OUTREACH

MacDowell Downtown

Season Seven
Filmmakers Jerome Bongiorno and Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno - *Oct 2008*
Filmmaker Rodney Evans - *Sept 2008*

October 2008

Husband and wife documentary and narrative filmmakers **Jerome Bongiorno** and **Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno** take an all-encompassing approach to their work. Indicative, perhaps, of their background in science (the pair met while enrolled as biology majors at St. Peter's College in New Jersey), the Bongiornos utilize extensive research as a foundation for all of their films. Balanced with their drive to uncover every last detail about a subject is their aim to emphasize its context and make an impact in the larger world.

So it began with 'Revolution '67,' a feature-length documentary about one of the deadliest racial disturbances per capita in recent U.S. history: the 1967 Newark, New Jersey, riots. Originally from Newark (where the couple now resides), Marylou first focused on the Newark riots as the subject of her short, narrative thesis film for New York University film school in 1997. With help from Jerome, she soon discovered that concrete information about this historical rebellion — which stretched over six days and left 26 people dead and 725 injured — was not easy to come by. But she wanted answers. "As long as I can remember, Newark has been stigmatized by the riots of 1967. The questions remain: What really happened, who's to blame, and why hasn't the city recovered? Are the problems that Newark faced in the '60s the same that plague it today? That's why my husband and I made this film — to get those answers."

Accordingly, the Bongiornos launched a thorough investigation of the Newark riots by interviewing — and recording testimony from — people directly involved in, or affected by, the riots, including such notables as activist Tom Hayden, poet Amiri Baraka (then known as LeRoi Jones), and journalist Bob Herbert, along with scores of eyewitnesses, historians, policemen, experts, and residents of Newark at the time. "It started out as a research tool, and became this whole thing in itself," Jerome says of the film. "The research grew, and it kept growing, and now it's become 'Revolution '67,' " adds Marylou.

Told through the use of archival footage, bold animation (created by Jerome), a musical score comprised of 60 contemporary jazz pieces, and interviews, the film — which premiered on the PBS series "POV" in July of 2007 — explores the American struggle with race, inequality, idealism, and power in the 1960s." The film's relevancy to recent world events, however, is of crucial importance to Marylou, who directed it. "Newark is a microcosm of what's wrong with this country," she claims. "It stands as a reminder of what happened and what can happen if problems are not addressed and corrected."

While in residence at MacDowell earlier this year, the Bongiornos put the finishing touches on a fictional screenplay based on 'Revolution '67.' The resulting feature-length film will be executive produced by Spike Lee. The Bongiornos are also currently in production on a documentary about eco-housing with the working title 'Off the Grid.'