

Salute Your Shorts

By [BRUCE BENNETT](#) | April 25, 2008

WHEN VIEWED IN BULK, THE PLOTS, THEMES, AND INCIDENTS MAKING UP SHORT FILMS TAKE ON A SAMENESS THAT AT BEST CELEBRATES THE UNIVERSALITY AND durability of storytelling, and at worst evokes the generic titles of “Friends” episodes (“The one about the grandmother’s last wish,” “The one about the nerd’s crush,” “The one about the bag of money,” etc.). Luckily, the Tribeca Film Festival’s short-film survey offers plenty of narrative and documentary creative value at cut-rate running times. Here is a 12-film sampling culled from among Tribeca’s nearly 80 short offerings.

THE AVIATRIX, Dir. [Toddy Burton](#), 10 min.: A repetitive but promising student-competition paean to the healing powers of imagination, romance, and sarcasm.

CUPCAKE, Dir. [Sean McPhillips](#), 9 min.: This kitschy, borderline grotesque curio explores personal empowerment through snacking. If there’s any justice, the art department didn’t pay for any drinks at the wrap party.

EAU BOY, Dir. [Eric Gravel](#), 5 min.: An eternally wet misfit meets his match in a film that remains cozy, cute, and slight until it suddenly grows mythological wings and small but sharp narrative fangs near the end.

ECLIPSE, Dir. Mark Lapwood, 10 min.: Homeless denizens of [Mumbai](#) are photographed with such state-of-the-art visual polish that they could be in a gruesomely down-market [American Express](#) commercial.

THE ELEPHANT GARDEN, Dir. [Sasie Sealy](#), 19 min.: This deftly visualized and beautifully performed Southern suburban tweener’s identity crisis is a welcome short-film program rarity: a student movie that holds its own alongside the non-student offerings. Writer-director Sasie Sealy comfortably packs a feature’s worth of taste, heart, and insight into 19 minutes.

GOOD BOY, Dir. Davyde Wachell, 12 min.: Two potential genre wrongs make a right. “Good Boy” fuses a kid’s movie with a hit-man movie, and seamlessly avoids the sentimentalism of the former and the macho nihilism of the latter.

I THINK, I THOUGHT, Dir. [Matthew Modine](#), 7 min.: A seasoned short-form pro neatly scores by setting and meeting reasonable goals for irony, satire, pathos, and running time. Composer Ben Wolfe’s standout music score gets the assist.

LAST TIME IN [CLERKENWELL](#), Dir. [Alex Budovsky](#), 4 min.: A syncopated struggle for global domination by Imperialist English birds, depicted in black-and-white silhouette animation that’s suitable for cell phone screens. To paraphrase the kids on [“American Bandstand,”](#) “it has a beat and you can goose-step to it.”

NEW BOY, Dir. [Steph Green](#), 11 min.: Culture shock as a Third-World refugee kid endures hazing on the first day of school in [Ireland](#). The film admirably holds back the treacle until the sentimental dam bursts at the end.

SIKUMI, Dir. [Andrew Okpeaha MacLean](#), 15 min.: A smooth, sad, wide-screen morality tale (and first-ever film performed entirely in Iñupiaq) that shrewdly and realistically de-romanticizes [Jack London](#)’s frozen north. Stunning.

WHEN I BECOME SILENT, Dir. [Hyo Yamamoto](#), 18 min.: Hyoe Yamamoto’s coolly cinematic Japanese drama quietly probes the emotional perils of intimacy, commitment, and self-expression within a society defined by double standards.

YELLOW STICKY NOTES, Dir. [Jeff Chiba Stearns](#), 6 min.: This amusing, animated, first-person film diary makes office supplies the scapegoat for a Canadian artist’s inability to confront the messy, scary world beyond his art.

