Kristian Salinas: Testing 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. [Music plays] Hi, I'm Kristian Salinas, I am from Alvin, Texas, and I am the Board President and Artistic Director of QFest, the Houston GLBTQ International Film Festival.

**Falling in love with film**

KS: When you're growing up, in whatever environment you're in, that environment becomes your world, that's what you know, that's what you breathe, that's what you are. And so when I was 18, I was still in high school and the very first trip I took to Houston, like to the River Oaks Theater, was to see a film called *The Player* which is a Robert Altman film, and the reason I wanted to see it was because it was about Hollywood, and I had these dreams of going to film school back then and it was really the first time that I went to the River Oaks and experienced that, and it just opened up this whole world of film. Shortly thereafter, this little bitty video store that was on Highway 6 out in the country, and in fact it was called Country Video, had what they called this basket of so called "adult films" but in there I'm not kidding you they had a copy of *The Coak, The Thief, His Wife, & Her Lover* which you know could be considered an adult film for whatever reason, but also *Babette's Feast* which was rated G from what I knew, and I remember renting both of those and they are polar opposites in terms of content and style but both were so dramatically different from what I was accustomed to in say Hollywood narrative, and I remember very distinctly that those two films just sort of created this whole path of wanting to digest more film, and to see everything I possibly could. You know, I had to go to Alvin Community College to get my two years out of the way, which was essentially the basics, but I had gotten this scholarship to study Business Administration and it was in the first semester there, I think within the first week and a half, I dropped out completely because I was sitting in this accounting class and they were doing T-charts, or T-graphs, that's what they were called, T-graphs, and I had no idea like where to put the numbers, it just didn't make any sense to me and I just remember going into this daze and literally feeling drool come out of my mouth, and just spacing out completely, and saying this is just not going to work. And so it was very immediately afterwards, I dropped out of that program, to the chagrin of my parents who really were not too happy with that, but I went into General Studies and just prepared myself to go to UT Austin…it was a wonderful opportunity at that time to explore all different fields of film, particularly films that dealt with all kinds of topics from all parts of the world. They had very active film exhibition programs, so I was seeing all kinds of films, I'd say on a daily basis. Video stores were still common back then, and there were at least three or four that I would go to regularly. So it was great, it was wonderful, in that regard. Production wise, I didn't get along well with my fellow students so I didn't really enjoy the production component. But thankfully I did enjoy the writing. And the funny thing is, when I was doing production, when I really got into production when I was in Austin, I wasn't doing it through the school. At this job I had at United Video, which were eventually bought out by Blockbuster, I met this guy who would
come into the store, and ask me a question, which led into this conversation, he was actually starting this film collective, and it was called Insitued, it was inspired by the Situationists, and I got sucked into that, met a lot of people in Austin that way, started working on a lot of experimental films, and doing a lot of experimental exhibition. And that led into an internship at South by Southwest, of all places, and then eventually an internship here at the Museum of Fine Arts in the film department.

QFest: The Houston GLBTQ International Film Festival
KS: The thing, I wouldn't say I hated, but that thing that is very challenging about working with a young festival is that you don't have the cache of established festivals, which makes programming a challenge. But the flipside of that, is that your programming, you're forced by necessity to make your programming inspired you have to be very creative with limited resources. The primary motivation for changing the name was to give the festival, in some ways, a broader appeal. We had worked for years with many arts organizations around the city, most of whom are not gay, but may do occasional gay programming. With that being said, the fact that we were involved with these organizations allowed us to attract audiences outside the typical GLBT community. And changing the name, I felt, took away, you know, the geographic limitations of calling it the Houston Gay and Lesbian Film Festival because when you do that it always has to be in Houston. And calling it Gay and Lesbian feels very restrictive because then it can only be Gay and Lesbian, and there are certain expectations that fall in line with labeling yourself certain things. So QFest still referred to queer but at that time, queer was being redefined in a new way that I felt was allowing, or that would allow the festival to host programming that was not part in parcel of a number of other gay and lesbian film festivals across the country.

Outfest: The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
KS: Outfest was a tremendous learning experience. That's a huge festival, and unlike anything that I've ever experienced before, and unlike anything that's in Houston. It's just a huge, huge event and there was a lot, a lot that I learned from that. I'd never been in an environment where you're getting ... I mean it seems so strange now to say there were a thousand submissions, but there were a thousand submissions in all categories. And to be in an environment where you have that many tapes, and this was still before DVD took off, like you'd get a few DVD's, but everything was on cassette. So you're getting a thousand cassettes, and they're all in these like, those plastic boxes you get from the post office to carry mail in, which they don't even have anymore. But we used to carry all that stuff, all those cassettes, which is nuts, and then having, you know, a screening committee that was responsible for taking forty to fifty tapes at a time, you know. And they had to watch these things in two weeks, and write coverage, and here's some more. And you have to develop the memory to recall instantly what you'd seen, it just really requires this kind of ... it really requires a love of cinema because you have to remember everything. I can't remember the title, but it has this scene, this scene, this scene. Yes! That's this one, great. That's what we want to show. Or I need to get the contact information for that director to you. It's very fast paced. It's intense. So yes, I did sort of go back to something that I had done before, but not really because it was blown up in a hundred times from anything I had ever done here in Houston.

On managing both QFest and Outfest
KS: Let's just say there were like two hundred films at one festival. That of course includes shorts. So two hundred, two hundred fifty films were shown there, and believe it or not, there are still things I wish I could have shown. And for whatever reason, and the reasons are varied, they couldn't be shown there. But I believed in the film enough to remember it, to then bring it to Houston if there was an opportunity. And there were a few cases like that where ... And that was one of the nice things about working on both of them, is that I felt like I could correct an error that was made at one or the other where I'm bringing this film. It really deserved to be shown, it wasn't, I want to give it a chance. One of the advantages that Outfest has, being in Los Angeles, really has nothing to with Los Angeles being open-minded, but all to do with the fact that it's an industry city. So they have the support of all the studios and a number of Hollywood executives who give them lots of money and lots of support. And Outfest has been very wise in how they use that to create an event that is really designed, and admirably so, to promote and support filmmakers who are just getting started. So a number of filmmakers who were just starting when I began working at Outfest are now producing or working on high profile projects and a lot of that is because of the support that Outfest has given them. Will Houston, will QFest for that matter ever be something like Outfest? You know, I've learned never to say never, but you know it's a twofold. First will QFest ever have the scale of Outfest? Nothing's impossible but I think a lot has to happen for that to take place. Will QFest be able to launch the careers, launch film careers in the same way that Outfest has? Well it depends on whether or not Houston and QFest can tap into industry support at that level. Sponsorship, the last couple of years that we've rebooted the festival, we haven't really relied on sponsorship. We rely mostly on grants and revenue that we make on the event. But sponsorship is not something that we've actively pursued, and I think it's given us the freedom to program the way that we do program. Outfest, San Francisco, well I should say Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Chicago to some extent, don't have the limitations imposed on them by sponsors because the cities are a certain way. There is an open-mindedness to, and an acceptance to the programming. Like its fine if they show that, no one is going to mind. When we start getting into Texas, as you said, Texas has certain limitations. Sponsors become more concerned about certain content, and we've had this happen in the past, where a sponsor was not happy about a certain film being shown because of the perception of an audience or just people who aren't going to the festival, but may see the name associated with it and see this film is being shown that they feel is too controversial. And we've had requests that were denied by the festival, to remove programs. And it didn't result in a sponsor leaving, but I can tell you for a fact that that's not something that Los Angeles has put up with recently.

It's something I would never do again. It was extraordinarily challenging because, you know, it was only meant to be temporary. I mean there were trips I had to make to Houston where I would be gone for three or four months here, and then I'd have to go back. The shifting of gears, like I would have to start to get accustomed to things here, and then having to go back and restart everything, I don't why I did that. I think there was this level of commitment to want to see the Houston festival continue, and the only way really at that time was to remain involved but yea, that ... it's like maintaining two different boyfriends at the same time, and they're both very demanding in their own way. Just think of that, like it's too much emotion involved in both. Like I can only pick one.

His inspiration
KS: My favorite film, I have five favorite films, and then a sixth, but it's like the, "If I was trapped on a desert island scenario. But my favorite film, I think has always remained, I think still continues to be *Imitation of Life*, which is a Douglas Sirk film with Lana Turner. I think that it's a film that speaks to so many different people on so many different levels, repeated viewings you always take away something new. It works beautifully as a social statement and as film art. It is perhaps one of the most perfect films I could think of.

**A message to aspiring artists**

KS: Stay true to your vision, but that's very cliché. I'd like to tell this story about a dream I had years ago in black and white where I was in Mexico, probably in 1950. And in this dream I met Luis Bunuel who was on set of some film he was shooting outside of a church, and it was so exciting because I got to meet him. And he's talking to me about what it means to be an artist. And he's going to give me his words of wisdom and I can't wait. So in this dream he says "You make art to live and breathe outside of your own existence, it's not about you it's about the art." And as soon as he says that he says "Ok I have to get back to work". And I see him walking away back to the set, and then out emerge Barbara Mandrell and Pam Grier handcuffed together in nun habits. And I just remember waking up crying and laughing that dream was so hysterical. But, you know, whatever they say about dreams and meeting dead people, I do believe what he said in that dream was true and that if you want to be a real artist, you have to make the art live and breathe on its own.