

Students, museum team for film about the Point

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Salem - Kirssy Gonzalez, 16, was attracted by the subject. A high school student then living in Salem's Point neighborhood, she was intrigued when Rosario Ubiera-Minaya, coordinator of the Museum Action Corps (MAC) program at the Peabody Essex Museum, told her of the program and the project.

That subject was the Point, Ubiera-Minaya said, and she said that the goal of the project was to create a vehicle of cross-cultural connection: "We want to bridge the gap between the museum and the Point."

Omayra Feliz, then a 19-year-old Salem State College double major in elementary education and math, was also keen to be involved.

"I knew Rosario before and got in contact with her. I came to the museum before it was remodeled, and I knew it had a lot of new things for young people," Feliz explained to the *Gazette*.

Now working as a Career Center coordinator at Girls Inc. in Lynn, Feliz was particularly pleased that project would focus attention on her culture and neighborhood — a culture and neighborhood that had been, she felt, underappreciated in the larger community.

"I liked the idea it was going to be about the Point," she said, "it was a neighborhood that was just 'there'."

The original group of interns gathered for what was to become the "What's the Point? The Hope of a Growing Community" film project included nine high school students, ranging in age from 16 to 17, and college students.

The film is structured in linear fashion, with a half-dozen "chapters," or sections. The first chapter is a short survey of the history of the section of Salem that came to be known as "the Point" in the 1800s, according to interviewee Patricia Hynes, a social studies teacher at Salem High School. Hynes also provides voiceover to a montage of historic photos of the area.

That the Point has traditionally been a neighborhood for immigrants is underscored by a brief interview with Lena Cripps and Yvette Corriveau, who were residents in the 1930s. Their comments address the formerly French-Canadian character of the area.

This initial section also introduces, on camera, Dominican Republic native Kirssy Gonzalez, who discusses her own family's immigration.

Reference to challenges facing all immigrants are woven throughout the film's story, and the historical introduction serves to connect past immigrants' experience to the present. Salem Police Lt. Conrad J. Prosniewski's assessment of the Point as "a little cultural pearl that's part of Salem that's a ... that you

know, one day will become somebody else's," near the end of the film, summarizes that theme.

Each succeeding section, all longer than the first, address issues described as "Identity," "Misconceptions," "Education," "Need" and "Moving Forward."

Student-museum partnership

MAC interns are selected by application and interview process, and admittance is competitive.

"MAC is a program that is the only one in the country to offer paid internships. Besides offering employment, it exposes students to creativity and to learn about art and culture in general, and specifically here, in a museum that offers so many different views," Ubiera-Minaya said. "It can open doors to many different things in the future."

The group working on "What's the Point?" decided to use the vehicle of documentary film to achieve their goal. None of them had had any previous experience in documentary filmmaking or knowledge of the history of documentary filmmaking.

Beverly resident Joe Bartley, then a senior majoring in communications and Biblical Studies at Gordon College, needed a full-time college internship, and MAC at the museum fit the bill.

"I found out I could work in the AV [audio visual] department and that was exactly what I wanted," he said. Bartley, who had worked with Beverly's Van Ness Creative Group (Paul Van Ness is also an owner of Salem's CinemaSalem) now works at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton. He would enter the Point project post-filming, as an editor.

The *Gazette* interviewed Gonzalez, Feliz, Bartley and Ubiera-Minaya last week at the Peabody Essex Museum offices. Gonzalez is now a political science major attending Syracuse University, and was interviewed via conference call.

The three interns interviewed described the filmmaking as a group process, including direction and scripting.

"We started giving ourselves the assignments; all of us interviewed, and we all did the storyboarding together," Gonzalez said. Filming was done with a digital camcorder.

Feliz oversaw the scheduling of interviews and other organizational details. Ubiera-Minaya, Gonzalez and Feliz also appear on camera, along with numerous others. The 45-minute film features nearly 30 interviews. Except for one brief section near the end, on-camera interviewees are shown responding to questions posed off-camera, and most interviews are conducted with a single person in the frame.

Editing was done in Ubiera-Minaya's office at the Peabody Essex utilizing the editing suite "Final Cut Pro." The editing style is fairly straightforward, with clean dissolves and few additional transitional effects throughout. The crew produced the DVD in-house and the entire process took nine months.

After producing the DVD and premiering the film the students ran into a legal problem, for they had used recorded music on the soundtrack without securing the rights. They rectified that mistake by issuing a second version, with rights secured. Most of the music is used over opening and closing credits, as bumper riffs between segments or scenes, or as it occurs naturally in the scene — as when teens are shown dancing.

An evolving neighborhood

Throughout the movie, the filmmakers highlight both the challenges of cultural prejudice and the joys of shared Hispanic culture. Nelly Matos, working in property management for the Salem Harbor CDC, moved to Salem's Point when there were few Hispanics in the city. The Point was then predominately populated by French-Canadians, and, she said, "It ... wasn't easy ... you weren't accepted from the beginning. You had difficulty finding an apartment because once you went to see the apartment and the owners saw your complexion and realized you're not Anglo, they'd find a way to reject you."

Religion is one strong bond of identity for the residents of the Point, said Rev. Marcelo Boschi, a Catholic priest. "It is not a community that lives its faith in a way that is hidden," Marcelo said, "it lives its faith in a way that is very expressive, with a lot of happiness."

Over scenes of musical worshippers at Mass, his voiceover identifies the church as a place of welcome for

those who “have left their land in pain.”

Interviews with both present and former Point residents highlight the fact that many immigrants who come to the United States are professionals, including doctors and engineers. However, until they can learn enough of the English language to pass the required tests in their professional field, many must work at jobs outside those fields, sometimes jobs far beneath their ability level. Their difficulties in blending work and family responsibilities with a steep cultural and linguistic learning curve in their new country are frankly discussed.

Interviews in the “Misconceptions” section contradict the idea that the Point is more dangerous than other parts of Salem. It is, however, very densely populated and that increases the “calls for service,” said Lt. Prosniewski. “The Point isn’t a dangerous neighborhood, by any means, it’s just a busy neighborhood,” he said.

The importance of family, in particular, is a strong theme throughout the piece, as is the importance of education. Gonzalez said in the film, “The Point functions like a big family, a family of friendship ... Our chain is as strong as the strength of each individual link.” The vital importance of school bilingual programs is underscored by teens and educators alike.

The film does not flinch from showing problems in the community, such as litter in the streets, and unoccupied teens congregating on street corners. “I think maybe people should take maybe more pride in their community, keeping the area clean, not throwing — not polluting,” said Grehica Moreta, another on-camera Salem State College student intern. Drugs and crime are also referenced briefly.

‘Moving Forward’

The film’s narrator follows up on-camera comments about the need for more programs for youth by saying that the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, a community health organization called V.O.C.E.S. and the Salem Harbor CDC are accessible, although residents express hope for a community center of their own in the Point. Children are shown on camera taking advantage of the programs at the YMCA.

The film also highlights programs such as Salem Cyber Space, established and directed by Linda Saris, and provides a look at ongoing work to enhance Mary Jane Lee Park.

In the final section, “Moving Forward,” children voice their hopes for “what they want to be when they grow up.” The theme expressed by each on-camera speaker is about the necessity for Point residents to have ambition, to become involved in community work, and to pursue ideals of self-determination and self-help.

In the three years since its release, “What’s the Point: The Hope of a Growing Community,” has been seen in many venues throughout the city. Most recently, it was shown at CinemaSalem in February as a featured event for the city’s “No Place For Hate” program.

Audience turnout was good, according to those who attended the showing, and reaction from those interviewed for this article is largely positive and enthusiastic about both the quality of the film and its message.

Most of those attendees interviewed by the *Gazette*, including one older Point resident, feel that the film will positively impact the larger Salem community’s view of the Point. All praised the project itself and the museum’s MAC program that provided the interns with the opportunity to make it.

The film summarizes the filmmakers’ own hopes for “bridging the gaps” in its final moments. “The future of the Point neighborhood,” it says, “rests on the hands of its youth who, through education and understanding, will aid the Point in receiving the recognition it deserves.”

Jim and Maggi Dalton

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ABOUT JIM & MAGGI

Jim and Maggi Dalton perform music of popular/vernacular, folk and cultivated traditions, covering time periods from the Middle Ages to the present, focusing largely on American, Celtic and British Isles repertoire. They specialize in music of the 19th and 20th centuries. Instrumentation: mostly plucked strings and voices.

Concerts and programs contain commentary designed to place the music performed in historical context for the audience. Programs reflect the continual and ongoing research in which the two delight. They also perform original songs and compositions.

Jim and Maggi have released two recordings to date, and have designed a full spectrum of programs which they present nationwide. They have been featured often on radio and television. (PBS, ABC, NBC, CBS affiliates, Cable Networks; NPR stations, NewsRadio, interview programs across the USA; feature stories in newspapers and magazines, i.e., *The Philadelphia Inquirer & Courier-Post*) They have performed at nationally-known venues (i.e., Colonial Williamsburg, Seneca Falls, the Harriet Beecher Stowe House) and countless local and regional venues nationwide.

They have served as artists-in-residence at various colleges, public history sites, community and educational centers, presenting series addressing American history and other topics in the humanities, using music as the core of each session.

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and concerts ~

Multi-instrumentalist *Jim Dalton* is an educator, conductor and award-winning composer and arranger.

As a performer, he specializes in historical and ethnic playing styles on a variety of plucked string instruments including guitar, mandolin, banjo, mandocello, Renaissance lute, bouzouki etc.

He also plays piano, organ, recorder and tin whistle.

In addition to duo performances with his wife, soprano and guitarist Maggi Smith-Dalton he maintains an active career as a freelance musician -- playing in chamber music ensembles, jazz and world music groups and in opera/theater and symphony orchestras.

He is a member of the New England Mandolin Ensemble.

His compositions have been performed across the U.S. and Canada and in Europe.

His choral composition, "The Rocky Road to Dublin," won first prize in the 1997 Toronto Camerata Competition. Two of his pieces for carillon have been published in anthologies by Fenwick Parva and the Friends of the Albany Carillon.

His composition for solo mandolin, "Gifts of the Bard," is published by Wolfhead Music.

His works are available through these publishers and Singing String Music Publications.

Jim is on the faculty of The Boston Conservatory, teaching music theory, ear training and world music courses for both the Music Theory and Music Education Departments. He has written articles for Blues Revue Magazine and is the author of *Mandolin for Beginners*, published by Workshop Arts, Inc./Alfred Publishing.

He is a frequent guest lecturer on topics such as composition, choral arranging and Irish traditional music. In the 2004-2005 year Jim received a MACRO research grant (Univ. of Wisconsin) to study and analyze palindromic compositions in concert music repertoire and presented this work at the 2005 Macro Musician's Workshop in Madison, WI.

Singer and musician, independent scholar, author and educator, *Maggi Smith-Dalton* has sung as a soloist with choirs and choruses both here and abroad, acted and sung in professional theater productions and produced/participated/performed in radio and television projects and programs.

She is a frequent guest lecturer -- on the integration of humanities and the arts, on folklore, and on American music and history, to name a few topics.

She has given lecture/demonstration programs at the college level (i.e., The New England Conservatory, The Boston Conservatory) and in numerous professional-development courses for educators and teachers at all grade levels.

Maggi enjoys an active performing career, which, after eleven years of work in cabaret, musical theater, and nightclub singing, has included more than two decades of concert performance nationwide and abroad, in partnership with her husband and as a soloist with choirs and in concert.

In addition, she authored a prize-winning short story and writes often for newspapers and magazines (including history and cultural/arts/educational feature articles, and a regular history column for the *Salem Gazette*).

Maggi's work in mainstream media included producing a cable TV series and programming and hosting musical theater, arts interview, and classical music shows for NPR public radio, commercial, and community stations.

A former Chairperson of the Haverhill Cultural Council, Maggi served as Musical Theater Director at Hill House (a community Arts Center) in Boston's Beacon Hill; as Director of "Adventures in Art," a summer arts program; and as a director of children's choirs.

With a background in teaching multiply-handicapped children, Maggi continues interest in and study of music therapy. She is working on a children's book; and is always working on a variety of writing projects.