

Fearless female filmmakers reel in a night of their own



Frozen Feet Films Documentary filmmaker Melody Gilbert, toting the tool of her trade.

Ask St. Paul-based documentarian [Melody Gilbert](#) why a program of short films by women directors is important and she'll favor the personal over the political.

"It gives you a deadline," Gilbert says of "Fearless Females," the distaff edition of indie curator Bobby Marsden's monthly "[Fearless Filmmakers](#)" series.

The all-female version screens at 7 p.m. Thursday (Feb. 28) at Oak Street Cinema in Minneapolis.

Gilbert is jesting, but not completely. She's someone who not only needs a deadline to work, but who also will work hard to push that deadline as far as possible — in service of the work, of course.

Indeed, Gilbert has only minutes before our phone chat to finish her two "Fearless" shorts (past my own deadline to review them, alas).

"I came to filmmaking from journalism, so it's an occupational hazard," she says. "I worked in TV for years (including WCCO and TPT-2) and had deadlines every day. I like deadlines — or at least I know that it's hard without them."

Since then, her films "Whole" (2003) and "A Life without Pain" (2005) have enjoyed wide acclaim at festivals and on television.

Gilbert's "Fritz: The Walter Mondale Story" and "Divorce Camp," the latter about a retreat for newly single women, are five-minute portions of feature-length projects due before year's end. (Yes, the filmmaker has deadlines for the long versions, too.)

Others of the dozen-or-so "Fearless Females" shorts include:

- Bridget Riversmith's gorgeously animated "Birds at Night (Might Fall)," which suggests a kid's pastel watercolor painting come to life.
- Jill Broadfoot's documentary "The Pussycats," about middle-aged women who hit the road to see what's new with their longtime idol Tom Jones.
- "Redefine," co-directed by Carrie Bush, Carrie Volk and Molly Worre, a haunting documentary portrait of female survivors of abuse living in the Harriet Tubman Family Alliance shelter in Minneapolis.

"It's amazing that it took three years for 'Fearless' to have an all-female edition," says Gilbert. "But now it's really timely — especially after the Academy Awards, where you notice how few women directors there are in Hollywood.

"Luckily in Minnesota," she adds, "we have a very rich community of female filmmakers. We have a sisterhood here. We all see each other's work, and we're all very supportive of each other as filmmakers. So it's nice that with this program and the Walker's 'Women With Vision' series, we can celebrate that."

Speaking of celebration: After the "Fearless Females" screening, a party with free food and drink will be held at a "high-class" and heretofore unknown location, curator Marsden says somewhat mysteriously.