

arts & entertainment

Film short pays homage to artist victims of Holocaust

Rita Blitt's short film, "Collaborating with the Past," has been selected for showing at the Kansas City FilmFest. Blitt's short will be shown prior to "Andrew Bird: Fever Year" at 5 p.m. Wednesday, April 11, at AMC Mainstreet 6 located at 1400 Main Street in downtown Kansas City. It will be shown again at 8:15 p.m. Saturday, April 14, at the Ward Parkway 14 located at 8600 Ward Parkway, also preceding "Andrew Bird: Fever Year."

Blitt created her 10-minute multi-media work "Collaborating with the Past" in homage to the Jewish artists whose works were silenced by Hitler. These drawings were made while she listened to the music of Czech-Jewish composer Pavel Haas at the Aspen Music Festival. Haas' passionate, evocative music is synchronized with the artist's spontaneous, minimal line drawings, fading in and out across the screen in expressive, patterns and rhythms.

Haas' string quartet "From the Monkey Mountains" recalls a happy era of his youth, when he spent summer vacations in the Czech-Moravian Highlands near Brno. The Czech composer studied with Leos Janacek and incorporated elements of folk music and jazz in his compositions. Together with many Jewish musicians, intellectuals, artists and children, Haas was deported by the Nazis to the Terezin transit camp near Prague in 1941. There, he joined colleagues in composing and performing music, despite the brutal conditions of the camp. He died at Auschwitz in 1944 at age 43.

Blitt herself has been described as a conductor of color and light. Her musical, flowing drawings synthesize the spirited movements and lyrical passages of Haas' composition, as she achieves her own personal and artistic collaboration with the past.

Blitt said creating "Collaborating with the Past" has been a very satisfying experience for her.

"It represents the culmination of an artistic project



An image from 'Collaborating with the Past.'

I've been trying to achieve for several years. In 1995, I responded with spontaneous drawings as I sat in a concert hall, listening to the music of the European composers who perished in Hitler's death camps: Pavel Haas, Gideon Klein, Hans Krasa, Viktor Ullmann, and Erwin Shulhoff," she explained.

She said the short film gives her the opportunity

"to both share the minimal line drawings I made, with great emotion, and to honor the legacy of those whose creativity was silenced during the Holocaust."

Blitt noted that both her mother and Haas' mother were born in Odessa, Russia.

"While working on my film, I realized that had I been living in Russia, I, too, might have been a victim of the Holocaust. The film is a moment in time for the viewer to grasp the magnitude of what has been lost, of what these composers might have produced, had they been able to live and create in freedom, as I have done all my life."

Blitt's film premiered at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco in May 2011.

Also the weekend of April 13, a new building will open at the Samuel U. Rogers Clinic in which 100 of Blitt's works will be on display indefinitely.

Founded in 1996, the Kansas City Filmmakers Jubilee presents an annual, juried film festival featuring more than 120 local, regional, national and international films. Traditionally the festival is held in April each year and the general movie-going public is encouraged to attend the screenings. More than \$200,000 in cash and prizes have been awarded since 1997. In 2012, a \$1,000 cash prize will be awarded for the best short film. Additionally, more than \$5,000 in other cash and prizes will be awarded to top juried films.

Panels and workshops are offered during the festival as local filmmakers have the opportunity to meet and learn from other filmmakers who come to Kansas City to judge and speak. In its 16-year history, the festival has attracted more than 250 top filmmakers from around the world to share their work and their insights on filmmaking.

For more information about the Kansas City FilmFest, visit www.kcfilmfest.org.