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Fog City Mavericks: The Filmmakers of San Francisco

[Starz / Anchor Bay](#) // Unrated // April 8, 2008

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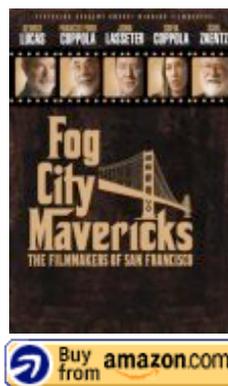
Review by [Brian Orndorf](#) | posted March 24, 2008 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

THE FILM

Innovation through location is the theme of "Fog City Mavericks." A diligent documentary on the illustrious alumni of the Bay Area cinema movement, the picture takes an affectionate look at those visionaries who not only originated from the city, but also pursued their dreams of financial and artistic autonomy on the welcoming streets of San Francisco.

"Mavericks" is not a documentary charting the individual explosion of success. With a diverse range of directors such as George Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola, Saul Zaentz, Philip Kaufman, John Lasseter, and Clint Eastwood, there's certainly the temptation to explore the highlights of these exceptional careers. "Mavericks" is more fascinated with freedom, and how the Bay Area cinema movement allowed for atypical creativity and camaraderie far away from the slimy clutches of Hollywood and their inbred methods of commercial assurance.

If the outstanding "Mavericks" lacks anything, it's concentration. The documentary jumps furiously around in time with an itchy nonlinear presentation, attempting to separate the lives of these filmmakers before bundling them together to make the picture's ultimate point of



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unification. The result is a modestly disjointed ride through history that starts and stops in fits. However, that does nothing to discount the profusion of information and interview access presented in the production, which accumulates dog-eared accounts of filmmaking dreams and skillfully infuses new life into them, even extracting a bombshell or two along the way.

"Mavericks" opens with the efforts of Eadweard Muybridge, an Englishman who gave birth to the motion picture through his groundbreaking photographic experimental work, including the Zoopraxiscope projection machine. Revealing the city's place in extraordinary film history, director Gary Leva soon settles into the stories of the men and women who located their filmmaking center in Northern California, taking pride in the majestic sweep of creative expression and individuality the late 1960s allowed for.

The two focal points of "Mavericks" are Lucas and Coppola, who united under the American Zoetrope production company and struggled to give an independent voice to the crowded, small-minded film business. Their origins are uniquely bonded by tragedy (both men faced certain death in their childhoods), and together, under Coppola's indefatigable leadership abilities, they marched forward, endeavoring to create shelter in San Francisco where other filmmakers could discover creative comfort. The effort failed with the evisceration of Lucas's esoteric "THX 1138," but the gates were kicked open, soon bringing talents such as Carroll Ballard, Walter Murch, and Caleb Deschanel to the industry.

For any fan of film, "Mavericks" is an enthralling journey of triumphs and failures, with the participants sharing anecdotes about their hardships and frustrations striving to rise above the money machine and get their voice out into the world. Buttressed by clips of the screen's most important offerings of filmmaking ("The Godfather," "Unforgiven," "Black Stallion," "Star Wars," "American Graffiti," "The Conversation," "Amadeus," "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "Lost in Translation," plus scores of other features), "Mavericks" exposes the soul of the San Francisco movement, underlining the implicit desire to create cinema of passion and interpretation; the creation of greatness through experimentation, not cold calculation. It's wonderful to watch these filmmakers recall their moments of stimulation, along with hesitation, as they achieved some of their wildest dreams.

I'm sure some will have trouble with a few of the more proudly mainstream biographical inclusions, including a discussion with underrated filmmaker Chris Columbus, who is perhaps the most San Francisco-centric filmmaker of the group. The patchwork quilt Leva is assembling carefully here has plenty of room for the likes of Columbus and even

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the Pixar story, which closes the film and represents the documentary's more outlandish idea of creative achievement.

THE DVD

Visual:

Presented in anamorphic widescreen (1.78:1 aspect ratio), the image is consistent with similar documentary efforts, lacking a certain polish, but perfectly acceptable. Film clips run the gamut in presentation, but overall this is a nice looking disc for an extremely specialized product.

Audio:

The 2.0 Dolby Digital sound mix of "Mavericks" is as modest as the visual presentation. Interviews are clear and balanced well with scoring, just don't plop this DVD expecting a complex soundfield.

Extras:

Three Starz promo spots (3 minutes) for "Fog City Mavericks" are included. Two of them are hosted by Richard Roeper.

FINAL THOUGHTS

"Fog City Mavericks" doesn't pursue many of its ideas to their logical conclusion (the ultimate independent productions, the "Star Wars" prequels, are not discussed), but the extensive ideas of revolution are awe-inspiring to see, especially situated so close together. It's an ideal narrative of historical achievement, and a watching these well-known stories retold with fresh, innovative angles creates a very special, educational experience - absolute pure gold to anyone who has ever followed these careers with unabashed admiration.

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