



a Film by Benjamin Schindler

The Film

PLAYLAND USA evokes memories of the global longing for escapism and illusion and portrays the continuing loss of grip on reality in the United States of America.

Benjamin Schindler's exceptional documentary PLAYLAND USA takes us on a journey through the United States as a country of unlimited narratives. It explores the great myths, stories and dreams that contribute to the creation of its identity, both past and present, influenced by the world's largest entertainment industry.

Embedded in allusions to Hollywood movies and other symbols of pop culture, the film bows from the conquest of the New World to the settlement of alien planets, linking past and future, traversing various genres, epochs, and fictitious locations. One by one, a doomsday preacher, a ghost hunter, Santa Claus, an indigenous storyteller, a toothless western lady, a UFO-believing cinema owner, talking dolls lead us through the film. They all seem less concerned with authenticity than upholding the belief in the impossible.

Fantasy and magic clash with references to contemporary issues such as racism, populism and gun violence, exposing the mechanisms of global narrative traditions. The boundaries between fact and fiction, dream and madness are becoming increasingly blurred, opening up a new level of reflection of a film in film.

About

Title: PLAYLAND USA

Genre: Poetic Documentary Feature, 1st time director

Language: English

Subtitles: German, French, English

Running Time: 88 Minuten

Country and Year of Production: Germany 2019

Screening Format: 2K DCP 2,39:1, Surround 5.1

Trailer & Homepage

www.playlandusa.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/playlandusafilm>

Booking

barnsteiner-Film

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Crew

Director: Benjamin Schindler

Script: Benjamin Schindler, Jan Wilde

Cinematography: Benjamin Schindler

Montage: Yana Höhnerbach, Benjamin Schindler

Original Music: Jan F. Kurth, Lukas Truniger

Sound Design: Lukas Truniger

Commissioning Editors: Sabine Rollberg (WDR/ARTE), Jutta Krug (WDR)

Producers: Levin Hübner, Benjamin Schindler, Fabian Wallenfels

a zeitgebilde Filmproduktion & Hübner/Wallenfels production

in coproduction with WDR in cooperation with arte

Filming Locations (selection)

Times Square • New York City • New York

Crazy Horse Memorial • South Dakota

Ark Encounter • Williamstown • Kentucky

Oconaluftee Indian Village • Cherokee • North Carolina

Jamestown Settlement • Virginia

Colonial Williamsburg • Virginia

Washington, D.C.

American Revolution Museum at Yorktown • Yorktown • Virginia

Metropolis • Illinois

Temple Theatre • Meridian • Mississippi

Fort Bridger State Historic Site • Wyoming

City of Tombstone • Arizona

Motel Rapid • Rapid City • South Dakota

Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid • Memphis • Tennessee

Devils Tower National Monument • Wyoming

Golden Spike National Historic Site • Utah

Cape Canaveral • Florida

USS Yorktown (CV-10) • Patriots Point • North Carolina

The Great Passion Play • Eureka Springs • Arkansas

Christ in the Smokies Museum and Gardens • Gatlinburg • Tennessee

Mysterious Mansion • Gatlinburg • Tennessee

The Island in Pigeon Forge • Pigeon Forge • Tennessee

LBJ Presidential Library • Austin • Texas

Fields of the Wood • Murphy • North Carolina

North Pole - Home of Santa's Workshop • New York

Atlantic City • New Jersey

Century 16 Movie Theater • Aurora • Colorado

U.S. Space and Rocket Center • Huntsville • Alabama

Biosphere 2 • Arizona

International UFO Museum and Research Center • Roswell • New Mexico

Reviews

programmokino.de: »(...) Benjamin Schindler has created quite a masterpiece with his refined form, in a fascinating imagery and with his occasionally slightly overriding will to art. And although the history of the US is in the foreground: This is not about blunt anti-Americanism or the well-known Trump-bashing - Benjamin Schindler uses almost all available cinematic means to represent his view of a whole country.« (Gaby Sikorski)

epd Film: »(...) The German director Benjamin Schindler delivers a capricious debut with »Playland USA«. Schindler studied art, and you can see that. His images, with their majestic traveling shots and grandiose widescreen compositions, are of great aesthetic power, of exquisite beauty; they mostly speak for themselves, without voiceover and structuring elements. Schindler brings her into a long, associative flow, leaves a lot of things for herself, does not even seek meaning or valuation. He is not a storyteller, not an analyst, more of a formalist in search.« (Frank Schnelle)

Film-Dienst: »(...) Benjamin Schindler's "Playland USA" (...) takes a journey through the history of American self-images, which reflect religious delusions, historical myths and merciless entertainment; the film leads to fascinating locations, such as a gigantic Noah's Ark, a pilgrimage site of Christian fundamentalists, or a unsuccessful amusement park. Benjamin Schindler was surprised by the enormous end time feeling he was confronted with on his journey through the Midwest. His images and discussions cast a spell and help to understand the current political and cultural crisis in the United States.« (Wolfgang Hamdorf)

Saarbrücker Zeitung: »One of the formally most interesting documentaries [of the twelve films in the Max Ophüls competition] is Benjamin Schindler's essayistic search for clues "Playland USA", which attempts to trace the US illusion culture in a large, bizarre picture arc, from Western backdrops to re-enactment troupes (with wigs & knickerbockers, with cannons, carriages & steam locks) to the hollywood staging of politics ranges. Schindler's fingerless play with the American whipping of fantasy and reality is not without comedy.« (Christoph Schreiner)

Deutsche Welle: »How could Trump become the 45th President of the United States? This question asks indirect also the German director Benjamin Schindler. (...) "I am interested in the extent to which American pop culture and cinema myths find their way into politics and thus into our reality and how narrative methods are used, for example, to justify the need for war on the population or simply to sell consumer goods better." The results of the young director are astounding: for one and a half hours, Schindler presents scenes from the USA without commentary to the spectators: historical plays, amusement parks, religious performances - the Americans in search of identity. That many people are now more interested in popular myths from Hollywood than reality is another result of Schindler's cinematic research.« (Jochen Kürten)





„Granny“, Arizona
Western Lady



Santa, North Pole



Heather, Pennsylvania
Ghosthunter

History is made

For his fascinating documentary "PLAYLAND USA", German director Benjamin Schindler embarked on a journey through the United States of America as a kind of modern myth researcher for the scenes of the great narratives that move the country and to which the nation appeals. He tries to fathom the sonorous rhetoric of America as "The Chosen Nation" and thereby presents a panopticon of a community that constantly has to assure itself of its self-certified exceptionalism through a cosmos of images in which it appears to be caught.

The myth is a story without a narrator, as theorized by Roland Barthes, the French cultural scholar who explored the "myths of everyday life" in consumer society. This makes it an ingenious move for the director to do without a "tour guide" on his journey, which is also a journey through the imagined and filmed history of the United States. There is no voice-over to set a direction; Benjamin Schindler trusts entirely in the assembly of formal associations and symbolic images as well as a complex sound design. His journey leads through different time periods, through topographical locations and pseudoplaces – places charged with (hi)stories whose realities seem to consist of pop-cultural images. Implications are evoked in the viewer that show in an intelligent way just how effective, timeless, and suggestive the myths are that make up the American Dream, and that their scope and impact are not limited to the US.

Many of the protagonists are "living historians": by means of re-enactments and adapting events from the past, they attempt to lift the distance between past and present. They strive for authenticity and at the same time address the ghostly power of cultural images and scenes that are indelibly imprinted on us and live on. These pictures are not from the history books, however; they come from the canon of the cinema. They come from the dreams and visions that the classic Hollywood film has produced and are now experienced as reality. A representative of the indigenous population visited by the director on a reservation recalls that the corners and edges of these great narratives have been grinded away. The self-conception of the United States springs from a heroic picture of history in which the dark sides of its past appear only marginally. But regardless of their truth, could not the wise words of the charismatic Native American come from a movie? The film asks essential questions: What is seeing? How do we see the world? And: What is invisible, for us, for others? How can that which is invisible be deciphered and thus recovered? In Benjamin Schindler's daring and successful film experiment, different realities meet. By evoking films and narratives that are a formative force in US society, including genre and movie quotes from history to disaster movies without becoming explicit (nevertheless making them immediately recognizable through their archetypes), Schindler succeeds in blurring the lines between fiction and documentation in the imagination of the viewer. The hidden elements in his picture puzzle film become visible. Different levels, both narrative as well as non-narrative, are linked. The viewer is led into in a sensual-poetic experiential space, a "twilight zone", in which he finally enters an oniric, dreamlike state.

The viewer's experience of watching "PLAYLAND USA" is complex and multidimensional. There is a self-reflection regarding film as a medium in which a blurring between film and reality in the dream movie experience is once again reflected. In addition, "PLAYLAND USA" cleverly questions the possibilities and limits of the representation of history. But even more: Benjamin Schindler draws connecting lines between the past and the present: Films have always utilized historical material, and the question of their authenticity has always been challenged. Still, more people today than ever before obtain their historical knowledge from audiovisual media and do not reflect on what is fact and

what is fiction. They consume myths, a suggestively reduced world view which despite drawing from history, at the same time has evaporated history. Populists like Donald Trump, himself a "TV offspring", a figure from the media-imprinted picture cosmos of the USA, have recognized that complex globalization processes overwhelm many. Figures like him know the collective longing for simple narratives and use their urge for escapism by filling myths with new updated meanings. At the same time, in the last few years another trend has taken hold: everything, even the anonymous and ahistorical, is now equipped with a story. We live in a society of the authenticity cult. We fetishize the "real" - whatever is meant with this vague term. We long for originality: for the good, true, simple things. To create this authenticity, history is simulated - like performers of re-enactments do. Populists are brilliant at playing this card of social obsession with authenticity. The we-versus-the-top rhetoric plays with the yearning for authenticity and the real, leaving the facts behind. The bottom line of Benjamin Schindler's film remains: "PLAYLAND USA" is a clever and entertaining survey of the USA and simultaneously a subtle, excellently composed reflection on the power of the film medium and Hollywood as the dream machine.

Sven Pötting (Filmgazette)

The Filmmakers



Benjamin Schindler

Director, zeitgebilde Filmproduktion (www.zeitgebilde.de)

Benjamin is a graduate of the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. His diploma film was shown at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen and at the Curtas Vila do Conde IFF, among other festivals. The film served as a preliminary study for "PLAYLAND USA". He is interested in hybrid cinematic forms and explores the limits of the documentary form worldwide. Feature films for which he was a co-director and cinematographer have premiered in German cinemas. In addition, he contributes his curiosity for experimentation to video installations and stage projections for dance and theater projects



Levin Hübner

Producer, Hübner/Wallenfels (www.hwav.de)

Graduate of the ifs international film school Cologne. His films and shorts have been featured at some of the most important German festivals like the Berlinale or Oberhausen, and won awards like the Deutsche Kamerapreis and Max-Ophüls-Preis. Together with his partner in crime Fabian he's currently developing and producing for web, cinema and TV, in collaboration with companies like Google, WDR, ARTE and the Film- und Medienstiftung NRW.

