

BLONDES IN THE JUNGLE



**A film by Ball Deep International
2009. 48 minutes, Color, 16mm on DV.**

WINNER: "Best Narrative Feature", 2009 Chicago Underground Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION: International Film Festival Rotterdam 2010

OFFICIAL SELECTION: 2010 NewFilmmakers NY Winter Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION: Columbia Gorge International Film Festival 2010

OFFICIAL SELECTION: The 11th Melbourne Underground Film Festival 2010

Short Synopsis

Comedy by artist-filmmakers Lev Kalman and Whitney Horn. On a hunt for the Fountain of Youth, three teenagers in 1980's Honduras buy drugs, harm nature and have magical encounters. Tons of landscape footage, a meditation on Mayan Archaeology and a heavy TV teen vibe highlight this very funny impulse-buy spiritual adventure.

Original soundtrack by 1987 World Beat band *El Jefe and The Executive Look*, featuring contributions by members of Aa, Asobi Seksu, Birthday Boyz, Vampire Weekend and Julianna Barwick.

<http://www.blondesinthejungle.com>

Long Synopsis

The film begins silently, the camera wandering through the jungle. We hear a distant drumming and follow the sound to reveal Armani Rivette, a Zack Morris-looking drug-dealer, shirtless, dancing alone to the music in his headphones. A title appears: "HONDURAS 1987."

Sitting on a porch are Jerome, Chino and Amber. Jerome is the teen child of white expats and Chino and Amber (brother and sister, 18 and 19 respectively) are visiting him from New York. They are lazily finishing their breakfast. A waterfall rumbles in the distance. They smoke drugs and listen to the radio as Jerome translates the show they're listening to. It is the story of the Children's Crusade, how thousands of young people in the middle ages went on a quest to Jerusalem only to be swindled, sold into slavery, and drown in the Mediterranean Sea.

Chino, Jerome and Amber, the blondes, enter the jungle. For the next half hour of the film, they have a series of experiences that emphasize the blondes' strange lack of connection with their surroundings. With your eyes closed, you might think they were still in Manhattan. Also throughout this part of the film, silent sequences of the jungle, shot hand-held like tourist films, interrupt the story. These jungle sequences remind the viewers of the peculiar physical setting of the film and give them time to consider the blondes' quest in context.

Chino kills a snake which may or may not be dangerous; Amber gets stuck in quicksand; she sees a monkey in the trees and befriends it. Out of nowhere, Armani Rivette approaches the blondes and, in a bizarre stream-of-consciousness sales-pitch, sells them sunscreen, bug-spray and three grams of cocaine. Amber explains to him why they're in the jungle: funded by their friend, a novelist named Bret, they are looking for the Fountain of Youth. They plan to swim in it, though they only vaguely understand what will happen. Armani joins the blondes along their path a bit then suddenly wanders off. Soon after, high and paranoid, Jerome freaks out and accidentally murders Amber's monkey. He apologizes and she says to "forget it."

The blondes camp for the night. Amber has a nightmare of cartoon vampire bats. She wakes up and sees a hunky, near-nude, dark red man crouched beside her. He has a tail. She doesn't know if she's dreaming, but she follows him into the woods. She asks "Are you a god?" and they begin to make out. The next morning (or rather at 1 p.m.) Amber wakes up her companions and tells them the Mayan Jaguar God has revealed to her the true path to the Fountain of Youth. Though skeptical, they agree to follow her, after doing another round of coke.

Bret parachutes into the jungle and finds the blondes. They do coke together and he tells them the story of his agent in Hollywood. She was another blonde in the jungle - in this case Tanzania - who emotionally ruined an elephant then stole its ivory. Now with Bret along, the blondes continue on the path. Very soon Amber finds the Fountain. And with new age music playing from their tape deck, they all change into their bathing suits. We see Amber jump into the water.

Here we leave the blondes and begin what appears to be a Discovery Channel-style documentary about the Mayan archaeologist E. Arthur Thompson. Only soon we realize that the narrator is the Mayan Jaguar God from earlier in the film. Here it is very clear that the actor is a white Ivy-League type in body paint. The Jaguar God reads excerpts from Thompson's book "Into the Well of Sacrifice" about a large expedition in the mid 1960s by British and American Archaeologists to excavate an ancient Mayan sacrificial well. He uses this book, which includes passages about a modern Mayan Christmas celebration and a vision of an ancient Mayan Philosopher-King, to make a point: that while true cross-cultural experiences may be impossible, seeking them is a crucial part of human growth, and the essence of adventure.

Directors' Bios

Lev Kalman (b. 1982) & Whitney Horn (b. 1982) are filmmakers in the alternative tradition of Warhol, Burnett, Fischli & Weiss. Their irreverent and experimental approach to narrative filmmaking mixes the exotic and artificial with the casual and idiosyncratic. Since beginning their collaboration as undergraduates at Columbia University in 2003, they have produced over a dozen films, music videos and video works. Kalman is based in Brooklyn, Horn in San Francisco.

About the Soundtrack

In the film, the blondes listen to one tape over and over. The tape is by a fictional, very eclectic 1987 Wold Beat band called *El Jefe and the Executive Look*. Like Devo, the *Executive Look* make music that both punks and preps could like, and thus could be shared by Chino and Amber.

The music was recorded by our friends: Vampire Weekend, John from Aa, Judd from the Birthday Boyz, Billy Pavone from Asobi Seksu, and Julianna Barwick. They were inspired by The Specials, Kid Creole and the Coconuts, Art of Noise, Julee Cruise and all the anonymous bands playing in party scenes on Miami Vice.

Sometimes the music is the blondes' soundtrack - as in, it's what they're listening to in their story. But other times it acts as another distancing device, like the silent sequences or the epilogue, and takes the viewer out of their story. Suddenly you lose the flow of the narrative and are just enjoying a jungle music video.

Before the soundtrack was recorded, co-director Lev Kalman made inspirational mixtapes to convey the vibes he and Whitney Horn were going for. You can download [Inspirational Mix 1](#) and [Inspirational Mix 2](#) from the film's [website](#).

Recently [Pitchfork Media](#) made available two tracks by *El Jefe and the Executive Look*. Read about and download [The Fountain](#) and Blair from [Pitchfork](#).

Movie Facts

- E. Arthur Thompson is a fictional composite of real archaeologists J. Eric S. Thompson, Edward H. Thompson, Arthur Thompson and Donald Ediger.
- With the exception of Ingrid Schram, a professional model and actress who plays Amber and won the role through a casting call, all of the actors in the film are non-professionals. They are friends of the directors and have been regular cast members of their short films. Their roles were written especially for them.
- The Bret character is an homage to 80's young-author-of-his-generation Bret Easton Ellis.
- The jungle scenes were all filmed in the small village of Las Mangas, near La Ceiba, Honduras. The only crew on location were Kalman and Horn - and occasionally jungle guides recruited from the teachers and students of a nearby after-school program.
- 2 scenes were shot in New York City: the *Club Sacrifice* flashback (filmed at a Columbia University School of the Arts lecture room, repainted and decorated by the directors) and the monkey footage (filmed at the Bronx Zoo).

Press Quotes

Cine-File

"If you could put a healing balm on the psychic wound that is the '80s, it would probably contain a dose of the original toxin. *Blondes in the Jungle* is just such a remedy ... [it] takes a panoramic view, at the same time gently revealing hypocrisies and reveling in a surplus of pleasures."

Bad Lit

"*Blondes in the Jungle* is a cheerful, genial and strange comedy, yet it's so good-natured and screwy that it's easy to go along with all of the improbable happenings - and there's certainly plenty of those. Plus, the scenery is absolutely beautiful to look at with gorgeous cinematography by Horn."

Cineville

"Mumblecore to admire: at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, *Blondes in the Jungle* by Lev Kalman and Whitney Horn."

The L Magazine

"Delightfully askew"

Sara Blaylock, curator

"Sexual appeal, adventure appeal, and voyeuristic appeal with super funny dialogue and great delivery."

Sara, audience testimonial

"*Blondes in the Jungle* made me younger, made me older, and reminded me to seek the hidden and beautiful fountains."

Thunderblizzard, audience testimonial

"Best of the festival. I could have watched it on a loop. While it was amusing to try to summarize it when I got home, I stood no chance of capturing its--what?--wallop. Make no mistake: this isn't just a good time; it's good for you."

Daily Candy: The Weekend Guide

"Saved by the Bell meets Werner Herzog"

Philadelphia City Paper: The Agenda

"Arrive at the store early to shop and cop the Blondes' 80s post-preppy look."

SF Remezcla: Featured Event

"This movie is full of surprises."

Pitchfork Media [about soundtrack]

"The film's soundtrack features contributions from a cross-section of the NYC indie rock mafia...Listen to the haunting track 'The Fountain', by Julianna Barwick and Aa's John Atkinson."

Wears the Trousers Magazine [about soundtrack]

"'The Fountain' is a thickly-layered, virtually a cappella choral duet between Julianna and Aa's John Atkinson that enchants as much as it disorients...It's rather lovely, actually."

Interview with Lev Kalman and Whitney Horn, directors

"We think of ourselves as Eric Rohmer if he were retarded."

Selected Dialogue

AMBER: So Jacinto, when you say he's an Indian, you mean like Mayan?

JEROME: (cringes) Yes.

AMBER: What was that beautiful language he was speaking? Was it Mayonnaise?

AMBER: Guys, I know this is obvious, but I really hope we find the fountain of youth. I want to go back to school looking my best.

ARMANI: (counting the money) Hunter college on the 4,5,6! Good school. Coke's for shit, though. Who's your dealer? Arm and Hammer? May as well just go to the supermarket. Bake yourself a cake.

AMBER: It doesn't work like that. If you're our age you just stay young. I don't know if it's for 50 years and then you have to come back - but that's cool 'cause we're gonna know where it is - or if you are young until a regular age like 100 and then you just die. Or maybe it makes you immortal. And if that sucks or gets boring you could just kill yourself. Whatever, I don't know how it works, but you definitely stay young for like a long time.

CHINO : You're so stupid. You let an Indian guy fuck you in the woods. Like, did you use a condom?

AMBER: Chino, gods don't have AIDS.

AMBER: Bret! How did you find us?

BRET : I have a lot of money.

BRET: Finally my agent visits the elephant. She walks up, cuts off the BFF necklace, walks twenty yards over, and ties it around the neck of some other elephant. The other elephant is real puffy and gay-looking, if you can picture that. Well you know how sensitive elephants are. That night it dies of a broken heart.

BRET : This is a great rainforest.

JEROME: Yeah.

BRET : We should really save it.

JAGUAR GOD (Reading Thompson): A dozen centuries ago, lacking precise instruments of observation, the priest-astronomer relied on his raw powers of perception to study the slow movements of the celestial seas. How long those nights must have seemed, and how eagerly he must have awaited the rising sun to warm his dew-soaked body or the dawn breezes to drive away the too attentive insects. A croaking chorus of frogs chanted around us. The sound was unforgettable.

JAGUAR GOD: I think some things can't be communicated across cultures. For example I belong to god culture and you're humans. I mean, I could say to you guys that Zeus and I went out to the bars last night, picked up some sluts, but you wouldn't really know what that means.

JAGUAR GOD: So what if Thompson couldn't know ancient Mayan culture as the ancient Mayans really did? The point is, Thompson wouldn't have had that vision if he had stayed at home. This vision deepened his understanding - made him a better scholar and a better teacher. Thompson opened himself up to the world and it changed him. That's why people go on adventures.

Screening History

June 06, 2010
IT'S A GAGE PARK FILM FESTIVAL!
Camp Bell - Chicago, Illinois

February 09, 2010
NEW FILMMAKERS NY
Anthology Film Archives - New York, New York

January 29, 2010
39TH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM
International Premiere

Thanksgiving weekend 2009
A-Z WEST - Joshua Tree, California

November 11, 2009
SANTOS PARTY HOUSE - New York, New York
Live music by Julianna Barwick and John Atkinson, Cool Places Soundsystem

September 18, 2009
SHOWPAPER BENEFIT BLOWOUT - Brooklyn, New York
"Blondes in the Jungle and Friends"

September 13, 2009
CHICAGO UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL
World Festival Premiere, Winner: Best Narrative Feature

July 25, 2009
A.P.E. GALLERY - Northampton, Massachusetts

July 10, 2009
OMA VINTAGE - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

June 11, 2009
GALLERY AT THE LEROY NEIMAN CENTER FOR PRINT STUDIES
Columbia University - New York, New York

June 05, 2009
MONKEY TOWN - Brooklyn, New York
NY Premiere

April 16, 2009
ARTISTS TELEVISION ACCESS - San Francisco, California
World Premiere

Main Credits

BY BALL DEEP INTERNATIONAL
Lev Kalman and Whitney Horn

CAST

André Frechette III – Bret
Trevor Hoff – Armani Rivette
Coogan Martin – Mayan Jaguar God
Travis Nutting – Jerome
Ingrid Schram – Amber
James Ward – Chino

MUSIC BY

EL JEFE AND THE EXECUTIVE LOOK

John F. Atkinson
Chris Baio
Julianna Barwick
Rostam Batmanglij
Mike Collins
Ezra Koenig
William Pavone
Judd Schoenholtz
Chris Thompson

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

Alex Orban

SOUND MIX

William Pavone

ADDITIONAL ADR

Jeff Curtin at Treefort Studios

ADDITIONAL COSTUMES

Sarah Dziedzic
Trevor Hoff
Julia McCallum

JUNGLE GUIDES

Francisco Javier Anchecta
Erick Jonathan Chávez
Scott Koch
Viktor Voight

HONDURAS FOOD AND LODGING

Cabañas en Bosque, Las Mangas

FILMED IN

Las Mangas, Honduras
New York City