



VARIETY

Posted: Tue., Apr. 29, 2003, 5:51pm PT

The Dance
(Docu)

A Haynes/Geadelmann Pictures production in association with Casa Grande Entertainment. Produced by Eric A. Geadelmann, John Darling Haynes, Scott Mayo. Directed by John Darling Haynes.

Narrator: Trace Adkins.

By JOE LEYDON

For a pic that spends most of its time inside prisons, "The Dance" is an often strikingly beautiful piece of work. Shrewdly composed and emotionally rich visuals enhance the nitty-gritty details of artist-turned-filmmaker John Darling Haynes' debut docu feature. Pic about an aging boxing trainer and his relationships with pugilist convicts may score a few theatrical rounds before going the distance in cable and pubcast.

A grizzled ex-boxer who has worked 44 years as a volunteer coach and referee in Louisiana prison system, Billy Roth comes across as a gregarious Good Samaritan who has, in his own way, changed several seemingly dead-end lives. Interviews with past and present inmates who have trained with Roth -- including heavyweight Clifford "The Black Rhino" Etienne -- attest to his wide acceptance as mentor and father figure. (Interviewed inmates, all black, frequently refer to Roth, a white, as "Pops" or "Dad.") Pic is disappointingly vague about details of Roth's outside life, and the glowing testimonials are a bit repetitious. Even so, pic tells a compelling story (that could easily inspire a dramatic feature) with tact, intelligence and skill. Terrific musical score includes blues and gospel standards.

Camera (color, digital video), editor, Scott Mayo; music supervisor, Scott Brasher. Reviewed on videocassette, Houston, April 5, 2003. (At South by Southwest Film Festival -- Documentary Competition.) Running time: 70 MIN.