

PLAY LAND LIFE



A documentary feature by
Benjamin Schindler

zeitgebilde Filmproduktion
Hübner/Wallenfels

Germany 2018, 88 min

WDR®

arte

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Logline

A poetic time travel fantasy through the imagined history of the United States as a modern fairyland, along the traces of our desire for illusion and escapism – fatally bound between fact and fiction, anticipating the current reality shifts in the US.

About

Title: PLAYLAND USA

Genre: Poetic Documentary Feature, 1st time director

Language: English

Subtitles: German, French, English

Running time: 88 Minuten

Country: Germany

Filming Location: USA

Screening Format: DCP 2K, Surround 5.1

Aspect Ratio: 2,39:1

Directed by Benjamin Schindler

Written by Benjamin Schindler & Jan Wilde

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

Produced by Levin Hübner, Benjamin Schindler & Fabian Wallenfels



Description

Washington isn't the capital of the US; Hollywood is. Or: the post-factual age started in 1492. Or: Noah's Ark once landed in the Promised Land, the United States of America. Benjamin Schindler's poetic documentary "PLAYLAND USA" shows the Land of Opportunity above all as one of unlimited identity formation between pop culture and Christian faith. Reality and staging, dream and madness, the sacred and the banal enter a vortex into which the movie immerses itself and finally blurs the lines.

The world has awoken from the American Dream – at least since reality was trumped by staged fiction. But when fiction comes after the dream, where was and is “reality”?

The film draws a line in cinematic images from Noah's Ark to the colonization of Mars, including dinosaurs, Indians, and superheroes, of course. It becomes increasingly clear that Benjamin Schindler has made many "American Dreams" into an "American Nightmare", inscribing quotes of popculture and Hollywood into a biblical history so that at some point it almost seems logical that the United States colonizes Mars with waving flags. The montage creates fractures and irritations by identifying images and narratives as a means of fiction and manipulation – exposing collective emotional control through politics, advertising, and pop culture. When the film recounts the shooting at the Batman premiere in Aurora, reality and fiction have finally merged.

The protagonists in "PLAYLAND USA" hardly seem to be interested in what is real and what is fiction. They do not look at history through scholarly books or museums, but through reenacted "historical" battles that are not very authentic, but nevertheless contribute to the formation of identity in the present and the future. Facts and interpretations, originals and signs are so intermixed that Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco would applaud.

A Thomas Jefferson double says in the film: "The profits of the future will be found in the wisdom of the past." What sort of wisdom can be found in a largely fictional hollowed past – "PLAYLAND USA" asks this impressively.



Roger, Mississippi
Theater Director & Pilot



„Granny“, Arizona
Western Lady



Santa, North Pole



Heather, Pennsylvania
Ghost Hunter



Richard, Pennsylvania
Vietnam Veteran



Fred, Cherokee
Storyteller

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 pseudo-places – 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.

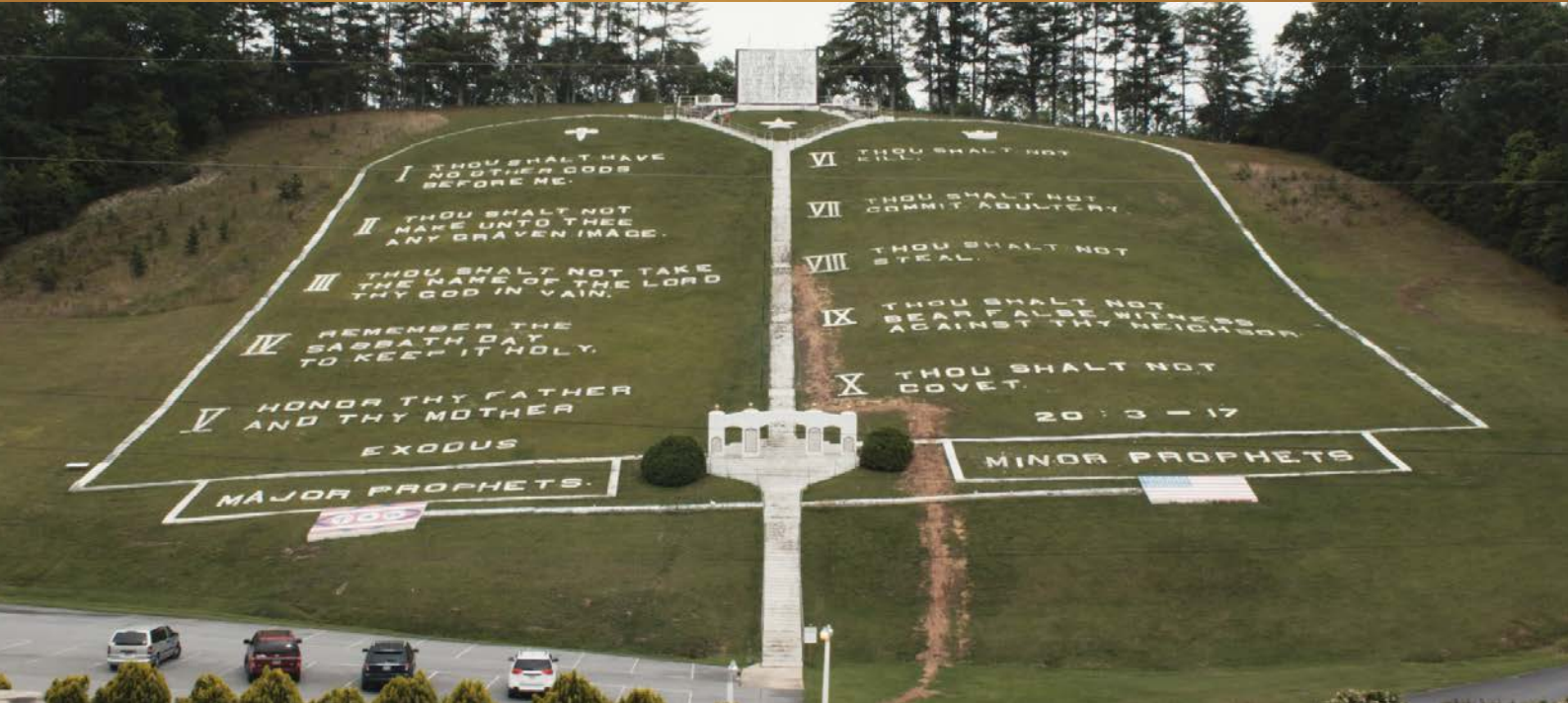
The viewer's experience of watching "PLAYLAND USA" is complex and multidimensional. There is a self-reflection regarding film as a medium in which a blurring between film and reality in the dream movie experience is once again reflected. In addition, "PLAYLAND USA" cleverly questions the possibilities 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)





Bios & Links



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.

Trailer & Homepage:
www.playlandusa.com

Screener

Please keep the following link confidential:

<https://vimeo.com/266940722>
PW: OconalufteeCV-10

PLAYLAND USA



A ZEITGEBILDE FILMPRODUKTION & HÜBNER/WALLENFELS PRODUCTION IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH WDR IN COOPERATION WITH ARTE

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SÄCHSISCHE LANDESANSTALT FÜR PRIVATEN RUNDFUNK UND NEUE MEDIEN CINEMATOGRAPHY BENJAMIN SCHINDLER FILM EDITING YANA HÖHNERBACH

BENJAMIN SCHINDLER SOUND DESIGN LUKAS TRUNIGER ORIGINAL MUSIC JAN F. KURTH LUKAS TRUNIGER RE-RECORDING MIXER ALEXANDER WEUFFEN HOLGER BUFF JASCHA VIEHL

COLORIST FELIX TROLLDENIER LINE PRODUCER ELISABETH KREFTA PRODUCTION MANAGER SILKE ABENDSCHEIN COMMISSIONING EDITORS SABINE ROLLBERG (WDR/ARTE)

JUTTA KRUG (WDR) PRODUCED BY LEVIN HÜBNER BENJAMIN SCHINDLER FABIAN WALLENFELS WRITTEN BY BENJAMIN SCHINDLER JAN WILDE DIRECTED BY BENJAMIN SCHINDLER

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TROLLFILM

Please contact us for further information regarding the film, team, or a high-resolution screener. We are happy to assist you.



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