

Try to remember

The  
Fantasticks

a film by Eli Kabillio

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

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Eight times a week, from 1960 to 2002, the Sullivan Street Playhouse in New York City's Greenwich Village played midwife to a musical theater ritual that attracted theatergoers from across globe. That show was the legendary and beloved *Fantasticks*, and for 42 years and 17,162 performances, a legion of performers—including future luminaries such as F. Murray Abraham, Ricardo Montalban, Elliot Gould, Liza Minnelli, Glenn Close, Richard Chamberlain and John Carradine—played out its sweetly timeless boy-meets-girl tale. On the eve of *The Fantasticks*' final Off-Broadway performance, documentary filmmaker Eli Kabillio takes a wistful look back at the show's genesis, its creators and, above all, its continued worldwide popularity.

USA • 2003 • Color • Running time: 57 mins

# Production Notes

It is January 10, 2002 three days before the closing of the longest running musical in the world and executive producer James A. Ruggiero calls to see if I am interested in shooting the final performance of *The Fantasticks*. My response: of course, but why not make a documentary.

I was about to find out why not. The creators of the show weren't interested in cooperating. The cast, all members of Actors Equity demanded a contract be in place and that they be paid extra or else they wouldn't perform. The stage manager didn't want our cameras anywhere in the theater regardless of what anyone else said. These were the minor problems. The biggest problems – no money, no distributor, one business day to solve all of the issue before we could shoot and finally, the Actor's Equity rep couldn't stop laughing when I said I needed a contract executed the next day.

Money: It was agreed that we needed to secure enough capital to shoot at least the final show and closing party and one additional day of interviews to create a trailer to raise the budget for the entire production.

Actor's Equity: Our rep stopped laughing long enough to have our agreement executed and ready to be picked up Friday at 4:55PM.

Stage Manager: Turned out to be one of the biggest assets to the production as he not only allowed our cameras in the theater, but also made sure we had the angles we wanted and then provided us with all of the names and numbers for cast and crew he had accumulated in five decades with the show.

Tom and Harvey: Tom Jones and Harvey Schultz were not excited by the last minute call from a filmmaker they didn't know. A chapter in their life was ending and I was asking them to keep it open. The answer: at Friday, 5:30PM, a resounding no. How could we document the history of *The Fantasticks* without the author and composer?

Saturday 10pm, what do we do? We do the only thing indie filmmakers know how to do. We decide to spend our Executive Producer's money to create a trailer with the hope that we would blow the socks off of Tom and Harvey and they would agree to be involved.

Two months later, with a ten minute trailer in hand, I arrived at Tom Jones' attorney's office to show them what we had and to try and convince Tom to get involved. After watching the trailer, the wait seemed like forever before Tom said, "good job, what do you need me to do?" And the snowball started rolling downhill.

With Tom and Harvey's commitment to be interviewed, to provide access to their library of archival material and to help in any other way necessary, James A. Ruggiero pumped his savings into the picture with the instructions, "please don't lose this money, its for my daughter's wedding." Mad Dog Films, Inc. provided the production equipment and editing facilities and the show was a go.

It was several months before Harvey returned to New York so that both he and Tom could be interviewed together. It took several more months to find the archival materials that document the history of the show. Finally, after trying for over a year to secure an interview with Jerry Orbach, and nearly giving up, we received word that Tom and Harvey would be presenting an award to the original El Gallo at a Drama League event. Not knowing weather Jerry would agree, we waited patiently for him to arrive, finish his scheduled press interviews and then hoped he would speak to us. He did and the film was complete. The final piece in a puzzle—that included hundreds of hours of original footage, and hundreds more of archival footage, thousands of photographs, articles, playbills and other materials and over a year of work—and the film was complete.

## ELI KABILLIO

### Director/Producer

Eli Kabillio is an award winning director and producer and the president of Mad Dog Films, Inc.

Kabillio recently directed and produced FIRST ROBOTICS 2003 for Discovery's Science Channel, and directed the feature film F\*\*K THE DISABLED starring Greg Walloch, Stephen Baldwin and Anne Meara. Kabillio also co-directed and produced FIRST DOWN, a documentary on the Women's Professional Football League team, the New York Sharks, which won the Best Documentary award at the IndieVision Film Festival, and JOE JACKSON'S TRAIL, a one-hour documentary about African-American land ownership in the post Civil War South.

Kabillio also directed and produced a documentary about trepanation, A HOLE IN THE HEAD, which won the Best Documentary award at the Atlantic City Film Festival and the Brooklyn International Film Festival, and was broadcast on Discovery and The Learning Channel and is available on video through Beatnik Home Video.

Kabillio recently directed and produced a series of commercials for KFC with Jason Alexander, Evan Marriot (*Joe Millionaire*) and Trista Rhen (*The Bachelorette*) and has directed and produced over forty national commercials for Pepsi Cola's PEPSI CHALLENGE campaign including the series starring Sammy Sosa.

He executive produced the independent feature film RELAX, IT'S JUST SEX, starring Jennifer Tilly, Lori Petty and Cynda Williams and produced PARANOIA, starring Larry Drake, Brigitte Bako and Sally Kirkland. He was the Associate Producer on the Miramax Films release LIE DOWN WITH DOGS, and DELINQUENT, for Beyond Films.

Kabillio's animation credits include producing and directing the animated short film, BORIS THE DOG, which was part of SPIKE AND MIKE'S SICK AND TWISTED ANIMATION FESTIVAL and which aired as part of MTV's CARTOON SUSHI. He also directed and produced the animated series THE BILL JOHNSON SHOW, for SPIKE AND MIKE'S SICK AND TWISTED ANIMATION FESTIVAL and video compilation.

Kabillio is a graduate of The Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland School of Law. As an entertainment attorney, he represented the films LAWS OF GRAVITY, LIVING PROOF: HIV AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, HANDGUN and JESUS' SON.

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The  
Fantastic

Directed by  
Eli Kabillio

Produced by  
Eli Kabillio  
James A. Ruggiero

Executive Producer  
James A. Ruggiero

Co-Executive Producers  
Julie Davis  
Anne Louise DePalo

Associate Producer  
Tony Noto

Director of Photography  
David Sperling

Editor  
Sean Casey

Sound  
Matt Israel  
David Pruger

Sound Design and Mix  
Martin Trum

Production Manager  
Donny Tam

Research and Clearances  
Julie Almendral  
Anita Womack

Camera Operators  
Mark Pines  
Neil Smith  
Matt Howe  
Teferra McKenzie

Publicity  
DIS Publicity  
David Salidor

Additional Sound  
Teferra McKenzie

Interviews

Tom Jones  
Harvey Schmidt  
Tony Noto  
F. Murray Abraham  
Ira Joe Fisher  
Carla Houston Bell  
Professor Denny Partridge  
Professor Robert Lee  
Virginia Gregory  
John LaRocca  
Rita Gardner  
George Lee Andrews  
Marty Morris  
Rabbi John Krug  
Peter Vallone  
Joe Franklin  
Katie Harlan  
Judith Smerek  
Jim Smerek

The Fantasticks

Sullivan Street Final Cast and Crew  
John Bundrick  
James Cook  
David Edwards  
Jere Ellison-Gladstone  
Natasha Harper  
J.C. Hoyt  
Jeremie Michael  
Kim Moore  
Bill Tost  
Bill Weeden  
Henry Whitmire

Scanning

Joaquim Perez  
Marc Thomas

Production Assistants

Christine McCaffrey  
Kim Alonzo  
Devon Ragsdale

Archival Footage

NBC  
ABC  
New York Times  
Corbis

Special Thank You

Tom Jones  
Harvey Schmidt  
Dan Shaheen

Thank You

Lorna Thomas  
Miriam Kabillio

Dedicated to  
Lore Noto

In Loving Memory of  
Margaret L. Ruggiero

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