

Memories, Moments and Myths

The 'Call to Arms' Q&A with Producer Jeff Newman and Writer, Director, Editor Randy Frykas

'Call to Arms' makes it clear that The Albert has a special place in the hearts of many in Winnipeg. What needed to be said about this place that people didn't know already?

JN: We certainly wanted to celebrate The Albert, but also didn't want to gloss over the reality of it and some of the grittier parts of its past. The Albert is what it is, and that's what people like most about it. Knowing that, we set out to do two things: demonstrate why the club has had such a lasting impact on Winnipeg's music scene, and provide a clear understanding about the place to those who have never been there, but have pre-conceived notions about what the place is all about.

RF: Not a lot can be said about The Albert. It's more of a feeling. If you get the feeling when you walk in the door then that's all that matters.

Lots of people in this documentary have made their living saying things that make people uncomfortable. Did anyone you interviewed surprise you?

JN: I have to admit I was surprised when an employee referred to the infamous 2003 murder that occurred there as a "claim to fame". It certainly drew a lot of attention to place though.

RF: Johnny Sizzle's chair surprised me.

There's probably a documentary behind this documentary. What was the most interesting or challenging aspect to putting Call to Arms together?

JN: Both Randy and I have played in bands that have played at The Albert over the years, so we were both excited about the idea. However, once we started to really get into the groove of the project, Randy got more and more into it. He poured his heart and soul into this film, and practically did everything: writing, directing, shooting, editing. He was easy to find though. I knew if he wasn't in his office he would be at The Albert. He's always there.

RF: The key to making this documentary was just to let things happen which is the same as any night at The Albert - things just happen. I had ideas and questions going in but in the end I just let The Albert tell the story.

Some of your interview subjects reveal a great deal of emotion. How is it possible that people feel such affection for a place that 'smells like beer

and piss'?

JN: How can you not love a place that has consistently maintained the perfect balance of live music along with an odor of beer and piss for so long? I guess people just appreciate the fact that while everything else changes, The Albert stays the same. It's making the same contribution to the music scene today as it did 25 years ago.

RF: Feeling has nothing to do with smelling, seeing, tasting or hearing. You can't help what you feel, so when you find a place that doesn't make you feel like an outcast and makes you feel like you are a part of something - that's where the emotion comes from.

The Albert might be described as a marginalized hotel for marginalized people. That might make it easy to dismiss, but is The Albert actually contributing more to the cultural landscape in Winnipeg than we give it credit for?

JN: Absolutely. I'm not sure where a lot of the bands playing there would get a chance to have an audience if The Albert did not exist. Plus, it's instant credibility. You could be in the worst band in the world, but if you tell people you've played at The Albert, then you must have something going for you.

RF: The Albert and the people that go there deserve a lot more credit but it's been the same situation for years, it isn't new. So yes it should get more credit, but will it? Probably not and that's ok.

What's your favourite moment from the making of 'Call to Arms'?

JN: When Natalie (The Albert GM) broke down talking about why she loved the place so much. It demonstrates how much impact this dingy little club has had on her and so many others. My second favorite is any moment with Johnny Sizzle. That guy is hilarious.

RF: My favourite moment of making 'Call To Arms' was after long shoots or edits and not knowing what to do next, I would just go to the Albert and talk with who ever was there and the answer of what I should do next would just come to me from those interactions. I have made so many close friends from this experience and I'm very lucky that I got to tell the story of The Albert.