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arts and entertainment

## Latino and short films take spotlight at two fests

By Lisa Kennedy  
*Denver Post Film Critic*

Posted: 04/01/2011 03:54:56 PM MDT

Updated: 04/04/2011 11:21:14 AM MDT



Harmony Santana as a gender-transitioning teen in "Gun Hill Road."

The global and the local get their respective — and quite different — close-ups when two long-standing film festivals open this week.

In its 20 years, the Aspen Shortsfest has become an internationally respected showcase of movies that, although brief, seldom short-shrift storytelling, acting or character.

In Denver, XicanIndie 13, the annual festival of Latino world cinema, takes flight with a documentary about Cuba, "The Man of Two Havanas," before touching down with a locally made documentary focused on a hometown

tragedy: Alan Dominquez's "Photos of Angie," about the murder of Angie Zapata, a transgender woman in Greeley, CO in 2008.

Denver Mayor Bill Vidal is slated to introduce Vivian Lesnik Weisman's

opening night film about her father, exiled Cuban revolutionary Max Lesnik. (7:30 p.m. Thursday)

Both fests have broad appeal. Shortsfest is ever mindful of expanding its audience beyond the denizens of its tony environs. And although residents of the resort town would be right to consider themselves fortunate to be the home of the eclectic festival, Shortsfest should be a destination festival for ardent moviegoers.

This year's slate is strong, particularly in the live-action category. (Caveat: I screened a quarter of the 83 films that will compete in 11 packages.) So, those hitting the mountain roads for the fest are likely to preview a film or two — live action, animated and documentary — that will make the list of nominees for next year's Oscars.

XicanIndie attempts to balance its artistic ambitions with a commitment to engage Denver's Hispanic community. This tango can

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occasionally make for uneven, but always compassionate, programming.

When festival honcho and filmmaker Daniel Salazar nails both desires, XicanIndie snags a work like Rashaad Ernesto Green's debut feature, "Gun Hill Road," which premiered to laudatory reviews at the Sundance Film Festival in January.

As different



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as the fests are, they prove once again, there's no shortage of options for the state's avid filmgoers.

### Aspen Shortsfest

**When:** Tuesday-April 10

**Where:** The Wheeler Opera House, and Carbondale's Crystal Theater

**Schedule, ticket and lodging info:** [aspenfilm.org](http://aspenfilm.org)

Films to look for:

**"North Atlantic":** A solo air-traffic controller in the Azores strikes up a conversation with a woefully off- course pilot in Portuguese writer-director Bernardo Nacimiento's gem, inspired by a real incident. "I'm a long way from anywhere,"

the errant pilot says in a rich brogue. He is. But he is not alone.

**"Just Be Frank":** Sometime jazz singer and man about town Frank Senior lives in New York City, arguably one of nation's most disorienting burgs — at least for the sighted. Senior, you see, is blind. "I'm not afraid of anything but bumping into scaffolding." One can only hope all guys named Frank are as candid as the subject of Elise Bialylew's micro-doc. "Every block's going to be a challenge," says Senior. "Do you want to take the challenge or stay home?"

**"Love at First Sight":** Narrative shorts are known for their "aha" kickers, their final, oh-so-clever (and authentically pleasing) twists. This



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tale of an elderly man (John Hurt) spying a lady love (Phyllida Law) from across the senior-home dining room turns on a tender revelation.

**"Hector Is Gonna Kill Nate"**: At the end of Ari Issler's smartly visceral story of a high-school basketball coach who intervenes to stop an act of retribution, I wrote down the director's name. Then I noted his cinematographer (Jeffrey Kim) and editor (Matt Ruskin). They should all surface again. It's an agile bit of work with actual emotional payoffs.

**"Cataplexy"**: A call girl rings the bell of a client. Turns out they were friends in high school. Awkward. Initially, this seven-minute piece feels like it's going to be one of those L.A.-type tales too clever by half. Then it keeps gently evolving.

**"Raju"**: In this color-saturated narrative, a German couple travels to India to adopt an orphan. Later, when the wife stays behind at the hotel, the husband and his new son share a glorious, pungent, vibrant outing. Then the unthinkable happens, followed by the heartrending but noble.

**"The Unspoken"**: Beautifully composed images capture a man whose body is betraying him. (The film is dedicated to families living with terminal cancer.) But his son, director and narrator Jason van Genderen, gives flesh to what matters. "I love you buckets, mate" he tells his father in this tone-poem homage.

## XicanIndie 13

**When:** Thursday-April 10

**Where:** Su Teatro, 721 Sante Fe Drive

**Tickets:** General admission \$17-\$20

**Schedule and info:** [martinezled.com](http://martinezled.com)

Films to look for:

**"Gun Hill Road"**: In Raashad Ernesto Green's moving domestic drama, ex-con Enrique returns to his Bronx home from prison only to learn, slowly, that his teen son is transgender. The performances combine muscle with vulnerability, starting with newcomer Harmony Santana as Michael/ Vanessa. Esai Morales and Judy Reyes do a dance of volatility and tenderness as parents. (7:30 p.m. Friday, director in person)

**"As Long As I Remember: American Veterans"**: Director Laure Varela found rich, thoughtful subjects for her documentary about three Mexican-American Vietnam War vets. (2 p.m. Sunday, 4/10)

In a nice bit of programming synchronicity, XicanIndie is also screening (7:30 p.m. Saturday, 4/9) the America Ferrera-produced narrative feature "The Dry Land," about an Iraq War vet returning to a rural Texas town and his wife (Ferrera) and mother (Melissa Leo).

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