BACKSTAGE PASS: The silent treatment

By: Heidi Kurpiela

It’s unlikely that you’re going to catch Amanda DiMase running to the movie theater with her girlfriends to watch the latest romantic comedy.

She’s not that girl.

She’s the girl who gushes about the quick cuts in Steven Spielberg’s obscure 1971 trucker-with-a-vengeance thriller, “Duel.”

She’s the girl who gets giddy talking about the film noir elements of Ridley Scott’s dystopian sci-fi classic, “Blade Runner,” and the use of stunning, disconcerting colors in Stanley Kubrick’s “The Shining.”

She’s the girl who’d rather curl up on the couch with a bowl of popcorn and a John Carpenter flick than a box of tissues and a Julia Roberts fairy tale.

“I’m not in a hurry to run out and see ‘21 Jump Street,’” DiMase says, referencing the latest Hollywood reboot of a 1980s TV series. “My friends told me it’s hilarious, but, to me, that’s not cinema. I’ll watch comedies to laugh, but most of the time it’s about: What’s the next blockbuster? How much money can be made? I think that’s why you see more independent filmmakers.”

Her guiltiest pleasure? Horror movies. And even those have become too “studio controlled” for DiMase’s liking.

A film student at State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, the 23-year-old cultivated her non-girly/film auteur tastes in a household full of boys. The youngest in a family of five, she grew up in Punta Gorda, watching “Edward Scissorhands” in the company of four older brothers.

When her black-and-white silent film “Just My Luck” was accepted into the Sarasota Film Festival, her brothers were among the first people to know.

“I found out the film got accepted in late February,” DiMase says of the six-minute short she filmed last semester on the SCF campus. “I wasn’t supposed to say anything to anyone until March 20, which killed me. At midnight on March 19, I started calling my brothers. I wanted them to be proud of their little sister.”
DiMase, who works part-time in the festival’s education department, is the only SCF student to have a film in this year’s festival.

A student in the college’s film production program, she entered the project at the suggestion of one of her instructors. It was originally shot as an end-of-semester assignment.

At the time, DiMase, who directed and appeared in the short, hadn’t even seen or heard of “The Artist,” this year’s buzzed-about Academy Award-winning silent film. She just liked the idea of making a silent movie.
“‘I thought it would be unique,’” she says. “‘I was definitely surprised by the timing of it.’”

She thought her script — a comedy about a hapless college student on a mission to return a lost book — was perfect for the genre.

Her biggest challenge was cutting together the final product when her original editor fell through, an experience that served as an important lesson for the aspiring filmmaker.

DiMase, though she would love to direct feature films one day, says she sees herself as more of an editor.

“I don’t mind sitting in front of a computer for 12 hours,” she says. “‘There’s such a sense of pride when you see the final product. When my editor fell through, I was like, ‘Just give me the footage and I’ll do it myself.’ It worked out for the best, because I was able to tell the story I wanted to tell.”

WHAT IS SFF@SCF?
Amanda DiMase’s short film isn’t the only connection State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota has to the Sarasota Film Festival.

In an effort to broaden its Manatee County reach, the festival formed a partnership this year with SCF and its film program director Del Jacobs, a longtime faculty member.

In addition to hosting several screenings, (“I am a Good Person/I am a Bad Person,” “Otter 501,” “How I Became an Elephant” “Chasing Ice” and the “Your Sister’s Sister”) the campus will host a “Women In Film” panel discussion at 5:30 p.m. April 20, at the Neel Performing Arts Center.

“It’s an opportunity to get our students connected to filmmakers in our backyard,” Jacobs says. “‘We’ve always had a good relationship with the festival, so it’ll be nice to have it on our turf.”

Film tickets are $12 or $8 for students. For more information, call 752-5252 or visit sarasotafilmfestival.com.
IF YOU GO
Amanda DiMase’s film, “Just My Luck” screens at 1:15 p.m. Saturday, April 14, and at 1 p.m. Wednesday, April 18, at Regal Hollywood 20.

"There’s always that fear you won't be the next Oscar-winning director,” says Amanda DiMase, a film student at State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota. "If I'm able to make independent films for the rest of my life and still support myself, I'll be happy.”