

THE BEAT HOTEL

A film by
Alan Govenar

82 minutes, 16:9, digital, stereo, English, documentary



FIRST RUN FEATURES

The Film Center Building
630 Ninth Avenue, Suite 1213
New York, NY 10036
212.243.0600 | Fax 212.989.7649
Website: www.firstrunfeatures.com
Email: info@firstrunfeatures.com

www.firstrunfeatures.com/beathotel

SYNOPSIS

The Beat Hotel, a new film by Alan Govenar, goes deep into the legacy of the American Beats in Paris during the heady years between 1957 and 1963, when Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky and Gregory Corso fled the obscenity trials in the United States surrounding the publication of Ginsberg's poem *Howl*. They took refuge in a cheap no-name hotel they had heard about at 9, Rue Git le Coeur and were soon joined by William Burroughs, Ian Somerville, Brion Gysin, and others from England and elsewhere in Europe, seeking out the "freedom" that the Latin Quarter of Paris might provide.

The Beat Hotel, as it came to be called, was a sanctuary of creativity, but was also, as British photographer Harold Chapman recalls, "an entire community of complete oddballs, bizarre, strange people, poets, writers, artists, musicians, pimps, prostitutes, policemen, and everybody you could imagine." And in this environment, Burroughs finished his controversial book *Naked Lunch*; Ian Somerville and Brion Gysin invented the Dream Machine; Corso wrote some of his greatest poems; and Harold Norse, in his own cut-up experiments, wrote the novella, aptly called *The Beat Hotel*.

The film tracks down Harold Chapman in the small seaside town of Deal in Kent, England. Chapman's photographs are iconic of a time and place when Ginsberg, Orlovsky, Corso, Burroughs, Gysin, Somerville and Norse were just beginning to establish themselves on the international scene. Chapman lived in the attic of the hotel, and according to Ginsberg "didn't say a word for two years" because he wanted to be "invisible" and to document the scene as it actually happened.

In the film, Chapman's photographs and stylized dramatic recreations of his stories meld with the recollections of Elliot Rudie, a Scottish artist, whose drawings of his time in the hotel offer a poignant and sometimes humorous counterpoint. The memories of Chapman and Rudie interweave with the insights of French artist Jean-Jacques Lebel, author Barry Miles, Danish filmmaker Lars Movin, and the first hand accounts of Oliver Harris, Regina Weinrich, Patrick Amie, Eddie Woods, and 95 year old George Whitman, among others, to evoke a portrait of Ginsberg, Burroughs, Corso and the oddities of the Beat Hotel that is at once unexpected and revealing.

FILMMAKER BIOS

Alan Govenar (director) is a writer, folklorist, photographer, and filmmaker. He is president of Documentary Arts. Govenar has a B.A. with distinction in American folklore from Ohio State University, an M.A. in folklore and anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin, and a Ph.D. in arts and humanities from the University of Texas at Dallas. He is the author of eighteen books, including *Texas Blues: The Rise of a Contemporary Sound*, *Stompin' at the Savoy: The Story of Norma Miller*, *Extraordinary Ordinary People: Five American Masters of Traditional Arts*, *Untold Glory: African Americans in Pursuit of Freedom, Opportunity and Achievement*, *Stoney Knows How: Life as a Sideshow Tattoo Artist*, *Deep Ellum and Central Track: Where the Black and White Worlds of Dallas Converged*, *Portraits of Community*, and *The Early Years of Rhythm and Blues*. His book *Osceola: Memories of a Sharecropper's Daughter* won First Place in the New York Book Festival (children's non-fiction), a Boston Globe-Hornbook Honor; and an Orbis Pictus Honor from the National Council of Teachers of English. The off-Broadway premiere of his musical *Blind Lemon Blues*, co-created with Akin Babatunde received rave reviews in *The New York Times* and *Variety*.

Govenar's film, *Stoney Knows How*, based on his book by the same title about Old School tattoo artist Leonard St. Clair, was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and was selected as an Outstanding Film of the Year by the London Film Festival. Govenar has also produced and directed numerous films in association with NOVA, La Sept/ARTE, and PBS for broadcast and educational distribution, including *The Voyage of Doom*, *Le Naufrage de la Belle*, *The Devil's Swing*, *Texas Style*, *Everything But the Squeak*, *The Human Volcano*, *The Hard Ride*, *Dreams of Conquest*, and *Little Willie Eason and His Talking Gospel Guitar*.

Alan Hatchett (Editor) has worked with Documentary Arts since 2003 as associate producer, technical director, editor and multimedia artist. Most recently he edited the feature film *Master Qi and the Monkey King* and the video content for the Jasper, Texas: The Community Photographs of Alonzo Jordan installation at the ICP. Alan is also a founding member of the Dallas Makerspace, where we created an interactive art installation for the TEDxSMU talks in 2010.

Documentary Arts (Producer) was founded in 1985 as a non-profit organization to create and preserve new perspectives on the arts, culture, and history. Over the years, Documentary Arts has produced more than two-dozen non-fiction films, ranging from *Cigarette Blues* (San Francisco Film Festival Judge's Award), *Texas Style* (American Film and Video Festival Blue Ribbon and CINE Golden Eagle), *Black on White/White and Black* (Michael A. Wilder Silver Citation Award) to *Le Naufrage de la Belle* (Le Prix Spécial du Jury, 16th Festival International de l'Emission Scientifique de Télévision Palamarès, France) and *Voyage of Doom* (NOVA), *The Devil's Swing* (Finalist, USA Film Festival) and *Jaber* (6th Recontres Autor de L'Art Singulier, Musée d'Art Moderne, Nice, France). To find out more about Documentary Arts' films, videos, radio series for national broadcast, touring exhibitions, publications, and interactive media, see www.documentaryarts.org.

ABOUT NOTABLE BEAT HOTEL RESIDENTS

William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) American novelist, essayist, poet, performance artist and the author of *Naked Lunch*, which was assembled at the Beat Hotel, among many other novels, novellas, poems and collections of essays. Burroughs moved to the Beat Hotel around 1959. Burroughs was one of the oldest members of the Beat generation. Burroughs met Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac in New York City while the latter two were attending Columbia University.

Harold Chapman (1927) British photographer. Chapman documented life in the Beat Hotel in photographs and appears in the film. Chapman moved to the Beat Hotel around 1956 and lived there until 1962. He began to be successful as a photographer while living in the Beat Hotel.

Gregory Corso (1930-2001) American poet, author of the poem *Bomb*. Corso grew up in New York City. Corso met Ginsberg at the Pony Stable Inn in Greenwich Village around 1951 and moved to Paris around the time Ginsberg did. He was one of the youngest members of the Beat generation.

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1197) American poet, author of the poem *Howl* and *Kaddish*, among other works. Was one of the first Beat writers to move into the Beat Hotel along with partner Peter Orlovsky in 1957. Ginsberg grew up in New Jersey and attended Columbia University, where he met Jack Kerouac, Lucien Carr and William Burroughs.

Brion Gysin (1916-1986) British painter, writer, sound poet and performing artist. Gysin developed the “cut-up” technique and invented the Dreamachine with Ian Sommerville at the Beat Hotel. Gysin met Burroughs in Tangiers in the mid-50s and moved to the Beat Hotel around 1958.

Harold Norse (1916-2009) American writer. Norse wrote the cut-up novel *Beat Hotel* while living in the Beat Hotel in 1960. He lived in the hotel from 1959 to 1963.

Peter Orlovsky (1933-2010) American poet. Was one of the first Beat writers to move into the Beat Hotel along with partner Allen Ginsberg in 1957. Orlovsky grew up in New York City. Orlovsky met Ginsberg while living in San Francisco in 1954 and began writing poetry at Ginsberg’s urging while living in the Beat Hotel in 1957.

Elliot Rudie (1939) Scottish artist. Rudie started living in the Beat Hotel in 1961. Rudie produced drawings of members of the Beat writers and artists while living in the hotel.

CREDITS

Produced by Documentary Arts
Directed by Alan Govenar
Editor Alan Hatchett
Cinematography Didier Dorant, Bob Tullier
Original Music Daniel M. Cavanagh, Daniel Cicourel Hanley
Musicians Tim Ishii, Mike Morrison, Victor Murillo, Jared Lee, Miles Napier, Nathan Salman, Aaron Ray
Mandolin Charles Pettee
Location Sound Alan Govenar, Pierre Aziza
Sound Mix Alex Wagner
Additional Editing by Jason Johnson-Spinos
Drawings Elliot Rudie
Animations Alan Hatchett, Blas Garcia
Historical Photographs Allen Ginsberg Trust, Special Collections, Stanford University, Peter Golding Harold Chapman Archive, OMC Communication LLC, Walter Lehrman Photography, Baird Bryant
Archival Books & Documents Butler Library, Columbia University

Footage from “Ghost at no 9 (Paris) used with permission of the Wylie Agency, Inc. on behalf of the William S. Burroughs Trust

Dramatic Reenactments:

Directed by Alan Hatchett
William Burroughs Kit Hussey
Harold Chapman Andrew Kasten
Gregory Corso Matt Mitchell
Ian Sommerville Nick Irion
Cyclops Jason Kendall
Extras Audra Hatchett, Stephen T. Howell
Makeup Jenine Galante
Production Assistants Richard Quadri, Clint Davis, Dalia Botello, Kathering Rae Mondo, Alex Govenar
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