

# ***THE FOLK SINGER***

## ***- A Tale of Men, Music & America -***

### ***Interviews***

#### ***“I feel a bit like an alchemist”***

**- An Interview with director M.A. Littler -**

**- Translated from German -**

*I recently visited filmmaker and writer M.A. Littler in his office outside of Frankfurt, Germany where he is currently completing his new film THE FOLK SINGER.*

*Littler describes his film as a merging of the world's of Dostoevsky, Jesus of Nazareth, Hasil Adkins and The Marx Brothers.*

Q: You've only shown me a few scenes of the film and hinted at it being about god, love and redemption but I have a suspicion the film is about a lot more than that.

A: It's also about men, music and America.

Q: How do you intend to incorporate all those themes into one film?

A: By forcing the form of the film to adhere to its authenticity and sincerity. The people in the film are complex individuals and have plenty to say and I intend to do justice to that.

Q: The film feels like a spiritual journey. You said you consider it to be a road movie of the soul.

A: Well, there's that element of geographical travel, the highways and byways of Texas and Louisiana but then there's the more significant spiritual journey – the confronting of one's demons and the rejoicing in one another's pain as Scott Biram puts it.

Q: Speaking of Scott Biram: His performance is incredible.

A: Yeah, he exemplifies the merging of the worlds of Dostoevsky and the Marx Brothers – Drunken joy and exuberance as well as melancholy, pain and reflection. I had hoped he would go there but he far exceeded all my expectations. I owe him.

Q: Could you describe your collaboration with John Konrad Wert a.k.a. Possessed by Paul James?

A: Well, I sort of ruined his life for 4 weeks. Kidding aside, we were friends prior to entering this film and now we're brothers connected by the experience of making this film together. He forced me to go places I hadn't gone before and I did the same to him. It's a bit like being in the military together – We're veterans of The Folk Singer.

Don't get me wrong, it wasn't all roses. We butted heads and we wrestled but I always felt we were both after the same goal: Making this film, raw, real and sincere and not drifting off into the superficial or fake.

Q: Do you still speak?

A: We'll speak until one of us kicks the bucket.

Q: Could you imagine working with him again?

A: I'll have to talk to his lady. I'm not sure she'll lend him to me again. As far as I'm concerned I'd work with him anytime.

Q: You told me you're not one of those filmmakers or artists that denies his influences.

A: I see myself in the folk tradition. I take what past generations have done and build upon that...and I am very grateful to be allowed to do that.

Q: Who were your artistic patron saints on this project?

A: Two men come to mind. One said: Poetic truth lies in between fact and fiction. The other said: "You must risk it all to express everything".

Q: Who were those men?

A: Werner Herzog and John Cassavetes.

Q: The Folk Singer is a lot different from your previous film THE ROAD TO NOD. Why the radical change of direction?

A: I was tired of working in a stylized overly aesthetic form. The film was a genre exercise where I get to show off how clever I am. I felt I wanted to leave that behind and become a bit more modest and make a film that really deals with the issues that cause me joy and pain.

Q: The film is very contradictory. It's hilarious and tragic at the same time.

A: Yeah, that was our goal: Portraying the human condition as Scott likes to say...I call it the human meat wheel in its complexity and diversity.

The characters are joyous, hurt, reflective, angry, loving, cruel, strange, beautiful and all those other conflicting adjectives that make up the g'damn human race. I feel a bit like an alchemist. I try to blend all those emotions and hope to find some sort of poetic truth.

Q: What are your hopes for the film?

A: I'd like someone who feels hurt deep inside to see this film and to feel a communion of the spirit. To feel he or she is not alone with their pain.

Q: That's pretty ambitious.

A: The more films I make, the more I understand that they need to do more than pass an hour and a half of someone's time. If it's not about the essential issues of life I don't want to waste my time, energy and dead presidents on it.

Q: An underlying theme in the film is the death of the American ideals.

A: Certainly. I met many people who feel they're being sold down the river by their government. They feel the American experiment has been sodomized. America strikes me as a strange, beautiful, cruel and hurt continent. Unlike some Europeans I love that g'damn country the way you'd love your retarded brother. John Steinbeck's Lenny comes to mind.

Q: Why the fondness for a country that is not your own?

A: America's blessing is also its curse: Is it a good idea? We don't think so but let's try it anyway. It's an experimental country. It reminds me of a large, muscular, young dog. I think America is experiencing puberty at the moment. One thing is clear: The country has always embraced me and my ideas and in spite of all my disagreements with it I do feel solidarity – Especially with my peers over there, who will hopefully be America's future.

***"I dance to a beat inside my head that only I can hear"***

- An Interview with M.A. Littler -

Q: Filmmaker, poet, spoken word artist, concert promoter...what the hell are you?

A: I reckon I'm a delusional jack of all outlawed trades. A patient suffering from the worst disease out there, the g'damn truth!

Q: Let's try to summarize your activities in the past 5 years.

A: I wrote a bunch of screenplays and two books of poetry, made a few documentaries about underground music and art and a moody feature film deemed too slow to watch.

Q: Why the rush?

A: I feel I've been working real slow.

Q: You always work with your peers; you never cast so called professional actors.

A: No. They're all professional performers. The fact that they're not actors doesn't bother me. To the contrary it intrigues me. They're rare, strange and beautiful creatures. I'd be a fool to cast anyone else.

Q: Let's talk about your new project THE FOLKSINGER. Is it a documentary or a fictional film?

A: Both. The film will follow real life folk singer Possessed by Paul James on tour from Texas to Kentucky. Embedded into the documentary style footage of the tour we will incorporate a fictional narrative revolving around the singer's struggle with doubt and anger as well as his religious upbringing and his relationship with the almighty.

Q: Those are autobiographical issues that you will capture on film?

A: Yes.

Q: The obvious question that comes to mind is the issue of trust.

A: He trusts me and I certainly have to trust him. The success of the entire film is solely dependant on his authenticity. We're kindred spirits. That will have to suffice. It's a risky but pure and sincere undertaking. I like to say we're god's wild children, a bit like Kerouac's holy fools.

Q: What other performers have you cast and what role to they play?

A: All the people play themselves. Scott H. Biram is played by none other than Scott H. Biram, Col. JD Wilkes is played by Col. JD Wilkes etc.

Q: What is your main objective, your main goal...what are you trying to achieve with the film?

A: It's about raw human emotions. Let's not hide behind the suave, the hip, the cool. It's a film about men with bloody knuckles, anger, fear and a relentless spirit that drives them on.

Q: Let's move onto your writing. There are a lot of references to mental health in your work. Have you had experiences with mental health issues?

A: I've come across many people who told me they thought that there was something wrong with them but upon spending time with them they seemed very healthy - emotionally healthy. They conveyed their fears verbally and many told me that they felt detached from the world and somehow out of place.

I soon realized that they were simply not in accord with society, or rather mainstream society. Because of that they had been led to believe that there was something wrong with them.

A lot of my writing that deals with the issue could be considered portrait work. I portrait individuals who feel outside of the world.

Q: They feel alienated?

A: They feel alone. To be alone is worth than death. If you consider yourself to be a freak but can exchange your thoughts with other so called freaks you feel a communion of the spirit. If you feel

isolate and alone your spirit shrivels up and dies. Fact is mainstream society has regimented rules to live by and many fall by the wayside. I feel drawn to those people.

Q: You use “big” words in your literature. Death, world, love etc. Have you been criticized for being presumptuous?

A: All the time. But what should I do? Those are the issues and themes that penetrate my brain and rather than trying to find cutesy metaphors, I write straight from the gut. I’m not concerned with good or bad literature. I concern myself primarily with the question of authenticity. Do I believe what I write? If I do, I feel I have succeeded. If not, I have failed. It’s all very subjective. My friend the photographer Miron Zownir refers to it as “radically subjective”. I dance to a beat inside my head that only I can hear.

Q: I have also discovered a fondness for hobo folklore.

A: I am interested in people living transient life styles; travelling preachers, hobos etc. But not only individuals who travel physically but also mentally - inner emigration.

Q: The hobo folklore has become a cliché.

A: So has the travelling preacher, Jesus and the devil and most everything in between. Due to biographic facts I relate to those issues. That’s what I was raised on and that is until today the thematic structure of my writing.

Q: Speaking of structure. Do you adhere to concrete structural guidelines?

A: Not consciously but there is a structure to all my writing which has evolved over the years. I don’t follow historic poetry structure or structures defined by literary critics.

Q: Do you see your writing as a continuation of a journey begun by beat generation writers?

A: No, I don’t see my writing as any continuation of any sort apart from a continuation of my own journey. I do feel very close to a lot of Kerouac’s writing...not really the adventures on the road, the drinking and travelling part. More the religious quest - the spiritual journey and the frustration of trying to figure out the world and ultimately failing. He’s a writer who has been read on superficial level. Few have done justice to the material. I also enjoy Burroughs every now and again but that’s about it.

Q: What relevance do publication and positive criticism have?

A: None what so ever. There’s no money in poetry. And if I require adoration or praise I talk to my wife or buy someone a drink who really needs one. You get a helluva lot more appreciation from a man who needs a drink than from the literature quarterlies. Art is not on trial therefore why should it be judged? Give it away. If someone can relate to the idiosyncrasies of your mind, than that’s a good thing. If not, I’m not all that pissed of either.

Q: I’ve come cross plenty of drugs in your poetry.

A: Drugs sedate and make you forget the world and your solitude. I don’t write drug literature. I focus on the solitary aspect not the drugs. They just happen to be a reality and lost souls seem to be drawn to them.

