



home > movies > reviews

You are not logged in: [login](#) or [join](#)  
1 member and 123 visitors online

 [search](#)

[lead stories](#) [on the scene](#) [insider](#) [movies](#) [buzz](#) [ipop](#) [video](#) [in depth](#) [indieLOOP](#) [blogs](#) [site map](#)

[on the scene](#)

- [afi](#)
- [berlinale](#)
- [cannes](#)
- [los angeles](#)
- [new york](#)
- [park city](#)
- [san francisco](#)
- [sxsxw](#)
- [toronto](#)

[insider](#)

- [advocacy](#)
- [biz](#)
- [people](#)
- [box office](#)
- [movies](#)
- [reviews](#)

[buzz](#)

- [acquisitions](#)
- [awards](#)
- [events](#)
- [festivals](#)
- [honors](#)
- [industry](#)
- [moves](#)
- [people](#)
- [more ...](#)

[ipop](#)

- [afi](#)
- [berlinale](#)
- [cannes](#)
- [sundance](#)
- [more ...](#)

[video](#)

[in depth](#)

- [awards](#)
- [watch](#)
- [box office](#)
- [documentary](#)
- [queer cinema](#)
- [shorts](#)
- [undiscovered](#)
- [gems](#)
- [world cinema](#)

[indieLOOP](#)

- [forum](#)
- [events](#)
- [classifieds](#)

[blogs](#)

- [blogs we house](#)
- [blogs we love](#)

[about](#)

- [the team](#)
- [contact](#)
- [legal](#)
- [privacy](#)

[advertise](#)

- [rates \(PDF\)](#)
- [press & quotes](#)
- [blog ads](#)
- [sponsorship](#)

[\[X\] close](#)

PARK CITY



A scene from Ryan Piotrowicz's "The Project." Image courtesy of the Slamdance Film Festival.

## PARK CITY '08 NOTEBOOK | Slamdance Offers Refreshing Alternative: "Paranormal"; "Fix"; "Project", "Tingler"

Park City coverage sponsored by **BE KIND REWIND**.

by Eric Kohn (January 22, 2008)

Compact in terms of programming and scale, the **Slamdance Film Festival** offers a refreshing grassroots alternative to the **Sundance Film Festival's** glamour. This year's program includes several markedly similar attempts to tell fictional stories within a documentary framework. These aren't lighthearted mockumentaries of the **Christopher Guest** variety: YouTube generation filmmakers have adapted the style as a non-ironic storytelling device--and when the tactic works, it's stunning.

**Supported by:**

ATONEMENT  
Congratulations to Atonement for their Golden Globe Awards  
learn more at [samsung.com/blueseat](http://samsung.com/blueseat)

[Read more...](#)

[place a premium ad on indieWIRE.com](#)

**Seoul, where dreams are made**



Realize your dreams with the help of Seoul Film Commission

- up to 25% Production Cost Support
- Location Scouting Cost

coverage presented by: BE KIND REWIND

"**Paranormal Activity**" makes a strong case for this approach. Despite its miniscule production values and somewhat rudimentary concept, this intelligently paced ghost story creates a stripped-down intensity that the horror genre often sorely lacks. Israeli-born director **Oren Peli** uses a technique reminiscent of "**The Blair Witch Project**," but it really suggests a DIY take on "**Poltergeist**." Shot on digital video and edited like found footage, the movie tracks the efforts of a young couple (**Katie Featherson** and **Micah Sloat**) to record a menacing supernatural presence haunting their home at night. Peli generates suspense with nuanced cues that suit the material (plenty of things go bump in the night). Like any great thriller, anticipation trumps excess. "When I watch a movie with a lot of editing tricks and loud sound effects--these kind of things make you jump, but they don't stay with you," Peli said last week shortly before the premiere of his film. "The ones that don't show a lot of things always scare me."

Consider Peli's alternative to the genre's typically simplistic shocks in light of the Slamdance documentary "**Spine Tingler: The William Castle Story**," which tracks the bizarre efforts of the prolific genre filmmaker to break the fourth wall of the horror filmgoing experience. Castle, whose stature as the producer of "**Rosemary's Baby**" became overwhelmed by the prolificacies of **Roman Polanski**, succeeded as a performance artist--but the camp value of his gimmicks cheapened his reputation. (In one interview, **John Waters** tenderly recalls the flimsy skeleton drifting over a bemused crowd during "**House on Haunted Hill**"). Castle's legacy is illuminating when juxtaposed with the icy power of "**Paranormal Activity**," where the illusion of real danger engenders a greater terror than any given mass market ploy.



The other Slamdance movies to combine documentary formalism with fabricated narratives are more conventional, but in both cases the morality of documentary filmmaking plays a central role. "**Fix**," a raunchy comedy with the gritty energy of "**Go**" and the speedy wit of "**Arrested Development**," centers on the rushed daylong experience of Milo (**Tao Ruspoli**, also the director) and his friend Bella (**Olivia Wilde**), during which they transport Milo's raucous brother Leo (**Shawn Andrews**) from jail to rehab and capture the whole thing on camera. "I was looking for a story that

Support  
-Filming and Location Support  
-Location Database and  
Industry Directory -->  
[www.filmkorea.or.kr](http://www.filmkorea.or.kr)  
[Read more...](#)

#### Gucci Tribeca Documentary Fund

THE GUCCI TRIBECA DOCUMENTARY FUND offers finishing funds to feature-length documentaries which promote social change and highlight critical issues currently absent from mainstream media. Applications will be accepted between February 5 and April 11, 2008 for grants ranging from 5k to 30k.  
[Read more...](#)

#### Be Kind Rewind

[Read more...](#)

#### 2008 SXSW Lineup Announced!



The 2008 Lineup Has Been Announced.  
113 Features, 64 World Premieres.  
Get Your SXSW Badge Today.



A scene from Jeffrey Schwarz's "Spine Tingler: The William Castle Story." Image courtesy of the Slamdance Film Festival.

would allow me to gradually transition to narrative filmmaking using the language I had learned making documentaries," explains Ruspoli about his feature debut. Whatever the language, "Fix" has a magnificent visual panache, glimmering with the neon hues of Beverly Hills. The talented cast of emerging

professionals (Wilde was recently cast alongside **Jack Black** in "Year One") compensate for a simplistic quest-based plot.

A simplistic treatment works directly against the heavy-handed conceits of "The Project," Slamdance's third phony doc. Its immediately cumbersome premise finds a trio of edgy film school grads trying to capture ghetto life in downtown Brooklyn while struggling with obnoxious white guilt. First of all, the idea such a large amount of violent gang wars would take place in the tame Fort Green streets is fairly intangible. Geographical quibbles aside, "The Project" suffers from a major tonal imbalance. **Ryan Piotrowicz** has an ear for amusing hipster cynicism, and his principle subjects are good for a few yucks, but the bleak, unsettlingly violent conclusion lacks imagination and feels emotionally vacant. A bold, misguided project itself, "The Project" needs no candid camera to reveal its characters' flaws.

With disparate productions lining up to take a crack at the same imitation of non-fiction, definite standards have started to form--and filmmakers need to think long and hard before deciding if their chosen story suits the method. At a relevant point in "Fix," one of the frustrated protagonists puts his friend to the test. "When are you gonna stop living your life like it's one fucking documentary?" he asks. As home video continues to encroach on mainstream entertainment (and "**Cloverfield**" dominates the box office), let's hope someone answers that question soon.

*indieWIRE's coverage of the 2008 Sundance Film Festival is available in iW's [special Park City section](#).*

( posted on Jan 21, 2008 at 03:50PM | filed under [Lead Story](#), [Park City](#), [Reviews](#) )

## MORE ARTICLES ABOUT

[Slamdance Film Festival](#), [Christopher Guest](#), [Paranormal Activity](#), [Oren Peli](#), [The Blair Witch Project](#), [Poltergeist](#), [Katie Featherson](#), [Micah Sloat](#), [Spine Tingler: The William Castle Story](#), [Rosemary's Baby](#), [House on Haunted Hill](#), [Fix](#), [Go](#), [Arrested Development](#), [Tao Ruspoli](#), [Olivia Wilde](#), [Shawn Andrews](#), [Jack Black](#), [The Project](#), [Ryan Piotrowicz](#), [Cloverfield](#)

## REACTIONS

Funny article coming from someone who probably has never been on the real streets in any city. I saw The Project and was totally engrossed in it's message. Also, when I go to a movie I try to pay attention to the details. Where was the "obnoxious white guilt" message delivered. Instead of sitting there and thinking about all the clever quotes you are going to write, try watching whats in front of you. I have lived there and have done that, it was raw and all too familiar. Next time you happen onto Fort Green try staying awhile

( posted by [drummer](#) on Jan 21, 2008 at 11:49PM )

I have to disagree. I saw the film and was totally engaged. The story cuts like a razor and the acting was superb! Your review does not represent the audiences reaction and excitement to this film.

( posted by [calibeach](#) on Jan 22, 2008 at 02:26AM )

Great article, Eric, thanks!

( posted by [pfunknmrk](#) on Jan 22, 2008 at 11:35AM )

Eric,

I totally agree with your comments on 'The Project.' I found the film thinly conceived, weak on details when it mattered most - the basic ideas were fatally flawed. That film was DOA with all

## TRACKBACK (PING URL)

[Read more...](#)

**HOT DOCS  
REGISTRATION NOW  
OPEN**



**Hot Docs Canadian  
International Documentary  
Festival**

North America's largest doc film festival, conference and market.

An essential meeting place for the international documentary industry.

[Register](#) today!  
Visit [www.hotdocs.ca](http://www.hotdocs.ca)  
[Read more...](#)

**New HBO Series IN  
TREATMENT**



WATCH IT NOW ON HBO.COM

**One doctor. Five sessions.  
Five nights a week.**

JAKE & AMY see Paul after infertility problems cause a strain on their marriage. Once pregnant, Amy has doubts causing Jake to become very suspicious.

**In Treatment**  
MON-FRI at 9:30PM  
See Jake & Amy's session tonight.  
ONLY on HBO.  
[Read more...](#)

