

# BILLY THE KID

A FILM BY JENNIFER VENDITTI

[www.billythekiddocumentary.com](http://www.billythekiddocumentary.com)

**INT'L SALES**

Annie Roney  
ROCO FILMS  
(415) 332-6471  
[annie@rocofilms.com](mailto:annie@rocofilms.com)

**DOMESTIC SALES**

Dana O'Keefe  
CINETIC MEDIA  
(212) 204 7979  
[dana@cineticmedia.com](mailto:dana@cineticmedia.com)

**PUBLICITY:**

Katherine Beaulier  
EIGHT FILMS  
(212) 741-1281  
[billythekid@jv8inc.com](mailto:billythekid@jv8inc.com)

**PRINTS:**

Chiemi Karasawa  
ISOTOPE FILMS  
(212) 659-3738  
[chiemi@isotopefilms](mailto:chiemi@isotopefilms)



Documentary Feature, Color, 85 Minutes © 2007 BILLY THE KID, LLC All Rights Reserved

## CREDITS

Director/Producer Producer	JENNIFER VENDITTI CHIEMI KARASAWA
Executive Producer	BARNET LIBERMAN BOB ALEXANDER LUBOV AZRIA
Associate Producers	JORDAN MATTOS DANIELLE DIGIACOMO
Director of Photography Add'l Photography	DONALD CUMMING PARIS KAIN
Editor Add'l Editor	MICHAEL LEVINE ENAT SIDI
Sound Design Re-recording Mixer Dialogue Editor Original Score	DAMIAN VOLPE TONY VOLANTE DAVID ELLINWOOD CHRISTIAN ZUCCONI GUY BLAKESLEE
Production Coordinator Story Consultant Assistant to Producer	NINA DAY CHAUDHURI FERNANDA ROSSI JACLYN PARIS
Additional Camera Stills Photographer Titles & Graphics	ROD LAMBORN SHANE SIGLER SETH ZUCKER
Assistant Editors	DAVID ASLAN JENNY CHIURCO
On Line Facility D I Colorist Online Editorial Post Audio Facility	POSTWORKS, NY JOHN CROWLEY PAT KELLEHER GOLDCREST POST, NY SOUND LOUNGE
Audio Equipment	GOTHAM SOUND

The Producers gratefully acknowledge the subjects whose honesty, trust & courage made this film possible:

Billy  
Penny & Ethan Baker  
Fay Smith  
Heather Pelletier  
David Farnum  
Rick Farnum  
Janet Coffman  
Frank the Moxie Man  
The Students, Faculty & Administration of Mt. Ararat High School  
Little Lisa's  
The Community of Lisbon Falls, Maine

---

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

*"I'm not black, I'm not white, not foreign...just different in the mind – different brains, that's all..."*

*Billy, 2005*

Jennifer Venditti's debut film is the provocative coming-of-age story BILLY THE KID, an odyssey into the soul of an American teenager. Following Billy as he bicycles through the quiet streets of small town Maine, we watch him traverse the frustrating gap between imagination and reality, grappling with isolation and first-time young love. By turns exhilarating and disturbing we see the world from the intimate view of an expressive and seemingly fearless outsider.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

*“The future is not written. There’s no fate except what we make for ourselves.”*

*Billy (Quoting from The Terminator) 2005*

A contemporary documentary, BILLY THE KID begins as an intimate portrait that quickly expands into broader social observation of teenage self-discovery; both the darkest and brightest places in youth. Shot over eight days over two seasons, summer and winter, the film uses a trans-genre, verité approach in which the subject seems to be directing the movement of the film as equally as the filmmakers behind the camera.

Jennifer Venditti stumbled upon Billy while casting Carter Smith’s short film, BUGCRUSH, from non-actor high school students in rural Maine. Intrigued by his eccentric wisdom and pop-infused intuition and sensibility, Venditti decided to include Billy along with other everyday heroes that she had encountered through her casting career in what she initially imagined as a multi-voiced documentary on iconoclastic characters. Filming began with a mini-dv camera and fellow BUGCRUSH alum actor Donald Cumming as DP. Venditti and he traveled up to Maine to capture moments from the precocious teen’s everyday life. Unfazed by the wireless microphone that he faithfully wore each day, Billy allowed Venditti and Cumming to follow him and witness the highs and lows of school, taunting from bullies and the colorful locals of Main Street, as well as intimate emotional discussions with his mother.

In the midst of shooting, Billy serendipitously crosses paths with his crush Heather at the local diner, and the film takes an unexpected turn as the filmmakers track the nuances of first-time teenage love and its aftermath. Billy shares intimate and acute observations about himself and those around him without restriction. Penny, Billy’s mother, proves to be a valiant touchstone. She shares their difficult history with Billy’s addicted, abusive biological father and we see glimpses of how Billy’s attitude towards women was shaped by his inability to protect his own mother when he was a child. His fantasy world is similarly constructed from heroic desires to overcome demons from their shared past and prevail.

BILLY THE KID is the coming of age journey of a teenage outsider who confronts obstacles with courage and awareness. He struggles to define himself apart from his past and others’ notions of who he is. The film challenges viewers to look beyond labels and to contemplate the undetermined future of a teen.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

You might say I'm a sucker for the underdog. I have always looked for beauty in the unconventional. My work is unusual in that I interview people continuously while maintaining a relatively normal schedule. I cast projects that look beyond the scope of traditional or existing talent pools. I've probably interviewed 10,000 people, maybe more and I always thought one day I would explore in feature form the most expressive of these people, and it was nearly accidental how Billy became the subject of this film.

I first met Billy when I was scouting a high school in Maine to cast real kids as extras for a film. I sat in the lunchroom for several days, marveling at the particular cliques and wondering if any kids ever tried sitting with anyone different. I filmed a table of bullies who described a scenario when they invited a new victim to their table. Apparently, the kid freaked out at the way he was treated. As they all laughed, I asked who this kid was, and they pointed across the room at a boy sitting by himself. "Over there," they said, "His name is Billy."

I was both awed by and uneasy with his personality; he was so completely open and without boundaries. When I asked teachers about him, they used phrases like 'emotional disabilities,' 'extreme caution' and 'special learning environment'. Other students seemed either jealous that I was so fascinated by him, or concerned that he was so volatile. The more I was warned away from him, the more I wanted to know. I cast him, of course, and came back a few months later to learn more and shoot some footage of my own. This footage turned into *Billy The Kid*.

As I drove back to the city after shooting for five days, the one thing I couldn't get out of my head was Billy saying, "Sometimes the imaginative world's much better than the real world, but there's one difference: Imagination ain't real!" By courage or necessity, Billy had created a technique to help him survive in an environment of pain, conformity, and labels. Pop culture superheroes became his source of confidence. I saw a kid who unknowingly made brilliant, wise comments that were fleeting and overlooked by his community, a young, modern day Don Quixote.

In making the film, I wanted to pass along to an audience the feeling I had when I was with Billy, while many adults were amazed and patient with him, a majority were suspicious, alarmed and cautious. My urge to figure out what was wrong with him was quickly replaced by uncomplicated appreciation and empathy. Every day we were laughing and crying along with Billy, tethered so readily to his feelings and perceptions. You might say we began filming as outsiders and ended as insiders. We saw his mother Penny being his only real friend but someone too close to his emotional gravity. While I conducted several interviews with teachers, students, family members and specialists, I ultimately threw them out in favor of Billy's voice. He tells the story himself, by being himself. All we have to do is experience Billy while he responds to a painful and riveting childhood, first time love, and life as an outcast.

For me this is a moment in time, in my life as well. With Billy up on screen, in the dark, I am interested in a life in progress, capturing a moment during this coming-of-age time when his thoughts, dreams, and actions are still actively designing his future. Like Billy, I too believe that the imaginative world can become reality. Ultimately, I feel Billy's journey is connected to all of our journeys, and that what we strive for, no matter how different we seem, is the same: acceptance, understanding, and love.

Jennifer Venditti, May 2007

## BIOS

**DIRECTOR/PRODUCER JENNIFER VENDITTI** (*One of Filmmaker Magazine's Top 25 New Faces in Film*) makes her directorial debut with the award winning documentary *BILLY THE KID* (*Jury prize Winner SXSW, Jury Prize Winner L.A. Film Festival, Jury Prize Winner Edinburgh International Film Festival, Audience Award Winner Melbourne Film Festival*). Venditti started her New York City based casting agency JV8INC in 1998. Traveling all over the world, street scouting real people for advertising, fashion, and film she discovers an inspired repertoire of diverse talent otherwise ignored by traditional casting methods. Photographers Richard Avedon and Bruce Weber and director Spike Jonze are just a few who have been impassioned by her refined aesthetic. It is her interest in finding the beauty in everyday heroes that provided her natural transition into filmmaking. While casting Carter Smith's short film *BUGCRUSH* (Sundance Short Film Winner 2006) in a rural Maine high school, Venditti discovered Billy Price whose unique and winning character inspired her feature documentary. Jennifer was named one of the top 25 new faces in Independent Film by Filmmaker Magazine. For more information: [www.jv8inc.com](http://www.jv8inc.com)

**PRODUCER CHIEMI KARASAWA** founded Isotope Films in 2005 to produce content for feature films based on non-fiction sources as well as independent documentary films. Her career includes over 15 years working in film, television and commercial production with such notable directors as Spike Jonze (*ADAPTATION*), Jim Jarmusch (*GHOSTDOG, COFFEE & CIGARETTES*), Larry Clark (*KIDS*), Spike Lee (*SUMMER OF SAM*), Steven Frears (*HIGH FIDELITY*), and in episodic television (*THE SOPRANOS, SEX IN THE CITY, ED*). She recently produced Katja Esson's *A SEASON OF MADNESS* (Woodstock, Austin & Florida Film Festivals 2006/7), and is currently producing a feature film directed by John Turturro.

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DONALD CUMMING** is a Renaissance man. As a filmmaker, Cumming has shot, directed, and edited many of his own short films. *BILLY THE KID* marks his debut camera work on a feature length film. An actor and also a model, Cumming was featured in Carter Smith's *BUGCRUSH* (Sundance Short Film Winner 2006) and has also worked with such acclaimed photographers as Peter Lindbergh, Terry Richardson, and Ryan McGinley. Cumming will also release a debut album with his band *THE VIRGINS* later this year on Atlantic Records.

**EDITOR MICHAEL LEVINE** most recently edited Amir Bar Lev's *MY KID COULD PAINT THAT* (2007). He also edited Bennett Miller's debut documentary *THE CRUISE* (1998) a feature length portrait about Tim "Speed" Levitch, an eccentric NYC Tour Bus guide. Levine has worked with Ken Burns (*THE WEST, BASEBALL*), Dan Klores on *BOYS OF 2<sup>nd</sup> STREET PARK* (2003) as well as on *RING OF FIRE: THE EMILE GRIFFITH STORY* (2005), and *FACTORY GIRL* with Sienna Miller.

**EDITOR ENAT SIDI** edited Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's 2007 Oscar 2007 Nominated *JESUS CAMP* (Magnolia Pictures 2006), a documentary about kids attending Evangelical summer camp, as well as the poignant and heartrending *THE BOYS OF BARAKA* (SXSW Winner Special Jury Award 2005) released by THINKFilm.



**Billy the Kid**

**Bottom Line: This revealing documentary about a teenage misfit will haunt viewers.**

By Stephen Farber

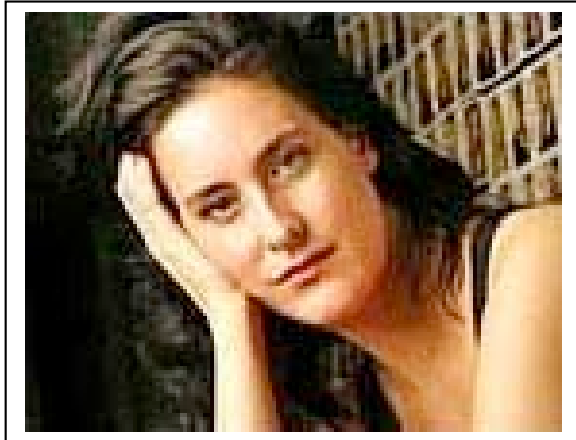
Jul 5, 2007

*Los Angeles Film Festival*\_\_ Many memorable dramatic films about adolescence have been made over the decades, but few of them can match the impact of "Billy the Kid," a striking, heartfelt documentary that deserves to have a long shelf life. Director Jennifer Venditti is a casting director who was interviewing high school kids in Maine for a short film. She came upon a young teenage boy, Billy Price-Baker, who didn't seem to fit with the other kids at his school, and she became intrigued by him and decided to see if she might gain entry into his world. Billy and his mother agreed to talk with her and share some of their secrets.\_\_What emerged is a portrait quite unprecedented in its candor and poignancy. Billy reveals the emotional problems that have plagued him since childhood. At one point, school administrators recommended that he be placed in a special school. His mother refused to accept their diagnosis, and it becomes clear that she was right. Billy's problems are not so different from typical adolescent alienation, and he clearly is a perceptive and bright boy who deserves a supportive environment where he might have a chance to flourish.\_\_Venditti followed Billy around and made him comfortable enough so that he opens up about the dark thoughts that he harbors, partly attributable to his history with an abusive father. Even more remarkable, while filming is under way Billy begins a tentative romance with Heather, a girl he courts at the local diner. The flush of first love rarely has been caught with such tenderness, and when the flirtation comes to a sudden end we're affected by the desolation that Billy feels.\_\_The film doesn't force a conclusion on us. It allows us to see that Billy has the potential to become dangerously antisocial, but he has a rock-solid ally in his mother, who proves to be far more generous and complicated than first impressions suggest. Like the best docus, "Billy the Kid" introduces us to some unique characters. Technically it's fairly simple but just accomplished enough to keep us riveted. Cinematographer Donald Cumming captures the small-town New England ambience.

The movie's main virtue is its intimacy; it takes us astonishingly close to its characters, and this is a tribute to the trust and empathy that Venditti and her unobtrusive crew achieved. One hopes that the film finds a life in theaters, then on television and DVD, where it will last as an indelible record of adolescent turmoil.

LOS ANGELES TIMES, JUNE 23, 2007

# Los Angeles Times



## **Billy the Kid,' lost on society's fringes**

**A documentary looks through the eyes of a startlingly sensitive teen with a disability.**

By Gina Piccalo, Times Staff Writer  
June 23, 2007

Billy Price is the weird kid at his high school, the one who walks funny and sits alone at lunch.

But get him talking, as first-time director Jennifer Venditti did in her debut documentary "Billy the Kid," and this gangly 15-year-old from rural Maine reveals a startling sensitivity to the world and a sad wisdom about his place in it.

"I try to look all tough and cold and emotionless on the outside, but the eyes give it away," Billy says in the film. "If you look in the eyes, you'll see a kid that's trying to be what he'll never be."

The film, which opens at the Los Angeles Film Festival Sunday night, centers on Venditti's first four days with Billy in the summer of 2005, when he meets a girl, falls in love and suffers his first heartbreak — the quintessential adolescent passage set to the anthem rock of KISS. It's a convenient story arc that has raised suspicion that the documentary was fabricated. But Venditti and Billy's mother, Penny Baker, steadfastly deny it. This high drama, they say, is just how Billy experiences the world. (The filmmaker consulted psychologists and received various speculative diagnoses for his condition, including Asperger's syndrome and high-functioning autism.)

"Billy was going through a lot of stuff, and it was just very fortuitous for them," said Baker, 38. "He'd met a girl. There were issues with boys at school. She just happened

to be there to catch it."

Venditti met Billy in his school cafeteria while casting extras for a short film. A group of bullies pointed him out, she said. The moment she and Billy started talking, she was struck by his odd, twitchy demeanor, his precocious interest in everything and his refusal to compromise his own needs to be accepted by his peers. Initially, Venditti said, she was driven to understand Billy's disability, but after a while she started to see a certain beauty in his imperfections.

"That's when I decided I wanted this film to be about life through the eyes of this outsider who wants the same things all of us want but doesn't know how to conform to get them," she said.

After lots of long talks with Baker, Venditti and cameraman Donald Cummings (also the lead singer of the Virgins) went to Maine and filmed Billy in the summer and the following winter for a total of eight days.

Billy always wore a microphone when they filmed, and Venditti said they never turned off the camera. They caught him dodging insults in the halls at school, eating lunch alone, awkwardly attempting to mingle with his peers. They watched Billy repeatedly tell complete strangers how much he loves a stepfather, a local radio DJ named Paul Baker, who is completely absent from the film.

At home, Billy and his mother analyze his differentness and recall his sad childhood, marred by a violent, drug-addicted father who abandoned them years ago. At age 4, Billy lunged at his father with a steak knife in an attempt to protect his mother. Today, Penny and Billy share a mobile home with Paul and Billy's younger brother, Ethan.

"I think the film will help others who have pain similar to me," Billy said in a recent phone conversation. "People who feel alone. People are still shunning me. I get a lot of that still. People look at me differently. In school, I was basically the kid who sat alone at a table by himself. I hope it will help a lot of kids who are in the same situation."

When Billy meets Heather, a 16-year-old with a disability of her own, his attempts to engage and impress her are endearing and excruciating. One moment, he's surreptitiously flexing his biceps as he brags about bodybuilding. The next, he's whispering a strange "death" mantra to himself in the restroom.

Later, Venditti captures Billy alone in his tiny room with an electric guitar strapped to his bare chest, aping Gene Simmons' moves in a KISS concert video. After Simmons and Paul Stanley watched the film, they granted Venditti festival rights to their music, she said.

Variety's John Anderson called "Billy the Kid" "a setup" masquerading as *cinéma vérité*, and criticized Venditti's portrait as "inappropriate," showing "willful blindness to the agony of adolescence in general, and a particular myopia concerning Billy."

Hot Docs programmer Sean Farnel had his concerns too. But after he did a bit of "auditing," he said, he was convinced the film was authentic and selected it for his Toronto festival.

"It's a marketing challenge," said Farnel. "Whoever figures out that challenge I think could have a sleeper film on their hands. Everyone I know who sees it tells other people to see it. It's totally a word-of-mouth experience."

As part of the film's promotion, Venditti established a MySpace.com page for Billy that Billy himself can't access, she said, so as not to overwhelm him. The film's festival screenings have drawn attention to the site, in at least one case from an old friend of Billy's.

"I like many high schoolers wondered, 'What the hell are they doing, making a movie about Billy?' " Noelle wrote, saying that she had lost touch with him. "But now it is obvious why. The question people should ask is 'Why hasn't anyone made a film about this kid?' "

"Billy the Kid" won the jury prize at the South by Southwest Film Festival in Austin, Texas. Venditti said she's now turning down other requests from festivals to screen it. She's also weighing two offers from film distributors, she said.

Venditti said she didn't enter Billy's life without seriously considering the consequences.

"We talk a lot about what the purpose of this is," said Venditti. "It's not about Billy becoming famous. It's about him opening up to other people and connecting to someone else he can relate to."

Venditti is contributing to his college fund, and she coordinated a visit to his school by Challenge Day, a costly and intensive three-day program for students conducted by a Carson company, designed to prevent violence and alienation.

"Everybody has their preconceived notions about people shooting movies — possible exploitation and what they're out to get," said Penny Baker. "Jennifer just wasn't like that."

Billy's now a junior in high school, scouting colleges and looking for a part-time job. The movie has made him something of a celebrity back home. His mother said his newly elevated self-esteem has sometimes gotten out of hand.

"At first, it was a little bit of a roller-coaster ride because Billy, in a way, didn't understand," said Baker. "I said, 'This is a wonderful opportunity — you've truly been blessed — but you're not a movie star.' "

Billy can't wait to get to L.A. Still, he said, it's embarrassing to share so much of himself with strangers.

"It's kind of awkward seeing my emotions on-screen," said Billy. "I think the scenes I liked the most was when I met Heather. I still see her from time to time. We talk occasionally. I get the feeling we'll be together again sometime."



## 25 NEW FACES OF INDEPENDENT FILM

*Filmmaker's* annual survey of new talent

### **Jennifer Venditti**

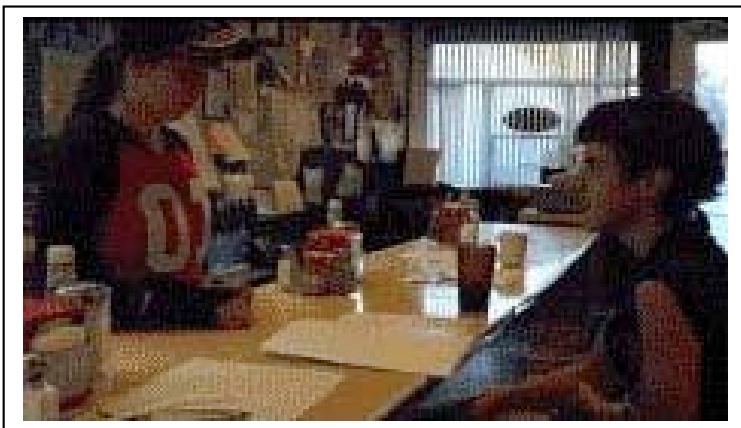
Jennifer Venditti has always walked backward into her future. "I was obsessed with characters and character through clothing — that's what got me into fashion," says the casting director turned director, who started out in the magazine world. She quit when she got close enough to see that for all its creativity and access to talent, the fashion industry espoused an idea of beauty that was as narrow as its waistlines.

Photographer Carter Smith had noticed Venditti's keen eye for street casting and brought her to Scotland to find real people for a *W* magazine shoot. That first job grew into one of the most dynamic and successful print-casting agencies in the city, stuffing its files with characters Venditti pulls off streets from Minnesota to Rio. Smith came back to Venditti to populate the world of his Sundance-winning short *Bugcrush*. She was

casting with Smith in Maine when some bullies told her about the boy who would become the subject of her first film, *Billy the Kid*.

"Sometimes, of course, casting gets trying, seeing face after face," Venditti says. "It's a huge turnoff when people are trying to please or impress me. Billy wasn't even aware of the idea of conforming to the accepted. He wanted what other people had, but he didn't have any idea of changing himself."

*Billy the Kid* is as deep a character study as one is likely to find in documentary, and it was honored with a Jury Prize by the SXSW Film Festival. Billy, 15, is a strange and singular person, alone in his articulate, curious, passionate opinions. Without narration or any third-party commentary, Venditti plays the audience's temptation to judge and diagnose with a maestro's touch. He might be autistic, he might have Asperger's, but who cares? Venditti believes in willing away labels and seeing beauty without demanding to understand it, and the film proves her right. — Alicia Van Covering



**BY DENIS SEGUIN**

***Billy The Kid* ventures into a small, contained community to focus on a single life and thereby turns the camera on the world. The Grand Prize winner at SXSW in Austin, where it premiered in March, and an audience favourite at Hot Docs in Toronto, the film is gaining traction for its insight into a little understood disability known as Asperger's Syndrome, part of the autism spectrum. Still, this is no "freak show" film – Billy wasn't diagnosed until after filming was complete – but a privileged view through the eyes of a genuine iconoclast.**

Its theatrical prospects will hinge on continued success on the festival circuit – it plays, for example, in the Los Angeles Film Festival this month. Beautifully shot, it has the feel and texture of a feature rather than a TV effort. Not unlike Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation*, the film may be too much for some viewers to embrace.

Still, Asperger's Syndrome, and indeed autism, is a hot topic. HBO recently picked up *Autism: The Musical* while Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time*, wherein the narrator is autistic, is set for adaptation by Steven Kloves for *Harry Potter* producer David Heyman and Warner Bros.

Debut film-maker **Jennifer Venditti** is a casting director for feature films. She was scouting the human fauna of a high school in a rural New England town when she stumbled on 15-year-old Billy eating alone in the cafeteria.

Transfixed by his unique world-view she somehow convinced Billy and his mother to let her small crew follow him throughout his day, from breakfast, school, special education class, lunch, after school at the diner and then home for a few days one spring.

What begins as a fly-on-the-shoulder exploration of life as a teenage boy becomes a sometimes tender, oft-times painful reminder of the subtle power of both kindness and cruelty to shape a person. And it is a portrait of the strength and grace of a mother who stands by her child despite poverty and abuse.

That this is possible is entirely due to the extraordinary kid at the centre of the film. Instantly appealing to audiences for his innocence and utter lack of guile, his plain-speaking and his fondness for air guitar, Billy is unlike anyone we know: we are forced through his eyes to see the world anew.

"I know I'm unique," he says in voice over as we watch him alone in that same cafeteria. "I don't let it get to my head... Sometimes I think the imaginative world is much better than the real world. But there's one difference, imagination ain't real."

That's for sure. Some sequences are excruciating: as when Billy attempts to socialise with some boys playing billiards. Despite his entreaties, they blank him. And yet he seems completely unaware that anything is amiss. The social chasm yawns before him as though he were a blindfolded at a cliff edge.

To put it in the stark parlance of his peer group, Billy is weird. Which may be why he takes a shine to Heather, a congenitally cross-eyed girl whose family owns the town diner. A conventional teenage peer but with a glaring physical stigma, she is the opposite of Billy, who is almost faun-like in his physical presence but whose invisible brain chemistry only betrays him when engaged. Their flirtation provides the dramatic backbone to the piece.

Vendetti and editor Michael Levine assemble exquisite montages – sometimes elegiac traveling shots, sometimes pensive static scenes - overlaid with the introspective and deeply felt voice-over of Billy as he recounts the troubles he has known.

His shadowed face, speaking from the dark of the family trailer home, accentuates the power of his inner world. "Despite my outside appearance," he say, in utter seriousness. "I'm actually very sensitive."

The temptation to dismiss these people as trailer trash is strong, and ultimately humbling. To dismiss Billy as emotionally disturbed is itself a condemnation of a society that cannot embrace otherness. If only more mothers were such strong advocates for their children. If only the world could understand more people like Billy.

INDIEWIRE, March 15, 2007

## ***SXSW '07 CRITICS NOTEBOOK | Quiet, Personal Moments Make Biggest Impact at 2007 SXSW Fest***

*by Michael Lerman (March 15, 2007)*

Easily the most-talked about documentary in this year's SXSW Film Fest, and with good reason, is **Jennifer Venditti's "Billy the Kid"**. To say the film is a haunting, intimate portrait of a teenage boy struggling through the regular hardships of adolescence would be selling the film short. Venditti's work is one of the strongest directorial visions, one made over the course of eight shooting days and months of precise, creative editing. The first twenty minutes alone are worth the price of admission for the contribution to furthering the language of documentary. Venditti's pulls the audience in with a series of telling vignettes, wrapping us in the whirlwind of Billy's life and dropping us deep into the verite of his first relationship, all the while never undermining but rather enhancing her subject. The touching nature of Billy's story is the epitome of the emotional experience that this year's SXSW has been; a crucial factor in why the film won the top documentary jury prize.

THE GUARDIAN, August 31, 2007



## *Just don't call them chick flicks*

Just 7% of films are directed by women – but the work on show at the Edinburgh film festival proves female film-makers are punching above their weight

BY CLAIRE BIRCHELL

...**Jennifer Venditti's** documentary about a disturbed but inspiring 15-year-old boy, Billy the kid. Perhaps Venditti shares Billy's feelings: "I'm not a very big fan of politics," he confesses. "I don't hate it, it's just not something I want to get mixed up in." Billy is bullied for his emotional and physical volatility, but he dreams of being a rock star, actor or superhero. The film follows him for a week, depicting his idiosyncratic approach to love, heavy metal and martial arts.

The modest aims of this film are misleading, for the story of Billy resonates as that of an American anti-hero: a loner lost in a fantasy world. The boy has a contradictory relationship with the community in which he lives – at one moment he wants to be the local vigilante, at another he describes how a cheerleader made his life "a living hell". Without his mother's level-headed guidance, Billy could easily be a Columbine waiting to happen. Venditti...has made an unexpectedly important film about ostracism and our strategies for coping with it.

The AUSTIN CHRONICLE, March 16, 2007

## **SXSW Film**

### *Daily Reviews and Interviews*

BY DIANA WELCH

### **Billy the Kid**

#### **D: Jennifer Venditti**

In her near-perfect directorial debut, Venditti lovingly captures the trials of one troubled adolescent's life in small-town Maine. At 15, Billy Price is practically a genius. He's interested in girls, Kiss, and slasher movies. He has a purple belt in karate and hopes to one day come to the aid of a damsel in distress. He also suffers from severe temper tantrums during which he's prone to bang his head against the wall. As a toddler, he gave his mom a couple of black eyes. But Billy is who he is, and his mother is proud of him. The empathy that Venditti feels for her subject is catching, tapping the audience into every awkward moment that Billy bravely endures. In her subject, she found not only a captivating kid but also someone who exemplifies the torture that is being a teenager, from the furtive shame of sitting alone in the cafeteria to the pain and elation of first love.



---

*Billy the Kid* received the Documentary Feature competition Jury Award.

1:45pm, Alamo Downtown