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SCREENING ROOM

'Married' drama opens Other Venice fest

■ The first Other Venice Film Festival is designed to call attention to the presence of filmmaking activity in the community.

By Kevin Thomas, Times Staff Writer

The first Other Venice Film Festival, a weekend event at the Electric Lodge, is designed to call attention to the presence of filmmaking activity in the community. Charlie Chaplin introduced his beloved Tramp character in his second two-reeler for Mack Sennett in "Kid Auto Races at Venice" (1914), and Venice has been a favorite location for movies ever since, most notably Orson Welles' "Touch of Evil" (1958).

But Other Venice's main point will be to celebrate the work of filmmakers who are residents.

The festival opens with Michael Pressman's **"Frankie and Johnny Are Married,"** a bittersweet, wryly amusing "dramatic fiction" about the producer-director's true-life tribulations while trying to stage the play "Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune." Pressman had decided that after a decade of marriage, he and his wife, actress Lisa Chess, should work together.

To play opposite Chess' waitress in the Terence McNally drama, they cast as the short-order cook an actor friend, who proves temperamental and insecure and who considers it beneath him to actually learn lines.

Financial disaster looms, and misery descends upon the couple. Pressman, however, makes a bold decision to try to save the day. Chess, her husband and Alan Rosenberg as the cook are terrific, as is Jillian Armenante as the play's overconfident producer. The film is studded with cameos by familiar names and faces.

A free spirit

In Chantal Akerman's droll romantic fable **"Night and Day"** (1991) — part of the UCLA Film and Television Archive's series honoring the filmmaker — a young couple, newcomers to Paris, are caught up in an intense, all-absorbing relationship. Their lives seem complete — until the woman, Julie (Nicole Colchat), meets one of her lover (Thomas Langmann) Jack's fellow taxi drivers, Joseph (François Negret), and swiftly begins an affair with him.

The point is that Julie is a free woman, quite capable of loving two men, but will the men be able to handle the situation? The film is airy and free-spirited and as graceful as Julie, and Akerman suggests how social conventions can stifle true feelings.

"Night and Day" will be followed by **"From the Other Side"** (2002), a documentary on border towns, Agua Prieta and Douglas, on opposite sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, that with "From the East" and "South" culminates a trilogy exploring the effect of dislocation, ethnic strife and globalization.

Turning point

Christopher Munch's extraordinary **"The Sleepy Time Gal"** is the next offering in the Monday night screening series at REDCAT in Disney Hall.

Munch first came to attention with "The Hours and Times," in which he sensitively imagined what might have occurred between John Lennon and Brian Epstein during a brief Barcelona interlude, and "Color of a Brisk and Leaping Day," a remarkably evocative account of the struggle to bring rail travel to Yosemite.

He has followed his first two intensely idiosyncratic films with yet another: a luminous portrait of a beautiful middle-aged San Francisco freelance writer (Jacqueline Bisset) who has reached a turning point in her life and longs for contact with the daughter she gave up for adoption. In the meantime, the daughter (Martha Plimpton), a successful Manhattan attorney, has reached her own crossroads, yearning to discover the identity of her birth mother.

"The Sleepy Time Gal" has a depth, range and subtlety far greater than most American films, and Bisset's superb, unsparing portrayal is supported strongly by Plimpton, Seymour Cassel, Frankie R. Faison, Amy



'Frankie and Johnnie Are Married'

(IFC Films)