

Metropole • Production Notes

Up until recently, film-going audiences in the U.S. (at least most Hollywood audiences) largely sought out films that would help them to escape their own everyday lives. The assumption was that the 'best' films were those that would help 'take them away' from the settings that surrounded them, sweeping them away to another place and time -- rescuing them, it was implied, from the boredom and the listlessness of their everyday lives.

But at a time when blockbuster film epics and highly choreographed spectacles -- from film to sports to the Fox-ification of the evening news -- have overtaken the content and marketing focus of mainstream media and cinema, contemporary film audiences have begun to move in the opposite direction.

Declining revenues for theatrical blockbusters for the major studios over the past several years (a trend which has not reversed despite the minimal upturn of Summer 2007) are only one of the examples of this movement. Even reality television, which was television's attempt to capitalize on these market trends has managed to turn the realities of everyday life into a tired and predictable game show spectacle. No longer seeking refuge in spectacles -- but rather a rescue from them -- film audiences of late have responded more positively to those films that are in touch with the concrete concerns of everyday lives, everyday realities, and everyday struggles.

Metropole (2007) -- a film that the directors, inspired by the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, have called a "documentary of the everyday" -- is a Pravda, LLC production. It is presented by The Meme Factory, a Seattle-based center of media production and film theory, as well as a house both for cultural studies of everyday life and social and political activism. The film is co-directed by Stephanie Skourtes and Brian Ganter.

Ms. Skourtes and Mr. Ganter are excited about their first feature together. In addition to being young filmmakers they are also media educators. Each has taught critical media and cultural studies at the college level for the past several years.

Ms. Skourtes the co-director and producer of *Metropole* teaches media and gender studies at various colleges in the Northwest and is currently pursuing a graduate degree in Sociology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC. She has focused heavily on the shape of contemporary youth culture in her educational work and in her filmmaking, as exemplified in her previous 2003 documentary *Growing Up a Mother*.

Mr. Ganter, the co-director and writer of the film studied filmmaking at Syracuse University in New York and received a masters degree in media studies and literature in Buffalo, New York. He has taught film, literature, and critical media studies in a variety of colleges throughout the greater Seattle area. His previous film a feature-length documentary and biopic about the anti-Franco Spanish poet Jaime Ferrán (*Jaime Ferrán: The Generation of 1950*) screened in New York. Mr. Ganter also now works as a programming contributor and instructor in the Education Department at Pacific Cinematheque, in Vancouver, BC.

Roy Wilson, the cinematographer for *Metropole*, has worked on productions for HBO, PBS, 60 Minutes, BBC, and various national commercials and industrial productions. Mr. Wilson's training and extensive professional background in 35mm and 16mm filmmaking helped *Metropole*, which was shot on Mini-DV, to achieve a look that is richly filmic and colorfully cinematic in scope and style.

Michelle M. Witten the film's editor has worked on a variety of feature documentary and narrative films within the Seattle independent film community as well as on a variety of international productions as well. The film's Production Designer is Tania Kupczak who has production designed many feature-length and short films in the Seattle area. Both Ms. Witten and Ms. Kupczak recently worked on Guy Maddin's *Brand Upon the Brain!* (Official Selection, Toronto Film Festival, 2006), and Lynn Shelton's *We Go Way Back* (Winner, Grand Jury Prize, Slamdance 2006).

Since *Metropole* unfolds without dialogue, audio, musical, and sound design play a large part in the crafting of the film, and the audiences' relationship to the characters. Much of the information about the characters, their environments, and their interactions are conveyed through sound rather than the usual visual means that film audiences have become accustomed to (including a short offbeat sequence that even includes a bit of morse code!)

Directors Skourtes and Ganter felt therefore, that only a full score could do justice to the characters and help to guide the audience through each individual's separate routines, while tying them together as a whole. They contacted composer Michael Hebert to work on the project, who was enthusiastic about the possibilities of a film in which the score would essentially play the role of narrator 'voice over'. The finished film features original music scored by Mr. Hebert who has worked on the locally-produced documentary *Beyond Wartime* and other short films and television commercials. He is also a regular contributor to the current MTV series *The Hills*. For *Metropole* he has generated a mixed acoustic-electronic score for the film that some have described as "mesmerizing." Music aficionados may recognize that his score echoes the urban audio aesthetics of Steve Reich, while still delivering a unique energy and character that adds to and complements the dynamics of each of the characters and the spaces they inhabit.

Paul Shevik the film's self-proclaimed 'Musical-Sergeant-at-Arms,' is the film's musical coordinator, who helped compile the remaining non-scored music for the film. Mr. Shevik has assembled a distinctive cast of musicians from an international roster. Highly regarded musicians such as Fūxa (Chicago), múm (Iceland), and Esmerine (ex-Godspeed You! Black Emperor) (Montreal) join legendary British avant-garde percussive pioneers AMM as well as younger local Seattle-area artists as well -- Blue Scholars, Joy Wants Eternity, and Specs One. The music is complemented by a sound design appropriate for a film of this nature. Sound designers for the film are Phil Thenstedt and John Nold.

Finally the film's graphic designer and coordinator of its print campaign is Pinar Undeger who studied with the well-known Turkish and Eastern European poster and graphic designer Bülent Erkmén. Ms. Undeger now works independently out of Vancouver, BC.

Metropole -- which is short for "metropolis," but also a word that has connotations of a globally networked urban environment -- features an ensemble 'cast' of five (5) 'characters' whose lives have drawn them together, for different reasons and in different ways, into the city -- the metropole. As the film unfolds in three distinct parts (respectively titled -- "Leisure," "Home," & "Work") we find that the connections of the 'characters' are brought together and made evident in unexpected ways. The film tells less of a linear overarching story, but instead shows the interactions of the characters through a culminating series of overlapping events and situations. Chris (who is 'played' by Chris King), a musician, and Frank (Frank Mazzeo), an aspiring music producer and student make their livings and their lives through 'music' -- which is emerging as the *lingua franca* of all metropolises in the world today. Alex and Ethan (Alex Loeb and Ethan Meginnes) balance their life in the city with their environmental priorities, straddling a life lived in the city and one on the outskirts of the coast, far from the downtown. Marcelino (Marcelino Diaz

Tafolla) works rigorous and long hours keeping a tension between his priorities of home life and those of work life. Finally there is Sachia (Sachia Tinsley), an athletic 'Renaissance woman', who rounds out the group.

The most distinctive feature of *Metropole* is that it is a 'silent' film with no dialogue, only sound and music. As a result it is not surprising that some of the traditions and counter-traditions of cinema that the film draws on thrived in the days of the silent cinema, especially in films which bridged the gap between documentary and social criticism while making use of the complex story-telling devices developed for use in narrative film.

One of the genres of silent film is the lesser-known 'city symphony' genre -- early twentieth century films that offered brief glimpses into the unprecedented upturn in urban living that had just begun to unfold within cities and their modernized cultures. This genre first became popularized in early films such as the 1921 short *Manhatta* and Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*, the latter in particular being a strong reference point for this documentary. This genre developed a more socially critical edge with Jean Vigo's *À propos de Nice* (a documentary also broken into three parts) that pitted the boredom of the elite classes in the casinos and at the seaside in Nice against the 'backstreet' lives of the working classes.

Metropole, in its structure, pacing, and subject matter, also builds on the work of those films that have reminded us of the complex rhythms, symbolisms, and interaction that can be found -- often in a mystified form -- in the processes of everyday life. Cinematic reference points here include films such as Chantal Akerman's feminist classic *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, which is devoted to a long day in the life of a housewife in Brussels, as well as Gus Van Sant's breakthrough film *Elephant*, a film that was itself an extended homage to the famous long takes of Hungarian filmmaker Bela Tarr. Ms. Skourtes also cites the documentary films from the 1920s and '30s by John Grierson and Robert Flaherty from the British silent documentary movement as significant for her. Frederick Wiseman, a pioneer of the cinéma vérité shooting style, and a key American documentary filmmaker of the past three decades, is also one of her central influences. She sites Wiseman as her, "favorite filmmaker." Overall the film is also inspired and influenced by the global thematics, urban aesthetics and minimalistic color patterns of the films of Tsai Ming-liang, especially *What Time Is It There?*

Metropole was shot on Mini-DV over the course of four weeks. As indicated above, Mr. Ganter provided the initial screenplay for *Metropole*. This screenplay helped the cinematographer and the lighting crew to choreograph beforehand the order of events, situations, and places that the camera covered during the course of the 24-hour day in the life of the characters of the film. This explains the 'odd' situation of a documentary film that includes a writer among its principle credits (!). A detailed script however was required since the 24-hour period presented in the film was shot over the course of approximately four weeks. Before shooting could begin, both directors, Ms. Skourtes and Mr. Ganter, followed each of the film's participants around for several weeks, detailing their routines and capturing the visual and physical sense of each of their living, leisure, and working situations. Yet despite this meticulous 'scripting' process, none of the actions or interactions of the persons in the film are scripted or invented -- they are simply the actual routines of actual lives brought to light through a collaborative effort between the filmmakers and the film participants.

Finally, the title of the film gestures towards the fact that the city itself is a character in this film. Principle photography on *Metropole* was done in the downtown and greater Seattle areas, on the streets and in some of the more landmark locations of the city, including the new and visually innovative downtown public library in Seattle, designed by architect Rem Koolhaas. Mr. Ganter remarks, "We were very happy to have be the very first feature film to be allowed to shoot inside the new downtown Seattle Public Library." However, after filming had begun the

director soon discovered that *Metropole* was not the first feature to request to shoot there. During their filming, the library liaison revealed to Mr. Ganter that *Mission Impossible Three* had previously requested permission to shoot there and had been turned down not too long before *Metropole* had filed its request. “That crew had wanted to shut down the entire downtown library location for the day in order to complete the shoot,” she explained to Mr. Ganter, something that apparently did not sit well with the library staff. “We were doubly happy that they had turned down Tom Cruise and yet allowed us to shoot there”, remarked Mr. Ganter. Yet even while the cityscape of the film might be identifiable for local-Seattle area viewers of the film, it is presented as an anonymous global ‘every city’ with few distinctive identifying marks.