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# INDEPENDENT

*Spirit*

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MAR 17 1992

STATE DOCUMENTS

Vol. XIII NO.1

Winter 1992

# BEHIND

Robby Henson.  
1990. 16mm. Color.  
56 m.

Edward L. Counts

# TROUBLE



A still from Robby Henson's film *Trouble Behind* of Dora "My Daddy always carried a gun with him and I'm the same way, because that's the way I was raised." (Photo by Russell Fine)

"The one thing I was hopin' was...is that we'd definitely be outa here before it began to get dark. I just don't want to hang around here." Thus, Dr. George Wright, African American Historian, expresses in a personal and direct way, what this documentary is about - the lingering legacy of racism in Corbin, Kentucky. Examining this tradition as a humanities advisor providing historical perspective is one thing. Experiencing it as a black man riding in a van down the main street of Corbin at dusk is another.

The above sequence takes place late in Robbie Henson's latest documentary, *Trouble Behind*. This hour-long film is full of interviews, archival photography - still and motion, - contemporary scenes of Corbin, all tied together by forboding music and haunting sounds and images of trains giving the film its motif and mood. Riding in a van, walking the streets, cruising with teenagers at night, the person with a movie camera shows the images of abandoned stores, fast food restaurants, broken signs, a long forgotten railroad station, and a weed and junk covered field - the last site in which a black community existed some seventy years ago in Corbin, before the "incident."

Because of a shortage of workers, the Louisville & Nashville railroad brought back laborers to Corbin during WWI. Soon after their arrival, an incident occurred which ended with the black workers and their families being sent out of town. They were rounded up by musical bands who marched to their homes and told them they would have to leave. They were taken to the depot, put on a special car provided by the L&N, and taken to Knoxville, Tennessee. Dr. Wright continues, "The legacy of all this lives right on in the community of Corbin." Several versions of this incident are examined in detail in the film. Henson interviewed older Corbin citizens, and former citizens who were eye witnesses or who remember their parents telling them about it, a Chamber of Commerce director who says he has heard about 100 different versions, and Dr. Wright who presents microfiche copies of newspapers of the time reporting on what happened. Toward the end of this long segment of the film, Henson returns to old film footage of trains, moving away from the viewer, heading out of town. The sad sound of guitar chords in a minor key reinforce the tragedy of this event that most contemporary citizens of Corbin wish had never happened or that Henson had not reminded them of at least. One Corbin business man says that exposing this legacy through the media creates more problems than it solves.

There is really no risk in making a film in condemning racism. Henson's risk, however, was making the film about the legacy of racism in a specific place and then having the residents of that place provide the evidence through their comments, attitudes and recol-

lections. A Corbin gas station owner says, referring to the incident of seventy years ago as a "damn lie. I say you're wrong in includin' Corbin in your write-up because you're gonna harm Corbin and people are going to jump down your throat because blacks have not been discriminated against in this town!" Nonetheless, and ignoring that possibility, Henson proceeds to string together a montage of images, and interviews that, unfortunately for Corbin, show that to this day, black people are apparently still not welcome. Would an African American person choose to live in a town with a road named "Nigger Creek Road?" Virtually all the town's residents that appear in the film deny that Corbin has any more racial prejudice than any other American town. Particularly unsettling is a sequence of high school students expressing their attitudes at a wild party. There is drinking and pot smoking and several of the young people express the harshest kind of racial slurs combined with obscenities. One even moons the camera, exposing himself in more ways than one. This is lively, risky, filmmaking expressing the turmoil of this party with grainy images, hand held camera, and the candidness of the subjects. In the midst of this Henson inserts a shot of a young woman, who appears to be embarrassed, commenting that people have kept the racist attitudes that have been passed down and she describes Corbin as "really a close-minded town." So, by including that shot, and some others of thoughtful Corbin citizens, Henson does show that there are some forces for change in the town.

Predictably, some people of Corbin, and some other Kentuckians have objected to Henson's portrayal of the town. Kentucky Educational Television chose not to air it. However, *Corbin Times Tribune* on July 6, 1990 printed an article about the documentary including many comments from Henson and some of the displeased Corbin citizens he interviewed. In that article, the film was not condemned or even criticized by the writer. It dealt only with the reactions to the film. After all, in *Trouble Behind*, Henson did not script any of the lines of the Corbin residents, he simply recorded what they said - which raises another issue related to this work.

In an interview segment of an older Corbin woman recounting her version of the previously described incident, she uses the word "nigger." She pauses, and asks if that word can be cut out. Apparently getting the impression that it could, she continues her story. Obviously, it could have been, but was not. Does a documentary filmmaker need to respect the wishes of people in his film - especially when he (Henson) gives the impression that he will whether he agrees or disagrees with what the person is saying? In *Trouble Behind*, this sequence is one of the most revealing and is a full expression of what the film is all about. The film would have lost a telling moment. Documentaries which are about social issues seen from

a particular view usually are controversial or contain controversial scenes and material. In Kentucky in 1984, as an illustration, Appalshop Films released the film *Strangers and Kin*. This documentary traced the history of negative stereotypes and caricatures in literature, journalism, television, documentaries, and feature films of the people of Appalachia. They also interviewed some residents of the region, who, in the eyes of the filmmakers, had contributed to the exploitation of the region and its culture in the name of progress. In one scene, the then mayor of Pikeville, Kentucky is shown standing in front of a massive construction project in which the mountains and environment have had major alterations. Unlike the filmmaker, he takes pride in this accomplishment and sees it as a very positive impact on the region that will lead to commercial and industrial development. In a lengthy review of *Strangers and Kin* in the March 14, 1984 edition of the Whitesburg, Kentucky *Mountain Eagle*, Tom Gish wrote that this segment was "one of the most cruel bits of film footage we have ever seen." Apparently, he was objecting to the filmmaker's placing the mayor in a context which made him appear to be one of the exploiters of Appalachia.

Dr. Robert Harris, an African American Historian, along with Dr. Wright, provide perspective and continuity. Henson also included residents who are sensitive about the town's reputation, reject racism, and express a desire for more African-Americans to live in their city. Late in the film, for example, one of the film's most thoughtful statements is provided by Dr. Stephen Ashmann, Pastor of Corbin Presbyterian Church who says that community leaders need to help Corbin understand its past... "forgetting just continues the wrong."

Could *Trouble Behind* have been a better film? Of course, as most films could have been. Generally, the photography is very good with some creative use of railroad sounds and images providing transitions. There is some nice montage editing of old photos and film images of Corbin. The subdued and moody score was composed by Henson. One puzzling part of the film is when Henson provides a scripted voice over (his) near the beginning. He says, after a graphic telling of race riots which occurred in America in 1919, "One of the riots occurred in Corbin, Kentucky on October 31, 1919. Sixty miles from where I was born." Throughout the rest of the film, however, he asks questions (unmiked) from behind the camera and does not provide any more of his own thoughts by voice over or by appearing in the film. The technique of a hidden voice asking questions from behind the camera is used frequently in documentaries but is somewhat distracting. This method may be necessary because the spontaneity of an interview may be lost if it is edited in such a way to exclude the unseen questioner's voice. Also, it would have been interesting and enlightening to see if Henson had any suggestions as to how this problem of Corbin's could be resolved and what he knew about Corbin's reputation when he was growing up sixty miles away. For a very good example of a "self conscious" film in which the documentary filmmaker is on camera frequently, see Joe Gray's 1983 film about the moral and economic concerns of tobacco farming in Kentucky, *Lord and Father*.

*Trouble Behind* is about an America of which Corbin is only a small, though not unique part. Racism is found everywhere - New York, Chicago, North, South and in Kentucky. Documentary films succeed when they encourage viewers to draw conclusions and possibly change attitudes or at least become a little more sensitive. "Forgetting just continues the wrong."

*Trouble Behind* was included in the Sundance Film Festival, the Cinema Du Reel, and INPUT. Other festivals and awards include: BEST FILM; Documentary Festival of New York, 1ST PLACE; Louisville Film Festival. 2ND PLACE; Baltimore Film Festival, 3RD PLACE; Athens Festival, Margaret Mead, Montreal, Sydney and Hawaii Festivals.

*Trouble Behind* is distributed by California Newsreel 415/621-6196

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# ALL DAY

Rodney Stevens



Robert "Honeymoon" Garner (left) and Fred Ford (right) perform in *All Day & All Night: Memories from Beale Street Musicians*, a special highlighting the lifestyles of blues musicians who lived on Memphis's Beale Street during its heyday. (Photo courtesy of Center for Southern Folklore)

*All Day & All Night: Memories From Beale Street Musicians*. Produced by the Center for Southern Folklore; directed by Robert Gordon and Louis Guida. Video. Color. 29 m.

Like other cinematic genres, musical documentaries do not have to be first-rate to qualify as precious products. In Louis Cavrell's *Bill Evans: On the Creative Process* (Rhapsody Films) the introspective pianist is rigid and uncomfortable before the camera. Yet, what easily holds us is Evan's magical fingers, as he displays—from basic melody to intricate chord variations—the jazz process for playing the euphonious *Star Eyes*.

*All Day & All Night* is also a routine but precious effort. But unlike *Bill Evans*, Gordon and Guida's documentary is at its best when the musicians are talking, not singing and playing. Witness the scene when such black elder performers as Fred Ford, Rufus Thomas and Evelyn Young gather for chili at the now faded Mitchell Hotel, in Memphis, Tennessee. With marvelous ease, the camera floats around and focuses on the various musicians—not to mention the nooks, textures and mem-



orabilia of the cafeteria itself—in an inquisitive and near perfectly composed manner.

The video also shines when the Rev. Dwight "Gatemouth" Moore makes his two or three brief appearances. The reverend (in a bright blue suit and vest, with a large silver cross dangling from his neck) is especially funny when he talks about how his style of singing changed after he arrived on Beale Street and breaks into an Irish melody. And like the group at the Mitchell Hotel, Rev. Moore knows how to play to the camera without gazing directly at it.

Rounding out the more admirable features of this production is the judicious use and selection of old photographs and film footage of Beale Street during the early days of this century. The directors intersperse the film and photographs throughout the documentary. Thus, we are never burdened with clunky portions of archival material.

Given that Gordon and Guida were so adept with the above aspects of the production, it is more than a little surprising that they were not as workman-like in, say, their interviews with legendary blues artist, B.B. King. Most of the interviews with the singer are done outside, in the middle of what I presume to be Beale Street. I say "presume" because the directors don't bother to clue us in on the location.

Also, the outside interviews with King are shot in harsh sunlight; and not only is King sweaty and uneasy, but the tape has a brown, washed-out look to it. How much better these scenes would have been had the directors chose to pan along the present-day Beale Street and let King talk more leisurely.

Still the directors are able to elicit some truths from the reticent singer. When King notes that not only were the best paying jobs outside of Beale Street, but that the wise musician—after making his or her mark on that Memphis thoroughfare—left to forge a career. This is a refreshing observation; for unlike many musicians, King doesn't romanticize neighborhood. In fact what King says about Beale Street is quite similar to what the phenomenal Harry Connick Jr. once noted about his own musical town: New Orleans, Louisiana. Connick remarked that some of the saddest and most routine of jazzmen are chockablock over The Big Easy, and he was determined at a very early age that he would never be like those guys who sat around all day, talking about the good old days of smoke-filled gigs, low (or no) wages, and second-rate instruments.

For the most part, the people that Connick refers to are, alas, the people in this video. And while they may speak fondly of earlier times, every now and then, one of them will say something about the true difficulties of those days. And the musician will speak of it only up to a point, beyond which—because of the heartache and injustice contained in those memories—words fail. When Evelyn Young, for instance, says that life on the road was "tough...it was tough out there," you see the weight of those words in the pauses of her speech, the sadness in her eyes, and the raspy, smoke-wounded voice. Though brief, this scene with Young was one of the most moving sections of the video.

The final scene in *All Day & All Night* was filmed at The Peabody Hotel. While nearly all of the musicians that were interviewed are on stage, the musical number is rather listless and the directors don't give us a sense of the interaction between the audience and the musicians.

For information contact Center for Southern Folklore, 152 Beale Street, Memphis, Tennessee 38103, 901/525-3655.

Other recommended jazz documentaries include Ken Ehrlich's *B.B. King and Friends: A Night of Red Hot Blues*; Garry Giddins's *Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker*; Shirley Clarke's *Ornette—Made In America*; and Dick Fontaine's *Ornette Coleman Trio*.

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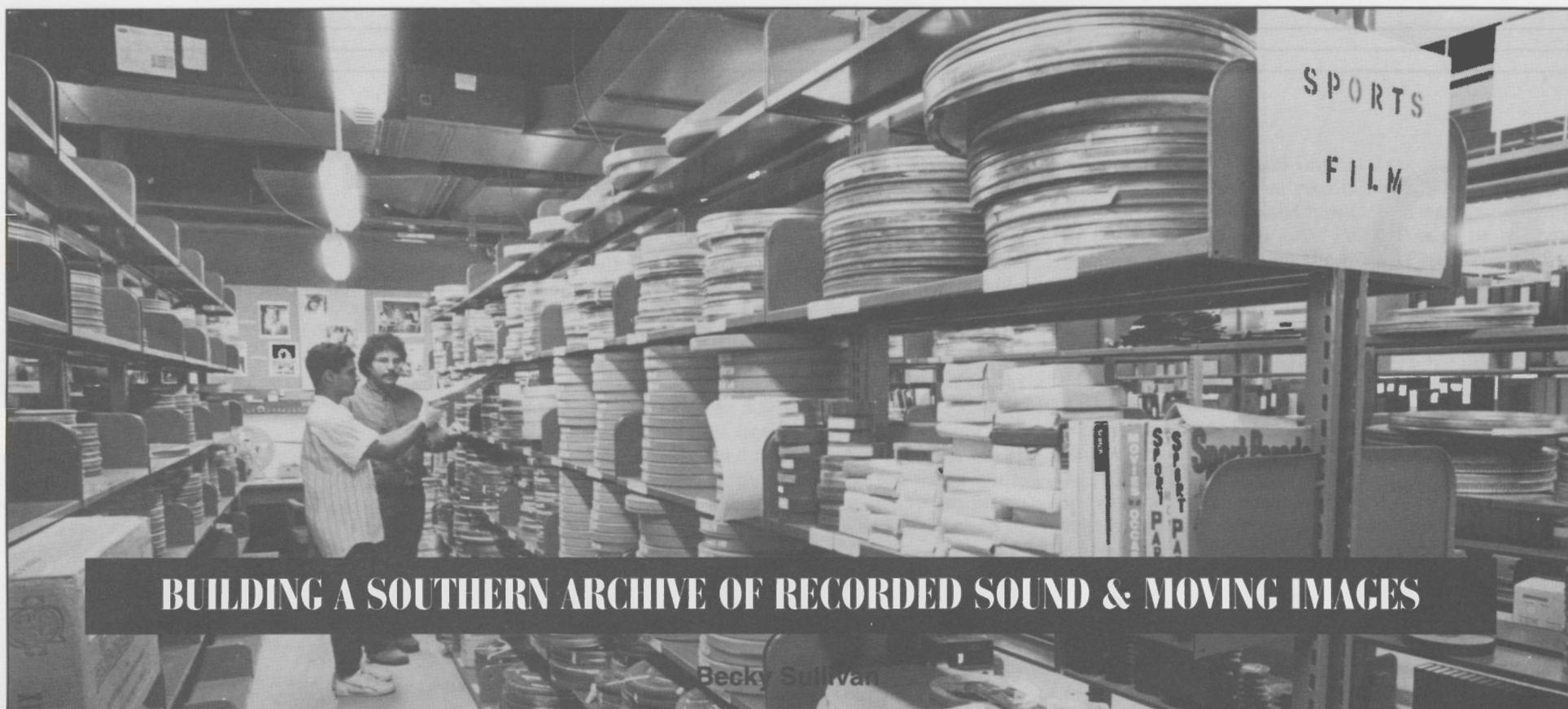
Andrew "Sunbeam" Mitchell and Ernestine Mitchell, whose restaurant has been a gathering place for musicians for decades, reminisce with saxophonist Evelyn Young (left).



Left to right "Honeymoon" Garner, Fred Ford, B.B. King, Rufus Thomas and Evelyn Young in *All Day & All Night: Memories from Beale Street Musicians*. (Photo courtesy of Center for Southern Folklore)

# ALL NIGHT

Memories from Beale Street Musicians



## BUILDING A SOUTHERN ARCHIVE OF RECORDED SOUND & MOVING IMAGES

Becky Sullivan

Wolfson Center Director Steven Davidson and archive intern inventory recent donation of local television sports films.

# Preservation

The explosion of recording technology in the past five decades might lead you to believe it would be the best of recorded times, but in many ways, it has been the worst of times. For a variety of reasons, collections of sound recordings and moving images which document southern life are sparse. At a recent Southern Broadcast Archives meeting in Cashiers, North Carolina this point was brought home to several archivists, scholars, producers, and broadcast executives who found themselves at first energized by each other's efforts, but "then we started to talk about where the gaps lie and it got very, very quiet and very sober because it was clear that the amount that's being archived in the South is very small. Very small, considering what's out there and the potential uses for it," said Tom Fowler, Assistant Vice President for Programming at South Carolina Educational Television. There is no formal organization for people interested in Southern moving image and sound archives. The Southern Broadcast Archives meeting led immediately to the understanding that more than just broadcast materials should be preserved. That meeting might also lead to a loose affiliation, an ad hoc group or some kind of formal not-for-profit organization.

While videotape has flooded our world with immediate images of current events, what it has done for historical preservation and documentation is more like a drought. "It's a real paradox because you have a lot more material that has been shot, you have more people doing it, but it is in a more fragile condition," said Fowler. Broadcast stations are potentially the richest source of this kind of recorded history, but stations are notorious for recording over tapes until they are full of dropouts and then tossing them, or saving tapes only enough for legal requirements. Even if tapes and early news films somehow avoided the trash bin, it is very likely they have been stored in basements, garages, or closets and exposed to moisture, light, heat and dust. "People say the period from the late forties until the mid-1970s will be the Golden Age of Television because it will be visually the best preserved," said Fowler. "The tapes that are shot from the mid-seventies on U-Matic are rapidly fading away. The oxide is falling off; you can literally see it flake off the tape. Images look softer, blurred, and that's not just how they look; they're physically degrading. It is also possible to find an early format tape and be unable to find compatible playback equipment. I defy anybody to pull out a functioning helical scan recorder. You can hardly even find one, much less one that works," Fowler said.

Compounding this problem is the fact that many stations have changed hands, especially in the last decade where stations went from local family ownership to corporate group ownership. "New owners don't have the same kind of relationship with the history. When they are faced with fire codes, cramped space, and they have no personal attachment to the recordings, the material is thrown out," said David Moltke-Hansen, director of the UNC-Chapel Hill Southern Historical Collection. Moltke-Hansen has been instrumental in alerting archivists, producers, and broadcasters of the potential loss and urging them to cooperate to save the materials. "A lot has been lost. I would guess at least 90% of what was potentially archivable at its creation in the realms of sound recording and moving image materials has been lost. Much of the balance is going to be lost," said Moltke-Hansen.

What makes this loss even more critical is the transformation our culture has undergone, a transformation in the way in which we record our lives. We have gone from documenting our lives in letters, diaries and photographs, to recording with floppy disks, cassettes, and camcorders. This transformation concerned John Rivers, Jr. enough to sponsor the Southern Broadcast Archives meeting. "So many people are consumed by the moment and consumed by the future and they forget the past," said Rivers. Rivers' father once owned the Charleston, South Carolina station WCSC. Much of that station's stored footage was damaged two years ago during Hurricane Hugo. He is concerned not just about the loss of historical footage, but the loss of cultural heritage. As TV saturates 99% of households, Rivers sees a subsequent "homogenization of personality" taking place in the United States. He worries that if people "want to study a cultural heritage, they won't be able to," making the preservation of motion images and sound recordings even more crucial.

"The ordinary environment, the milieu of our daily lives, is something that we are as human beings notorious for not documenting," said Fowler. "We don't take pictures of it, still pictures. We don't take moving pictures and things change. You know in our home movies we have those reels of Christmases and birthdays and grandpa's visit, but we don't have the house, we don't have the street, we don't have the things that connect our daily lives." There are many non-broadcast places where some of the recorded sounds and images of the South might also be found: chambers of commerce, small recording studios, public schools, universities, manufacturing or textile plants, as well as in the work of independent filmmakers and cultural documentarians,

e.g., anthropologists, sociologists, and folklorists.

Setting priorities for exactly what to collect, preserve, and archive is a difficult task, exposing a lot of gray area. Broadcast stations, alone, produce 87 million feet of recorded footage a year. Moltke-Hansen suggests Southern archives follow the example of established successful archives in setting priorities. "Inevitably, people understand when you put something low on the priority list that sends it to perdition. It will have disintegrated," said Holtke-Hansen. Some archives have committees of historians who help decide what is worthy of preservation. "What an archive can collect will depend on its resources, space, staff, shelving and environment. But you've got to start someplace and go from there," said Steven Davidson, Director of the Louis Wolfson II Media History Center in Miami, Florida. The Wolfson Center is the result of cooperation between the University of Miami, Miami-Dade Community College and the Miami-Dade Public Library. Focusing on South Florida, the Wolfson Center gathers its material from ten different sources including television stations, production houses, and Eastern Airlines. In some ways, however, Davidson says they are "victims of their own success. When can you get to it all? One reel of TV news film can take eight hours to repair, cleaning the edits, fixing the sprocket holes. Then it still has to be catalogued."

The Wolfson Center was established as a moving image archive and Davidson says that, in and of itself, was an important decision. Even if an archive, library or university has a collection of recordings, "they are one of many collections and they don't get the attention they deserve to make the collection accessible." Davidson urges archivists to, wherever possible, "get copyright ownership. If they want to make it available to the public, they can generate licensing fees. Those fees can help defray the costs in maintaining ownership." However, Davidson adds, it is important to keep public access in mind and not turn into a stock footage library. Tom Fowler shares this concern. "The thing we've got to do is not be a priesthood, say that we're some exotic sect that unless you know the secret password you can't get in. That's not the way to go at it. We've got to make it so it's, in a sense, like a public library. It's available and accessible. You know, when we do that we're going to increase the possibility of saving what we have and finding public support to do that," Fowler said.

In addition to public support, archivists will need the support of broadcasters. Moltke-Hansen hopes to make broadcasters more aware of the value of the secondary uses of the material they gather. "With that awareness, we hope they will buy additional tape and let archives have the original tapes, even if they let the archive have it with restrictions on its use." Archives, in turn, will have to become more aggressive and "market themselves as cost-beneficial service instruments for broadcasters and other media companies," Moltke-Hansen said.

One of the largest obstacles to preserving these recordings has begun to be chipped away: producers and archivists are beginning to communicate. Participants of the Southern Broadcast Archives meeting will begin surveying archival collections in the South, to identify what archives are preserving and what their ambitions are. Whether this regional effort will result in a few large archives or many smaller ones is unclear. "That's a tough one because you've got different archives with different missions and different perspectives. One of the things that this meeting wanted to do was discuss how to divide up responsibility, so that there is no territorial land grab," said Fowler.

For information about preserving material or about an archive in your area, contact:

Susan Dalton  
Archivist  
National Center for Film and Video Preservation  
John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts  
Washington, D.C. 20566  
202/828-4070

A good resource for information about existing archives:

*Footage '89* and the supplement *Footage '91*  
Published by Prelinger and Associates, Inc.  
Richard Prelinger, President  
Room 403  
430 West 14th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10014

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# PLAYED

# IN



He looks like an old time fiddler but he's not. Papa John Creech (above right, with Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson) made his name playing psychedelic fiddler for Jefferson Airplane, but rock is only part of his repertoire. Stevenson J. Palfi's "Papa John Creech: *SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT*" from "Played in the USA." (Photo by Janet Van Ham)

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# THE

# USA



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**Eric  
Vaughn  
Holowacz**

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One of the most ambitious and visionary projects now being produced for television is The Learning Channel's *The Independents*. In a proverbial sea of situation comedies, dim-witted docudramas, and scandal-hungry talk shows, this project aims to bring the vision of independent film and video artists to nationwide television audiences. By broadcasting a string of episodic works, often disparate but always contextually related to a central theme, this project gives the viewer an interesting smorgasbord of complementary film and video pieces. With over 300 works already showcased, *The Independents* touts itself as "the only on-going project in the U.S. dedicated to bringing the diverse works of independent artists to nationwide television audiences on a regular basis." The current visual feast, "Played in the USA" features 34 works anthologized in 13 one-hour programs.

As the eleventh series to be produced under the aegis of *The Independents* project, "Played in the USA" explores the influences and traditions of American Music and exposes this country's enduring love affair with music. Culled from among the best available independent films and videos about music, the series is more than the sounds of America. It is a rare look at our culture as seen through the eyes of some of America's most talented film and video producers. Folk singer Pete Seeger reflects on the contributions of old time favorite Uncle Dave Mason; Latin jazz great Machito teaches America to mambo; Eartha Kitt reveals the childhood tragedies that haunt her life; Elaine Stritch, Dean Jones and the cast of "Company" conquer fatigue to record a Broadway cast album; psychedelic violin player Papa John Creech runs the gamut of musical styles with his amazing fiddle; and the a cappella singers "Sweet Honey in the Rock" take on apartheid, war, and "A Seven Day Kiss." There's also a documentary on polka, an animated tribute to Charlie Parker, a drum and dance-filled look at Ben Black Bear, Sr. and a blues session with B.B. King.

"Played in the USA" ventures from recording studio to jazz club, concert hall to Native American reservation in search of the music, musicians, and composers that help define our culture. With Martin Sheen as host and moderator, these thirteen episodes take the viewer down Broadway, to Beale Street, and into a bluegrass jamboree to show us how music thrives within our culture. The entire spectrum of American musical history is documented: from the primal beat on a Native American drum to the sock-hop syncopation of rock and roll from centuries-old folk music to modern day protest songs, from classical compositions to minimalist New Age works. This series attempts to blend the myriad styles of American music and the limitless visions of media artists in a cohesive and interesting production. While an occasional seam may appear, "Played in the USA" is a fabulous testament to the importance of America's music and musicians.

One musician featured in the second program of "Played in the USA" (originally aired October 13, 1991 on The Learning Channel) is the electric violin player, Papa John Creech. Inspired by the amazingly eclectic musical talents of Creech, videomaker Stevenson Palfi set out to expose the one-time Jefferson Airplane fiddler as one of the most talented and diverse musicians of our century. The fruit of his labor, *Setting the Record Straight* traces Papa John's mastery of jazz, blues, ballads, country music, and psychedelic rock from his beginning as a member of The Chocolate Music Bars in the late 1930's all the way to Creech's anomalous part in late-sixties acid rock.

Though classically trained and a veteran of the West Coast jazz circuit, Papa John Creech has become best known as the tall and skinny electric fiddler from The Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna. *Setting the Record Straight* begins here with the most unchallenging music of Creech's career. The old fiddler remembers, "I thought (rock and roll) was lousy...sounds like beating on tin tubs...played only in one key, with no harmony changes." Jorma Kaukonen of Hot Tuna recalls the novelty of Creech's stage presence: "One of the attractions was to see this old black guy playing

with us live...the social implications outweighed the musical ones." He then recalls his discovery of Papa John Creech's talents and how Creech was limited only by the guys he played with. Palfi takes us on a retrospective journey through the life of Papa John as the fiddler easily absorbs more styles of American music than anyone else alive.

Five years in the making, this musical odyssey covers half a century from ragtime to jazz, to blues, gospel, rock and roll and beyond, uniting Papa John Creech with many great musicians including Jorma Kaukonen, Sylvester Scott, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Henry Butler, and George Winston. Palfi documents Creech as he performs with friends and musicians from his past in rehearsal halls, recording studios, bars, nightclubs, and homes. The musical segments are punctuated by conversations with Papa John in his own home. He stands beside a tall hat rack and ponders the many caps. While each jam session is being introduced, Creech chooses the appropriate hat to wear and reflects on each of his styles. Palfi wastes no time in bringing the live manifestation of Creech's genius to his documentary. Whatever the setting, whatever the music, Papa John effortlessly tackles the limits of style and technique.

It is clear that Papa John Creech wears many hats, and that he wears them like no one else.

Other musicians comment on how Creech plays his instrument like no other violinist: "He plays the violin like a saxophone." Papa John goes on to explain his technique and the restraints of his instrument: "A violin was all so squeaky-like to me; it didn't have a big fat round tone like a horn does." He explains how he wanted the horn-like sound, then with each jam session, proceeds to conquer the range of American music with his old friends in accompaniment.

Stevenson Palfi's fine video does not lionize Papa John Creech. It simply allows us to discover him through his astounding performances. *Setting the Record Straight* does just that and shows us that the former rock and roll anomaly of the Jefferson Airplane is actually a master of musical styles, a wearer of many hats, and one incredible fiddle player.

*Setting the Record Straight* is preceded by a laconic and almost charming introduction by host, Martin Sheen. Then, as an example of rollicking rockabilly music, there is a short excerpt from *Flat Duo Jets Document*. Produced by Jim McKay and Jem Cohen, this work takes us on a Mr. Toad's Wild Ride through one realm of alternative rock and roll. Although probably a red-headed stepchild in the house of MTV, McKay and Cohen's work "documents" the wild power of The Flat Duo Jets.

In rough and un-glitzzy maneuvers, the hand-held camera moves through a dark neighborhood in search of music. A single floodlight illuminates the path and reveals a line of cars, a wandering mongrel and ultimately, the promised house party. The music slices and builds through the house as the choppy footage deteriorates into a delirious frenzy of loud stroboscopic bursts. Ushered on by the music, the grainy images of the house, the crowd, and the band collide at once. As the final chords of The Flat Duo Jets resound throughout the house party, the camera takes flight past the row of cars and returns to the night. This short work not only captures the raw energy of a raucous rockabilly band but also captures the exhilarating synthesis of music and image.

A showcase for independent films and videos, "Played in the USA" offers viewers an extraordinary opportunity to enjoy the creativity of artists who work outside the mainstreams of New York and Hollywood. From a stark black and white documentary to high-tech computer animation, cinema verité to music videos that challenge the best of MTV, "Played in the USA" is a remarkable adventure.

*Eric Vaughn Holowacz is a cineaste, an abecedarian filmmaker, a poetaster, and an employee of the SC Arts Commission.*

Legendary Broadway producer Hal Prince and perennial Broadway star Elaine Stritch find time to laugh during the recording of the original cast album for "Company," the first musical for which Stephen Sondheim wrote the music as well as the lyrics. Shelved for nearly 20 years by rights issues, "Company: Original Cast Recording" by D.A. Pennebaker and his collaborator Richard Leacock, makes its comeback in "Played in the USA," a television series celebrating American music and the people who create it.







**D**oug Bonner began making films on Super 8 as a child. An early film, about a day in his life as a small-time rock musician, was voted "Best Comedy/Erotic Film" at a festival in Cincinnati. As Bonner's bio sheet says: "When he was four years old, Doug Bonner's mother took him to see Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. A bomb went off in his head and he was never the same. Within a couple of years he knew the whir of a motion picture projector and the beating of his heart were two rhythms inexorably linked."

After film school and working for Walt Disney Studios, Bonner returned home to Atlanta to work in public television, where he earned an Emmy for his audio work. Since then Bonner has done his independent work on video. Watching *V-Mail* and *Two Men and a Virus*, in fact, is much like taking part in a painful healing process. Though these two videos concern very different aspects of Bonner's own life, viewers will recognize the universal attempt to find sense and meaning in devastating experiences.

In *V-Mail*, Bonner grapples with images of a father he never knew. "Almost seventeen years after his death," Bonner as narrator says "I'm searching for my father." After his father's death, looking at photos sent home from Europe and Africa to Bonner's mother, he meets a father who laughed and seemed to enjoy his life, a father very different from the one Bonner knew as a boy and young man. "To me, he was a silent, distant figure," says Bonner.

"What was it like to have fun with my father?" he asks. He wonders about the smile his father wears in the photos, a smile he would not wear as a father. "Was he just smiling for the camera, or was this a period in his life when the smile was genuine?"

Seeing such a young man in the photographs of his father, Bonner recognizes that "I'm looking for traits, for clues to an earlier personality, one that I never knew."

"The word failure was a frequent word around the house. On weekends my Dad would drink and call himself a failure. It got worse." Almost casually Bonner continues, "Then one morning he grabbed a shotgun, walked out the front door and killed himself. One person who saw his body as the gun was removed from his hands said there was a smile on his face, a smile at last, but I couldn't look."

But the black and white photographs, some taken by his father and some taken of his father, have not offered any help in an adult's attempt to know his father. Bonner finally describes his father again, "always unapproachable, always a mystery, always silent."

*Two Men and a Virus: A Love Story* opens with an intimate conversation between Bonner and his lover in which Bonner asks permission to share details of their relationship in the video. "I am thinking of doing a video about the virus, about HIV, and I was wondering if I could tell a bit of our story on it." Granted the permission, Bonner, again the narrator of his video, begins to tell their story.

Bonner's use of music in this video emphasizes its romantic, sometimes melodramatic, theme; romantic because even though "the virus" is a primary player in the video, the subject is love. The first song, "Isn't it a Pity" by George and Ira

Gershwin performed piano-bar style, is a tender love song. Over images (in a bathroom mirror) of two men shaving together and pausing to kiss gently, Bonner talks of meeting Charles in San Francisco in 1988 and falling in love. "Since it was 1988, and since we were gay men, there was a question I couldn't ignore." The video portrays "the virus" as the intimate third partner in relationships between gay men, ever present or always on the sidelines ready to intrude.

"I suppose the virus has surrounded my body," says Bonner, "but one night on this bed the virus surrounded my emotions." After disclosing to his lover that he has been tested negative for HIV, Bonner receives the news that his lover, Charles, has tested positive. "He turned to me and, for the first time, I saw him in tears," Bonner says; "he said, 'I don't know how much time I've got,'" the sound of a clock ticking, the two men embracing, a door closing.

The virus becomes part of their lives. Listening to "I'll Take Manhattan," Bonner contemplates this addition to their relationship. "If it were up to just the two of us, our dreams would be attainable, but the virus put everything in peril." Complicating the issue, their reactions to the virus's role in their lives are different. "I wanted to talk about the virus, he didn't," says Bonner; "it was our relationship, but it was his virus. I was outnumbered two to one." The virus became their "silent partner."

In a dream, Bonner hears the aria "Nessun Dorma," meaning "none shall sleep," from Puccini's opera *Turandot*. The opera tells the story of a princess who decrees that all her subjects will be put to death unless the name of a stranger is discovered. The townspeople search through the night while the stranger sings the aria. In Bonner's dream a ship of nameless souls sails into oblivion while he hears "Nessun Dorma," and draws the parallel, "Unless the name is found, we all shall die."

But Bonner is not willing to let the video end on a down beat. "We still have dreams," the videographer reminds himself and his viewer. Before the credits role, their feet dance slowly in a sunbeam to the Gershwins' "Aren't You Glad We Did."

Bonner is currently working on a third piece that will complete (along with *V-Mail* and *Two Men and a Virus*) a trilogy of first-person video he refers to as his "Southern Gentleman in Psychotherapy" series. *Profession of Love* is a densely textured study of things that he values. According to Bonner "it's about love, passion, devotions, and chest hair."

For information about distribution contact IMAGE Film/Video Center, 75 Bennett St. NW, Suite M-1, Atlanta, GA 30309.

Debbie Fraker is Operations Manager for IMAGE Film/Video Center in Atlanta, GA and a freelance writer. She has recently completed a short experimental narrative video on childhood sexual abuse called *In Remembrance*.

## Gail Munde

Franco, Debra. *Alternative Visions : Distributing Independent Media in a Home Video World*, Los Angeles : The American Film Institute Press , 1990 , 181 pages , paperback.

In this book, Franco scrutinizes the current and emerging marketplaces for independent media and turns out the first real piece of industry analysis that I know of. It is a comprehensive and thoughtful "attempt to address [the] confusion and to provide ... information about what is going on in an increasingly fragmented and specialized market today." The book reports the results of a huge research undertaking, involving interviews of over one hundred individuals in the media field, all of whom have a unified interest in the success of videocassette sales of independent works. The book serves as a kind of "state of the state" message for traditional and nontraditional works in both the institutional and consumer markets. The book's emphasis is well placed on examining and penetrating the consumer market, which has been anticipated as a potential savior for independent work. It is clear that the mass market was the "dog that bit us." And, perhaps, some hair from that dog will revive us.

The book is divided into two sections, which follows the natural order of things: the institutional market (well-established and fairly predictable university, K-12 and public library buyers) and the consumer market (the still experimental retail, catalog and direct response territories). However, the information Franco presents is well-integrated, so that the progression of events and the interaction among market forces is demystified when possible. For the institutional markets, the chapters include such intriguing nuggets as descriptions of market size, typical purchasing patterns, overcoming barriers to sales, guidelines for approach, and in some cases, future trends.

The chapters on consumer distribution channels are fascinating, for their narrative information, as well as for the real world examples of success and failure, which are prepared throughout the text. For instance, the chapter on retail includes sections on video, book and special interest stores and puts into perspective the actual and potential market for "quality special interest" video materials. Currently, these materials account for less than one half of one percent of home video sales, but Franco carefully documents the reasons behind a tentative optimism for growth on the part of progressive dealers and retailers.

The chapter on television sales piqued my interest. It contained a discussion of the value of television advertising, primarily an explanation of PBS' policy on post-broadcast sale offers made directly to viewers (the "on-air tag," accompanied by an 800 number for ordering ). I have to admit, I admire the ingenuity of the PBS people for their ability to write wafer-thin policy statements. Fortunately, Franco had more patience than I. As well as outlining the policy, she leads the reader through the calculations necessary to estimate profit/loss from on-air tag deals.

Franco synthesizes the information in a final chapter titled "The Overall Picture," in which she discusses some characteristics of video works that have been successful in the consumer market and five commonly successful marketing strategies. She also charges the independent distribution community with a task she considers essential to the development of an expanding consumer market- the education of a new group of advocates.

Perhaps the way to best envision the future distribution of alternative work is through an expanding network of informed "gatekeepers" -those who purchase and use media for organizations, institutions and other places where people come to learn and to seek information...With the proliferation of low-priced media, there are thousands of new gatekeepers who need to be made aware of, and educated about, this type of media, its importance, and how to use it. They, more than the individual consumer, may be the best promise for the future dissemination and use of this work.

The book includes as an appendix seven individual case studies of both specific titles and subject-specific distributors. These narratives, told by the distributors, outline the marketing "life stories" of *Baby Basics*, *Coverup: The Iran Contra Affair* and *The Power of Choice* series and package promotions done by Maysles Films, Davenport Films, KIDVIDZ and Video Data Bank. The stories are honest accounts of mistakes made, efforts redirected, and eventual saturation through what were often very sophisticated and just plain clever strategies.

Franco's reportage is dispassionate and unbiased and she writes in an intelligent style that is scholarly yet readable. This is a very different book than the how-to-do-it manuals; it is a piece of whole cloth. Highly recommended for all who are serious about understanding the current economic realities of distribution-students and teachers of media arts, career film and video makers, scholars and researchers, and those who administer media programs and/or serve in consulting capacities to artists.

Gail Munde has a Ph.D. in library science and is a former media librarian and visiting lecturer at the University of South Carolina. She lives in Orlando, Florida.

# DISTRIBUTING INDEPENDENT MEDIA

# WORKS IN PROGRESS

George Georgas

**SCOTT CARR AND JAMES HYATT**  
Raleigh, North Carolina

Satire, which can be traced from the ancient Greeks to Shakespearean drama and onto television programs like *Saturday Night Live*, lives again in Ballistic Production's forthcoming feature film. *Night of the Living Debutantes*—the brainchild of Raleigh-based Scott Carr and James Hyatt—consists of four 25-minute vignettes.

These segments satirically scour marriage and relationships, "focusing on the different attitudes men and women have about them," according to Carr. The first two vignettes, "Scared Like the Dickens" and "Night of the Living Debs," have been completed, with the two segments targeted for completion in early 1992. Carr said the final product will have involved an ensemble cast of 45 and a 10-member crew, drawn largely from Raleigh and surrounding communities.

Carr, who wrote the screenplay and directed *Scared Like the Dickens*, fashioned the vignette after Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. He said the parody points at the faulty nature of relationships: "I've seen so many friends get married to the wrong people, or for the wrong reasons." The vignette follows the "ghosts of relationships" past, present and future to chronicle a man's near-marriage to the wrong woman. This segment features performances by Rob Blackman and Bill Guandolo, hosts of "Rob and Bill's Talk Show," a weekly program that airs on Raleigh's Community Access Channel 10.

"Night of the Living Debs," the title vignette, is the creation of Hyatt, Carr's collaborator. This segment parodies the zombie classic, *Night of the Living Dead*. Despite this phantasmagorical premise, this theatrical piece also considers the tortuous nature of relationships. Explaining that the film's protagonist is brought down by his interest in women, Hyatt notes that his segment illustrates the adage—"be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it." "Night of the Living Debs" showcases two more Raleigh-area talents: Tom Caruso, co-owner of a local improvisational troupe, and Robin Watkins, a regular performer in local dramatic productions.

Carr and Hyatt believe that the film's subject matter will be equally popular with married couples and single people alike. They hope that the humor and special effects in the film will appeal to all audience members. The duo stresses that the largely local cast and crew contribute heavily to the quality of the production.

For more information contact Scott Carr at 6011-201 Winterpointe Drive, Raleigh, North Carolina 27606.

**BLAINE HICKLIN**  
Columbia, South Carolina

An American boy two decades and several thousand miles removed from one of the earth's most monumental events is bidding for an interpretation of his own. Hicklin, 23, is putting the last touches on a dramatic movie depicting life in Italy during World War II. The film *An Honorable War?*, focuses on the lives and emotions of people caught in the cross-fire—both literal and figurative—of wartime upheaval.

Hicklin said this film, which is in post-production, was shot on Super 8 and transferred to video for editing. It is not meant to be the typical life during wartime drama. "We've tried to make the location and the uniforms fairly generic to give it an *Everyman* quality," Hickman said. "I'd like to point out that the (question mark on the title) doesn't say World War II isn't honorable, I'm just using the question mark because the war is actually considered one of our most honorable wars.

"I'm questioning whether war in and of itself can be honorable," he added. "When you break it into its basic components, war comes down to a lot of men and women with different sets of values."

Hicklin goes on to say that dishonorable men and women reside on both sides of such an issue. *An Honorable War?* sets out to gauge the range of experience surrounding a troubled time. It recalls the old adage that there is truth where there is disorder.

For more information contact Blaine Hicklin at 504 S. Beltline Boulevard, Apartment 13, Columbia, South Carolina 29205.

**RICHARD SAMPSON**  
Columbia, South Carolina

Like the whimsical bard Harry Chapin, Sampson enjoys a healthy fascination for cab drivers. Well, one in particular—Tommy Ard. Sampson "discovered" the loquacious, self-styled rock and roll expert in January of 1990 and decided he had to feature him in a film.

Ard picked him up in his cab at the local airport one night and shook his world up a bit. Sampson said Ard struck him as an unbounded source of pure entertainment. "He was singing songs and talking a lot. He wears glasses, but they were broken and he could hardly see. Here he was driving and telling us that!"

Despite this fleeting anxiety, Sampson said he knew he had a gold mine of witticism and information on his hand. Following the lead of the Nike commercials, Sampson said he decided to "just do it" and got a camcorder to film this driver. Sampson found Ard rather perplexing: "At first, I wondered if he was a pathological liar. He's hard to figure out; what's real and what's not real."

Sampson said that the mystery of Ard makes him more attractive for filming. Ard is so interesting that Sampson has been careful to give him almost all of the camera's attention. "It's a character piece on him, because he's such a character," Sampson said.

The majority of Ard's musings revolve around Elvis Presley and rock and roll. Ard has unabashedly claimed not only friendship with the King but also blood relations. Ask him about Elvis or Ricky Nelson or other crooning icons, and Ard will offer more than his two cents' worth.

Sampson received funding for his film from both the Southeastern Media Fellowship Program and the South Carolina Arts Commission. The film, which features a trip along Ard's taxi beat, is in post-production. Sampson wants to shoot more footage of Ard in his favorite haunts—both in and out of the car. He hopes this footage will "focus the piece to narrow the scope of the storyline." Along these lines, clips of Elvis are to be added. Sampson is happy with the look of the film to this point. Driving around with Ard in the various parts of Columbia made for "neat atmosphere" according to the filmmaker. He said the lighting changes along the cab's route made for interesting effects. Sampson plans to complete the project in mid-1992.

For more information, please contact Richard Sampson at 1427 Gladden Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29205.

# WORKS IN PROGRESS

**RON SCHILDKNECHT**  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Schildknecht's *Borderlines* will take viewers back to a seemingly sleepy Southern setting around the turn of the century that was, in actuality, deceptive, and brutal. He prefaces any discussion on his narrative piece by pointing out that the featured four county area along the Kentucky-Tennessee border had a homicide rate four times the national average during the period between the Civil War and World War II.

Set in 1936 in Kentucky, his film captures the energy of the area. Schildknecht uses a rural setting as a foreground and historical violence as a background that is inspired by a book the producer/director read by Dr. Lynwood Montell. Montell's book, *Killings*, documents 50 homicides occurring in the border region between the 1860s and 1940s. Part of the premise here is that the confrontations surrounding the passing of Union and Confederate armies through the strategically located border area established a tone of trouble. When one thinks of the Kentucky-Tennessee region, images of the Hatfield-McCoy feud are easily evoked. Schildknecht said family feuds represent a portion of the documented violent incidents, but they are in no way the whole story. While he said "disagreements spread through generations of families," he points to a cataclysmic event as the possible trigger for the violence that endured. As the war ended and Yankee troops were heading through a Kentucky town on the way North, a Union soldier reportedly shot a man without provocation. The victim supposedly was on his porch watching the enemy fraction on its pipeline to the North, when he was shot. "I think that introduced violence into the area," Schildknecht said. "There were very few documented killings before that incident."

The story he developed reflects this fact of burgeoning rural violence. *Borderlines* is a drama about a murder that occurs for no apparent reason at the General Store. The protagonist is a female teacher who only recently moved to the border town. "The fact the community accepts the murder upsets her," Schildknecht said. "All through the movie she makes choices as to whether she will stay and deal with the community's way of living and dying, or leave like her predecessor."

*Borderlines* is in post-production, as the director plans on adding new scenes. The film was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as the Kentucky Arts Council.

For more information, write to Ron Schildknecht at 725 Greenlawn Drive, Bowling Green, Kentucky 42103.



In Ron Schildknecht's film *Borderlines*, students (Ashley Ann Gaines, Garry Anslow, Jeremy Catron) wait for their teacher to return.

**SHERRY AND JIM RUMSFELD**  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Rum Productions of New Orleans has completed a script entitled *The Rest of the Oyster*, and producer Sherry Rumsfeld and writer/director Jim Rumsfeld are shopping it to investors. The story is about an adman who represents his father in the latter's campaign to win an election in a small Louisiana town. The town is Shell Mat, and it will be highlighted for its many eccentricities, as will the father.

The father and son relationship is symbolic of the larger dichotomy between a small town in Louisiana, and mercurial New Orleans. Sherry Rumsfeld said she and her husband hope to shed light on the characters who inhabit two seemingly diverging areas: a sleepily insidious and corruptible Louisiana parish, and the blatantly seamy but vital Big Easy. She said

she hopes to shatter the many clichés persisting in modern film about the people of New Orleans, and to address the incongruities of New Orleans life depicted in recent movies like *The Big Easy*: "We'll show eclectic New Orleanians the way they've never been seen before—in their natural habitat," Sherry Rumsfeld said. "You have to treat New Orleans as a foreign country; separate not only from the rest of Louisiana but also the rest of the country."

For more information, contact Rum Productions at 824 Baronne Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70113.

*George Georgas is a master's student in English at the University of South Carolina.*

# THE 1992 CHARLOTTE FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL

Independent filmmakers and videographers working in the U.S. are invited to submit their work to the 1992 Charlotte Film and Video Festival.

The festival will again take place in several Charlotte locations during the week of April 28-May 8, and will include an opening night at the Mint Museum of Art.

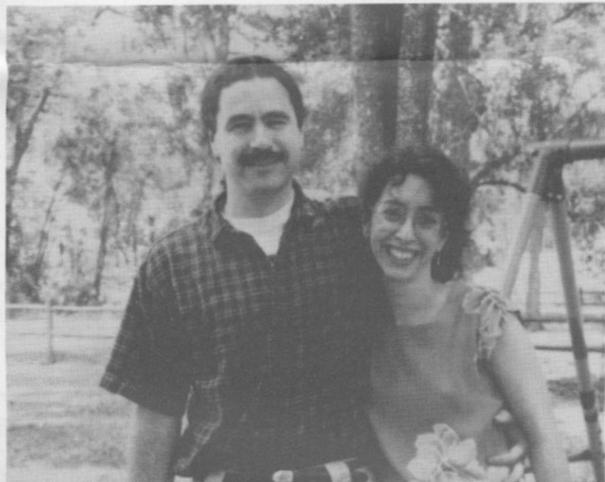
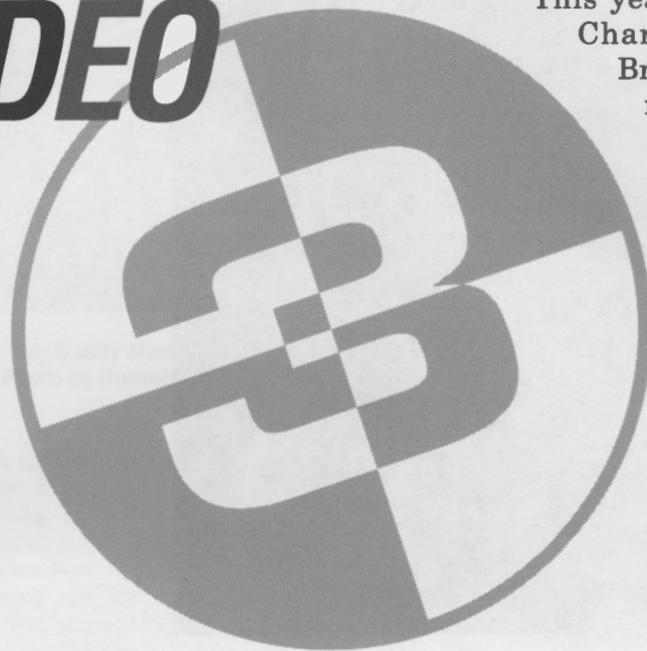
Prospectuses can be obtained by contacting Robert West at the Mint Museum of Art, 2730 Randolph Road, Charlotte NC 28207, 704/337-2000 or FAX 704/337-2101.

Last year's festival screened 36 films selected from over 300 entries, and more than \$5,000 was awarded to the filmmakers. This year a minimum of \$3,000 in prize money will be allocated, with a higher amount likely.

All films and videos, regardless of their original format, will be juried in the format submitted. Four formats will be accepted in the festival: 16mm and 35mm film, 3/4" and VHS video. Documentaries, narratives, experimental, and animated films completed after 1989 are welcome. **Entry deadline is March 9, 1992.**

This year's major sponsor is Cablevision of Charlotte. Along with Cablevision, the Bravo Channel is co-sponsoring the premiere screening of a major independent film and plans to broadcast winners in the festival on the local Bravo Channel.

The screening sites will include the Mint Museum of Art, Spirit Square Center for the Arts, the Afro-American Cultural Center, the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County and the Manor Theatre.



Michael Fleishman, late Arts Commission Media Arts Center Director, poses with his wife, Audrey Weber, in 1989.

## Memorial Fund Created to Honor Michael Fleishman

As a living memorial to Michael Fleishman, the boards of the SC Arts Commission and the SC Arts Foundation have established a Media Arts Trust Fund to honor the late Media Arts Center Director.

The fund is being supported from contributions donated by Michael's widow, Audrey Weber, family members and donations solicited from the national media community and the South Carolina arts community. All donations are welcome and can be sent to:

The Michael Fleishman Media Arts Trust Fund  
c/o SC Arts Foundation  
1800 Gervais Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

An individual media artist will be selected annually to receive an award to enhance his or her career.

### ON THE COVER

A still from Robbie Henson's film *Trouble Behind* that looks at how a 1919 race riot still affects a small Kentucky town.

INDEPENDENT SPIRIT is published by the South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center with support from the National Endowment for the Arts and is distributed free of charge to media producers and consumers and other interested individuals and organizations, most of whom are located in the Southeast. Contributions pertaining to the INDEPENDENT SPIRIT or to the independent media community are welcome. All correspondence should be addressed to INDEPENDENT SPIRIT, South Carolina Arts Commission, 1800 Gervais Street, Columbia, SC 29201. The viewpoints expressed in this issue do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the South Carolina Arts Commission.

The South Carolina Arts Commission is a state agency which promotes the visual, literary, performing and media arts in South Carolina. The SCAC Media Arts Center supports media artists and media arts in a ten state southeastern region, which includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, as well as South Carolina. Both SCAC and SCACMAC receive funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Susan Leonard, Editor

Taj Shiben, Designer

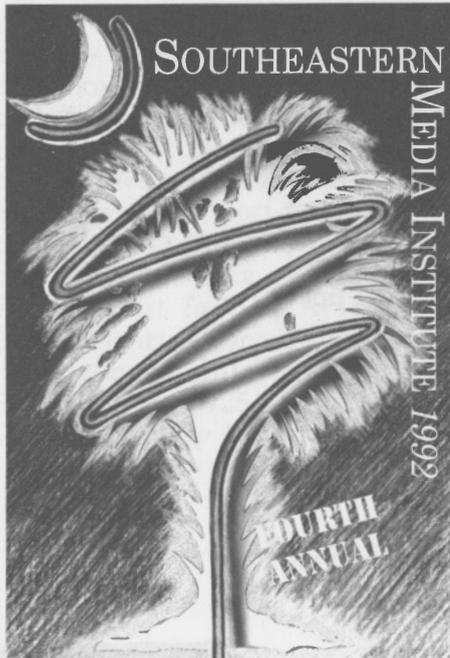


## South Carolina Arts Commission

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