

# THE INSTRUMENT

## PRESS KIT

a narrative feature film by  
Adam Nemett

100 minutes

---

“Slyly ambitious....A series of music-based rites that become increasingly compelling to watch.”

-VARIETY

“Damn near unclassifiable...the music, costumes, art direction and personalities-information that contribute to this lively exercise in art and/or gestalt therapy provide a potent draft of vicarious pleasure.”

-LA WEEKLY

“A wonderfully imaginative and ambitious project, with visionary overtones.”

-Joyce Carol Oates

---

### **Publicity Contact:**

Kim Dixon  
dominion3, Inc.  
6464 Sunset Boulevard, Suite 1060  
Hollywood, CA 90028  
Phone: 323-466-3393 Cell: 310-880-3016  
Fax: 323-466-2773  
kim@dominion3.com

# THE INSTRUMENT

**Director:** Adam Nemett

**TRT:** 100 minutes

**Shooting format:** MiniDV, Super 16mm

**Available screening formats:** HD, Digibeta, BetaSP, DVD, MiniDV, VHS

**Production Company:** Magister Productions

**Locations:** Baltimore, MD & Princeton, NJ

**Completed:** January 2005

## **SYNOPSIS**

Arthur Zarek, an enigmatic art school custodian, dies and leaves behind the blueprints for a new system of ritual worship -- one based on music. Seven students, including young filmmaker, Pallo Zo, are selected to live together in Arthur's sacred space (known as "The Instrument") to delve into his spiritual legacy, and in turn, their own minds.

THE INSTRUMENT is a film, seen through Pallo's lens, which chronicles both the routine and the otherworldly experiences of seven very different art students working towards one common goal: unlocking the secrets of Arthur's ritual framework. If they succeed, the students stand to inherit a multi-million dollar piece of property. However, ritual can have unforeseen, altering effects, and The Instrument soon becomes a magnifying glass for the fantasies and horrors hidden in the human mind.

In order to fully claim their inheritance, the students must live together for one month, and learn to participate in these seven diverse musical rituals, each corresponding to a specific "waypoint" found in music and in life: *Inspiration, Attack, Consonance, Dissonance, Improvisation, Silence, and Harmony*. Throughout their journey, Pallo relies on the meditative practices taught to him by Arthur -- namely, the power of Silence -- and he uses this spiritual practice to guide him through the collective rite of passage.

Featuring an eclectic original score ranging from orchestral to electronic, and all points in between, THE INSTRUMENT stands as a narrative portrait of musical meditation -- the spiritual power of Sound and of Silence.

"Welcome to The Instrument. Choose whatever resonates..."

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

An art school custodian dies and leaves behind the blueprints for a new system of ritual worship -- one based on music. Seven students are selected to live together in his sacred space, which soon becomes a magnifying glass for the fantasies and horrors hidden in the human mind.

# THE INSTRUMENT

## STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR

Improvisation -- the central ideal of *THE INSTRUMENT* -- lies behind both the thematic intentions of the film and the actual process of its creation. The characters of the film undergo a process of learning to jive with all the actions and reactions, ups and downs present in an ever-changing reality. This improvisatory perspective, I have come to believe, is not only the crux of the artistic and musical processes, but is also the essence of being in the world.

In short, *THE INSTRUMENT* is a meditative training in the art of improvisational living.

As human beings, we are constantly giving and receiving, attempting to discern the nature of our personal and extended worlds. We are passionate beings, occasionally overwhelmed by the pretty or ugly. We are explorers and circus performers who specialize in feats of balance.

It is the presence of surprise, the potential for experimentation, and the promise of discovery that gives life its majesty. The process I have undergone during the last three years has allowed me to further realize my place as a student and a servant (a *minister*) in the world. The project has *given*, has provided intangible and immeasurable amounts of teaching. I spend my days in the humbling presence of a Master (*Magister*), and it is an experience that resonates. I have no choice but to love it.

We are instruments, all types and timbres, through which the jazz of existence resounds.

## DIRECTOR BIO

**Adam Nemett (Writer/Director/Producer/Co-Editor)** While majoring in Religion and Creative Writing at Princeton, Adam completed the script for *THE INSTRUMENT* under the guidance of award-winning author, Joyce Carol Oates. He served as Editor-in-Chief for *The Nassau Weekly*, and was founder and president of Modern Improvisational Music Association, now a nationally recognized non-profit organization devoted to education through improvisational music.



Since age 13, Adam has been a meditation practitioner. From 2000-2002, he engaged in a series of week-long silent meditation retreats which informed much of the spiritual framework of *THE INSTRUMENT*. Adam has since worked as a developer and producer for non-fictional television programming and several music-based films, including the recent documentary for the Bonnaroo 2004 Music Festival (Dir. Danny Clinch). His novella, "Verity's Million" won the Frances LeMoyne Page Award for Fiction in 2003 and has since been adapted into an award-winning screenplay. *THE INSTRUMENT* is his first film.

# THE INSTRUMENT

## GENESIS OF THE FILM

Adam Nemett began writing *THE INSTRUMENT* the summer of his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday while backpacking through the mountains of Shikoku, Japan. Nemett, an award-winning graduate of Princeton University's prestigious Creative Writing department, initially intended *THE INSTRUMENT* to take the form of a novel. When the heavy emphasis on music and dance made the story more conducive to the multi-sensory medium of film, Nemett began adapting a screenplay in the Summer of 2001, and completed it during a Fiction Workshop taught by prolific author, Joyce Carol Oates, in Spring 2002.



Rather than invent wholly fictional characters from scratch and then find actors and actresses to assume these roles, Nemett attempted to base the seven student characters on the actual people who play these parts. The plan was to do several takes of each scene as scripted. But many of the scenes would also be performed improvisationally, with the likelihood that the scripted and improvised versions would be edited together to achieve a certain naturalness and spontaneity.

While Adam formulated his core group of actors and wrote a flexible script around their personalities, he also helped construct the primary sets for *THE INSTRUMENT*, namely, the 30' X 30' sanctuary and ritual elements supposedly created by fictional character, Arthur Zarek.

In order to do this, Adam and his father, Barry Nemett, organized a semester-long course at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), generally regarded as one of the top three fine arts schools in the country. Together, they hand-picked a group of 25 visual artists, from various visual arts disciplines, to collaborate on the production design of the film, all under the auspices of a credit course called "Art & The Instrument".

To foster the collaborative spirit of the project, and to better explain the different facets of the project, several Princeton-based members of the cast and crew traveled to Baltimore throughout the semester to lead the classes. Essentially, the construction of the space depended on two main aspects: fleshing out the fictional character that was supposed to have created the space, and further developing his seven ritual ceremonies.

# THE INSTRUMENT

## CREATING A CREATOR

The character of Arthur Zarek, our semi-fictional visionary, was essentially a conglomeration of four real-life personalities:

- **Harry Partch** – a musician and legendary composer, famous for developing a system of musical theory based on 43 tones per octave (instead of the standard Western theory based on 12 tones per octave. He called this system "Just Intonation."). He then built an arsenal of musical instruments -- each of them sculptural in nature and requiring a certain amount of dance-like movement in order to play (see Fig. 1) -- all capable of actualizing his system of Just Intonation. Partch proceeded to compose works based on a sort of ritual musical theater, which he called "corporeal music," and staged numerous performances incorporating elements such as Noh drama, opera, and filmmaking.
- **James Hampton** – an uneducated Washington D.C. custodian, legendary for the post-humous discovery of his life's work, an installation known as "The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium, General Assembly" (See Fig. 2). The installation, constructed over a 14-year period in an anonymous garage space, includes 177 objects -- furniture, altarpieces, and shrines -- each meticulously wrapped in aluminum and gold foil. It is assumed that Hampton was creating a sacred church space that would eventually be used as a functional sanctuary, with himself serving as minister. The work of folk art is considered by some to be "the finest work of visionary religious art produced by an American," and now sits in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C.

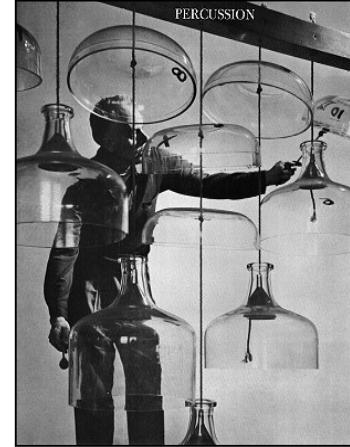


Figure 1



Figure 2

# THE INSTRUMENT

- **Perry Cook** – Princeton associate professor of Computer Science and Music, Cook has created over a dozen digital musical instruments, including an electronic didgeridoo (an Aboriginal drone instrument; See Fig. 3) and even a digital musical coffee mug. Cook's desire is to create an “augmented reality” by using a computer to



**Figure 3**

model a real-life sound, and then creating any number of “controllers” to manipulate these sounds. In other words, by hooking up a digital sensor to any physical object, a human can use a computer to change the nature of the sound produced by that object. Ajay Kapur, who played “Nirav” and served as Director of Music for the film, worked with Cook during his senior year

at Princeton to create an electronic tabla (later used as one of the instruments in the film).

- **Richard Kalter** – Serving as Philosopher-in-Residence at Maryland Institute College of Art since 1979, Richard Kalter was the natural choice for the role of Arthur. Kalter was largely regarded as the spiritual center of MICA, and touched countless lives over the course of his twenty-five year tenure at the Baltimore institution. THE INSTRUMENT is dedicated to Richard Kalter’s memory, as he passed on in November 2004. He will be remembered as a sage, counselor, and dear friend.



In Memory  
Richard Kalter  
(1926-2004)

# THE INSTRUMENT

## PRODUCTION NOTES

In the Spring of 2002, 25 visual artists gathered at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), one of the top visual arts colleges in the nation, to create the sacred space and ritual elements used in *THE INSTRUMENT*. They were given no production sketches or rules to follow. The process was entirely spontaneous and collaborative -- the room came together bit by bit, with multiple artists often working on the same space of wall, the same costume, or the same electronic musical instrument.

This method of production design -- the maximum amount of artistry with the minimum amount of expense -- exemplifies the sort of improvisational spirit explicitly dictated by budgetary constraints. However, the script, the manner of filming, and various other elements of production were structured in such a way as to use these seeming limitations to an artistic advantage.

Since the production did not have the budget to pay for room and board, the entire production cast and crew (nearly 30 of them) lived in the director's house for the month of June, sleeping ten to a room at times. While the living arrangements were, in a sense, less than ideal, the intensely concentrated atmosphere actually mimicked the plot of the film -- a diverse group of people thrown together for one month with one common goal -- and thus, aided in developing the culture necessary for the cast and crew to play their roles effectively.

Evenings at the Nemett house were not filled with relaxation. Everyone was engaged in some aspect of production at nearly all times -- the costume designers constructed ritual garb in the den, the musical directors were composing and recording drum loops in the kitchen, actors practiced choreography in a vacant bedroom, all to ensure a successful performance to be shot the next afternoon. In the most real sense, we were all actually *experiencing* the same process being fictionally presented in *THE INSTRUMENT*'s screenplay. The line between fiction and reality became wholly blurred. It was quite a ride.

Since the actors were very often engaged in the same process of preparation for ritual performance as was scripted, the cast was asked to refer to each other by character names for the entirety of the month. This way, the camera operators could shoot constantly and capture serendipitous moments of method acting. Indeed, many of these golden unscripted moments did end up in the final cut.

After a two-year edit, the final cut represents a creative collaboration between professors and students at two of America's premiere institutions of higher learning. In addition to the feature film, *THE INSTRUMENT* has spawned an award-winning novella and screenplay ("Verity's Million") and a critical analysis of the religious undertones present in the film ("Unlocking 'The Instrument: A Critical Companion to the Film,'" Princeton, 2003).

# THE INSTRUMENT

## THE FILMMAKERS

**Frankie Ng Tze Wei (Director of Photography, Digital)** - Frankie Ng Tze Wei is a video artist, playwright and stage director with an Economics degree from Princeton. He is currently fulfilling his duties as an only son and Central Bank Scholar from Singapore. His shorts have appeared at several film festivals in North America and Asia.

**Chris Freilich (Director of Photography, Super 16mm)** - Chris is a cinematographer, gaffer, and still photographer working in the New York-Philadelphia corridor. His work as director of photography includes short films, documentaries, corporate videos, music videos, and a feature film. He is widely traveled, having photographed Japan, Greece, Australia, France, Great Britain, China, Italy, and all over North America.

**Macauley Peterson (Editor)** - Macauley Peterson studied Philosophy at Princeton (B.A. 2001) before concentrating on filmmaking. In addition to *THE INSTRUMENT*, Macauley has shot and edited numerous shorts. Macauley is also a former film columnist for *The Daily Princetonian*, and has contributed to AIVF's *The Independent Film and Video Monthly*.

## THE CAST

**Hilton Carter (Pallo/Camera)** - Known to some as Ultramatik, Hilton is a director, actor, and video artist from Baltimore, MD. After graduating from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2002, Hilton has since directed and appeared in several music videos and short films. He currently attends the California Institute of the Arts, where he is studying film directing.

**David Hittson (Tyler/Composer)** - David graduated from Princeton University's Music department in 2003, and composed the original musical score for *THE INSTRUMENT* under the guidance of electronic music pioneer, Paul Lansky. He began his musical experience at age two, and intends a career in the music industry. David plays guitar, bass, piano, violin, and has considerable voice training.

**Heather Iandoli (Reese)** - Heather is a regular on the Washington DC theater circuit, after training at the New Jersey School for the Arts and American University, where she received her BA in Theatre.

**Ajay Kapur (Nirav/Composer)** - a double major in Computer Science and Music, Ajay graduated from Princeton University in 2002, after developing many of the electronic instruments used in *THE INSTRUMENT*. He has played drum set for over 12 years and has experience in world percussion instruments such as djembe, dolak, and tabla. After living and studying music in India, Ajay moved to Victoria, British Columbia, where he is currently working on a joint Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering, Computer Science, Music and Psychology, building artificially intelligent music and media technology for live performance art.

**Jamie Klassel (Chloe)** - A Theatre major at University of Maryland, College Park, Jamie has performed in numerous dramatic and comedic roles in Baltimore, Washington DC, and New York City. She is now pursuing her acting career in New York.

**Jose Mertz (Carlos)** - Mertzalini Flight 504 landed in Queens, New York on April 1, 1980 and was raised in Kendall, Miami. He now lives in New York City where he continues painting, drawing, and composing music. Jose is co-founder of Gild, an arts collective showcasing fine art throughout New York City. His first album, "Orbit of the Morbid," will be released in October 2004.

**Taryn Wayne (Lida/Choreographer)** - Graduated from Princeton University in 2001 with a major in Anthropology, where she performed and choreographed for various campus dance companies and musical theater productions. She has trained in ballet, jazz, and modern dance for 14 years, and spent two years dancing with Pacific Northwest Ballet Company in Seattle.

**Cornel West (Father Figure)** - Dr. West is one of America's most gifted, provocative, and important public intellectuals. He is the author of numerous articles and books including *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, *The Cornel West Reader*, and *Race Matters*. Dr. West can be seen in *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*, and served as a philosophical consultant to the Wachowski Brothers during the making of the sequels.

# THE INSTRUMENT

## CAST & PRODUCTION CREDITS

MAGISTER PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
AND  
MARYLAND INSTITUTE COLLEGE OF ART

## THE INSTRUMENT

WRITTEN, DIRECTED, & PRODUCED BY  
ADAM NEMETT

RUNNING TIME: 100 MINUTES

### CAST

<b>Pallo Zo</b>	Hilton Carter
<b>Arthur Zarek</b>	Richard Kalter
<b>Professor Eppers</b>	Barry Nemet
<b>Carlos</b>	Jose Mertz
<b>Chloe</b>	Jamie Klassel
<b>Tyler</b>	David Hittson
<b>Reese</b>	Heather Iandoli
<b>Nirav</b>	Ajay Kapur
<b>Lida</b>	Taryn Wayne
<b>Lawyer</b>	Timothy Fowler
<b>Security Guard</b>	Joe "Elmo" Struck
<b>German Wolf</b>	Kadi Hughes
<b>Blonde Bitch</b>	Alexis Frasz
<b>Inner Victim</b>	Tommy Landers
<b>Dr. Abuse</b>	Zuanna Sherman
<b>Fantasy Madame</b>	Cara Marsh Sheffler
<b>Fantasy Girls</b>	Felice Aarons
	Jennifer Brea
	Kristin Burke
	Amanda Dennis
	Keiyana Fordham
	Sapna Gupta
	Eva Hagberg
	Emily Kim
	Emily Lenz
	Tshepo Masango
	Lauren McCollum
	Veronica McRipley
	Kate Lynn Schirmer
	Penelope Tang
<b>Carrot Girl</b>	Laini Nemet
<b>Jewish Mother</b>	Diane Nemet
<b>Father Figure</b>	Dr. Cornel West
<b>Inner Child</b>	Deon Jamal Veale

### PRODUCTION

<b>Writer/Producer/Director</b>	Adam Nemet
<b>Dir. of Photography (Digital)</b>	Frankie Tze Wei Ng
<b>Dir. of Photography (S16mm)</b>	Chris Freilich
<b>First Assistant Director</b>	Dan Wachtell
<b>Second Assistant Director</b>	Evan Naides
<b>Camera Operators</b>	Dan Wachtell Hilton Carter Macaulay Peterson Evan Naides

# THE INSTRUMENT

<b>Sound Recordist</b>	Rick Pickett
<b>Boom Operator</b>	Evan Naides
<b>Dialogue Coach</b>	Teniqua Crawford
<b>Line Producers</b>	Jessica Asch
	Brittany Blockman
	David Hittson
	Kadi Hughes
<b>Set Decorator</b>	Jennifer Brea
<b>Body Double</b>	Meka Asonye
	Rachel Axelbank
	Jules Joseph
<b>Stand-in</b>	Laini Nemett
<b>Production Assistants</b>	Brian Deleeuw
	Phil Legendy
	Phil Michaelson
	Eamon Carrig
	Mario Perez
	Adam Gitlin
	Jesse Hellman
	Brooks Miller
	Ryan Metzger
<b>IT Support</b>	Khalil Sullivan
<b>Risk Management</b>	Lisa Zimmaro
	Lorraine Fuhrmann

## RITUAL CONSTRUCTION

<b>Concept</b>	Adam Nemett
<b>Director of Music</b>	Ajay Kapur
<b>Ritual Music Supervisor</b>	David Hittson
<b>Choreographer</b>	Taryn Wayne
<b>Producer</b>	Mertzalini
<b>Costume/MU Designers</b>	Jennifer Brea
	Penelope Tang
<b>Asst. Hair/MU Designer</b>	Annalisa Rosmarin
<b>Additional Ritual Costumes</b>	John Giglio
	Rachel Katz

## ARTHUR'S WORKSHOP

<b>Production Designer</b>	Barry Nemett
<b>Art Director</b>	James Gillispie
<b>Hypercube Propmaker</b>	John McGill
<b>Digital Instrument Designer</b>	Ajay Kapur
<b>Set Construction/Visual Art</b>	Jason Bartsch
	Melissa Bierer
	Ryan Brown
	Anna Davis
	Alyssa Dennis
	James Gillispie
	Rashawn Griffin
	Stephen Hebert
	Anel Henning
	Mark Karnes
	Mike Simon
	Julie Libersat
	Amber Miller
	Drew Moody
	Alex Morton
	Barry Nemett
	Courtney Puckett
	Jen Rattigan

# THE INSTRUMENT

Arturo Romo  
 Sarah Wertzberger  
 Scott Wilder  
 Chung Yi  
 Liz Zacharia

## ADVISORS

<b>Screenplay</b>	Joyce Carol Oates
<b>Ritual Framework</b>	David A. Cooper
<b>Ritual Research</b>	Shoshana Cooper
<b>Musical Composition</b>	Jeffrey Stout
<b>Electronic Instruments</b>	Cornel West
<b>Hypercube Animations</b>	Paul Lansky
<b>Business</b>	Perry Cook
<b>Legal</b>	Eric Schuldenfrei
	Ed Zschau
	Cynthia Sanders

## POST-PRODUCTION

<b>Picture/Sound Editor</b>	Macauley Peterson
<b>Supervising Editor</b>	Adam Nemett
<b>Consulting Editor</b>	Robert Tate
<b>Trailer Editor</b>	Macauley Peterson
<b>Lead Animator</b>	John McGill
<b>Previsualization Animators</b>	Brigid Boyle
 	Eva Hagberg
<b>Visual Effects</b>	Chris Freilich
 	Macauley Peterson
<b>Chuck Programmers</b>	Ge Wang
 	Perry Cook
<b>Lab Services</b>	Lab@Moving Images
<b>Sound Editor/Mixer</b>	Dominic Bartolini
<b>Sound Design</b>	Bob Kirschner
<b>Additional Sound Engineering</b>	Michael Yang
<b>Audio Post-Production Facility</b>	City Sound Productions, NYC
<b>Recording Supervisor</b>	Mary Roberts
<b>Orchestra Conductor</b>	Michael Pratt
<b>Music Technology Specialist</b>	Ajay Kapur
<b>Music Supervisor</b>	Clemens Morgenroth

## MUSIC

“Gallery of Ritual Memory”	Written and Arranged by Dan Iglesia
Written and Arranged by Dan Iglesia	Performed by The Brentano String Quartet
Performed by The Princeton University Orchestra	
“Manoj”	“For Desire”
Written & Performed by Zookjera	Written, Performed, and Produced by
Recorded and Produced by David Hittson	Nick Yu
“Ash”	“Wind Tunnel”
Written & Performed by Dimitri Hamlin & Ajay Kapur	Written, Performed, and Produced by
Produced by Ajay Kapur	Nick Yu
“Karmate”	“Influx Ritual”
Written, Performed, and Produced by	Written by David Hittson
Dimitri Hamlin & Ajay Kapur	Performed by The Princeton University Orchestra
“Arthur’s Passing”	

# THE INSTRUMENT

## “Voxen”

Written and Performed by  
Arthur Purvis & Drew Youngren  
Produced by lo bit landscapes

## “Consonance Ritual”

Written and Performed by David Hittson & Ajay Kapur  
Produced by  
David Hittson, Ajay Kapur & Jose Mertz

## “Dissonance Ritual”

Written and Performed by  
Dimitri Hamlin & David Hittson  
Produced by David Hittson

## “Poppies”

Written, Performed & Produced by  
lo bit landscapes

## “Pleasant Drone”

Written & Performed by  
Dimitri Hamlin & Arthur Purvis  
Produced by lo bit landscapes

## “My Heart’s Not In It”

Written, Performed, and Produced by  
lo bit landscapes

## “Exploration Ritual”

Written and Performed by  
The Composition of Students  
Recorded by Evan Naides

## “Deep Duck”

Written, Performed & Produced by  
Clemens Morgenroth

## “Idle Chatter”

Written and Performed by Paul Lansky  
Courtesy of  
Bridge Records, Inc., 1994

## “Harmony Ritual”

Written by David Hittson  
Lyrics by David Hittson and Adam Nemett  
Performed by David Hittson & Ajay Kapur  
Produced by David Hittson

## “Ankhmaze”

Written, Performed, and Produced by  
lo bit landscapes

## “Psalm 4 The Fearless”

Written, Performed, and Produced by  
lo bit landscapes

## “Arthur’s Theme”

Written, Performed, and Produced by  
Ajay Kapur & Adam Nemett

## “just\_more\_idle\_chatter”

Written and Performed by Paul Lansky  
Courtesy of Bridge Records, Inc., 1994

## “Notjustmoreidlechatter”

Written and Performed by Paul Lansky  
Courtesy of Bridge Records, Inc., 1994

## “Smallish Nonsaga”

Written, Performed, and Produced by  
lo bit landscapes

## MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY **Princeton Departments**

Religion  
Music  
Computer Science  
MIMA  
Dean of the College  
Vice President of Campus Life  
Painting  
Fibers  
Video  
Dean of the College

## **MICA Departments**

Aaton Super 16mm cameras supplied by  
Abel Cine Tech’s Student Filmmaker Package Program;  
Staten Island, NY

Filmed on Location in  
Baltimore, Maryland and Princeton, New Jersey

# THE INSTRUMENT

## ACCLAIM

"Slyly ambitious...this slice of semi-underground post-grad imagination will perk up the college pic circuit...."The Instrument," though, surprises most for eschewing any genre tack whatsoever....The students concoct a series of music-based rites that become increasingly compelling to watch."

**-Robert Koehler, VARIETY**

"Finally, and damn near unclassifiably, comes Adam Nemett's *THE INSTRUMENT*, an engaging shaggy-dog story....The music, costumes, art direction and personalities-information that contribute to this lively exercise in art and/or gestalt therapy provide a potent draft of vicarious pleasure."

**-Ron Stringer, LA WEEKLY**

"*THE INSTRUMENT* is a wonderfully imaginative film with visionary overtones."

**-Joyce Carol Oates, Author**

"This is a film to watch out for...extremely artistic, quirky and fascinating. The ensemble was very well cast and engaging. While the story of the film; sort of a private reality game show of rituals, was complex and sometimes convoluted I never lost interest or felt confused. Adam daringly explores metaphysical themes through the construct of a game which includes music, ritual, emotional interactions, and artistic expression. Best were the natural and refreshing moments of humor. The audience was prompted to laugh out loud repeatedly, and never to at someone's expense. This is a unique film from a filmmaker we all need to watch."

**-Muriel Stockdale, Filmmaker  
Director of the Institute for Spiritual Entertainment**

*THE INSTRUMENT* has screened at:

NewFilmmakers Screening Series  
(8/10/05 - New York, NY)  
Institute for Spiritual Entertainment -- *Closing Film*  
(6/10/05 – New York, NY)  
DancesWithFilms Festival – *Feature Competition*  
(5/10/05 - Los Angeles, CA)  
Johns Hopkins Film Festival – *Closing Film*  
(4/24/05 - Baltimore, MD)

PRESS CLIPPINGS

# LA WEEKLY

F I L M

DANCES WITH FILMS

As in past years, the real discoveries in this eighth annual installment of L.A.'s spookiest semipro film festival tend to be the films that rise above genre pretensions, and even conventional notions of polish and professionalism, into a rawer, more immediate engagement with their subject. Among the docs this year, the standout is Josh Adell and Steve Hicks' *Finding Bryon*, about a pair of (trust-funded?) filmmaker wannabes who follow the trail of a legendarily inept audition tape across the U.S. and into the lives of a not-so-thriving subculture of Appalachian misfits. As a record of cinematic self-discovery, *Finding Bryon* earns a place beside Mark Moskowitz's *Stone Reader* and Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation*, in Tamar Halperin's *Shelf Life*.



*Finding Bryon*, an engaging shaggy-dog story (scripted "under the guidance of Joyce Carol Oates," with a faint nod to the recent *House on Haunted Hill* remake) in which a bunch of CalArts types — played, or so it would seem, by a bunch of Maryland Institute College of Art types — is led by a demisexual dead professor, through a maze of music and performance puzzles, toward all manner of obscure revelation. Despite the amorphous nature of these largely improvised proceedings, the music, costumes, art direction and personalities-in-formation that contribute to this lively exercise in art and/or gestalt therapy provide a potent draft of vicarious pleasure. (Monica 4: Fri.-Thurs., May 6-12. See Film & Video Events.)

SHORT  
RUN

FRENCH CINEMA AND THE OCCUPATION

Among the many historical periods — from Hollywood under the Production Code to the cinemas of contemporary China and Iran — in which government-imposed censorship has inspired filmmakers to acts of subversive creativity, that of France during the country's Nazi Occupation exudes a particular fascination, perhaps because the stakes were so high. In 2002, Bertrand Tavernier's sprawling epic, *Le Silence de la Mer* (*Seize the Conquest*), revisited these years through a recounting of the heroic efforts of two individuals — assistant director Jean Deneuve and screenwriter Jean Aurenche — for whom filmmaking itself became a viable form of resistance. Now, *Le Silence de la Mer* bookends a monthlong series of films made during or about the Occupation, seven of which have been handpicked by Tavernier himself. Set at Christmas, 1947, Claude Autant-Lara's stunning, Aurenche-scripted *Douce* (1943) depicts the forbidden passions and social-climbing ambition that ensnare a widower count, his teenage daughter (who uses *Le Livre des Dangereuses* as a sort of instruction manual), her beautiful tutor, and the family steward in a destructive romantic quadrangle. Made the same year, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* follows the venom from a series of poison-pen letters as it swiftly infects the denizens of a small village, turning neighbor against neighbor amid anonymous accusations of adultery, abortion and murder. With their morally compromised characters and jackknife twists of fate, both films offer unreliably bleak portraits of humanity, yet *Le Corbeau* in particular was a major hit, suggesting that, even at the time, audiences saw the films for what they really were: encrypted status reports from the frontlines of Petainist French society. LACMA's series also features revivals of several well-known classics, including Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise* and René Clément's *Forbidden Games* (again, from a script by Aurenche), as well as several short and feature-length documentaries. (LACMA, May 6-June 4. See Film & Video Events.)



—Scott Foundas

"Finally, and damn near unclassifiably, comes Adam Nemett's *The Instrument*, an engaging shaggy-dog story (scripted "under the guidance of Joyce Carol Oates," with a faint nod to the recent *House on Haunted Hill* remake) in which a bunch of CalArts types — played, or so it would seem, by a bunch of Maryland Institute College of Art types — is led by a demisexual dead professor, through a maze of music and performance puzzles, toward all manner of obscure revelation. Despite the amorphous nature of these largely improvised proceedings, the music, costumes, art direction and personalities-in-formation that contribute to this lively exercise in art and/or gestalt therapy provide a potent draft of vicarious pleasure."

-Ron Stringer,  
LA Weekly

# THE INSTRUMENT

Variety.com - The Instrument



file:///C|/Documents%20and%20Settings/Owner/Desktop/Adam/press/Variety\_com%20-%20The%20Instrument.htm

To print this page, select "PRINT" from the File Menu of your browser.

Posted: Tue., Jun. 14, 2005, 8:08pm PT

## The Instrument

A Magister Prods. presentation in association with Princeton U. and Maryland Institute College of Art. Produced, directed, written by Adam Nemett.

**With:** Hilton Carter, David Hittson, Heather Iandoli, Ajay Kapur, Jamie Kassel, Jose Maertz, Taryn Wayne, Richard Kalter, Barry Nemett.

**By ROBERT KOEHLER**

"The Instrument" is a slyly ambitious if only slightly realized post-modern play on college documentary filmmaking. Hatched by writer-producer-director Adam Nemett under the auspices of Princeton U., result is a multi-disciplinary effort by Nemett and his father Barry at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Pic is framed as a docu on music students who must live and create together for a month per the will of a Harry Partch-like music maker. Pure fest fodder, this slice of semi-underground post-grad imagination will perk up the college pic circuit.

Student filmmaker Pallo Zo (Hilton Carter) starts a documentary on the life and ideas of Arthur Zarek (played by the Maryland college's late philosopher-in-residence, Richard Kalter), a custodian at Pallo's art school and creator of music instruments designed to tap into spirituality. Zarek, who is clearly modeled on such unclassifiable American masters as John Cage, Partch and Morton Subotnick, makes an offer that can't be refused upon his death: His will states his multi-million dollar estate will be inherited by all the students who attend his memorial service --but only if they stay in the property as a group for a month.

Putting aside the unlikelihood that a custodian could own such a valuable piece of real estate, or that the studio seen on screen (decked out with acoustic, string and electronic devices of every shape and size) hardly looks like such a pricey property, premise carries all the earmarks of the kind of psycho-horror fodder that's the specialty of Bob Weinstein's Dimension

file:///C|/Documents%20and%20Settings/Owner/Desktop/Adam/press/Variety\_com%20-%20The%20Instrument.htm (1 of 2) [7/7/2005 3:06:42 PM]

# THE INSTRUMENT

Variety.com - The Instrument

label -- or of Roger Corman back in the day. "The Instrument," though, surprises most for eschewing any genre tack whatsoever.

It also disposes with most of the overused "Blair Witch" docu-within-fiction strategy, even though things do get a tad hysterical. The student group, most with music training, seem to take to the studio live-in happening although it is strictly private and even a little like prison.

Zarek's ideas about "consonance" and such things as "outflowing hunting rituals" are just too nutty to take seriously, but the students concoct a series of music-based rites that become increasingly compelling to watch, even when the group gets twitchy with cabin fever.

Nemett covers the action with trippy wide-angle lensing and with more cameras than Pallo could possibly have for his film-within-film. Additionally, pic never makes sense of the insertion of Pallo's personal memories and dramas. Cast, looking like it's having a load of collegiate fun, never breaks the illusion of a docu.

Behind the scenes, pic received advice and research from novelist Joyce Carol Oates and scholar Cornel West, who makes a half-cracked cameo that's slightly shorter than his turns in the last two "Matrix" entries.

**Camera** (color, Super 16mm/DV), Frankie Tze Wei Ng, Chris Freilich; **editor**, Macauley Peterson; **music**, David Hittson, Ajay Kapur; **music supervisors**, Hittson, Clemens Morgenroth; **production designer**, Barry Nemett; **art director**, James Gillespie; **set decorator**, Jennifer Brea; **costume designers**, Brea, Penelope Tang; **sound**, Evan Naides; **sound designer**, Bob Kirschner; **supervising sound editors**, Peterson, Dominic Bartolini; **visual effects**, Freilich, Peterson; **animation**, John McGill; **choreographer**, Taryn Wayne; **line producers**, Brittany Blockman, Hittson, Kadi Hughes; **assistant directors**, Dan Wachtell, Naides. Reviewed on videotape, Los Angeles, May 16, 2005. (In Dances With Films.) **Running time:** 101 MIN.

Read the full article at:

<http://www.variety.com/story.asp?i=story&r=VE1117927374&c=31>

Like this article? Variety.com has over 100,000 articles, 35,000 reviews and 10,000 pages of charts. Subscribe today!

<http://www.variety.com/emailfriend>

or call (866) MY-VARIETY.

Can't commit? Sign up for a free 14-day trial!

<http://www.variety.com/emailfriend>

© 2005 Reed Business Information  
Use of this Website is subject to [Terms of Use](#), [Privacy Policy](#)

# THE INSTRUMENT

THE SUN

Movies:  
Hopkins  
festival  
showcases  
Maryland  
films. PAGE 6

Scene: MICA  
plays host to  
fashion show.  
PAGE 28

04.21.05

# LIVE!

Page 6T : Thursday, April 21, 2005 : The Sun

LIVE!

## Movies

On Screen • DVD/Video

### Md. filmmakers in the spotlight

By CHRIS KALTENBACH  
SUN MOVIE CRITIC

**E**van Gulfoyle and Jonathan Schultz's *Winterlude* is an episodic, subversively elegiac look at relationships. John Kinhart's *Non-Player Character* is a documentary about three men whose lives are perhaps uncomfortably defined by the make-believe roles they play. Niko Miller's *A Special Message* from CCAQZ is a happy absurdist short about gay zombies and their antisocial behavior.

#### Directors' works to be shown Sunday at Hopkins

Three films, aimed at disparate audiences, but with one common thread — all are the work of Maryland filmmakers, as are all the films being shown Sunday as the seventh Hopkins Film Fest winds to a close.

"The films we got from Baltimore were almost uniformly good," says festival director Sean Ruch, a senior film major at Hopkins. "It was surprising, considering how many of our submissions are usually not good."

The four-day festival opens tonight at 8 with a restored print of Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai's 1991 *Days of Being Wild*, followed at 10 by Federico Fellini's 1965 *Juliet of the Spirits*. Over its four-day run, the festival will

highlight works by filmmakers you've never heard of — obscure, low-budget features and shorts that make up in imagination (and potential) what they may lack in polish.

The three feature-length and nine short films on Sunday's schedule range from the crazed to the sublime, from the surprisingly well-polished to the profane and defiantly amateurish.

Gulfoyle and Schultz's *Winterlude*, for instance, follows a director as he struggles to make a movie that mixes reality and fiction, starring a real-life couple and based on their lives together, with some scenes scripted, others improvised. But what the film-within-a-film is really about is the director's own failed relationship, and his attempts to discover what happens by seeing it re-enacted by another couple (who don't realize they're being used as behavioral guinea pigs).

Gulfoyle, 26, who has worked locally as a location scout for HBO's *The Wire*, says he and Schultz followed the example of British director Mike Leigh, who works with his actors to give them an understanding of their characters, sets down a plot, then pretty much lets their interpretations and improvisations dictate where the movie goes.

"Basically, it was just a lot of rehearsal," he says, "and by the time they were ready to roll, we were ready to roll."

Not realistic at all are Miller's short films, gleefully primitive



Sean Ruch (left), Evan Gulfoyle, Richard Baker, Jonathan Schultz and Niko Miller.

and anarchic shots across the pop-culture bow that look to make their audiences howl (hopefully in merriment, but perhaps in outrage) while hopefully getting them to think. *Special Message* is presented as a nine-minute infomercial by a group of Christian right-wingers determined to rid the world of gay zombies.

"I'm trying to make fun of everybody, so that nobody gets left behind," says Miller, 22, who is studying film production at Towson University. "The No. 1 thing I try to do is to give people a good time and just be absurd ... have them not realize that they're thinking about stuff. After they laugh initially, then they think about it."

For Richard Baker, whose short *The Fashion of the Christ* suggests that the Son of God would need a killer haircut for his message to be heard nowadays, inspiration came from being teased about his own hair.

"I constantly get teased for my hairstyle," says Baker, 31, a part-time teacher from Hampden who plays the title role in his film. "A few of my students

kept telling me I looked like Jesus. I'm not really a Christian, but I often wonder what people would really think if Jesus appeared back on the street."

Kinhart, a Harford County native who has studied painting and video at Maryland Institute College of Art, wanted to make a documentary that could straddle the fence between drama and comedy. For *Non-Player Character*, he settled on three men — a stand-up comic who goes by the stage name Gemini, a member of an improv comedy group, a guy who helps devise labyrinthine imaginary worlds for him and his friends to role-play in — whose lives involve a blurring of the line between who they are and how they want to be perceived.

"I wanted to [find] something that was kind of silly that I could take seriously, that I could find something serious about, but still treat it as a comedy," says Kinhart, 25.

All four fledgling directors said they were glad to be part of the festival's decision to highlight local filmmakers — "It's nice, to be shown with other

filmmakers that we know," says Gulfoyle. But then, when you're struggling to get a foothold in the business of making movies, it's nice to be shown anywhere.

"The whole goal of it is not to sell movies," says Miller, "but just to find people on the same wavelength to work with ... and, hopefully, getting a job someday."

*Sunday's schedule of movies from local filmmakers begins at 3:30 p.m. with "Non-Player Character," followed by a selection of shorts at 5 p.m. and "Winterlude" at 7 p.m. The festival closes with a screening of Adam Nemeth's "The Instrument," the story of seven art-school students experiencing a new form of worship based on music, at 9 p.m. All films will be shown in Shriver Hall on Hopkins' Homewood campus; tickets prices are \$3 per film, \$5 for a day pass or \$15 for a pass to the entire festival; Hopkins students and faculty get in for free. Information: [www.hopkinsfilmfest.com](http://www.hopkinsfilmfest.com) or 410-340-4703.*

**For film events, see Page 30.**



THE  
INSTRUMENT

THE INSTRUMENT

**Baltimore**

WWW.BALTIMOREMAGAZINE.NET

AUGUST 2002

OUR  
BIGGEST  
ISSUE  
EVER!

# BEST OF BALTIMORE

## BEING ADAM NEMETT

BY STEPHANIE SILVER

A deceased janitor's will offers seven people \$3.5 million to live together for a month in a desolate warehouse and complete seven specific rituals. Sound like

David Lynch meets *The Real World*?

Actually, it's the premise of *Art & The Instrument*, an avant-garde film by first-time writer/director and Stevenson native Adam Nemett. Shooting just completed at the Maryland Institute College of Art, which provided much of the means (sets, space, etc.) to make the picture. (You may have read about another Nemett project in the May 27 issue of the *New Yorker*—he's an editor of a satirical Princeton University newspaper which drew some attention for its "Girls of Princeton" story.)

So how did the 21-year-old Nemett, a religion major entering his senior year, end up making a movie he calls surreal, if not "weird"? A student in Joyce Carol Oates's advanced writing class, Nemett says that while Oates "was slightly freaked out by some of the ideas," she encouraged him to take the project further.

The script, says Nemett, was inspired by ancient ideas of mysticism and "movies that make people think and question themselves," like *Being John Malkovich*. The film's premise is rooted deeply in

music as a means of worship and as a vehicle for transcendence, rather than as entertainment. "It becomes more a question of the nature of reality," Nemett says.

After Oates's positive response, Nemett and his father, Barry, chairman of the painting department at MICA, began to collaborate on the film. The father-son pair decided to team-teach a class at the college and gathered students from each artistic discipline to create the movie's main set.

Though Nemett has drawn from several institutional resources and generous donors, the issue of monetary backing continues to loom over his hopes to distribute the documentary-style feature length film in less than a year. Nemett says he projects that \$15,000 to \$20,000 is necessary to "really do this right" and to "get this thing seen anywhere and everywhere." Fortunately for him, everyone involved in the venture has agreed to work without compensation.

Nemett's thrilled "that everyone's been doing this out of the goodness of their heart. So far, it's grown and grown, and I'm hoping it won't stop."

Adam Nemett's script impressed (and "slightly freaked out") his teacher, novelist Joyce Carol Oates

PHOTO BY MICHAEL MELKONIAN

# THE INSTRUMENT

**The Best of PAW:**  
100 Years of Princeton Alumni Weekly **NOW AVAILABLE!**  
Click here for author interview and a special look at this anthology of Princeton

Write a letter  
about this  
article 

May 14, 2003: On the Campus

## A collaborative effort

For one senior, the thesis pulls from music, religion, computers, and film

By Melissa Renny '03

Adam Nemett '03, a religion major, is one of 15 students writing a creative thesis this year. He isn't working on a novel, or a collection of poetry, as many do. Instead, he's the writer, director, and producer of *The Instrument*, a feature film scheduled for a test screening at Frist Campus Center May 22.

Nemett began thinking about the film two years ago, when he came up with a character he named Arthur Zarek, who was based on two American artists from the 1960s: Harry Partch and James Hampton.

Partch, an innovative composer who died in 1974, took the traditional 12-tone scale and created one with 43-tones to the octave; he also built musical instruments on which to play it. Hampton was a janitor in Washington, D.C., and is famous for creating an altar of 177 small objects wrapped in gold and silver foil; the altar was discovered after Hampton's death in 1964 and is now at the Smithsonian Institution. Zarek, an amalgam of the two men, is a visionary who believes in a musical form of worship.

The film opens with Zarek's death. In his will, Zarek requires that seven art school students live for a month in his apartment, which he calls "the instrument," and which is filled with strange musical instruments, in order to inherit a multimillion dollar piece of property. Pallo Zo, one of the seven, records their lives as a documentary, and Nemett's film follows the students through Zo's lens as they pool their talents to unlock Zarek's musical secrets. Music is the most important aspect of the film, and Nemett believes that by addressing the spiritual, transcendent powers of music, his film offers viewers something new. "For musicians, and other people who have devoted significant time to either playing, studying, or listening to challenging music, this movie, I hope, will resound deeply," he says.

At the beginning of his junior year, Nemett enlisted Ajay Kapur '02, a computer science major who was creating electronic instruments for his own thesis; he became both music director and an actor in the film. David Hittson '03, a music major looking for an opportunity to compose music, also signed on.

The project became a collaboration between Princeton and the Maryland Institute College of Art when Nemett's father, a professor there, set up a course last spring in which students created the room Nemett would use in his film. Nemett, Kapur, and Hittson traveled to Maryland and asked students to contribute paintings and sculptures based on music. "The project could not have happened without everything that the institute contributed," Nemett says.

Working with Joyce Carol Oates, Nemett finished the screenplay last spring and was accepted by the creative writing program to write a creative thesis, which includes the screenplay, the film, and a novella based on Arthur Zarek. His religion thesis includes the film and a critical analysis.

"It's a wonderfully imaginative and ambitious project, with visionary overtones; quite unlike any other thesis I have



Photos: From top,  
David Hittson '03,  
Taryn Wayne '01,  
and Ajay Kapur '02  
in scenes from *The Instrument*.  
(photographs: tze wei ng '04)

# THE INSTRUMENT

advised," Oates says. "It may well have a life independent of its academic origins."

Filming took place in Baltimore last summer, where 20 students and recent graduates from Princeton and the Maryland Institute College of Art converged on Nemett's house. "I had about 17 members of cast and crew living in my house in Baltimore for a month, working 20-hour days. When you make your first feature film, you basically have to assume every part of the production, from budgeting to editing, business-plan writing to lighting design, set design to schmoozing the cops into letting me shoot in restricted areas," Nemett says.

Many of the scenes involve dance and singing performances set to Hittson and Kapur's music. Hittson's contributions include orchestral music, world music, electronic music, a composition for a rock band, and improvisation. As a music major, Hittson used these compositions as the basis of his thesis, making him one of the first music majors to work on a film.

With 70 hours of footage, the editing began. Macauley Peterson '01, a former Princeton film student, helped Nemett create a trailer and cut the film.

Although distinguished professors, including Oates, Cornel West '80, and Paul Lansky, will evaluate the project, Nemett says the film is for the public. He plans to enter it in festivals this summer. "I don't want this to be just a thesis project that is going to get shown once at Princeton," Nemett says. "I think we have a good enough product to shoot for the top." 

Melissa Renny '03 wrote her senior thesis on storytelling in novels written by children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors.

**Related links:**

<http://www.TheInstrumentMovie.com>

[Return to beginning of On the Campus](#)  
[HOME](#) [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

---

[HOME](#) ■ [SITE MAP](#)

[Current Issue](#) ■ [Online Archives](#) ■ [Printed Issue Archives](#)  
[Advertising Info](#) ■ [Reader Services](#) ■ [Search](#) ■ [Contact PAW](#) ■ [Your Class Secretary](#)

# THE INSTRUMENT

**IMAGES FROM THE INSTRUMENT**  
**(Hi-Res Production Stills available at [www.TheInstrumentMovie.com](http://www.TheInstrumentMovie.com))**



Jose Mertz as Carlos, preparing for the Dissonance Ritual

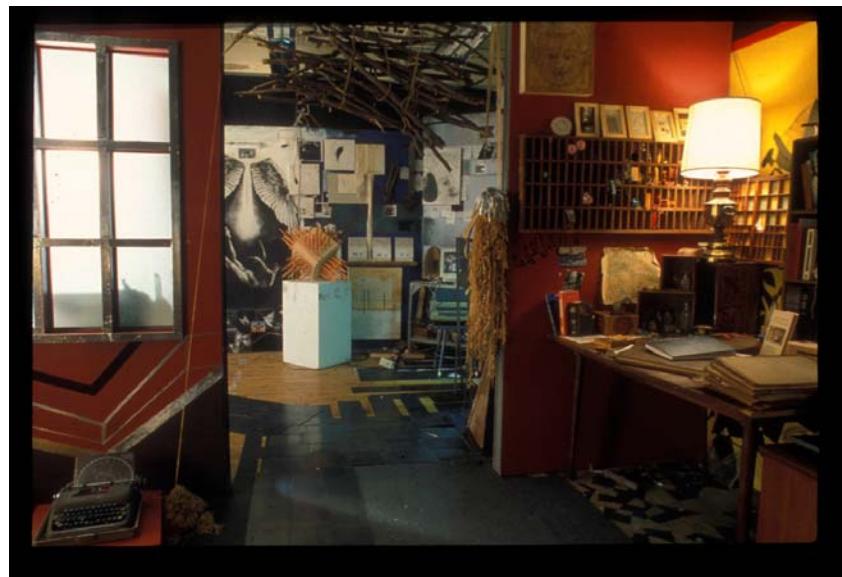


Jamie Kassel as Chloe, in costume for the Consonance Ritual

THE  
INSTRUMENT



Ajay Kapur as Nirav, in the Dissonance Ritual



Arthur's Workshop: View #1

THE  
INSTRUMENT



Ritual Space #1



Ritual Space #2

# THE INSTRUMENT



Ritual Harp



“Beware Lest This Direction Cast a Spell”