

[A festival for Oscar hopefuls works the docs](#)

August 20, 2008 Susan King, Times Staff Writer

A candid look at one of America's most innovative composers, an inspirational story of a Tibetan monk who survived decades of torture, and a gritty examination of notorious gangs are among the 18 feature and four short documentaries making up this year's edition of the International Documentary Assn.'s DocuWeek. Developed to give filmmakers an opportunity to qualify for Oscar consideration by providing the theatrical platform necessary to be considered for an Academy Award nomination, DocuWeek opens Friday and continues through Aug. 28 at the ArcLight theaters in Hollywood and Sherman Oaks. Twenty-five films featured in previous DocuWeek programming have gone on to garner Oscar nominations, with six winning the Academy Award, including Alex Gibney's 2007 film, "Taxi to the Dark Side." Highlights of the festival:

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'Fire Under the Snow'

With only positive images of China being broadcast during the Olympics, this heartfelt look at the resilience of the human spirit from director-producer Makota Sasa is a vivid reminder of the other side of life under the reign of Chinese communists. Sasa allows his subject, the Venerable Palden Gyatso, to tell his own story with simplicity and warmth. The Tibetan Gyatso, who has been a Buddhist monk since he was child, was arrested in 1959 after a peaceful demonstration. Imprisoned without a trial, he was tortured and starved during his 33-year incarceration. His spirit, though, was never broken, and he's now one of the leading activists striving for Tibetan independence from China.