

cuts the way to success for Tropfest's best



Richard Jinman

When Annabel Osborne learned her film *Chipman* was one of this year's 16 Tropfest short film festival finalists, excitement got the better of her.

"I squealed like a pig and ran up and down the hallway," said the 29-year-old film-maker from Coogee who made her seven-minute short for \$6000. "Then I called everyone I know."

Tropfest received a devilish 666 entries this year.

That's fewer than the record 723 films entered last year, but organisers claim the overall standard - in particular the production values of the entries - is higher than ever.

Chipman, a film about a man who realises his life's purpose while feeding chips to the seagulls at Manly, is part of a diverse group of finalists announced yesterday. There are two animations, three "mockumentaries" - inspired, perhaps by the success of television's *The Office* - as well as the usual dramas and comedies.

The interpretation of this year's signature item, a hook, was just as diverse. Some film-makers went for piratical prosthetics, but addictions and musical riffs were also popular.

As usual, film-makers from NSW supplied most of the films (389), but a sharp increase in entries from Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory suggests the festival's appeal is still broadening. The top awards will be handed out on February 22 when Tropfest 2004 is held in the Domain from 3pm.

Several "Hollywood names" will be among the judges, said Tropfest's project director, Serena Paull.

John Polson, who started the festival in the early 1990s in Darlinghurst's Tropicana Caffe, is in New York directing a Robert De Niro thriller. "We still consult with him every day and he watched all these films in New York on his one day off," said Ms Paull at a finalists' gathering in the Domain yesterday.

Sam Worthington, a star of the Australian feature *Gettin' Square*, is also a Tropfest finalist. The Sydney actor directed the wry comedy *Enzo*. "It's the first time I've ever directed anything, so I didn't have a clue," said Worthington, who wrote the short film with friends Dorian Nkono and Andrew Legalo.

"We shot it over four days in Moore Park and Bondi for about \$500." Worthington said he was thrilled the film made the cut, but would "stick with acting".