

Hackney is one of the most diverse places in the UK. In this regular feature, we profile the borough's great & good or just plain interesting

hackneypeople



Photo: Gary Marhine

Film-maker on song

Film-maker Jamie Jones's short documentary 'The Birdcage' landed the Lower Clapton resident the Film London 90 Second Challenge prize

KARAOKE enthusiasts have long known the spirituality found in banging out a good power ballad.

Spotting storytelling potential, Lower Clapton resident Jamie Jones had the idea to create a short documentary based around amateur singstars at Columbia Road boozier 'The Birdcage'.

Three local people were documented preparing for an unknown event, with the reveal at end of the film being their star turn on stage. Stripping out all dialogue, the finished product is beautifully shot, bright, uplifting and documents overlooked slices of East London life.

"One inspiration for 'The Birdcage' came from a man who isn't in the film

– he's deaf yet still loves to sing. Even though he's not in tune, his attitude on stage and the crowd that watch him is amazing. He's happy being there even though he can't hear anything," says Jamie.

"So I wanted to make something different to that usual stereotype of dark, depressing inner city London. It's looking at lives of real people; they're not all affluent, some live in high-rise tower blocks, but you can't overstate the power and freeness they feel when performing," he adds.

Hackney selected Jamie's film as the borough's entry into the 'Film London in 90 Seconds – Capital Tales' competition earlier in the year, and on 7 September the

34-year-old was crowned overall winner. Despite a successful TV background – Jamie went to film school in Swansea and has directed shows from The X Factor to hard-hitting documentaries for the BBC – he admits his surprise at being named the Hackney finalist, never mind winning the London-wide contest.

"I know a lot of talented film-makers in Hackney; there was a lot of stiff competition and all the finalists were brilliant," says Jamie.

"At the final, I was really nervous because I didn't want to freeze up or go the other way and come across as arrogant," he adds.

Although he wasn't totally unprepared.

While hobnobbing with established film industry names, he was ready to whip out from his top pocket a rolled up screenplay when a Film London patron asked him about his next big project.

For Jamie, film in Hackney is huge. He speaks proudly of the many local people he works with, including physiotherapists and bankers, who, while having no technical background, have cinematic knowledge that sometimes outstrips his own.

He says: "The Birdcage was my most successful film, but was also the least stressful. The scenery, the set and the story were all already there. At the same time it wasn't really a documentary either,

I still needed to direct real people in their own lives – re-shooting scenes, getting them to do something again.

"Someone asked me if I am representing true life, they said 'nothing is real, you're watching what the director wants you to watch'. But I think that with everything, they're all just viewpoints. Maybe blurring the boundaries – using film techniques to show real-life experiences is being more honest because you're clearly saying this is what I think."

Curriculum Vitae: Jamie Jones

1977	Born in London
1985	Moves to Swansea
1998	Completes Environmental Engineering degree at Cardiff University
2000	Directs short film 'Silent Shores'
2001	Graduates from Visual Arts course in Swansea
2005	Directs BBC documentary 'Fighters'
2007	Directs BBC documentary 'Heroin to Heaven'
2007	Moves to Lower Clapton
2011	Wins Film London 90 Second Challenge for short film 'The Birdcage'

MORE INFO

To see The Birdcage and more of Jamie's films, visit: www.beyondfiction.co.uk; for more info on Film London: www.filmlondon.org.uk