

festivals is to dedicate a block of time to the administrative and organizational resources available to artists. For example, there could be a series of panels dedicated to organizational support for indigenous artists and artists of color.

The creation and continued operation of a family-oriented showcase such as CAFF prompts the following questions: How are the films sourced? How do festival organizers decide which films will be shown? How will Pacific Islander-made films be showcased, and how will relationships between the Pacific and the rest of the world be demonstrated and strengthened?

By celebrating cultural animators' social and technological accomplishments and realities and centering on their unique creative voices and audiences, CAFF promotes the continuation of cultural animation as an artform. It takes up exciting challenges—and, potentially, responsibilities—and acts as an important resource for artists and for community leaders, educators, families, and other individuals interested in representing and sharing culture through animated films and videos. The festival offers a novel and appealing platform for Pacific Islander and other indigenous filmmakers, and its potential as a springboard for artists of all ages and professional statuses is staggering. Events like CAFF are important for the future of animation, particularly for indigenous artists and artists of color, whose work will not flourish without adequate resources and support. CAFF's potential for providing distribution and resource allocation opportunities allows for the amplification of voices

that have been talked over throughout the history of mediated representations of marginalized peoples. Although CAFF is at the beginning of its life as a festival, its anchoring in community support will continue to be a pillar of strength as time passes.

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Ainikien Jidjid ilo Boñ. DVD, 80 minutes, color, 2012. In Marshallese with English subtitles. Produced, written, and directed by Jack Niedenthal, Suzanne Chutaro, and Jukulius Niedenthal.

Batmon vs Majuro. DVD, 80 minutes, color, 2017. In Marshallese with English subtitles. Directed and produced by Jack Niedenthal, Ben deBrum Wakefield, and Vivian Niedenthal. Written by Jack Niedenthal and Ben deBrum Wakefield.

Jilel: The Calling of the Shell. DVD, 78 minutes, color, 2015. In Marshallese with English subtitles. Produced, written, and directed by Jack Niedenthal, Suzanne Chutaro, and Jukulius Niedenthal.

Lañinbwil's Gift. DVD, 99 minutes, color, 2011. In Marshallese with English subtitles. Produced, written, and directed by Jack Niedenthal, Suzanne Chutaro, and Jukulius Niedenthal.

Ña Noniep. DVD, 108 minutes, color, 2009. In Marshallese with English subtitles. Produced, written, and directed by Jack Niedenthal, Suzanne Chutaro, and Jukulius Niedenthal.

Yokwe Bartowe. DVD, 90 minutes, color, 2010. In Marshallese and English. Produced, written, and directed by Jack Niedenthal, Suzanne Chutaro, and Jukulius Niedenthal.

All films distributed by Microwave Films and available for purchase from www.microwavefilms.org. United States and Canada, US\$9.99; all other countries US\$16.99.

Jack Niedenthal, when discussing his films at festivals in Hawai'i and Guam, enjoys telling the story of perusing rental video titles at the E-Z PriceMart on the Marshallese atoll of Majuro in 2008 when his eleven-year-old son, Max, asked, "Dad, how come there are no films in Marshallese?" A good question, he said. So he set out to make one. "Imagine growing up all your life," he would continue, "never seeing a film in your own language, set in your own country, dealing with issues and values that are unique to your own culture."

During filmmaker panels, Niedenthal balks at describing the process as reinventing himself. "I've always been a storyteller," he says. "Now I've become one with a camera." Niedenthal first arrived in the Marshalls twenty-seven years earlier as a Peace Corps volunteer. He learned the language and legends of the community of atolls and islands the indigenous inhabitants call "jolet jen Anji" (gifts from God). On Kili he married into the diaspora of Bikinians displaced by nuclear testing, becoming their Trust Liaison to the United States. His rich store of Marshallese mythology and folklore was now supplemented by stark contemporary tales of a people's

deprivation of homeland, body, and spirit.

Niedenthal's first cinematic venture was *Ŋa Noniep*, a tale of middle-school student friends Liki and Miko, whose budding romance is put on the skids when an auto accident kills Miko's family. Although not to blame, Liki's father was the driver of the other car. Nonetheless, Miko's grandmother, Lijimu, places Liki under an evil spell. The noniep, an invisible but persistent sprite, works hard to protect Liki and to try to break the spell. Nonieps are youthful spirits, however, and don't have the full powers of a ri-anijij, or sorceress, like Lijimu. Miko's love for both Liki and her grandmother, combined with the noniep's benevolence, creates the power to convince Lijimu to lift the curse and accept Liki and his family into hers. The themes of good and evil, young love thwarted and reunited, revenge, and redemption carry the story well beyond the Marshall Islands' borders and earned the film a nomination in the 2009 International Youth Film Festival.

Ŋa Noniep played for three weeks to turn-away crowds at the lone Majuro theater. DVD copies were greedily consumed on the outer islands and by the Marshallese expat community in Arkansas. Randon Jack and Lulani Ritok, who played Liki and Miko, became Island celebrities. Although almost archetypically grandmotherly, with a bright sense of humor, Netha Gideon became regarded as the real Lijimu, with Islanders crossing the street to avoid her and sharing anxious whispers about her reputed magical abilities.

Niedenthal accomplished all of this

in a microbudget DIY filmmaking style using a standard definition prosumer camera, available and ambient lighting, a single boom microphone, and a self-taught course in Final Cut Pro. He admits to minimal production values on this first feature, as his higher-order goal was to get “lots of ‘kid time’ on screen to show kids their lives are worthy of exploration in film.” One critically important production resource was Suzanne Chutaro, who served as Niedenthal’s assistant producer and director. Although Niedenthal is fluent in Marshallese, Chutaro proved to be the exacting dialogue coach when working with the young non-actors.

The enthusiastic reception of *Ńa Noniep* convinced Niedenthal to enlist Chutaro and what would become his repertory company of actors and characters to create a second legend-based feature, *Yokwe Bartowe* (*Hello Poor Bartowe*). This film is the middle of what could be called the “Lijimu Trilogy,” as the now-renowned Island sorceress plays a central role. Liki and Miko also become recurring characters, as do Lyel Tarkwon as Bartowe and Martha Horiuchi as his wife Kaila.

Niedenthal gathered his actors’ company, family, and friends and embarked on the story of twenty-year-old Bartowe, caught in a life crisis and rejected by his family, who hold him responsible for the disappearance and presumed drowning of his younger sister, Lijiamao. He falls into a spiral of drunkenness and despair that costs him the love of his girlfriend and fellow college student, Kaila, who decides to move to Arkansas to get on with her life. What we as the audience know is that while swimming in the

lagoon, Lijiamao was kidnapped by a kwolej bird—an evil demon spirit. With this twist, the film turns to Lijimu, the only sorceress with enough power to overcome the kwolej demon, to resolve the crisis. Niedenthal adds two subplots, the first featuring the “two-beer gang” (four ne’er-dowells who can only afford two beers among them), who try to rob Lijimu but suffer the very uncomfortable consequences. The second follows the steadfast belief of Lijiamao’s best friend, Tili, who refuses to believe she is forever gone and who will not allow anyone to sit in her place at school. As comic relief, he also introduces actor Phil Okney as a long-winded but slow-moving driver with whom Bartowe is stuck as he tries to get to the airport before Kaila leaves for Arkansas. Alas, they are too late. However, Lijimu is finally able to battle the winged Madam Kwolej to the ground, bringing Lijiamao back to life, Kaila back to Majuro, and Bartowe back to happiness.

Yokwe Bartowe’s Majuro is not the crystal-water lagoon and swaying palms of the tourist bureau. It looks through a gritty and dark lens at alleyways, decaying buildings, and the scourge that alcohol can bring. Bartowe sinks into an alcoholism driven not by outer demons but rather by inner ones that come from the despair of the loss of home and family, a metaphor for the historical trauma of Bikinians and the people of Eniwetok and Rongelap, who were displaced from their homes and forced into diaspora when their land was obliterated and radiated “for the good of mankind” (as they were told by the US Army). The metaphor connects to

other Marshallese facing the contemporary inundation of their low-lying atolls because of climate change, a specific theme in Niedenthal's later films.

The third film in the "Lijimu Trilogy" took honors at the Hawai'i Ocean, Columbia Gorge, Moondance, and Guam International festivals, as well as the Asia Pacific Screen Awards. *Laninbwil's Gift* introduces another mystic set of characters out of legend—Mejenkwar, a particularly nasty demon, and Letao, a devilish trickster up to no good. The film brings back Bartowe and Kaila (now married), schoolmates Liki and Miko, the noniep, and Lijimu, who is once again called on to cast out the evil spirits. The Mejenkwar has put her spell on a pregnant Kaila in retribution for Lijimu's casting out the bird demon kwolej in the last film. Meanwhile, the noniep is seeking to give Laninbwil, a simple-minded homeless boy, the gift of a normal life. This, it seems, is a generational legend. Jacob, a village elder, was once like Laninbwil and was given the gift of a normal mind and life. Now the noniep must convince Jacob it's time to give back. Mejenkwar, however, has sent Letao to take control of Laninbwil and turn him into a Marshallese-style hipster named Tao, who drives a wedge between Liki and Miko, outperforming star student Liki in the classroom and luring Miko away with gifts and overtures of affection.

The three stories run in parallel in an increasingly sophisticated narrative style for Niedenthal. Bartowe seeks Lijimu's help, the noniep seeks Jacob's recognition of his duty to pass on his gift, and Miko eventually sees through

Tao's trickery and goes to her grandmother—the great Lijimu—to cast him out. The maturity in narrative style is matched by a greater command of camera, editing, and sound. Jack and Ritok also contributed original compositions and performances to the soundtrack. Okney returns as the harried and bemused husband of a Marshallese wife and provides what has become a bilingual Niedenthal dig in this and later films: the theme of foreigners who don't bother to learn Marshallese and Marshallese who assume all foreigners don't understand what's being said about them.

Niedenthal personalizes that dig in his next film when he takes on a major role as a bearded and bedraggled shipwrecked stranger. As a pair of young Marshallese cab drivers chat away about how strange he is, he shames them in their own language for their stereotyping. His character speaks Marshallese because he is the contemporary embodiment of a Bikinian spirit chief, Worejabato, sent to heal a family torn apart by geographic, cultural, and economic displacement. *Ainikien Jidjid ilo Boñ (The Sound of Crickets at Night)* is Niedenthal's most personal and best-realized film, calling on his experiences representing the people of Bikini, as well as his own family, and on the thirty years of stories passed on to him from Bikinian elders. It is a visually arresting portrayal of how nuclear testing can destroy nuclear families, earning numerous awards in a dozen festivals.

The film follows Kali, a ten-year-old girl living with her family on Ejit, an island in the Majuro Atoll that has become a home for displaced Bikinians. Her parents argue inces-

santly and decide their only hope is to move to Arkansas (a recurring theme, as fully 10 percent of the Marshall Islands' population has relocated in and around Springdale) with Kali's younger sister, but Kali must remain behind to care for her jima (grandfather), Jebuki. Jebuki knows his youthful exposure to nuclear fallout is now taking its toll, but he is more concerned about his granddaughter Kali's decline, as she won't eat or play because she despairs for her family, particularly her sister. Jebuki summons Worejabato, who appears in the form of the shipwrecked stranger Kali finds washed up on the shoreline. The stranger shadows Kali, protecting her, curing her depression, and eventually reuniting her family. Jebuki has salvaged the lives of his family by giving up his own to Worejabato.

Niedenthal uses a sepia tone for the scenes with the Bikini deity, and his shots of Ejit and Majuro are impressive, as he had upgraded to high-definition equipment and some key lighting. The sharp visuals work particularly well with Salome Fakatou, who plays Kali with both a haunting and vulnerable intensity that won her the Best Acting Award at the Guam International Film Festival. He weaves in comic relief subplots, including twin Bikinian sub-deities Kwelik and Kweiar, who are conjoined back-to-back so that they can never see each other. They bicker continuously, including over which of them is the most handsome. Each can see only his own reflection and declares it to be the most handsome. It falls to Worejabato to provide both mediation and discipline. Lijimu and Miko

share a cameo as shoppers in the E-Z PriceMart, a recurring setting along with the Flame Tree bar and Majuro Cooperative School.

Having drawn on Marshallese legends for his first four films, Niedenthal created an original legend for *Jilel: The Calling of the Shell*. His film notes describe "the story of Molina, a young Marshallese girl who is confronted for the first time with the idea that her island—her beloved homeland—is vanishing because of the rising seas caused by world-wide global warming and how she turns the tide of doom."

Molina's grandmother, Bubu Titi, presents her with a dying gift, a jilel, or shell with secret powers given by a mystic king and passed on by the generations of her family since prehistory. We learn of the secret powers after the shell is stolen by Molina's erratically employed cab driving brother, Ketowate, so that he and his scheming friend, Samson, can buy some cigarettes at a roadside mini-mart run by Liki and Miko. When removed from its intended owner, the shell causes any power source to sputter out. First it's Ketowate's cab, then, as it passes from hand to hand, it's radios, a police officer's house, and a boat's motor, until it finally reaches its climactic act of eco-disruption—a warning to curtail fossil-fuel gluttony and ceaseless climate change. It is Lijimu's second sight that recovers the shell from its journey as the camera pans across heartrending scenes of shoreside grave sites crumbling and surrendering to the encroaching sea. Where Niedenthal's previous films ended with a resolution of reunification, *Jilel* takes a different turn, con-

cluding with an extended stand-up of a slam poetry recitation, activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's "Tell Them." *Jilel* is the shortest of the Niedenthal and Chutaró features at only seventy-eight minutes. Although the third-act shortcomings left some reviewers unmoved, others were more forgiving, such as *Filmmaker* magazine's Jason Sanders, who wrote in the 3 February 2016 issue that "as a work of cinema, *Jilel* barely passes muster, but as an authentic expression of life it's far more memorable than many films." *Jilel* marks the end of the Niedenthal and Chutaró collaboration, as the codirector and producer moved from Majuro to Hawai'i after its production.

The next film shifts from the serious to the near-silly, marking new cowriting and codirecting partnerships and an approach that endeavored to work into the narrative and production any and all ideas from the cast and crew. The mixed-bag result was *Batmon vs Majuro*, which imports an iconic comic legend into the Marshallese milieu. The "Batmon" spelling doesn't reflect the Marshallese pronunciation, Niedenthal explains, but rather his attempt to keep the film below the radar of DC Comics and Warner Bros Entertainment, Inc. Written, directed, and produced with *Batmon* actor Ben deBrum Wakefield, the film portrays an amusing culture clash as the caped crusader—now rather disheveled, out of shape, and out of work—stumbles his way through the Marshallese lifestyle.

Despite the featherweight storyline and over-the-top performances, the film is replete with Niedenthal trademarks, including a focus on kids

(Batmon adopts a young Marshallese sidekick—or perhaps it's the other way around); naturalistic performances by Island nonprofessionals; deep rooting in Marshallese culture and lifestyle (the acceptance and inclusion of the cross-dressing community is highlighted as Niedenthal takes a role as Bingonella, member of the Ghurlpower Gang and addicted to the local passion for bingo); real location shooting (the Flame Tree bar from previous films reappears, as does the Majuro airport, and the Ghurlpower Gang's beauty shop is a real one); foreigners integrating into local culture through language (Batmon shows off his skill at quick language learning, to the delight of the local community members); and the appearance of Lijimu as the sorceress-in-chief.

Niedenthal has used his family on both sides of the camera, with members performing in roles large and small, contributing music to the soundtrack, and handling increasing technical duties. Nephew Maxter was the original noniep in the first film; daughter Vivian was a codirector and producer on the last. He hopes they will start making their own films, building both the filmmaking industry and culture. He said, "So often people here feel that the world is way too big for them. What we are attempting to do is show that . . . their lives, too, are worthy of exploration in film—and that you don't have to use millions of dollars to make an interesting film."

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