



Article by Britt Aamodt

Britt Aamodt gives you the lowdown on this year's MNTV line-up, an annual showcase of the best new short films made by local talent, presented by IFP, the Walker, Intermedia Arts and TPT, all broadcast through this month on public television.

A FATHER, PLAGUED BY GUILT, RECEIVES A MYSTERIOUS message. Could it be from his comatose daughter? Meanwhile, in fashion land, lovers Bruno and Fillipa emerge from seclusion to astound the world with the "most dangerously stunning creation the world has ever known." Of course, this is when the Iranian father decides to visit his son and his son's American wife in Minnesota; in the process he lands himself squarely in the middle of a domestic war. Where is Charlton Heston when you need him? Oh, there he is, arisen from the dead to campaign for car owners and their gas-guzzling vehicles.

Either you've just tuned into a *Desperate Housewives* spin-off, or you're watching the latest batch of MNTV film and video shorts. What is [MNTV](#)? Aside from being a catchy acronym—MNTV stands for Minnesota Television—it's probably the only chance you'll get this year to see some of Minnesota's best shorts by some of Minnesota's best filmmakers, *and* from the best seat in the house. Your house, that is, because MNTV airs on [Twin Cities Public Television](#) (channels 2 and 17) beginning December 2008.

A joint project of [IFP](#), [Intermedia Arts](#), the [Walker Art Center](#), and TPT, MNTV is designed to be a showcase for Minnesota films which were made in the past two years and are no more than forty minutes long. Dean Otto, assistant curator for film and video at the Walker, along with Lu Lippold at IFP, and Marlina Gonzalez at Intermedia Arts, judged over seventy-five submissions from fifty-one Minnesota filmmakers for this year's MNTV line-up.

This year's assortment of shorts features sixteen pieces packaged into three one-hour programs. Below you'll find mention of some of the stand-out films and videos selected for this year's showcase of local talent. If you'd like to get the full line-up and more detailed broadcast information for each program, you can visit the [Walker Art Center website](#).

Program I: Summer Festivals

The first of the three MNTV programs airs December 14 on channel 2 and December 20 on channel 17; this initial group of short films centers on the theme of summer festivals. There isn't

anything more evocative of summertime in Minnesota than the Minnesota State Fair, the subject of filmmaker [Brian Dehler](#)'s *Midway*, the two-minute short which opens the broadcast. Maybe you're thinking you've seen enough footage of the State Fair. After all, every television station within driving distance of the Great Minnesota Get-Together hosts a fair booth from which they subject you to nightly reports on the latest food on a stick. Well, this ain't that kind of State Fair documentary. Dehler, raised in Saint Paul, started making films around the same time he started writing and recording music, so it's not surprising that *Midway* is as much about music as it is cinema. "Usually with music videos, the filmmaker will take a song and then make a visual representation of it," says Jeff Weihe, MNTV's director and producer at TPT. "But what Brian has done is to build the song off the video." *Midway* is composed of home video footage taken in the midway area of the State Fair which is then broken down into smaller chunks that play over a rhythmic track. In one scene, fairgoers on one of the rides spin in and out of frame, their forward momentum staggered, reversed, and replayed in time to the musical track. The effect is arresting because, removed from a chronological storyline, the images condense to musical notes and meaning is derived from the juxtaposition of the two, rather than from some inherent visual narrative alone.

With [Mr. Positive](#), another of the noteworthy films included in this evening's collection, co-directors Mike Hazard and Emily Rumsey have created one of those documentaries that lingers with the viewer long after the credits roll. *Mr. Positive* himself is Carl Bentson: a resident of Saint Paul, a product of the foster care system, a school janitor, a homeowner, a car fanatic, and the best neighbor a person could ask for. If you hear a roar in the middle of the night, that's just Carl coming by with his snowblower to clear your drive. *Mr. Positive* proves that it isn't money that makes the world go round, but humble acts of kindness that inspire those who behold them to do better and be better in the world.

Program 2: Animation

MNTV's second program (airing December 21 on channel 2 and December 27 on channel 17) comprises eight animated and fantasy-themed shorts, with fetching titles like *Charlton Heston Brought Back from the Dead* and *The Wood Witch*. Minnesota has never been known as a hotbed of animation, though MCAD's program in the field has begun to attract some talented animators to the area. One of the guiding lights in this emerging local scene is [Tom Schroeder](#), an MCAD animation instructor. Schroeder has distinguished himself in the annals of MNTV history for having work in nearly every edition of the annual showcase, according to juror Dean Otto, the Walker Art Center's assistant curator for film and video. (Also of note, Schroeder is also distinguished by being the only Minnesotan with work selected for inclusion this year's [Sundance Film Festival](#).) [Yellow Bird](#), Schroeder's animated short selected for this year's program, opens on a sweep of tranquil Montana ranchland. The scene turns bloody when a young ranch hand accidentally shoots himself; during the wagon ride back to camp for medical attention, the injured man relives the painful experiences that first drove him to Montana. Schroeder has created a fatalistic dream, where decisions made by the young protagonist—dodging the draft, leaving his pregnant wife—are shown to ripple inexorably toward that fateful moment of the accident in the field. *Yellow Bird* is quietly beautiful, backgrounds and figures sparsely rendered, and more hard-hitting for that restraint. His is the kind of animation you wish Disney, with its deep pockets, would produce but likely never will.

[Dean Otto](#) has been involved with MNTV since the 1990s, and he admits that the program "is great for presenting the work of established filmmakers like Tom Schroeder over the course of their

careers. But we're also really surprised when we get submissions from filmmakers we've never heard of. We wonder, *Why haven't we heard of this person?* Some of the films we get are so polished." Otto pegs [Ryan Wetherall](#), another filmmaker featured in this broadcast, as just such a newcomer to watch. In fact, the recent film graduate from Minneapolis College of Art and Design has two pieces in this year's MNTV group: the post-apocalyptic *Incubus Drone* and the darkly fantastic music video *Chiasm*.

Program 3: Bridges

The last MNTV program airs December 28 on channel 2 and January 3, 2009 on channel 17. This last installment constellates around the concept of bridges. [Paul Bernhard](#)'s offering fits the bill precisely: *Bridges* is a leisurely boat trip down the Mississippi, accompanied by structural information on twenty Twin Cities' bridges that may have you investigating alternate routes to downtown. Bridges of the metaphorical variety are also well-represented: *Diego's Trip to Guatemala* documents nine-year-old Diego Luke's trip to Guatemala to meet his birth mother, an impoverished coffee plantation worker. Equally touching is the narrative short by Denise Kriesel, *The Kings & Queens of Persia*, which grew out of an improvisational workshop Kriesel conducted with her Iranian-born mechanic and his father, both new to acting, about Iranians living in America.

TPT producer/director Jeff Weihe has seen the quality of MNTV submissions improve over the years, something he chalks up to the widespread availability of lower-cost digital cameras and editing software, "which allow filmmakers to spend more time on their stories." Still, he admits, you won't find these shorts on commercial television. "There's no money in them. But the mission of public broadcasting is to show people [films and videos] they might not otherwise see. And you don't get any closer to that than MNTV."

About the author: [Britt Aamodt](#) is a freelance writer living in Minneapolis. She loves the arts, meeting new people, and grocery shopping.

[Click here for the full MNTV broadcast schedule.](#)

Related Links

- [MNTV Broadcast Schedule](http://calendar.walkerart.org/event.wac?id=4738)(<http://calendar.walkerart.org/event.wac?id=4738>)
The Walker Art Center lists a current broadcast schedule for MNTV 2008. Also check the TPT website for rebroadcasts and streaming video of MNTV programs throughout the year.
- [Intermedia Arts, one of the host organizations for MNTV, is in trouble](http://blogs.walkerart.org/mnartists/2008/12/16/will-intermedia-arts-be-the-next-to-fall/)(
<http://blogs.walkerart.org/mnartists/2008/12/16/will-intermedia-arts-be-the-next-to-fall/>)
Read mnartists.org's blog post about the recent financial woes to hit Intermedia Arts, one of MNTV's sponsoring organizations.
- [IFP Minnesota](http://www.ifpnorth.org/)(<http://www.ifpnorth.org/>)
The IFP MN Center for Media Arts website: get info on this and other film and video

programs, grants, and education offerings.

- [Walker Art Center - Film/Video](http://filmvideo.walkerart.org/index.wac)(<http://filmvideo.walkerart.org/index.wac>)
Visit the Walker's web presence for its film/video programming and collection.
- [Twin Cities Public Television](http://www.tpt.org/)(<http://www.tpt.org/>)
The TPT website has rebroadcast information for this year's MNTV films and will offer streaming video of all of the 2008 shorts throughout the year online.
- [Britt Aamodt](http://www.mnartists.org/artistHome.do?rid=103814)(<http://www.mnartists.org/artistHome.do?rid=103814>)
Read more about and by the author on her mnartists.org webpages.
- [FILM: "Chick Flicks" by Britt Aamodt](http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=200989)(<http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=200989>)
These days, accomplished film pros—many of them women—see no need to head for LA to make their way in the industry. Britt Aamodt talks to a slew of MN women working in the business about the innovations revolutionizing how we make (and see) movies.
- [FILM: "Something to Say" by Britt Aamodt](http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=209598)(<http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=209598>)
Writer-about-town Britt Aamodt offers up the skinny on the TCYMN All-City Youth Film Showcase, coming on October 25 to the Walker, with a line-up of screenings of films submitted and curated by young local artists.
- [FILM: "Making Movies that Matter" by Myron Berdahl](http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=194793)(<http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=194793>)
"Butter City" producer Myron Berdahl chats with MN documentary filmmaker Emily Goldberg about her newest production, "TCGMC: Reflections on Meth Addiction," which will have its broadcast premiere on TPT June 21 at 8 pm.

Author Bio



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Photo of Carl Bentson, the eponymous character in "Mr. Positive" directed by Mike Hazard and Emily Rumsey. (See the short film on TPT channel 17 December 20)

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