steps onto national stage

By Emily McFarlan Courier-News / Chicago Sun Times April 5, 2012



Filmmaker Steve Taylor answers questions after a showing of his movie, "Blue Like Jazz," at the Imago Film Festival at Judson University in Elgin, Ill., on Saturday, March 31, 2012.

Andrew A. Nelles~For Sun-Times Media

ELGIN — What's a movie that begins: "Do you know the difference between being free and being high? Yeah, me neither," doing at a Christian film festival?

Exactly what Imago Film Festival director Terrence Wandtke had envisioned for the short film festival, now in its seventh year at Judson University in Elgin.

Imago stepped onto the national stage for the first time this year with the highly anticipated movie adaptation of Donald Miller's New York Times-bestselling book "Blue Like Jazz," its first-ever pre-release showing of a film.

The festival ran March 27 to 31 at Judson, ending with that screening and a keynote question-and-answer session between Wandtke and its co-writer, producer and director Steve Taylor.

"Blue Like Jazz" was something the festival director "actively pursued" after seeing a trailer for the film last summer, he said. Luckily, he said, one of Judson's trustees knew Taylor from his career in Christian music.

"I think the subject matter is completely appropriate, and I think the tone of the film is very on target for our festival," Wandtke said.

“One of the things I like so much about the book is Donald Miller is so refreshingly honest about his Christianity, his struggles. Too often there’s this standard pattern that people feel like they have to fulfill, usually showing Christianity as some sort of heroic destination, rather than the beginning of a story.”

The movie translates Miller’s book of essays, subtitled “Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality,” into the story of a 19-year-old college freshman struggling with his Christian beliefs at ultra-liberal Reed College in Portland. It earns its PG-13 rating along the way, Taylor noted.

But, he told the crowd of about 200 who turned out to see “Blue Like Jazz,” the Bible is no less messy of a book.

“If we took out the parts that weren’t safe for the family, it would be a much shorter book,” he said.

Those are the types of films Wandtke said he is interested in showing at Imago.

This year’s grand-prize winner was Scott Magie’s 30-minute documentary “When Cotton Blossoms,” the story of Dr. Laurence C. Jones, told through archival footage and reenactments. Jones started the Piney Woods Country Life School to educate the sons and daughters of impoverished sharecroppers in 1909 in rural Mississippi.

Other prize-winners were “Mato Oput,” a 22-minute documentary by Tim Guthrie about peace and reconciliation efforts in northern Uganda; and “El Cortejo,” a 14-minute film by Marina Sereskesky about a grave digger who finds hope in his interactions with a woman who brings flowers monthly to her husband’s grave. The audience choice award went to “The Dance” by Pardis Parker, a 10-minute silent film about a man trying to win his co-worker’s heart.

“I don’t think there’s a certain type of ‘Christian’ film. I think it should represent the variety and diversity of experiences in the world,” Wandtke said.

In all, Imago Film Festival showed 21 short films this year, in addition to feature-length films “Blue Like Jazz” and “Heaven’s Rain” by Brooks Douglass, who also appeared at the festival. About 70 films were

submitted to the festival, which the director said is about average.

The festival expanded its marketing outside the Chicago area for the first time this year, and interest in it returned from as far away as Italy, Wandtke said.

“I’m glad our reputation is growing in this way,” he said.

“Blue Like Jazz” opens in theaters April 13. For more information about the film, visit [bluelikejazzthemovie.com](http://bluelikejazzthemovie.com), and the Imago Film Festival, [imagofilmfestival.com](http://imagofilmfestival.com).