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TIFN Brings 'The Happy Poet' and Other Indies to San Marcos

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#) on October 3, 2011 - 11:30am in [Local Indies](#)

Texas State University-San Marcos has film and screenwriting classes. I know. I'm just as surprised as you are. Texas State may not be UT and the film and TV-related theatre classes and media studies minor may not be a full radio-television-film program, but with the arrival of former Texas Film Commission Director Tom Copeland in 2005, and recently, Austin Film Society Artist Services Director Bryan Poyser, college life is looking a little bit more film-y in the 78666.

The San Marcos premiere in September of *Echotone*, a documentary about Austin music culture, marked the burgeoning presence of the [Texas Independent Film Network \(TIFN\)](#) at Texas State University.

TIFN co-founder Ryan Long and Austin actor [Chris Doubek](#) attended the Sept. 28 screening of *The Happy Poet* at the Texas Music Theater in San Marcos during their statewide promotional tour for the movie. I had the opportunity to speak with Long, who's also the AFS programs and operations manager, and whom I had the pleasure of working with last summer as an AFS intern; and Doubek, who plays Curtis, the protagonist's moocher friend in *The Happy Poet*.

The Austin-shot micro-budget sleeper hit of SXSW 2010, *The Happy Poet* is the story of Bill (writer-director [Paul Gordon](#)), an out-of-work poet who uses the last of his money (and a loan) to buy an all-organic, mostly-vegetarian food stand. Read [Jenn's review](#) from SXSW for more details.

Gordon has attended TIFN-sponsored screenings of *The Happy Poet* in other Texas cities, but was unable to attend the screening in San Marcos, so I called him to ask some questions about his movie. He said it's "a metaphor for trying to make an independent film, someone being idealistic and earnest about something."

Gordon, a University of Texas RTF program alumnus, said he wrote the script for *The Happy Poet* in a month. Filming began three months later. He cast local actor friend Doubek in the role of Curtis because Doubek had no shame in eating Gordon's food.

"That part is definitely written for him," Gordon said. "He'll show up to your house with Tupperware, going through your refrigerator. It's funny."

Doubek, who is a local substitute teacher, said he met Gordon when he lived with *The Happy Poet* producer [David Hartstein](#). Over the past 10 years, Doubek has transitioned from acting in UT student films and short films to major roles in feature-length films. He credits his first big role as Rudy in Bryan Poyser's 2010 dark comedy, *Lovers of Hate*.

Gordon said *The Happy Poet* will have a limited theatrical release. He said an unnamed distributor would like to screen the film in L.A. In addition, a DVD release is tentatively scheduled for sometime in the next nine months.

The Happy Poet has garnered positive reviews from *Entertainment Weekly* and IndieWIRE. Doubek said Gordon had the opportunity to screen the film in Spain, Poland and other European countries. Ryan Long's local independent micro-cinema helped raise travel funds for Gordon, actress Liz Fisher and Hartstein to attend *The Happy Poet*'s screening at the Venice Film Festival's Venice Days in Italy.

Long said he has been a fan of *The Happy Poet* for years.

"When there's a film out there that I feel strongly about, I'll definitely do whatever I can to get it seen," Long said.

Texas Independent Film Network is another way for audiences -- such as students majoring in mass communication -- to watch Texas independent films and meet filmmakers. The organization officially launched statewide in February 2011 with the series "Texas Legends... Before They Were Legends." The series featured first films from prominent Texas filmmakers, such as Robert Rodriguez (*Bedhead*), Richard Linklater and Lee Daniel (*Woodshock*), Wes Anderson (*Bottle Rocket*) and Tobe Hooper (*The Heisters*).



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Ryan Long and Louis Black, co-founder of the *Austin Chronicle* and SXSW, have partnered with universities, film organizations and societies around Texas such as the Lone Star Film Society in Fort Worth, AFS, the Video Association of Dallas, the Fort Worth Modern Art Museum and the Houston Museum of Fine Art, the Texas A&M University- College Station film organization Aggie SWAMP, and Baylor University's Film and Digital Media Division to screen a different Texas independent film per month statewide.

Long said TIFN connects students with filmmakers.

"Here's a filmmaker who's maybe only a few years older than you who's doing it," Long said. "How did they get there? Well, ask them because they're in the room."

TIFN will be touring two other Austin films from SXSW 2010 around the Lone Star State in October and November: *Dance with the One* ([Debbie's review](#)) and *Mars* ([Jenn's review](#)).

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