

**BIG WHISKEY STUDIOS**

*PRESENTS*

**STERLING HALLARD BRIGHT DRAKE**

**A FILM BY ROBERT SICKELS**

**DOC SHORT • 15 MINUTES • 2012 • USA  
HDV | PHOTOS • DOLBY STEREO**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Through the process of challenging the old maxim “Dead Men Tell No Tales,” Sterling Hallard Bright Drake parses the line between truth and memory in solving the mysteries surrounding one of the world's most notorious and talked about tombstones. The result is a surprisingly funny and unexpectedly profound meditation on the seemingly inexhaustible optimism and promise of youth, the subsequent inescapable mortal realities of aging, and the bittersweet double-edged sword that comes part and parcel with true love.

## **FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT**

In the warmer months I am an avid cyclist. I often end evening road rides by meandering through Walla Walla, Washington's Mountain View Cemetery, which is right by my house. There's something magical about this cemetery at dusk in the summer. The colors, the stillness of the warm air, the shadows cast by the trees, the way the light catches certain tombstones, monolithic and otherwise—on certain nights the sum of the disparate elements adds up to something sublime. On one such summer night, I took a turn down a path I'd never taken, and was struck by a strange backlit outline off in the distance. It was a giant black X, a shape I'd never seen in a cemetery before. As I got closer, I slowed down to get a better look at this X, which turned out to be the headstone of Sterling Hallard Bright Drake and Lady Gwinavier. I was stunned by its unusual imagery and riveted by Sterling's epitaph, which reads, "An idealist and a dreamer, he died of loneliness and a broken heart, searching for a shrine he never found." I wondered what the story behind this magnificent tombstone could possibly be and I knew right then and there I was looking at my next movie.

I went home and did an internet search on the name and immediately realized that there is a whole culture of folks who are intensely interested in unusual tombstones. And among

the most popular “mystery” tombstones currently under discussion by these folks is none other than this one, right here in Walla Walla, just a couple of blocks from my home. Somewhere along the way someone had posted pics of the grave online and they’d spread across the web like wildfire; as a result, the tombstone's origin and meaning, to date unknown, were a cause célèbre. I had never been as excited about making a film as I was about making this one and now that it's done I still can't believe the dumb luck that I had to stumble across something so close to home that is such pure documentary gold.

Ultimately, I approached this project in such a way as to give the audience a myriad of narrative points of view while still allowing viewers to find their own meaning in this tombstone. “Their own meaning” is particularly important to me as I didn't go into this piece with a set point of view and then attempt to craft the film in such a way so as to convince the audience to come over to my side of the aisle. Instead, I approached it with no preconceived ideas at all. I didn't know what I was going to find or where the journey would take me. This process was hugely important to the final product as my having approached the film in this way now lets the audience share in the sense of discovery that comes with unraveling the tombstone's mysteries.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**PRODUCER/DIRECTOR/EDITOR** Robert Sickels has been obsessed with movies since he saw *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* at a Seattle drive-in when he was three years old. This fixation with all things cinematic ultimately led to his earning a PhD with an emphasis in film studies at the University of Nevada. He is a father, an independent filmmaker, a writer, a baseball junkie, a serious foodie, a semi-professional mixologist, hopelessly addicted to pop culture, and the founder of Big Whiskey Studios, which specializes in micro-documentary projects that emphasize engaging personal narratives over superfluous pyrotechnics.

Sickels has embraced the digital revolution and the accompanying freedom that comes with being able to make high quality projects with microscopic budgets. He is a self-taught filmmaker who has co-written, directed, edited, and/or produced several previous documentary shorts, all of which were made on a wing and a prayer and have screened widely in the US and abroad, including on PBS and at the Ann Arbor, Bare Bones, BFI London International, Big Bear, Chicago International, and Sidewalk Film Festivals.

Since 1999, Sickels has taught Film History and Filmmaking at Whitman College, where he is a Full Professor.

**CINEMATOGRAPHER/EDITOR** Zack Ellenbogen is a director, editor, cinematographer, and writer. He has directed a variety of films ranging in form from live action narratives, ski movies and advertisements to music videos and documentaries. Zack's most recent short documentary, *Believing Bigfoot*, is just now beginning to make the festival rounds.

**COMPOSER** Josh Karp (a.k.a. Budo) is a Seattle-born-and-bred multi-instrumentalist, composer, recording artist, producer, and touring musician. Equally at home on the stage and in the studio, Josh has forged a unique path along the way to becoming a noted presence in the modern music scene. Partnering with fellow Rhymesayers records recording artist Grieves, the two have created a signature sound that fills a beautiful gap between traditional hip-hop and something intangibly awesome. The duo tour constantly, and with the release of their debut Rhymesayers record, *Together/Apart*, they're poised to make a major impact on the national scene. Josh has also worked extensively with Ghanaian native and Minneapolis resident M.anifest, and is celebrating the release of M.anifest's second solo record, *The Immigrant Chronicles: Coming To America*. From production work for some of the Hip-Hop industry's most widely respected and renowned artists, to movie scoring, to his own solo projects, to his relentless touring schedule with Grieves, Josh is a force to be reckoned with.

*STERLING HALLARD BRIGHT DRAKE IS A*  
BIG WHISKEY STUDIOS PRODUCTION

PRODUCED & DIRECTED BY  
ROBERT SICKELS

CINEMATOGRAPHY  
ZACK ELLENBOGEN

COMPOSER  
JOSH KARP

EDITORS  
ROBERT SICKELS & ZACK ELLENBOGEN

AUDIO & VIDEO POST-PRODUCTION SERVICES  
VICTORY STUDIOS, SEATTLE

*FEATURING (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)*

TIM BOUTZ  
PHIL RESER  
BOB FOX  
PAMELA MURRAY  
JOHN NEEL  
GARY JOHNSON  
VERDIE MORRISON  
ROBERT WITHYCOMBE  
HEATHER BABBITT  
JOAN SCHILLE  
SHELLY FLOCH  
CHUCK DE GRASSE  
WALT WYMAN  
HELEN KIM

ADDITIONAL ARCHIVAL MATERIALS COURTESY OF  
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THE DRAKE FAMILY

SUPPORT FOR THIS PROJECT PROVIDED BY  
WHITMAN COLLEGE'S AID FOR SCHOLARSHIP &  
INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND AND  
PERRY GRANT PROGRAM

SPECIAL THANKS!

ANNIE BUCHAN  
ASID FUND COMMITTEE  
BEN POHL  
CARLENE DRAKE  
CHUCK & GINNY SICKELS  
CITY OF WALLA WALLA  
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