

Reeling it in

KET provides opportunity for Kentucky Filmmakers to Shine By Kim Thomas

Filmmaking is a chance to live many lifetimes.

— Robert Altman

KET producer Kelli Burton, the visionary behind the Pet Milk Project, is known for giving a leg up to local artists (see November 2008 archives at aceweekly.com). Her Pet Milk project in November, and then again in January (where it picked up at UK), brought together an eclectic group of literary, visual and musical artists for a magazine, an accompanying CD, and a standing-room-only exhibition at ArtsPlace.



Burton describes Pet Milk as “kind of my own free time, labor-of-love thing” and has moved on, adding, “now my enthusiasm is with KET’s newest film project.” Having worked for KET on different contracts for three years, Burton is proud to present the currently airing *Reel Visions* series, “I thought the community and KET viewers would appreciate the art form of short film and be very excited about the talent in our own state. We started accepting submissions early this year; and August 3rd was the first episode of our first series.” October 1 is the deadline for submissions KET’s next series.

Reel Visions is a new KET series of half-hour programs featuring several short films that have been produced, directed, written or edited by Kentucky filmmakers. *Reel Visions* airs Mondays and Sundays (check local listings).

Series producer Burton worked with Associate Producers Sara O’Keefe, Ben Allen, Allison NeCamp (all three were involved in Pet Milk) and Clark Bradshaw, “who has mad animation and graphic skills. Together we all make a very good team. It’s exciting to be friends with your co-workers, to collaborate on creative projects at work and outside of work.” Executive Producer is Nancy Carpenter.

Since Burton’s Pet Milk project, she has completed her MFA in creative writing from Murray State and currently is working on an art show called DollBaby for September 22nd at the Niles Gallery (puppet show, doll cakes, and stop-motion animations made with dolls). She has also been collaborating on a short film night at the Miller House on October 3rd.

Meet the Filmmakers

Gaines Fellow Bill Santen (*Portrait Studies*)

Bill Santen creates short films for gallery exhibitions and occasional film festivals. He has been working on 16 mm film for the last couple of years while attending the University of Kentucky. Bill will be attending Columbia University School of the Arts in fall 2009 to study visual arts and sculpture. He recently finished a relief sculpture mural of imaginary animals at Kentucky Children’s Hospital. (See Side by Side, *Ace Weekly*, June 2009; see Santen’s “Swap” interview with Bruce Burris, July 09; both at www.aceweekly.com)



Photo by Georgia Henkel

Will Oldham and Bill Santen

Santen’s initial venture was a documentary titled *Dark Green*. “My first film was an experimental video-documentary that focused on Lexington native, Kris Kelly, as she contemplated moving out of her apartment into the ‘urban wilderness.’ The project was created for an independent study course at UK’s College of Fine Arts in 2007.” His film for the KET Series was created for his Gaines Fellowship thesis project. “During the first semester, I focused on Kentucky oral histories, specifically my grandmother’s experience as an only child growing up in Bourbon County; then in my second semester, I concentrated on the history of film and film production. The audio and visual were slapped together for the film.”

He points out “the most difficult parts of the project were the progress meetings with my thesis committee. I had some difficulty explaining exactly what the finished product would be. Initially, I planned to illustrate my grandmother’s stories with imagery from Bourbon County. Her narrative and performance was so powerful, I decided to film people ‘listening’ to her stories. It was also great to work with actors Jack Cotton, Tom Marksbury, and Will Oldham.”

“The decision to use 16mm film was a fantastic learning

experience, although 100 percent trial and error. The project began in Summer 2008, and was completed in Spring 2009. I began researching the project by watching early Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray films (cinemoems).”

Santen emphasizes that viewers will not only relate to the actors, but should tune in to discover how the film ties together how these actors reveal stories about “Alexandre Dumas, typhoid fever, and snakes.”

Josh Flowers (*Fast Love* | *Heart* | *Still Life*)

Flowers has lived in Kentucky most of his life and says he has “done most of the Kentucky things that Kentucky people should do.” He’s “been to the state Capitol, eaten at the original KFC, toured Mammoth Cave and have even ridden a horse, but not well.” Since 2004 Josh has made at least 30 short films.



Photo provided by KET

Still Life

His videos have been featured on YouTube, shown on CNN Headline News, played at SXSW (South by Southwest Festival) and one was screened at Cannes. Nearly all of the KET videos were shot in the Bluegrass. Josh plans to keep making short films because “he couldn’t stop even if he wanted to.” In *Fast Love*, award-winning Kentucky filmmaker Flowers visits various fast food drive-thrus with a video camera to pose a very important question to total strangers.

Flowers’ introduction to filmmaking came early in life. “Well I started out very young. Mainly I starred in documentaries. My dad was the cinematographer and would set the camera on a tripod. I would then proceed in front of the camera and open many colorfully wrapped packages to various degrees of delight and surprise. Not quite the most original material but I like to think I had my own unique take on it ... but seriously, I would say I really started in 2001 when I discovered public access in Northern Kentucky. I made so many bad public access shows. I don’t know what I would have done without their free equipment. The stuff I learned as I went and the people I met on the way still affect my work today.”

“I learned of the new KET show from a post on the SOFA (Southern Ohio Filmmakers Association) board by Kelli Burton. I’ve always liked KET and free submission is always the right price for me so I thought why not?”

Flowers has an assorted array of submissions in the KET Series. “I actually have three films in the series, *Fast Love*, *Still Life* and <3. I make a lot of these short films. Three may seem like a lot but considering I submitted a DVD with over an hour’s worth of stuff ... well ... I lost more than I won. I think it’s important to lose, it’s an ego check. Winner’s stories are

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– Josh Flowers

usually the same anyway. Losing is where it gets interesting ... and that is how I sleep at night, heh.”

When asked about the greatest challenge in getting the project finished, Flowers admits, “In *Still Life*, the hardest part was finding everyone to contact. In *Still Life* is all one shot of a line of graves and I have the audio from different family members telling a memory about the deceased. Before I started, I was hoping that I couldn’t get a hold of someone. I kept imagining a really great moment where you see a grave, and there was just silence. It almost happened, too, except the day after I decided to quit on one elusive tombstone, the deceased’s loved one called back. Talking to people, though, about such a sensitive topic was surprisingly easy. People want to open up.”

For aspiring filmmakers, Flowers offers a few words of advice: “I had the idea for *Fast Love* for a few weeks. I wanted to question people on what they loved and why. I had always imagined it starting in a drive-thru and ending in one. However I tried to talk to a few people and something felt wrong. One Saturday I was taking a shower and realized it should all be drive-thrus. Then I just went out that same dreary day and went through a lot of fast food drive-thrus. In a little over two weeks from that date Youtube featured it and it has had almost 700,000 views. I was shocked. Don’t wait. If I had waited for everything to be perfect, the number of films I’d have in this KET show would have been zero. Work with what you got and not what you might get!”

Flowers says, “*Fast Love* really just took a weekend. I filmed on Saturday and edited Sunday. *Still Life* took a bit longer as I had to do a lot of calling and research. <3 was made because a friend I hadn’t seen in four years was coming into town from Louisville and wanted to make a short film with me. We sat around in a coffee shop trying to think of something and then he went to smoke and left his cell phone behind. I then thought about what I’d do if his phone rang.”

He says, “I have a film about love, death and one mocking the way we now communicate and the new language we are creating as we go along. If you don’t relate to at least one of those already, then please record *Reel Visions* and keep it on hand. It will happen.”

Travis Jones (*Dog Days* | *26th Step*)

Jones is a native Lexingtonian and a graduate of Sayre School. He earned a bachelor’s degree in film from Southern Methodist University and later attended the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. He also completed an 8-week directing workshop at the New York Film Academy in New York City. In Los Angeles, Travis worked as an editor for E! Networks and The Weinstein Company and completed a few short films, including *Dog Days*.

In 2006, he returned to Lexington to direct a documentary entitled *Pat Smith’s Habitat Dream*, which focused on Pat Smith, a victim of the ComAir Flight 5191 tragedy, and his

life’s work with Habitat for Humanity. The film premiered at The Kentucky Theatre on February 27, 2007.

Travis is currently writing a feature length script, and “hopes to benefit from Kentucky’s newly passed incentives for film production in the near future.”

Bently Tittle (*Brand New You*)

Bently Tittle grew up in Henderson, Kentucky. He was first exposed to filmmaking through Henderson County High School’s Gifted and Talented Arts program, where he made short films and documentaries. He graduated from Western Kentucky University with a degree in film and television. He now lives in Los Angeles where he works as a writer/producer/director on music videos, commercials, television shows, and both short and feature films. Kentucky-born and L.A.-based Bently Tittle’s *Brand New You* tells the story of a man who experiences a “dark night of the soul” and comes “face-to-face with his demons literally.

Sarah Wylie Ammerman (*Spread* | *Wires and Birds* | *Building*)

Sarah Wylie Ammerman is a recent graduate of San Francisco Art Institute’s MFA program in filmmaking. In addition to short videos she makes feature-length narratives, documentary features and shorts, music environs, and gallery-fit sculptural projections. She has a “fervor for collaboration above all else and therefore finds herself in different situations depending on the mind she’s next to at any given time.” The films shown in this series are collaborations with Lexington-based musician Jason Corder (offthesky.com). “I started saying I was going to be a cinematographer at ten-years-old and when I went to University of KY for undergrad, I double-majored in English (because they had a Film Crit emphasis) and Art Studio (for photography and new

media). I got really into photography and thought that was my calling until a few years into a protracted art conversation with my mentor, James Baker Hall, where we shared our deep passions about the film medium. Even so, it wasn’t until I signed up for an MFA in filmmaking at San Francisco Art Institute about three years ago that I started actually feeling like a filmmaker.”

“The films that are showing for the KET Series lean toward the experimental so the bases for them are more emo-

Photo by Morgan Siler



Sarah Wylie Ammerman

tional. If I were to generalize about them all, I would say that they explore tension and release in various ways.”

As for the evolution of the process, she says, “I had finished each of these about two years ago and they were silent. Kelli Burton gave me the advice to add sound to them for the KET Series. I had worked with experimental musician Jason Corder (moniker offthesky) in the past and since we knew each other’s work it was a very straightforward, albeit creative, task. After several YouSendIt file exchanges the videos had turned into great collaborations.

“The first step for me in this type of work is looking. Hard. At everything. Seeing that becomes knowing — and using the camera as that type of eye. That’s where I start.”

Clint Davis (*The Sea is My Brother* | *Unquiet*)

Clint Davis is from Carrollton, Kentucky. He recently graduated from the University of Kentucky with a bachelor’s degree in piano performance. Davis will begin graduate studies (fall 2009) at the University of California at San Diego where he will explore new techniques and practices in multimedia and installation-based arts. His films included in this series represent his first effort to combine his creative interests in musical and visual arts. (<http://sweb.uky.edu/~crdavi2>)

Bonnie M. Duncan (*Critical Timing*)

Bonnie M. Duncan currently teaches second grade at Stephens Elementary, the largest elementary school in Kentucky.

Film Submission Info

KET is currently accepting submissions for the next series of Reel Visions programs. Kentuckians may send their art films, experimental films, documentaries, narrative films, animations or student films, along with contact information, to:

Reel Visions
KET
600 Cooper Drive,
Lexington, KY 40502

The deadline for submissions is **Oct. 1, 2009**. Short films must not exceed 27 minutes in length, and acceptable formats include DVCAM, DV, Mini DV, DVC PRO or DVD. ■

She studied oil painting under Annaliesa Wahrenburg of Walton, Kentucky, and abstract acrylics at Baker Hunt Foundation, Covington. Duncan earned a BA in elementary education with middle school language arts endorsement from Northern Kentucky University. She also earned an MA at NKU. She says she loves Kentucky living and tries to bring that into her work.

Brad McCombs (TA Tundra)

Brad McCombs lives in Fort Thomas, Kentucky where he is the Schiff Professor of Art at Northern Kentucky University. McCombs' role as an artist is comprehensive and embraces activism, anthropology, ecology, and sociology. He uses a broad range of materials and works in many mediums including computer graphics, film and video.

Bruce Parsons (Drawing Between the Lines | Varroa | I Know You)

Bruce Parsons is a filmmaker and educator at Appalshop, a non-profit media arts organization in Whitesburg, Ky. He is a recent graduate from the Ohio University School of Film and intends to continue making films in the region. Bruce is currently working on a feature-length narrative script about children chasing whales in Lake Michigan and co-directing a documentary titled *Dirt* with Appalshop filmmaker Natasha Watts.



Photo provided by KET

Filming *Varroa*

John Fitch III (The Tie)

John Fitch III grew up in rural Jessamine County and in Wilmore, Kentucky. Ace readers may remember him best in the band Rostulara. He worked for twelve years in the televi-

sion and music recording industries and has been making films since 2000. Fitch has a BA from Asbury College and an MFA from Savannah College of Art and Design. He currently teaches film and video production, cinema history and screenwriting at Eastern Kentucky University.

In November, Lexington's Pet Milk Mastermind and Reel Visions producer Kelli Burton will move to New York City, and will start NYU's screenwriting program in February of 2010.

But we haven't heard the last of her.

She says she "will more than likely return to Kentucky at some point," adding, she "Just can't stay away!" ■

Reel Visions will be airing throughout August and September on KET. Check their website or your local listings for schedule, as they vary.

Kim Thomas has a degree from NKU, formerly wrote for *The Thoroughbred Record*, works at a downtown Lexington law firm and is a commissioned Stephen Minister.

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