

Clearing Up Mental Stigmas

Movie Monday master releases his own creation:
Chomavision

DANIELLE POPE / Apr. 6, 2011 2:00 p.m. / BUSINESS



Artist Bob Choma

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When Bruce
Saunders started
filming his
documentary

about bipolar artist Bob Choma, he never thought the project would be 17 years in the making. He also never considered it would reach far beyond the boundaries of his other pet project, Movie Monday, to be a showcased film at the Vancouver bipolar convention — but that's exactly what's happened.

"Part of the reason I was so attracted to this project was because I admire this man's story," Saunders says. "Bob has a relatively extreme version of bipolar disorder, and he's had drinking problems and relationship problems, but all his life he's just been teeming with good ideas."

Saunders may be best known for his own intimate relationship with bipolar disorder and his Movie Monday mastermind that started back in 1993 in an effort to entertain and enlighten patients at the Royal Jubilee's Eric Martin Pavilion. But while filming isn't new to him, *ChomaVision* is Saunders' first official production, which he filmed,

photographed and financed. He brought editor Jay Carr on board to perfect the project just in time for the March 31 event, where the Collaborative RESearch Team to study psychosocial issues in bipolar disorder — termed CREST.BD — will showcase the flick.

The documentary itself profiles the life and times of 86-year-old Choma, a graduate of the Eric Martin Pavilion. Saunders describes Choma's tale as a "classic, creative, chaotic story" from growing up as a child artist to running high-production businesses, to Choma's fall into alcohol problems, mood swings, relationship failures and finally rediscovering his creative muse as an outsider artist later in life. It touches on Choma's time in the navy — he once stole a plane, and sunk a military boat — as well as his time in jail after almost losing his four children. All the while, Choma's sparkling personality and charming wit floats through, even in his senior years.

"Bob was a real player in his community at the time. Often, people are just trying to keep [those who suffer from bipolar] from being ill, but forget that people need creativity to thrive," Saunders says.

Saunders talks about his own journey, with the creativity of his film as an outlet and a cleansing action. So why did it take 17 years to pop out? Saunders spends his summers gardening and says he could only donate winters to the production. It was also a challenge to fit 86 years of life into under-an-hour film, and converting 17-year-old files to new Mac programs was another hurdle — but Saunders and Carr managed it.

"This is very exciting for me — just knowing that I'll have the chance to communicate in this way with people, through this production," Saunders says. "We see great artists in our time, like Van Gogh cutting off his ear, and people say what's the big deal? It's hard for them to understand. But when you're a driven artist, this is just what you do. It's your purpose, and your release."M

Chomavision6:30pm Monday, April 11Eric Martin
Pavillion, 1900-block Fort St.By donationmoviemonday.ca