Romantic Blues
(“Romantic Stockholm A Go-Go” and “Cold Oven Blues”)

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract:

Drama is made when ordinary people are thrust into strange or extraordinary experiences. The two short films of *Romantic Blues* do just that.

*Romantic Stockholm A Go-Go* is the story of a woman and a man caught up in their romantic ideals, brought together by the violent absurdity of a surreal world. *Cold Oven Blues* tells the story of broken marriage, a wandering amnesiac, a diner; and how all of these come together to fix the world and set things right. It was our intention that, together, these films would show a world that is absurd, frightening and explosively romantic.
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Author’s Statement

Filming a feature length movie is a daunting task in and of itself. Filming a feature in only a few months along with work, classes, and any semblance of a social life sounds insane, to say the least. Regardless, that is what Aaron Wittwer and I signed up for, and that is what we managed to do. We wanted to challenge ourselves and go out with a bang instead of letting our college career sizzle with something small. We talked for a few months and mulled the idea over. Obviously, if we were going to take the time to do a creative project we wanted it to be something personal and memorable. Aaron is a fan of B-movies and grind house culture and he is very skilled at writing in the genre, but he had a hard time finding people to film his scripts and do them justice. I had the opportunity to film one of Aaron’s scripts in the Spring semester of 2010 and he was pleased with the outcome. This led to the formation of our dual honors thesis and ultimately, the completion of the project before you.

Going into the project, I was worried about getting the proper equipment, crew, actors, and all of the standard accouterments you need for a general film shoot. We had a camera, some script ideas, and enough passion to fool ourselves into thinking nothing would go wrong. That same passion was what led to acquiring a brilliant cast and crew that helped bring everything together. I was able to work with connections I had made over the years, which proved to be valuable in obtaining the equipment we needed for the shoot. It showed me proof that the movie business truly comes down to who you know rather than what you know (although I like to believe I do have some skill and knowledge on the subject). The networking skills I learned in the telecommunications department definitely paid off in this instance because without the help of others it would be impossible to finish something of this magnitude in the time we had allotted.

Aaron and I set out writing several short scripts. We wanted to do something different. A problem that we saw with other filmmakers in the department is that they always chose safe or easy locations to film in such as a room in a house (that would often
read as a "college" house) or somewhere on campus. This usually leads to the end product looking like a "student" film. After the Fall 2010 semester we had 5 scripts ready, all 10 minutes or longer, to choose from. Looking over the scripts we had accomplished our goal, we didn't use any of the standard "student film" locations.

Instead, we were left with a challenge. Now we had to find a way to film in some difficult locations including a church, a diner, a hospital, a cabin, a gas station, and even a desert.

We were pleased with our options, but ultimately decided to only do two of the longer scripts rather than complete all of them because, as we quickly found out, actors are very busy people and sometimes locations won't get back to you. Even the two films we were able to shoot were severely delayed because of illness, rain, and general unavailability. As in most cases, some sacrifices had to be made. We traded our desert for a deserted country road and created our own diner stockroom out of a church basement storeroom. We were somewhat displeased at having to pare down our original ambition, but looking at only three locations and seven actors total was much easier than looking for the twelve or so locations and fifty plus actors that would need to be involved for every script that we had hoped to do.

I was probably most afraid of the production aspects of these films. Aaron likes to write in a good amount of special effects shots into his movies. The only issue is Aaron also wants all of his special effects to be real and not added in digitally. This was a curveball, to say the least. Even though we only had two scripts to do, we had to make an egg bleed, make convincing gunshots and wounds, add prominent scars to a character's face, and, of course, make a woman become pregnant on the spot and then, in real time, have a monster rip out of her fake pregnant belly. It was a ludicrous idea that we would be able to accomplish this on such a minute budget, and I often came to set not knowing what to expect, but through much research, creative thinking, and sheer willpower, we were able to pull off all of these effects at varying levels of success. We were even able to have a live snake and rabbit on set (not to mention a live small child...) and they even cooperated! These more difficult parts of the production made for good milestones and morale boosters and I think they were actually instrumental in keeping us going during production.
In the end, I believe we chose two strong scripts that played well on screen and were fun and challenging to work on. I truly believe this final project is an accumulation of what I have learned from my time here at Ball State, including creative problem solving, networking, and communication skills as well as the filmmaking aspects. I am proud I was able to accomplish what I set out to do and maintain the excellence in quality that I hoped to achieve. Through this process I grew as a filmmaker and learned some of the aspects of film that I would prefer not to do. It helped me to further define myself as an artist and not only discover my strengths and weaknesses but learn how to improve. As difficult as the project was, I would do it all over again because of how rewarding it is to work with a good team of people you enjoy working with and being able to create a product that everyone is proud of.