

THE WIND-UP BIRD CHRONICLE

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Project Overview

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is an interdisciplinary theatrical production based on the internationally acclaimed novel by one of Japan's most renowned writers, Haruki Murakami. Inspired by Murakami's visionary style, creator/director Stephen Earnhart (*formerly Director of Production for Miramax Films*) merges live

performance, live music, puppetry and dance/movement with cutting-edge video and audio technology to create a "theatre of dreams." This cross-cultural play incorporates both English and Japanese languages (with appropriate surtitles) and represents an international collaboration between Western, Asian and Asian-American artists and designers.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is a surreal mystery that follows Toru Okada as he searches for his wife who's inexplicably vanished. As Toru investigates the reasons behind his broken relationship, he confronts Japan's WWII dark history and political figures determined to keep these secrets hidden. Toru encounters a cast of strange characters that transform his Tokyo suburban existence into a world in which the barriers between fantasy and reality dissolve.

By using multimedia elements as part of a carefully crafted aesthetic, Earnhart addresses a theme in Murakami's work: how modern, technological society is causing a profound sense of alienation. To realize this theme theatrically, multiple video projectors cast images throughout the theatre, using scrims, set pieces, mirrors, actors' bodies, even water and fog to create non-traditional projection surfaces. These projections, along with hypnotic soundscapes, transport the audience into Murakami's multiple realities and worlds.



The bilingual aspect of the play incorporates Japanese and English languages to play with the idea of how language affects perception. In the performance, Japanese is the language of dreams, memories, and characters' "inner worlds" while scenes that occur in the "real" world are presented in English. Surtitles appear and disappear within projections, becoming active characters themselves.



The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle has been supported by generous grants and assistance from the Japan Foundation, Japan US Friendship Commission, NYSCA, Asian Cultural Council, the Asia Society, 3-Legged Dog and the Saison Foundation. This allowed Mr. Earnhart critical developmental resources to help realize the first of three production phases:

Phase 1: Script Development and Workshops (9/04-9/08).

Earnhart began his adaptation while living in Kamkura, Japan and further developed a working script at the Edward Albee residency in 2006. Earnhart then launched a workshop phase to help integrate the play's complex narrative with its interdisciplinary form. The first workshop took place at New York's prestigious new multimedia center, 3-Legged Dog, in October 2007, followed by more developmental work and five presentations during the ISPA and APAP conferences in NYC, January 2008. The play was chosen as one of ten projects highlighted by ISPA at their "New Works Now" program.



Earnhart then traveled to Japan for a three-month Asian Cultural Council fellowship. While in Tokyo, he spent twenty days of workshops at Morishita Studios working with Japanese actors, translator, dramaturge and movement coach. He was joined by Aaron Harrow (video

designer) and Tom Lee (puppeteer) from New York to explore selected scenes that involved a mixture of puppetry, movement, video projection and Japanese text. Earnhart achieved a new perspective based on this experience, as well as discovering several Japanese collaborators with whom he would like to continue working. Presentations were made before members of the Tokyo theatre community to try to secure a Japanese co-producer and presenter.

In the final leg of this phase, the group reconvened in New York at the Asia Society in August 2008 to experiment with different structural ideas for the play's sweeping narrative. Rachel Cooper, Director of Performing Arts at Asia Society helped to organize three public events for critical feedback. Here, the group performed approximately eighty minutes of material, the most substantial amount of the show presented to date.



Phase 2: Residency Leading to Premiere (summer/fall 2009).

In this phase, the entire multidisciplinary team will come together in residency to shape the work explored in the independent workshops into a unified, fully realized 2-hour performance. They will focus on collectively honing the narrative and cementing the performance vocabulary between the actors and the technological elements.

The end result of this residency will be a showcase production in the US to secure future bookings in the US and abroad. The Asia Society in New York has offered to host this pilot production in the fall of 2009 while Earnhart continues to explore possibilities with other presenters.

Phase 3: US and International Tour. The show will now be available to tour venues in the US, Japan and other international theatres. The touring period will commence toward the end of 2009 through 2011. There is interest from presenters who attended prior showcases and who continue to closely monitor the show's progress. Earnhart will work with his advisors to develop this tour.

Given Murakami's exploding popularity, the international interest in his work, and a growing appetite for non-conventional theatre, this production offers tremendous critical and commercial potential to showcase a successful collaboration between artists from multiple cultures.

Director's Notes

I first discovered Haruki Murakami's work in 2003 during a nine-month walkabout through Southeast Asia. Having worked for more than twelve rigorous years in the New York film and theatre world, my creative energy was depleted and my soul felt empty. I left my familiar world behind to venture into foreign lands with a vague notion of jump-starting my artistic drive. It was there that fellow travelers kept handing me dog-eared copies of Murakami's books, insisting, 'You *have* to read this.' I read eight of them back to back.

Above all, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* inspired in me an opportunity to take a bold new step in my artistic life. Its protagonist, Toru, had also dropped out of mainstream society due to existential crises to seek some unnamable epiphany like me. I could clearly visualize using live performance, puppetry, music and film working together to create the different realities in the book. This, I told myself, was a project where I could finally combine all my disparate passions to create a living, surrealist "Murakami universe."

Through a series of serendipitous events, I found myself half a year later across the table from Mr. Murakami explaining my idea of a "theatre of dreams." Fortunately, he loved my notion of an experiential hybrid film-theatre. He graciously granted me the rights to adapt *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* with more creative freedom than I could ask from any author.

For ten months I lived in Kamakura, Japan, feeling like I was completing some kind of circle by composing my adaptation in Japan after Murakami had written his novel in Massachusetts. But more importantly, I hoped to feel closer to the characters in his novel. I wandered through Tokyo unable to effectively communicate due to the language barrier, feeling as alienated from society as Murakami's characters did. I perceived Japanese society through image and sound. This experience made a lasting impression on the play's eventual shape.

Although an epic, sprawling tale, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*'s human dilemma continues to captivate me every day. Thanks to generous foundation funds, I've begun to realize my dream project. With my extraordinarily imaginative creative team, I've formed the collaborative setting of which I've always dreamed. The four workshops were as thrilling as they were challenging, while boosting my confidence and experience. The addition of Tom Lee as puppeteer breathed new life into the project and led to a compelling new aesthetic.

My biggest challenge is to engage the imagination of viewers as Murakami has done with his writing. By bringing together artists from Tokyo and New York, I believe the final product has a better chance to speak universally about Murakami's themes and that our collaboration will lead to creating something truly magical.

Cast list for "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle"

WOMEN

Malta Kano- *early thirties. Elegant, beautiful mysterious woman who has psychic abilities and a deep connection to water. Malta has a quiet, compelling essence and an other-worldly manner that masks a crafty agenda.*

Creta Kano- *mid twenties. Malta's younger, more sexually aware sister who's become a "prostitute of the mind". She dresses in vintage 1960's attire and is learning how to use her sexuality to heal her past defilements. Her quirky sensibility camouflages a deep sadness.*

Kumiko- *late twenties. Struggling with her inner contradiction between being a dutiful wife and searching to fulfill her erotic desires. Kumiko is never seen clearly throughout the play, presented mainly in vague film and audio snippets.*

May Kasahara- *14 yr. old quirky, unsettling schoolgirl. Adventurous, inquisitive, very direct. Obsessed with death, manga, and motorcycles. Innocent, yet has a dangerous edge to her.*

The Telephone Woman- *a ghostly woman who summons Toru to her dream world via the telephone, promising to fulfill his erotic fantasies.*

MEN

Toru- *the protagonist. Mid-thirties, quiet, resigned, and introspective man. Currently at a loss with what to do with his life, out of touch with himself. Passive, but with a brewing inner life, Toru eventually breaks through his own malaise and experiences deep rage.*

Noboru Wataya- *the antagonist. late thirties/early forties, powerful right-wing ultra conservative politician. Noboru can appear charming when cameras are rolling, but possesses a cold and cunning interior.*

Lt. Mamiya- *elderly man, WWII veteran. Deathly ill, despondent, has lived a life filled with solitude and despair. Haunted by a mystical experience he had while witnessing atrocities in Manchuria.*

Ushikawa/The Waiter- *forties. Physically very small, but very dangerous. A messy, sadistic little rat. Henchman for Noboru Wataya in the real world, a jolly deviant in the fantasy hotel world.*

Plot/story

At once a detective story, an account of a disintegrating marriage, and an excavation of the buried secrets of World War II, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a surreal mystery that follows a quiet, unassuming “everyman”, Toru, as he searches for his wife who has inexplicably vanished. Toru soon encounters a cast of strange characters, and as he searches for his wife, the mundane world of Tokyo suburbia grows stranger and stranger. Toru’s new acquaintances show up in his dreams, opening doors to a hallucinatory world charged with sexuality and violence. Soon, the lines between dreams and reality dissolve.

However, Toru’s real journey is an internal one, where he confronts the dark forces that exist inside him. With the help of a mysterious spirit guide, Toru is lead into the dream world of an old hotel and is shown to the formidable room #208. Here, Toru is given the chance to come face to face with the real truth behind his wife’s disappearance. Will what he find there help mend the rift in his relationship, will learning the truth destroy any chance of saving his marriage?

Ultimately, the play makes us question our ability to have fulfilling human relationships knowing that powerful forces of violence, lust, and greed lurk in the darkest corners of ourselves.



“Theatre of Dreams”



The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle employs a dynamic blend of theatrical elements to tell its story, creating a hypnotic “theatre of dreams”. Multiple video projectors cast images throughout the theatre, using scrims, set pieces, mirrors, actors’ bodies, even water and fog to create non-traditional projection surfaces. Video projections and audio speakers envelop the audience so they feel as if they’re inside the play, not watching from a distance. Traditional forms of Asian puppetry are used to contrast with more modern technology to show a culture grappling with transition.

The multiple realities of the narrative demand a multimedia approach to emphasize the dream-like intangibility of Murakami’s fluid worlds. Some characters only exist live on stage, others are trapped in the world of film, and some characters have the ability to pass back and forth. While technology plays an important role, the play remains anchored by a strong, emotional narrative. The goal is to use technology to support the overall meaning without overwhelming the material’s humanity.

Water

As one character puts it, “Human existence is largely controlled by elements of water.” Wells, pools, reflections, and dreams involving oceans and rivers all provide the predominant image system. Characters “swim” through mid-air, traversing worlds of live performance and cinema. When the protagonist descends into his own consciousness, it is a world of water that becomes more turbulent as he nears his life force.

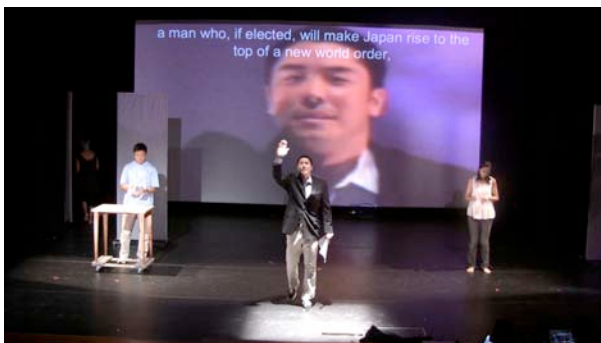
Puppetry

The element of puppetry is a central element in the play used to create a world of mystery with surprising simplicity. At times, Toru is represented by a Bunraku-style puppet, a traditional Japanese art form that requires three puppeteers to manipulate a single puppet. Other storylines incorporate shadow puppets and hand puppets of various size and scale. Tom Lee and his puppeteers experiment with breaking traditional rules, taking liberty to make room for a Western viewpoint. In some ways, the puppets engage the audience's imagination in ways that living actors cannot, acting as a "mirror" onto which the audience can project their own emotions.



Technology

Earnhart uses multimedia elements to address how text messages, virtual-lovers, chat rooms and other technology have created "virtual intimacy", secret worlds wherein we reveal our true selves. Characters struggle desperately to find deeper connections with each other, but hide the truest parts of themselves in digitized domains. We see Toru haunted by recurring digital images that he rewinds and repeats as he struggles to solve his mystery.



Eyeliner

Depending on budget constraints, we may make use of a new projection technology called *Eyeliner*. *Eyeliner* is a unique holographic video projection system that allows freeform video imagery to be projected within a live stage setting. It's the digital version of the old "Peppers Ghost" mirror effect. Live actors and projected characters (or other video imagery) appear alongside each other, creating a very dreamlike effect. In the most pedestrian example, think of the effect created for Warner Brothers movie, "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?"

Eyeliner uses a specially developed foil (or transparent scrim) invisible to the audience which reflects images from video projectors, making it possible to show virtual images as if they were "floating in space" next to the real actors on stage. While we can create a very dream-like Murakami world without this system, the *Eyeliner* adds an extra layer of technological surrealism that can be exploited for maximum effect in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.



PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS

While not all technical and creative decisions have been finalized and will continue to evolve, the following is a general outline of production needs based on the developmental work accomplished thus far:

Cast: eight performers

Puppeteers: four performers

Musicians: one musician

Sound system: P.A. to accommodate six or seven miked actors, two off-stage mics, pre-recorded music, and one on-stage musician

Lighting package: a medium sized lighting package that would include in the range of 48 to 96 dimmers at 2.4k each, 10-20 pars, 20-50 source 4 ellipsoidal with a range of lenses, 5-8 i-cues, fresnels and strip lights, color scrollers and other dmx controlled effects.

Set: while the set is still being finalized, the overall aesthetic is one of “Japanese minimalism.” Many set pieces are designed to also act as projection surfaces. The predominant set pieces are tall shoji screens on wheels (approximately 4’ wide and 10’ high) that constantly move to define different environments. These spaces include the kitchen and living room of Toru’s house, an abandoned, overgrown alley, an old-fashioned hotel room, upscale café, and the bottom of a well. Smaller movable props such as an aquarium, large television, table and chairs, table top for puppetry and miniature sets, and bed are quickly wheeled on and off stage and therefore require easily-accessible wings.

Video Projectors (all require hanging)
provided by Wind-Up Productions

- 2500 lumen projector for subtitles
- 2500 lumen projector with Rosco I-Cue intelligent mirror attachment

provided by theatre:

- additional 2500 lumen projector with Rosco I-Cue intelligent mirror attachment
- main/front projector (approximately 10,000 – 12,000 lumens)
- rear projector (approximately 5,000 lumens)

Eyeliner: Depending on budget constraints, we may make use of a new projection technology called *Eyeliner* to create an extra layer of technological surrealism. Eyeliner uses a specially developed foil (or transparent scrim) invisible to the audience, which reflects images from video projectors, making it

possible to show virtual images as if they were “floating in space” next to the real actors on stage.

The rigging to secure the Eyeliner foil consists of 3 parts. (1) the anchorage and rigging pipes which are secured at a 45-degree plane at the top and bottom lines. (2) the foil frame, which attaches to the Eyeliner scrim itself at the top and bottom edges, and (3) the ratchet straps, which attach the foil frame to the anchorage and rigging and are used to tension the eyeliner. A video projector, preferably DLP with an HD card/minimum native resolution of 1280 x 1024 and brightness of 5000+ lumens bounces its imagery off a reflective white surface (can be painted wood), which is mounted either on the floor or the ceiling and concealed from the audience. Alternatively, the foil can be stretched into a truss framework and flown from its own hanging points.

All the images used on an Eyeliner system are projected as two-dimensional images (2D/3D) into a 3D stage set. The mind of the audience created the 3D illusion. This means that production costs are minimal, needing only the single camera for filming and a single projector for the playback – hence the phrase ‘Glasses-free viewing’.

Projected Timeline (*pending input from developmental partners*)

- **May 2004** – Mr. Earnhart travels to Japan to discuss project and secure rights to novel from Mr. Murakami
- **Sept. 2004 – June 2005** – Mr. Earnhart writes adaptation while living in Kamakura, Japan
- **June 2005 – June 2006** – script work, shooting of multi-media materials in Tokyo, fundraising, creation of promotional dvd, auditions, editing, and several return trips to Japan to foster relationships with actors, theatre companies, theatre presenters, producers, translators, etc.
- **Summer 2006** – Mr. Earnhart attends Edward Albee playwright residency for multi-media workshop, resulting in 40-minute performance attended by Mr. Albee and members of public community
- **October 2007** – 2-week technological workshop at 3-Legged Dog, NYC, script work, fundraising
- **January 2008** – 2-week workshop and presentation at 3-Legged Dog during ISPA and APAP conventions; invitation by ISPA to “Pitch Session”
- **April 2008** – 3-week workshop in Tokyo with Japanese artists, translator and dramaturge with Earnhart, Puppeteer Tom Lee and video designer Aaron Harrow
- **August 2008** – 3-week workshop and presentations at Asia Society, NYC
- **summer/fall 2009** – residency and showcase performances
- **fall/winter 2009 - 2011** – full performance tour in US and international venues

Production Biographies

Haruki Murakami (novelist)

Haruki Murakami, born in Kyoto in 1949, now lives near Tokyo. One of Japan's most renowned writers, his work has been translated into forty-two languages, making him among the most widely read Japanese authors ever. A Pulitzer Prize nominee, Mr. Murakami's many honors includes the prestigious Franz Kafka Prize and the Yomiuri Prize, whose previous recipients include Yukio Mishima and Kenzaburo Oe and . *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle* is considered his most important work. Several of Mr. Murakami's short stories have been adapted for stage and screen, including Simon McBirney's critically acclaimed *The Elephant Vanishes* (Lincoln Center 2004), and two productions by Steppenwolf, *After the Quake*, and *Kafka on the Shore*. This project marks the first time Mr. Murakami ever granted permission to an artist in any medium to adapt one of his full-length works.

Stephen Earnhart (director/co-writer): Throughout his professional experience, Stephen has traversed both the film and theatre worlds. A graduate of New York University's film school, Stephen worked several seasons on *Saturday Night Live* before becoming Director of Production for *Miramax Films*. Stephen was an internal Miramax producer internationally and in the US for such films as *Madonna: Truth or Dare*, Neil Jordan's *The Miracle*, *A Rage in Harlem* and *Hardware*. He produced music videos for David Byrne and internet programs for *IBM*, *American Express* and *Kenneth Cole* as well as musical artists *Santana*, *KD Lang*, *The Who*, *Seal*, *Sammy Hagar*, *Bare Naked Ladies*, *Sheryl Crowe*, *Limp Bizkit*, and *The Wallflowers*.

As a film director, his critically acclaimed documentary, *Mule Skinner Blues*, was distributed nationally by Sundance Channel in theatres, on cable television and home video. In addition to developing *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, he recently completed his documentary *Source of Pride* for New Line Cinema, which chronicles the journey of actors Ed Norton, Colin Farrell, and Jon Voight through the making the feature film *Pride & Glory*.

As an actor, Earnhart was trained at *Shakespeare & Company* in Lennox, Massachusetts and performed at the *Folger Shakespeare Theatre* in Washington, D.C. He was cast in several films, including Clive Barker's *Lord of Illusions*, after which he adapted Barker's play, *Colossus*, for the screen. As a director, Stephen has directed several plays including Pinter's *The Lover*, Pirandello's *I'm Dreaming, but am I?* and an original play entitled *A Nest of Saws*, all in New York City. He created and performed in several multimedia shows, including *Behind the Door* at the IN TONE jazz festival in upper Austria, *Bone to be Wild* at Mannes College, New York and *Triolog at Hangar 7*, commissioned by Dietrich Mateschitz, president of *Red Bull*, performed in *Red Bull's* airplane museum in Salzburg, Austria.

After traveling to Japan to meet Mr. Murakami and secure the rights to his novel in spring of 2004, Earnhart lived in Kamakura, Japan for eleven months writing and shooting materials for the play and fostering relationships with producers, actors and artists in the Tokyo theatre world. He was accepted into the Edward Albee playwright fellowship in August where he performed a 40-minute performance attended by Mr. Albee and members of the community. He has been creating and developing *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* for more than three years and anticipates the first production to be performed in NYC in fall of 2009.

Rachel Cooper (consultant): Rachel Cooper has been at the Asia Society since 1993 and is currently Director, Cultural Programs and Performing Arts. She has extensive experience in the presentation of traditional and contemporary Asian and Asian-American performing arts and the development of interdisciplinary programs. At Asia Society she developed *Soul of Asia*, a multi-year and multi-faceted program series which seeks to promote greater understanding of Asian belief systems. This series has featured *In the Path of Rumi*, created and composed by Hafez Nazeri with master musician Shahram Nazeri and the performance work-in-progress with a symposium *Tibetan Book of the Dead LIVE* featuring composer Philip Glass and Tibetan thangka painter Romio Shrestha. Ms. Cooper has also presented many internationally known performers including Parisa, Houmayun Sakhi and Almasbek Almatov. Working with the New England Foundation for the Arts and Lisa Booth Management, she co-produced a twelve-city tour *Dance: The Spirit of Cambodia*, and an eight-city tour by India's Chorus Repertory Theatre. At Asia Society, she commissioned, produced and presented several new works including *In What Language*, by composer Vijay Iyer and poet Mike Ladd; *The Floating Box: A Story of Chinatown* by Jason Hwang; *18 Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Story of Wenji* by Bun-Ching Lam and Xu Ying; *Forgiveness*, directed by Chen Shi-Zheng; and *Empty Tradition/City Of Peonies* with choreographer Yin Mei and composer Tony Prabowo.

Previous posts include Associate Director of the University of California, Los Angeles Center for Intercultural Performance, Co-founder, former director and current board president of the San Francisco-based Balinese music and dance company, *Gamelan Sekar Jaya* Ms. Cooper lived in Indonesia for six years.

Bonnie Sue Stein (consulting producer): Ms. Stein serves as Executive Director and Producer for GOH Productions, a non-profit arts services organization based in New York City, specializing in international arts project development, production and coordination, with annual budget range of \$300,000 - \$500,000. She oversees all projects, budgeting, development, post-production, hiring, final reporting and coordinating staff of three full-time and twenty part-time project staff. Since its inception in 1988, GOH has worked with projects in Europe, the USA and Asia, including with Russia, Israel, Macedonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia,

Lithuania, France, UK, Ireland, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan. In NYC, Ms. Stein and GOH have produced or co-produced with venues and organizations including: Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Kitchen Center, La MaMa E.T.C, PS 122, PS One Contemporary Museum, Dancing in the Streets, Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church, Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall, The Town Hall, Dixon Place, Vineyard Theater, the Public Theater, Dance Theater Workshop, and others.

Prior to starting GOH, Stein was Program Associate of Performing Arts, The Asia Society, NYC, working with Beate Gordon, Executive Director, primarily on the promotion and marketing of performing artists from across Asia, in presentations in NY and on tour throughout the U.S.

Seth Goldstein (consulting producer): Seth Goldstein founded Splinter Group Productions to produce visionary theatrical works, beginning with Joe Calarco's critically acclaimed Shakespeare's R&J, which transferred to London's West End before touring the UK. He recently received a Drama Desk Award for Christine Jorgensen Reveals. Management clients include Gazillion Bubble Show, Gutenberg! The Musical! (Lortel Nom), Confessions of a Mormon Boy, Apparition by Anne Washburn, Fascinating Aida's Absolutely Fascinating, The Riot Group in Pugilist Specialist and Ami Dayan's A Tale of a Tiger and The Man Himself. The Splinter Group manages NY Musical Theatre Festival and The National Alliance for Musical Theatre's Festival of New Musicals.

Prior to The Splinter Group, Seth served as Managing Director of Manhattan Ensemble Theater. With the company's Artistic Director, Seth produced award-winning productions of Kafka's The Castle and Hank Williams: Lost Highway, H. Leivick's The Golem and Death in Venice (in association with the Glasgow Citizens Theatre). He has produced and developed new works for the stage including workshops of Avenue Q and productions of Joe Calarco's Four Now. Seth was the Artistic Associate for the York Theatre Company from 1999-2000, where he was involved in the development and production of over 30 new musicals and plays.

Jennifer Costello (consulting producer consultant): While keeping one foot firmly planted in the not-for-profit world, Jennifer went on to work in the Broadway commercial community, first for PACE Theatrical Group, then SFX Entertainment, Clear Channel Entertainment, and finally Broadway Across America where on a yearly basis she creates and maintains a division-wide annual budget with an estimated average yearly profit of \$10 million. At its largest, she managed a staff of 15, overseeing their projects and creating road maps for their growth in the organization. Currently she evaluates projects for the division's involvement in all commercial productions, acting as executive producer on select projects – for the Broadway 2004-05 Season these productions included: *The Producers*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *All Shook Up*, and *Sweet Charity*. Her current Broadway production is *High Fidelity*.

Tom Lee (puppeteer): Raised in Mililani, Hawaii, Tom Lee is a performer, designer and puppet artist based in New York City. His original puppet theater works include *Hoplite Diary*, *Punch of the Dead*, *Odysseus and Ajax* and *Ko'olau*, in addition to work as puppeteer in a wide array of styles. He has extensive experience in performance based on the Japanese bunraku and kuruma ningyo forms and integrates animation and live puppet projection into his work.

Tom Lee is a principal puppeteer in the Metropolitan Opera production of *Madama Butterfly* directed by Anthony Minghella with puppetry by Blind Summit Theater. He was a builder and performer in Dan Hurlin's *Hiroshima Maiden* at St Ann's Warehouse. As a resident artist of La MaMa Experimental Theatre, he has performed around the world and worked as part of artist collaborations in the Buryat Republic of Siberia and The Rhodphi Mountains of Bulgaria. In the U.S. he has appeared at Yale Repertory, Second Stage Theater, PS 122, RedCat, La MaMa ETC, among others.

Tom's design work includes sets, puppets and lighting for SLANT, Kinding Sindaw, Yoshiko Chuma, Tom O'Horgan, The Czechoslovak American Marionette Theatre, Kevin Augustine/Lone Wolf Tribe, and Ellen Stewart. A recipient of the NEA/TCG Career Development Program for Designers, Tom spent two months in 2005 studying traditional and contemporary puppetry throughout Japan. His work has received support from The Jim Henson Foundation, The TCG/ITI Travel Grant Program, The Pennsylvania Council for the Arts, The Puppet Lab at St. Ann's Warehouse and artist residences at Sarah Lawrence College, The Rhodphi International Theatre Collective (Bulgaria) and Buffalo Seminary.

Greg Pierce (co-playwright): A fellow of the Edward Albee playwrights residency, Mr. Pierce has had two plays, *The Suburbanoids* and *The Bad Astronauts* produced in NYC and Chicago. His new play, *Smack the Wagon*, has been officially selected for the Great Plains Theatre Conference in June 2007, attended by Edward Albee and Terence McNally. His short play, *Old Parties*, was recently featured at Playwrights Horizons' Williamstown Theater Festival Showcase. In the summer of 2006, Mr. Pierce was commissioned by the Hollywood Bowl to write new verses to accompany Camille Saint-Saens' *Carnival of the Animals* which were performed last summer with the L.A. Philharmonic. His short story, *Short letters*, will be published the new literary journal, *Sentient City*. He was an artist in residency at the New York Public Library in 2004, and has written two novels, *Waltz Games* and *Live from the Tapioca Room*.

Peter Ksander (set designer): Peter Ksander is a Obie-award winning set designer, sculptor and theater artist currently based in Brooklyn, NY. Peter holds a master of fine arts from the California Institute of the Arts. Credits include designs for: *The Brothers Size* (The Public Theatre), *Laude in Urbis* (Compania

di Colombari), *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* (Theatre of a Two-Headed Calf), *The Blackamoor Angel* (Bard Summerscape), *This Place is a Desert* (ICA Boston, Under the Radar Festival), *Oh What War* (HERE Arts Center/Juggernaut Theater), *Women Dreamt Horses and Panic* (Bait Festival/PS122), *Stanley 2006* (HERE Art Center w/ Lisa D'Amour), *Carson Kreitzer's 1:23* (co-design with Doug Stein). His design work has appeared in the Buanos Aries in Translation Festival, The Ontological Hysteric Incubator, PICA's Time Based Art Festival and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In 2008 he won an Obie award for the scenic design of *Untitled Mars (this title may change)*, created and directed by Jay Scheib and presented at PS122. Over the years he has worked with Richard Foreman (*ad Behavior*, *Wake Up Mr. Sleepy! Your Unconscious Mind is Dead*, *Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland*, *Astronome*), Erik Ehn (*Ideas of Good and Evil*, *ICE: Cry me a river...*), Karin Coonrod (*Laude in Urbis*, *The Blackamoor Angel*, *Love's Labors Lost*), Mark Wing-Davey (*1:23*, *Small Tragedy*) and Robert Woodruff (*Oedipus*). Between 2001-2004 Ksander was associate scenic designer to Douglas Stein, working on projects both nationally and internationally.

He is co-founder of Tiny Elephant, a theater company dedicated to the performing object, and has continuing artistic relationships with the Theater of a Two-Headed Calf, Banana, Bag, and Bodice, The Ontological-Hysteric Theater, and TENT. In 2005 Peter was one of the recipients of the NEA/TCG Career Development Program.

Ruppert Bohle (media design consultant): Ruppert Bohle began his career working for cultural institutions like the New York Public Theater, Lincoln Center, and Creative Time. At the Public Theater in New York, he programmed the projections for Tina Landau's *Space*, Anna Deveare Smith's *House Arrest*, George Wolfe's *Radiant Baby* and *Harlem Song* and Michael Greif's *Dogeaters*. For Lincoln Center he worked on the productions of *Complicite's Noise of Time*, William Kentridge's *Zeno At 4 AM*, Dawn Upshaw's *Roundabout* and Deborah Warner's *Diary of One Who Vanished*. For Scharff Weisberg, New York, he has worked on many staging events and audiovisual installations.

In 2001, he created his first theatrical projection design for the Public Theater production of *36 Views*. His design for this show was nominated for the Henry Hewes Award and the Drama Desk Award. Since then he has created original designs for, among others, the National Actors Theater production of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, the Complicite production of *The Elephant Vanishes* and the Ping Chong & Co. production of *Cathay*, *Three Tales of China*.

Aaron Harrow (media designer): Aaron Harrow is a freelance media designer working between the UK, Rome and New York. He has worked in many areas of media design; 3D modeling and animation for film, television and architectural

projects; visual effect design; video and sound editing; interactive website design and graphic design.

A philosophy graduate, Aaron's diverse skillset has enabled him to create interdisciplinary media for clients such as New Line Cinema, Goethe Institute, Mazda, Red Bull, Sky Television, Café de Paris, Medusa Films, Other Earth, Mezzaroma and Supperclub. Aaron collaborated with Stephen Earnhart on the multimedia show *Trialog* at Hangar 7, Austria, commissioned by Dietrich Mateschitz, president of Red Bull.

Keiko Tsuneda (written translator): Winner of the Yoshiko Yuasa Award for theatre translation in 2001, Ms. Tsuneda is one of Tokyo's top theatrical translators. She has translated major works of Broadway and off-Broadway shows into Japanese, including *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Tape*, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, *Tape*, *The Vagina Monologues*, *Morning Becomes Electra*, *Stuff Happens*, and the book for *Little Shop of Horrors*. Her book translations include *RIDICULOUS-the theatrical life and times of Charles Ludlum*, *Democracy*, *Backwards and Forwards*, *Vas as in Victima*, *Tell My Horse*, *Frankie Bosser Comes Home* and *The Moral Intelligence of Children*.

Yin Mei (movement/choreographer): Yin Mei has established herself as a choreographer and performance/visual artist exploring themes at the intersection between Asian traditional and Western contemporary performance. She has collaborated with well-known visual artists such as MacArthur Award-winning Xu Bing and Cai Guo Jiang (US/China) and composers Robert Egan (U.S.) and Tony Prabowo (Indonesia), as well as performers as varied as Tibetan modern dancer Sang Jijia (formerly with the William Forsythe Company), traditional Balinese masked dancer I Nyoman Catra and dance luminary Jeanine Durning. Yin Mei received a Guggenheim Fellowship in Choreography in 2005 and was a Choreography Fellow of the New York Foundation for the Arts in 2004. She received a grant from the Asian Cultural Council which originally allowed her come to the US from China to study dance.

Yin Mei's choreography has been presented at numerous New York venues including Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church, Dance Theater Workshop, La Mama ETC., the Asia Society, the Japan Society, City Center's Fall for Dance Festival, PACE Downtown Theater, the Lincoln Center Out-Of-Doors Festival, the Queens College Theater, P.S. 1, the Knitting Factory, the Williamsburg Art Center and the Queens Museum. Her work has been presented twice at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and at U.S. venues including the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the Miami Performing Arts Center, Columbia College Dance Center, University of California Los Angeles, UMASS-Amherst, University of California at Santa Cruz, the Kohler Arts Center, and University of Arizona.

Yin Mei's work has been supported by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation Multi-Arts Production Fund, the Doris Duke Fund for Dance of the National

Dance Project of the New England Foundation for the Arts, the Jerome Foundation, Meet The Composer, Arts International, Greenwall Foundation, NEA, New York State Dance Force, Asian Cultural Council, Bossak/Heibron Charitable Foundation, Asian American Arts Alliance, and "BUILD" New York Foundation for The Arts. Yin Mei is a professor of dance and currently Director of the Dance Program at Queens College, New York City University.

Yoshihiro Watanabe (rehearsal translator/assistant director) recently returned to Japan after graduating from Humboldt State University in California with a degree in Theatre Arts and Dance. Yoshi is currently working in various capacities in film and theatre in Tokyo as well as continuing studies in ballet. He is fluent in both Japanese and English and collaborated with Stephen Earnhart in the summer of 2006, acting as translator and assistant director during rehearsals and shooting of materials for *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle*. His skills include Japanese Martial Arts, shakuhachi (Japanese flute), ballet, modern and tap dance, and has technical training in both theatre and film. Yoshi also works as a freelance translator and teaches English via a high-tech pod-cast that's very popular in Tokyo.

FILM IN REVIEW; 'Mule Skinner Blues', directed by Stephen Earnhart

By A. O. SCOTT – *New York Times* – Friday, April 12, 2002

Directed by Stephen Earnhart; not rated, 93 minutes

The main character in "Mule Skinner Blues," Stephen Earnhart's documentary tribute to homegrown American eccentricity, is a retired Florida shrimper named Beanie Andrew, who is an epic talker and a recovering alcoholic. He describes himself as a 60-year veteran of show business, but what he means is not altogether clear.

The assertion sounds like a vain, sad boast coming from a man who lives in a cramped trailer outside Jacksonville. And the picture, following in the footsteps of Chris Smith's "American Movie," is not without a whiff of condescension. Mr. Andrew and his friends -- two would-be guitar heroes, an aging country crooner and a prolific writer of unpublished pulp fiction, among others -- dream of hitting the big time even though their best shot would seem to be an appearance on "The Jerry Springer Show" or "Cops." Mr. Earnhart, who discovered them while looking for extras to cast in a music video, records their ambitions with a detachment that can sometimes be cruel. How deluded these people sound; how pathetic their lives seem.

But at the same time, "Mule Skinner Blues," which opens today at Cinema Village (22 East 12th Street, Greenwich Village), regards this makeshift local art scene with unironic admiration, disclosing a vibrant, eclectic and deeply weird folk culture flourishing in the shadow of the global, celebrity-driven culture industry. In the South especially, every town and hamlet once had its own musicians who played at barn dances and barbershops and whose creations have been beloved by urban hipsters from Bob Dylan to the Coen brothers. It is good to know that these traditions persist and that new permutations continue to evolve.

Ricky Lix, a hotheaded heavy-metal player, and his sometime partner, Steve Walker, a much-divorced Vietnam veteran, are impressively dedicated to their music, which doesn't sound half bad. Nor does Miss Jeannie, a 70-year-old songwriter who can yodel in the high lonesome style (she sings the title song, an old Jimmie Rodgers number) and who still holds out hope of recognition. (At the end, she gets a plaque in the mail and, thanks to Mr. Earnhart, her very own music video.) Larry Parrot, a retiring, round-faced office cleaner with a wife, a child and an invalid mother, cranks out ghoulish novels and stories, for which he supplies his own Freudian interpretation.

For his part, Mr. Andrew used his contact with Mr. Earnhart to bring to fruition a project he had been nursing for decades: a 15-minute horror film about a swamp-dwelling gorilla on a bloody quest for his severed arm. The Jacksonville premiere

of that film, called "Turnabout Is Fair Play," concludes Mr. Earnhart's movie. Its triumph, for an audience of cast, crew, assorted friends and curious members of the local press, makes you realize that show business success can take as many forms as creative expression.

"Mule Skinner Blues" partakes of many of the horror film's cheesy video techniques, and its do-it-yourself sublimity affirms a jaunty solidarity between the documentarian and his subjects. The pleasure and hard work of putting on a show, however strange and crude the show may be, provide rewards richer and more peculiar than fame. It might be tempting to regard Mr. Andrew and his collaborators as oddballs, but Mr. Earnhart's quizzical, charming movie allows us to see them, finally, as artists.

-A. O. SCOTT

April 7, 2002

(feature article in *Sunday New York Times Entertainment Section*)

Film; Just Folks Whose Wish Came True: To Be Stars

By LEWIS BEALE

SOME five years ago, Stephen Earnhart and Victoria Ford were looking for some local color to inject into a music video they were shooting in Mayport, Fla., outside Jacksonville. A friend of a friend suggested that they get in touch with Beanie Andrew, a neighborhood character whom Mr. Earnhart describes as the "Moses of the trailer park," because "people follow him."

An upbeat former shrimper in his 60's, Mr. Andrew was also a recovering alcoholic and an aspiring singer and musician who had for years nursed an inexplicable desire: to star in a movie as a gorilla crawling out of the mud.

Mr. Earnhart, a former Miramax executive, and Ms. Ford, a cinematographer on independent movies, were enchanted. And when Mr. Andrew introduced them to his friends, the filmmakers agreed that they deserved to be in a movie. The result is "Mule Skinner Blues," which documents this eccentric and colorful group of would-be entertainers as well as their homemade horror short in which, yes, Mr. Andrew crawls out of the mud in a gorilla suit.

"I saw them as mirrors of ourselves, people struggling to create their art and do their thing," Ms. Ford said of the film's characters. "It appealed to me in a weird way that there was this similarity between us."

"Mule Skinner Blues," which opens on Friday in New York, is the latest in a string of documentaries -- "Brother's Keeper," "Gates of Heaven" and "Crumb" are others -- about, er, unusual characters. But it is also a commentary on "outsider" art. And it uses highly subjective techniques pioneered by filmmakers like Errol Morris.

"There's been a liberation in the documentary genre," Mr. Earnhart said. "They don't have to be boring and dry, and they can actually be fun. We want to find and explore people who aren't like ourselves." Ms. Ford added: "It's just not a tribe in Africa. It's people in your own backyard."

More than anything, however, "Mule Skinner Blues" is a funny and compassionate look at people trying to create art against all odds. The strivers include Miss Jeanie, a 70-ish country singer who writes songs like "D.U.I. Blues" ("I don't ever want another D.U.I.," runs the chorus) and who admits, "My voice gets better with schnapps."

There's Steve Walker, an emaciated, scary-looking Vietnam veteran and alcoholic who writes tender love songs, has been married five times and says: "I want a woman that will take me for what I am. I'm a drunk musician with a future."

Larry Parrot, who wrote the horror film-within-a-film with Mr. Andrew, is a portly, phlegmatic man with a mail-order bride from the Philippines, a small cleaning business and a drawer full of unpublished horror stories.

And Annabelle Lea Usher is a college-trained artist who designs hardwood floors, has a storage room filled with period costumes (including a gorilla suit) and keeps her dead bulldog in a backyard freezer.

They may sound like grotesques, but Mr. Earnhart and Ms. Ford treat them with respect, no doubt because of the collaborative nature of the project. After Mr. Andrew appeared in their music video, they arranged to lend him a video camera. Mr. Andrew began making what were essentially audition tapes of his friends and sent them to Mr. Earnhart and Ms. Ford in New York. Mr. Earnhart was negotiating to make a horror film at the time, and Mr. Andrew wanted him to come back to Jacksonville to shoot it. When the project fell through, the filmmaking partners turned their attention to Mr. Andrew and his buddies.

"What's inspiring to me when I saw Beanie's videos," Mr. Earnhart said, "is that they aren't held back by the confines of what art should be. There's such a lack of pretension."

But instead of just dogging Mr. Andrew and his friends with a video camera, Mr. Earnhart and Ms. Ford encouraged them to make a horror film as a sort of community project, one that would include a scene in which Mr. Andrew fulfilled his fondest show-biz dream. They made a deal: if the Floridians made the film, the New Yorkers would help them as little or as much as they wanted. They wound up doing only the editing.

A Heisenberg effect was operating here: by observing a process that they had themselves set in motion, Mr. Earnhart and Ms. Ford were changing the way it evolved. And they employed some nondocumentary techniques -- re-creations, superimposed images, stop-motion animation -- to record it. They even shot "D.U.I. Blues" as a music video. And they are unapologetic about their methods.

"Every night I thought, 'What is my role as a documentarian?' " Mr. Earnhart said. "I had this huge crisis. And in the end I decided to say: 'We can't hide, and I don't want to hide. I'm going to see this more as collaboration rather than just observation.' "

Ms. Ford added: "Every documentary filmmaker chooses where they're going to

interview their person -- their kitchen, their library, their back porch. I don't think there's anything different, it's just a lot more overt. It seemed completely right."

"Mule Skinner Blues" ends with the premiere of "Turnabout Is Fair Play," the group's 17-minute horror film, at a community theater outside Jacksonville. The short won't win any Oscars, but that's not the point. "Mule Skinner Blues" clearly wants to say something about the value of artistic achievement, whether it comes from Mr. Andrew and his friends or acknowledged masters.

"I wasn't thinking about outsider art when I went down and met these people," Ms. Ford said. "But I suppose they are creating their own world of art outside conventional society. I was really more inspired by their desire to do, just create."

"Mule Skinner Blues" is not without a downbeat side. The film took four years to shoot because of financing problems, and during that time the film's subjects had to deal with divorce, homelessness and illness. Mr. Andrew fell off the wagon, spent time living in the woods and eventually entered a 12-step program. But none of this erodes their spirit. At the end, their dreams are still with them. Or as Mr. Andrew puts it cryptically in the movie: "If you fall down in the mud, you might come back as a gorilla."