

The Cola Conquest
Irene Angelico's Real Thing
by Maurie Alioff
Cine Festival

It's an innocuous-looking brown liquid, but it comes packaged in one of the most famous objects in the world. Ten thousand years from now, collectors will pay fortunes for good 20th century specimens, and the Coca-Cola Company will still be engaging in its endless struggle to hold top position in the international, inter-galactic cola market.

World premiering at the festival, Irene Angelico's three-hour TV doc, **The Cola Conquest** is a witty, effervescent tour of soft drink lore. At the same time, the films use Coke to make points about the systematic image-making that fuels international pop culture.

The beverage was first concocted by a wounded Civil War veteran trying to shake his morphine habit, but an evangelist called Asa Candler figured out how to sell Coke. "He helped to create modern advertizing," explains Angelico during an interview, adding that the original, patent medicine version of the drink featured a "huge jolt of caffeine and a significant dose of cocaine." Naturally, Atlanta headquarters never acknowledged there was once coke in Coke. The drug's nasty reputation obviously doesn't jibe with the pristine image of the drink carefully nurtured by Robert Woodruff, who ran the corporation for sixty years.

A myth in the cola industry, Woodruff "put Coke on the international map," says Angelico. Under him, Coca-Cola established beachheads in Europe and influenced politicians back home. "It's amazing what levels of power we're dealing with here," Angelico continues. "The king of the soft drink industry dealt with leaders at the highest levels."

Wired with information, filmed around the world, **The Cola Conquest** tracks Coke's ongoing crusade to turn all of humanity into drinkers of its fizzy product. Pepsi once had Michael Jackson, but according to a psychologist, Coke has been manipulated as a symbol of God. As the TV series progresses, we see New Guinea cannibals enjoying their first frosty one, and Saharan teenagers driving sixteen hours to get theirs.

Angelico talks about the executive who says that Coke is the top pop in the world, but wants to win over the holdouts who prefer coffee, tea and water.

"We haven't shied away from criticizing the company," says Angelico about the show she made for DLI Productions, a local operation she runs with her husband, producer-director Abbey Neidik. "But **The Cola Conquest** is not an attack. We've tried to be honest, and we've tried to be fair."