



## Brooklyn Fest - Carny

**By Ronnie Scheib**

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**(Documentary -- Canada)**

A Hellhound production, in association with TVO/Sundance Channel. (International sales: Hellhound Prods., Toronto.) Produced by Kathleen L. Smith, Alison Murray. Directed, written by Alison Murray.

**With:** Bozo Dave, David Varney, Poochie Love, Hairy, Michelle, Debbie, Ray.

**Nostalgia pervades "Carny," Alison Murray's panoramic study of a small-time traveling carnival and its motley denizens. By turns lyrically impressionistic and casually scruffy, the docu evokes the many moods of the midway while limning the marginal existences of those who call it home. Long attracted to misfits on the fringes of "normal" society, be they rail-hopping hobos ("Train on the Brain") or street kids ("Mouth to Mouth"), director Murray accords her subjects their full measure of dignity, pathos and absurdity. Evocative winner of the Brooklyn fest's docu prize could prove a sideshow attraction on cable.**

Unlike "Train on the Brain," in which director Murray inserted herself as a greenhorn explorer, "Carny" follows a path forged by the film's lenser, Virginia Lee Hunter, in her photographic art book of the same name.

The docu's sure familiarity with the routines and rhythms of the fairgrounds matches that of its narrator, a shorn-haired lesbian cotton-candy lady dubbed Hairy (uncannily resembling the shaven-headed Ellen Page of Murray's earlier fiction feature "Mouth to Mouth").

As Hairy observes, the carnny harbors those who were born to it, those who deliberately chose it and those with nowhere else to go. That Hairy herself, the product of an abusive childhood, decidedly belongs to the middle category is evident in her tendency to bond: She goes from booth to booth collecting hugs, lusts after exotic, metal-studded fire-eater Chelsea, and romantically dreams of someday carrying off a townie.

David Varney, with his "diary" of tattoos, his children scattered cross-country and his menage a trois with two girlfriends, realizes his options are limited on the outside. Sharing money, a tiny cubicle and a truck, he and his two female companions -- with a full mouth of teeth between the three of them -- enjoy a surprisingly heartfelt relationship.

Mild-mannered family man by day, insult-hurling dunking clown by night, Bozo Dave qualifies as the pic's most memorable character. The brother of famous Siamese twins, Dave feels proud of having established his own carnny identity. When his tank is repossessed and his wife falls ill, he weakly rationalizes that his new 9-to-5 job as a sales trainer still constitutes a form of showbiz.

But the docu reserves its flat-out star treatment for the carnny itself -- whether poetically framing roustabouts assembling the midway in sharp-edged black-and-white, or capturing, in Super 8 Kodachrome, the whirling rides and neon lights that invite eager small-town crowds to "Shoot the Sky."

Camera (color/B&W, DV, Super 8), Virginia Lee Hunter, Murray; editor, Roland Schlimme; music, Don Kerr, sound, Sean Karp. Reviewed on DVD, New York, June 4, 2008. (In Brooklyn Film Festival.) Running time: 75 MIN.

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