

Reel Madness will challenge the mind

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Saunders is pretty high on two of the films in particular: *Gordon's Head* and *Dad*. The former, a fairly arty piece, is directed by native Victorian Clive Holden. It's a kaleidoscopic montage constructed around a teenager's monologue about his schizophrenic brother. *Dad* is Chris Triffo's surreal investigation of how his family suddenly lost their white-picket-fence, suburban life and descended into drugs and near-murder — and about a father who spent 10 years in a high-security mental institution.

Both films, explains Saunders, are studies of family members trying to resolve what went wrong.

"It's not an easy evening's watching," he says matter-of-factly. "It's not purely entertainment. It's an attempt to help people to understand what mental illness is and how to survive it."

The Eric Martin Pavilion certainly isn't Cannes. There's no throwaway fluff in this festival, no A-list celebs hobnobbing over Perriers and no deal-making in the casino. Missing are the glitz and glam, and skirts slit to the waist.

But Reel Madness does offer some tough documentaries and fictional accounts of men-

tal breakdowns that will have you riveted to the screen.

However, that's not to say Reel Madness is without its celebrity cachet. Several directors will personally introduce their films and on the afternoons of Jan. 20 and 21, directors Lulu (*The Moody Brood*) Keating, Davor (the Genie-nominated *My Father's Angel*) Marjanovic and Scott (*Rollercoaster*) Smith will hold seminars on their craft.

Saunders, 50, is a gardener by profession and started projecting big-screen features in the Eric Martin Pavilion theatre seven and a half years ago. His free Movie Monday series has attracted critical praise and let thousands of Victorians (Eric Martin residents and others) enjoy great films every Monday night at 6:30 p.m. He's shown nearly 450 films and has drawn capacity (100 seats) houses for many of them.

Over the years, Reel Madness has been attracting a loyal following of Movie Monday regulars, but it also draws from a much wider population.

"Last year, it was just packed with young people," says Saunders, "people who had never come to Movie Monday before".

Saunders has always inserted films such as the ones he's showing at the festival into the Movie Monday program,

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Bruce Saunders of Reel Madness and Movie Mondays

but recognizes how attention-grabbing five days of "madness" can be.

Or a lifetime of it.

Saunders has been battling manic depression for more than a decade and has been hospitalized twice for treatment. His willingness to discuss his condition has won him respect from both his peers and the public at large.

"If one is open about one's situation, people are more empathetic. It takes a lot of the shame and the fear away, and you perform better than you may have (done) if you were really, really careful. It's sort of my experiment and it's turned out way better than I imagined it could."

In the past year, Saunders has been thrice-honoured for his community work.

He was nominated for the provincewide Courage to Come Back Award, which celebrates the perseverance of in-

dividuals overcoming problems with drugs, poverty or mental illness.

He also won the Consumer Involvement Award (given out by the Canadian Mental Health Association) and the Giraffe Award for — literally — taking a big risk and sticking his neck out to help people.

Movie Monday and Reel Madness have served as part of his therapy and as a way to involve others with similar afflictions.

"It's quite remarkable for getting people to come into a psychiatric hospital and sit with patients to watch a movie," he says.

For festival information, call 595-FLIC or visit www.islandnet.com/mm. Admission is by donation. To register for the directors' seminars, call 595-5977.

All screenings are at the Eric Martin Pavilion, south entrance, in the 1900-block of Fort Street.