



A different kind of Citizen Kane film

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" Raisin Kane flyer "

Finding an audience
for documentary

films is never easy. With some rare exceptions (think *Hoop Dreams* or *Roger and Me*) they don't play in theatres and while there's more potential for exposure on television, their share of the ratings isn't about to push *ER* or *Survivor* out of the top 10 anytime soon.

But that's not fazing Alison Duke, whose documentary *Raisin' Kane* kicks off *Iced in Black* this weekend.

"I'm taking a page out of Spike Lee's book," she says from her office in Toronto. "When he did *She's Gotta Have It*, people told him that there was no audience for that film and what he said was 'I'll take it to the audience.' So that's what I'm doing with this film."

The film follows Toronto hip-hop group *Citizen Kane* as they prepared to release their first CD. She picked the group because she knew the guys in the band — one of them is her brother. But she also chose them because *Citizen Kane*'s experiences are not unlike those of other hip-hop acts.

"When people watch the film," says Duke, "they say, 'You know what? This is about *Citizen Kane* but it's not really about *Citizen Kane*, I mean, I can relate to it.'"

When she began the film, Duke assumed that the story of *Citizen Kane* would be very much a Canadian one. What she found, though, was that independent hip-hop bands seem to share the same experiences no matter where they live.

"A lot of independent bands in the States are going through the same thing, it just depends where they live. For most people they have to move to New York or LA or down south to Atlanta. What if you live in Nebraska? What if you live in, you know, Maine? What happens to you?" she asks.

In the end, maybe Canadians and Americans are simply not as different as we want to believe they are. Like the Canadian subjects of her film, Duke says, "there's a lot of American young people who want to be hip hop stars. It's just that dream to be an artist."

Viewers shouldn't expect an overly glamorous depiction of the independent music business. Duke wanted to portray the band's ups and



downs in as realistic a manner as possible. Her background in music videos meant that even before taking on the project she knew exactly what she didn't want.

"I didn't want it to look like a fantasy or something that was unrealistic to what these guys were actually going through.

"I wanted it to be passionate and beautiful and very gritty at the same time. Beautiful because it's just capturing life, gritty because sometimes you're in situations where you can't worry about lighting, it's just about getting the story and the true essence of what's happening."

And the reality for a lot of rap acts in this country can be pretty harsh. MuchMusic is one of the only mainstream broadcasters that plays rap and hip-hop. And as for radio airplay, there aren't many stations interested.

"The infrastructure is more broken, so there's less opportunity to succeed," she adds bluntly.

Problems with infrastructure are something that carry over into the world of documentary filmmaking as well. Governments across the country have cut millions in funding from the arts over the last 10 years, leaving more artists scrambling for less. On top of that, grants are often tied to a project's commercial potential.

"Documentaries are not seen as commercially viable as dramas and those made for the theatre." Duke says. "And then issues that relate to people of colour tend to be not represented well."

The film is playing UW as part of Black History Month, something Duke is happy about because it appeals to younger audiences.

"Usually when they show black films during this month it's all older history, it has nothing that really relates to them or that they can even remember." she says. "So it's something that they can relate to and make them feel proud of being black and it gives them a sense of hope."

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