

A cinematic essay in defense of remembering



The Royal Road

A FILM BY JENNI OLSON

**WRITER-DIRECTOR-VOICEOVER: JENNI OLSON | CINEMATOGRAPHER:
SOPHIE CONSTANTINO | EDITOR: DAWN LOGSDON | SOUND: JIM
LIVELY | PRODUCER: JULIE DORF | EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: PAUL
MARCARELLI | VOICEOVER CAMEO: TONY KUSHNER**

**⊕ Official Selection: 2015 Sundance Film Festival ⊕
(2015) | 16mm/HD | color | 65 minutes | USA**

RoyalRoadMovie.com

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About the Film:

A cinematic essay in defense of remembering, *The Royal Road* offers up a primer on the Spanish colonization of California and the Mexican American War alongside intimate reflections on nostalgia, butch identity and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* — all against a contemplative backdrop of 16mm urban California landscapes, and featuring a voiceover cameo by Tony Kushner.

I strive in my films to achieve a combination of essayistic personal reflection, romanticized fictional narrative, the sharing of lesser-known histories — all against a backdrop of carefully composed urban landscape images. In 2005, the San Francisco Film Critics Circle presented me with the Marlon Riggs Award “for courage and vision in Bay Area filmmaking” for my first experimental feature documentary, [The Joy of Life](#). I strive to be worthy of this distinction in all my work, and my conception of [The Royal Road](#) is nothing if not courageous and visionary.

Deceptively simple California urban landscapes serve as the framework for the film's lyrically written voiceover which combines rigorous historical research with a stream-of-consciousness personal monologue and relates these seemingly disparate stories from an intimate, colloquial perspective to tell a one-of-a-kind California tale. Shot on 16mm film and contemplatively crafted of long takes, *The Royal Road* is a film about landscapes and desire, memory and history - and the stories we tell.

About Jenni Olson (Writer-Director-Producer-Voiceover):

Jenni Olson is one of the world's leading experts on LGBT cinema history and is currently VP of e-commerce at WolfeVideo.com. Her debut feature film, *The Joy of Life* world premiered at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival and went on to play a pivotal role in renewing debate about the need for a suicide barrier on the Golden Gate Bridge, as well as earning the 2005 Outfest Award for Outstanding Artistic Achievement and the 2005 NewFest Award for Best U.S. Screenplay. Jenni's most recent short film, *575 Castro St.* premiered at Sundance and the Berlin Panorama in 2009. Commissioned for the release of Gus Van Sant's *Milk*, the film can still be seen online at the *Milk* website, on the Sundance YouTube Screening Room page, and in a permanent installation at 575 Castro Street (home of the Human Rights Campaign Action Center & Store).

In 1995 Jenni was one of the founders of PlanetOut.com where she established the massive queer film industry resource, PopcornQ and pioneered the first online showcase for LGBT short films (the PlanetOut Online Cinema). More recently she co-founded the first global LGBT streaming movie platform, WolfeOnDemand.com. She is on many advisory boards including the Outfest/UCLA Legacy Project for LGBT Film Preservation, and Canyon Cinema. She is also on the board of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival

and is very proud to be the co-founder of the legendary Queer Brunch at Sundance. She frequently serves as an advisor to filmmakers and is currently a consultant on Deb Shoal's new lesbian feature, *AWOL* (now in pre-production).

As a film collector and archivist Jenni's historical movie trailer programs (including the ever-popular: *Homo Promo*, which is now available on DVD) have been shown at film festivals around the world, as have her many short films and videos. In addition to her vast curatorial experience (including stints at the Minneapolis/St. Paul and San Francisco LGBT Film Festivals) Jenni has written extensively about LGBT film since 1985 for publications too numerous to mention. Her wildly entertaining coffee table tome, *The Queer Movie Poster Book* was a 2005 Lambda Literary Award nominee. Materials from Jenni's personal archive of rare LGBT film prints have been utilized in dozens of films including such acclaimed documentaries as *Stonewall Uprising* and *I Am Divine*. She can be seen in several documentary films offering her perspectives on LGBT cinema history, most recently in the IFC documentary, *Fabulous! The Story of Queer Cinema*. She is also featured in the documentary, *Vito* a film portrait of Vito Russo (author of *The Celluloid Closet* and one of her most significant mentors).

Cast & Crew:

Producer Julie Dorf has been doing fundraising in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1989 when she founded the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. She has also worked as a fundraiser for the Vanguard Foundation, as a consultant for the Open Society Institute, and as director of philanthropic services at Horizons Foundation. She is currently senior advisor at the Council for Global Equality. In 1990 she co-directed the first documentary about gay life in the former Soviet Union, *Outcasts in Moscow and St. Petersburg*. She was also co-producer of Jenni's *The Joy of Life*.

Cinematographer Sophia Constantinou is senior producer and director of photography at [Citizen Film](#), a San Francisco-based production company dedicated to telling personal stories with care and dignity. Her films have shown around the globe in festivals, museums and on TV. Her most recent feature-length documentary, *Divided Loyalties*, traces the history of Cyprus through the stories of exiles and immigrants, who reflect back on their lost homeland. Sophia also shot Jenni Olson's *The Joy of Life*.

Editor Dawn Logsdon's career has been dedicated to making films about civic issues and city life. She directed and produced *Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans* which premiered nationally at the Tribeca International Film Festival and won the SFIFF Golden Gate Award for Best Documentary and was a PBS Black History Month feature presentation three years in a row. Dawn co-directed and edited *Big Joy: The Adventures of James Broughton* and *Lindy Boggs: Steel and Velvet*. Dawn edited the Sundance Award-winning *Paragraph 175* by Rob Epstein & Jeffrey Freidman, Academy Award-nominated *Weather Underground* by Sam Green, Emmy award-winning *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?* by Connie Field, the Peabody award-winning *The Castro* and Jenni Olson's 1997 short *Blue Diary*. She is also currently in production on *Free for All: Inside the Public Library*.

Sound Designer & Recordist Jim Lively is a San Francisco audio engineer who has worked on innumerable independent film projects — including *The Joy of Life*.

Additional Voiceover Tony Kushner's plays include "A Bright Room Called Day," "Angels in America," and "Homebody/Kabul." He is the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, an Emmy Award, two Tony Awards, three Obie Awards and an Oscar nomination — among many others. Among his numerous achievements he has also written the screenplays for *Lincoln* (2012), *Munich* (2005) and *Angels in America* (2003).

Executive Producer [Paul Marcarelli](#) is an actor, writer and producer and co-founder of Table Ten Films. As an actor he is best known as the Verizon Guy ("Can you hear me now?") in commercials for Verizon Wireless. His screenwriting credits include *Clutter* (the acclaimed comedy-drama starring Carol Kane) and *The Green* (the award-winning gay drama starring Cheyenne Jackson).

Consulting Producer Michael Ehrenzweig's award winning documentaries and non-fiction features have been seen on PBS, The History Channel, HBO, National Geographic Channel, in theaters, and on television worldwide. He has worked as producer, line producer, production manager, and consulting producer on such films as *The Celluloid Closet*, *Paragraph 175*, *The Cockettes*, *Freedom Machines*, *The Rush* and *Here Is Looking At You Boy*.

Historical Advisor [Lisbeth Haas](#) is a professor of history and feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she also chairs the feminist studies department. Her research and writing consider colonialism, imperialism, and their legacies, focusing on the multiethnic populations of California. She is the author of many books and publications including *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936* (UC Press, 1995).

Historical Advisor [Steven Hackel](#) is a professor of history at the University of California, Riverside where he specializes in colonial America, the Spanish borderlands, California missions, and California Indians. A leading scholar of Spanish California, he is the author of *Junípero Serra: California's Founding Father* (2013). He is also the general editor of the Huntington Library's Early California Population Project, and the director of the Early California Cultural Atlas, a spatial history of colonial California funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Voiceover Director [Sawyer Steele](#) is Senior Producer for The Moxie Institute Film Studio + Lab and Senior Producer and co-founder of Let it Ripple: The Cloud Filmmaking Studio. He has produced, written and co-edited several award-winning films with acclaimed director Tiffany Shlain. His work with Shlain has been instrumental in pioneering a new type of participatory filmmaking they call "Cloud Filmmaking."

Sound Mixer [Lora Hirschberg](#) is an award-winning sound mixer whose credits range from mainstream blockbusters like *Into the Wild*, *Panic Room*, *The Dark Knight* and *Inception* (for which she won an Academy Award) to acclaimed independent documentaries like *To Be Takei*, *How To Survive a Plague*, *Trembling Before God* and *Paragraph 175*.

Sound Recordist [Lauretta Molitor](#) has been working as a sound recordist in the San Francisco Bay Area since the early 1990s and has worked on such acclaimed documentary projects as *The Celluloid Closet*, *We Were Here* and *Inequality for All*.

Associate Producers: [Tom Rielly](#) is an accomplished actor, stand-up comic and satirist and is director of the TED Conferences TED Fellows program. **Paul Lee** specializes in producing films for first-time filmmakers, LGBT filmmakers, and in international co-productions. **Marc Henrich** is a filmmaker, film teacher and editor who has taught editing and film history in the Bay Area for many years.

Second Cinematographers: **Alison Kelly** An MFA graduate of the American Film Institute Alison's wide-range of experience as a cinematographer includes dozens of documentary, short and feature projects. **Abigail Severance** earned an M.F.A. in Directing from UCLA and is writer/director of numerous award-winning films. **Christian Bruno** has received acclaim and awards at festivals around the world. He is currently in production on a feature documentary, *Strand: A Natural History of Cinema*. [William E. Jones](#) is an artist, filmmaker and writer. His 1991 feature *Massillon* was a formative influence on *The Royal Road* writer-director Jenni Olson.

Assistant Editors [Ewan Duarte](#) is an artist, writer and award-winning independent filmmaker. **Alexis Hazelwood** is a San Francisco-based filmmaker. [Amanda Hudson](#) is a San Diego-based photographer.

Director's Statement:

I've always found it challenging to adequately characterize in words the complex nature of my filmmaking. I can describe the ostensible topics (in this case an array of interests ranging from the Mexican American War to the production of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*) but of equal, if not greater, importance is the style and cinematic strategy of the storytelling. My simple photographic compositions and the lengthy duration of my shots are crucial components of this vision (in my favorite review of *The Joy of Life*, *The Village Voice* called the film: "thrillingly minimalist.") My dedication to the analog medium of 16mm film is a significant aspect of my creative aesthetic in achieving the experience I seek to create for my audiences. Through mostly wide and very static long takes, my films preserve a record of California's rapidly changing urban landscape. With great affection, and an understated sense of civic pride, I aspire to make the mundane heroic and to give viewers a way of seeing that they can take out into the world when they leave the theater. Perceptually and spiritually, my work challenges viewers to slow down and pay attention to the moment and to the world around them, drawing attention to the beauty of what might—at first glance—appear mundane, but is in fact a rich tapestry of architecture, light and shadow, and ephemeral history. For me, the joy of my films is found in the poetry of the static image — in the experience of time passing on film, undistracted by plot, actors, dialogue and other narrative conventions. An internal drama is evoked in the sensitivities of each viewer who is open to the subtleties of these mundane shots that are almost bereft of movement and sound.

Praise & Acclaim for Jenni's previous feature, *The Joy of Life*:

"Another perfect film with a masterful screenplay."
—indieWIRE.com

"Thrillingly minimalist. Gently hypnotic."
—*The Village Voice*

"Provocative and evocative, both political and erotic."
—MediaRights.org

"A cinematic love poem...Beautiful."
—*San Francisco Bay Guardian*

"Simply stunning to behold."
—AfterEllen.com

"Absolutely brilliant. A poetic and heartfelt adventure."
—SFGate.com

"The festival's best film. . . vividly evocative."
—*The Boston Globe* (from review of Boston L&G Film Fest)

"The pick of the festival. . . one of the most sensuous documentaries you will ever see."
—*The East Bay Express* (from review of SF LGBT Film Fest)

"Lonely and beautiful...unlike anything you've seen (or heard) before."
—*The Washington Blade*

91% Fresh — Rotten Tomatoes Rating!

***The Joy of Life* — Official Selection:**

Sundance Film Festival | San Francisco International Film Festival | London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival | Seattle International Film Festival | SILVERDOCS: AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Festival | Provincetown International Film Festival | New York Lesbian & Gay Film Festival (**Best US Screenplay Award**) | San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival | Outfest: Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Film Fest (**Outstanding Artistic Achievement Award**) | Vancouver International Film Festival | Viennale: Vienna International Film Festival | **Winner: Marlon Riggs Award, San Francisco Film Critics Circle**

About *The Joy of Life*:

The Joy of Life combines stunning 16mm landscape cinematography with a bold, lyrical voiceover (performed by LA-based artist/actor Harriet "Harry" Dodge) to share two San Francisco stories: the history of the Golden Gate Bridge as a suicide landmark, and the story of a butch dyke in San Francisco searching for love and self-discovery. *The Joy of Life* is a film about landscapes, both physical and emotional.