

YOUTH IMPACT REPORT: BIGSCREEN KIDS

Meet the 25 under-21 talents and adult mentors who transformed youth entertainment in 2009.

JESSE HARRIS

Fast fest learner

Jesse Harris knows all about the challenges facing teen filmmakers. After all, he used to be one. “Basically, I convinced my parents it would be a good idea to take my college money and make a feature film with it,” Harris

says. At age 17, he wrote and directed “Living Life,” hustling it to festivals before securing a limited multicity release.

As others caught wind of his story, young filmmakers from around the world began to contact Harris for advice and help on their own projects, motivating him to co-found the National Film Festival for Talented Youth (NFFTY), a sprocket opera dedicated exclusively to helmers 22 and younger. Three years in, Harris and his team receive more than 400 submissions from kids of



all ages, selecting roughly a quarter of them for the fest (Harris suggests teens start out helming shorts,

which make up the majority of NFFTY’s program). “Our youngest filmmaker to date was 7 years old,” beams Harris, now 23. “There’s everything from a really rich USC student who spent \$30,000 to a kid who made a film for \$10. We really look more at the story when we’re picking films.”

Attendance topped 4,000, with most of the filmmakers present. In addition to showing their films, Harris hosts a number of industry guests for panels. “It’s kind of like producing a film. You have to raise the money every year,” he explains. “It’s not like we just screen these films in a classroom. We use the best theaters in Seattle.”

— Peter Debruge

Impact: Co-founded NFFTY, the largest fest dedicated to ages 22-and-under talent.

Next: Developing an online festival submission system with San Francisco-based company Indee.TV as an alternative to Without a Box.

Causes: The carbon-neutral event features a NFFTY Earth sidebar focusing on films with environmental or social justice messages.

all ages, selecting roughly a quarter of them for the fest (Harris suggests teens start out helming shorts,