

SPECS' 12 ADLER MUSEUM CAFE

A DOCUMENTARY FILM WEAVING TOGETHER THE LIFE OF
SPECS SIMMONS, TOP NOTCH STORYTELLER AND OWNER
OF
SPECS' 12 ADLER MUSEUM CAFÉ, A "NORTH BEACH HOLY
SPOT" WITH THE LIVELY STORIES OF THE OFFBEAT
DENIZENS OF THIS WORLD RENOWN ESTABLISHMENT.

By

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SUMMARY

Specs' 12 Adler Museum Café is a documentary film about Specs Simmons, owner of the infamous North Beach "holy spot", a bar on Columbus and Broadway in San Francisco and the creative community of denizens who gather at his watering hole. When Specs Simmons opened the bar in April of 1968, it quickly became a nucleus for activism, creativity and community in the North Beach neighborhood.

Along with City Lights Books, Vesuvio Café, and Tosca's on Columbus Avenue, Specs' bar has played an important role in the social and cultural climate of San Francisco, as it embodies the values of the man who created it -- tolerance, respect for diversity, and workers' rights, among others. The story of Specs' will be recalled through interviews, contemporary footage, historical footage, and still photographs collected over the bar's 40 year history.

Directing the film is Elly Simmons, Specs' daughter, allowing an insider's view of the man and the neighborhood. "*Specs*" will tell both the personal story of the man himself, and the story of the culturally rich neighborhood of North Beach, San Francisco. *Specs*' is shot entirely on mini DV. With current footage, great interviews and hundreds of photographs, the film will be a collage of images and music, poetry, great humor, and the sorrow that 40 years of the life of a neighborhood also embraces.

Specs' is intended both for audiences in San Francisco and California, and also to be viewed nationally and internationally. This film will be submitted to film festivals in the U.S. and abroad, and distribution will be sought through theatrical and broadcast mediums.

Shooting began in 2003. After a several year hiatus, Elly Simmons is working diligently on completion of the film for this year of 2008, the 40th anniversary of the bar, and the 80th birthday of the man. Over 75 hours of interviews and footage have been shot and logged. An eight minute sample reel is available for viewing.

Director/Producer: Elly Simmons

Associate Producer: Jason Bryan

Editors: Jason Bryan, Gina Leibrecht

Cinematography: Jason Bryan, Adam Ballachy, Gina Leibrecht, Marc Hiyashi, Lalo Obregon, & Johanna Harman

INTRODUCTION

SPECS' 12 ADLER MUSEUM CAFÉ is a film about SPECS SIMMONS and the

creative community of denizens who gather at his pub in San Francisco's North Beach. When Specs Simmons opened the bar in April of 1968, it quickly became a nucleus for activism, creativity and community in the North Beach neighborhood during a period of great creative ferment and cultural change. Along with City Lights Bookstore, Tosca and Vesuvio, all on the same block of Columbus Avenue, Specs' bar has played an important role in the social and cultural climate of San Francisco over a course of forty years. The film will embody the values of the man who created the well-loved bar, including activism, love of art, music and culture, a fervent love of humanity, and a strong respect for workers' rights. In fact, respect for a great diversity of people is a strong current running through the film.

Elly Simmons, daughter of Specs, is directing and producing the film. The documentary will be both a personal story of Specs Simmons, and one celebrating the famous and celebrated North Beach community contributing greatly to the diversity of our great city.

Specs is shot entirely on mini DV. With current footage, historical footage, numerous interviews and countless still visuals, Specs will be a compelling and lively documentary.

When Specs Simmons opened Specs' 12 Adler Museum Café, the bar on Columbus Avenue in San Francisco's North Beach, San Francisco was still a blue-collar town, and many of the original denizens were longshoremen, merchant marines and other workers. In the late 60's, the much celebrated summer of love brought thousands to San Francisco seeking a new way of life. The United States was in the midst of the Vietnam war, the Black Power movement, the Asian-American movement, the Women's movement and the Chicano movement. Specs' bar quickly became a center drawing people active in all these causes, as well as drawing artists from the beat culture of North Beach, and your neighborhood working man and woman looking for a welcoming hang-out after a long day's work. Dancers from the topless clubs also called Specs their own, a safe haven for rest and relaxation. This was the rich mix establishing Specs' 12 Adler as the beloved bar it is today.

In its' setting in Saroyan Alley, one-half block down from Columbus and Broadway, and across the street from Kerouac Alley, Specs' comprises one of the points in the triangle between City Lights Books/Vesuvio Cafe and Tosca's. This triangle of bars and the famous City Lights Books is as lively and important a cultural nexus today as in the 50's and 60's. Our film will recount a history of this cultural haven, and illustrate the lively and active nature of the arts and politics and bar culture in the neighborhood today. In 2008, Specs' remains the "living room" for sharp-witted bartenders, musicians, painters and poets, visitors from around the world, actors; those politically committed to union, and anti-war causes, seamen, city workers, and dancers from the neighborhood. The unchanged nature of the folks who inhabit Specs is part of its' allure, keeping strong values in the face of major change. Our film will celebrate the great ethnic diversity thriving in San Francisco, and pouring into its' haunts.

The Specs' documentary is not only about the community, but will tell a personal story as well. We capture the strong values that Specs the man, and Specs' the bar embody.

Specs Simmons, (Richard Edward Simmons) a top notch storyteller and iconic North Beach figure, has created a place that reflects his esteem for the working man and woman. For example, Specs' is the only union bar in San Francisco, and he hired California's first female bartender in 1975. Because of his support for labor and political activities, activists in environmental and political causes have called the bar home for many years. Specs' is also known as a place where women feel safe and comfortable coming in alone for a quiet coffee or drink.

Our film will explore the his early history, born into a working class Jewish family in Roxbury, Boston. Specs began working at age 15 in the family sheet metal shop, giving shape to his labor values. His early exposure to Yiddish theater and comedy gave foundation to his classic East Coast Jewish humor, This dry wit was inherited from his mother and nine aunts and uncles. At an early age, he started working for social justice and equal rights for all people. Also, at age 16, Specs wandered clubs working comedy routines and singing folk music (ribald and political). He performed during the war for the troops at home. In our film, we also explore Specs' generosity in the neighborhood, his love of people, love of literature and music, and his non-stop repartee of one liners and quick witted storytelling. We will explore his political and historical savvy. Ultimately, Specs remains the quintessential storyteller, entertaining and sharp, offbeat and funny.

Finally, we explore the soul and complexity of a man with real life experience. He is a man well

loved, valued, and honored in the neighborhood for who he really is, quite popular with the women despite his gruff demeanor. Contrary to his gregarious social nature, he is also a man intensely private in his personal life, remaining an enigma to many people. These characteristics add to his iconic presence in the neighborhood.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

“You can be anyone you want to be at Specs.”

--Sean Jackson, bartender

It is not unusual to saunter into Specs’ and find a lively crowd of young European travelers, who have all read of Specs’ in their travel books, or a collection of Dubliners who have come to share “the craic” with Sean “Jacko” Jackson, our Irish bartender. Recently, Elly entered the bar to encounter a regular, a Tibetan who assists the Dalai Lama and who brings in a gathering of Tibetan mountaineers, who also work for a top local real estate tycoon. At the next table sat Smitty, an old friend of Specs, an African-American who has worked good union jobs in the Bay Area over his long lifetime and has come in to celebrate his retirement at last. Young students from the Art Institute and other creative city teaching institutions are always hanging at back tables, while at the front of the bar you can find on Tuesdays and Fridays, the Bechtel crowd of white collar workers, largely European–American and Asian, sitting in the window seat and the front six stools for an afterwork martini, sharing life stories, politics, and celebrating the end of the work week. A collection of homeless people and musicians may be found in the alley outside of Specs. The blues harp player always draws a curious audience. Specs himself said he never would have met the same variety of people in Boston or New York because of sharp delineations in neighborhoods.

The film will take on a more personal note as it illustrates a classic American life as told by bar owner Specs Simmons, whose Russian/Polish Jewish immigrant family moved to the east coast from the old country. He grew up in Roxbury, Boston, in a neighborhood of black and Jewish working class and poor families. This shaped his awareness of class and racial inequities. His three uncles, Yay, Tzib and Tex ran a candy store that fronted a bookie joint which Malcolm X frequented. At an early age, Specs began organizing in civil rights work, through a neighborhood youth group of blacks and Jews. He started work at age 15, in the family sheet metal shop. His early work included building sheet metal coffins for those who died in WWII. Through years of manual labor, working side by side with men of a variety of nationalities and life experiences, Specs shaped his working class values. His sense of social justice transferred easily to a true valuing of women's worth and his actions continue to support women's equality and women's delight!

In the 1950's, he traveled west to create his own life, independent of family and place of origin. Eventually he opened the bar where he was able to implement all his learned values and savvy life experience. He held fast to hiring union bartenders, was determined to provide a comfortable joint where neighborhood workers could relax during off hours, and had no tolerance for racist attitudes. He hired the first woman bartender in San Francisco, and created a bar which continues to be a place where women feel safe and welcome. He created a bar that stands out from other establishments in its atmosphere of respect.

The *Specs'* film is shot entirely on mini DV. Interviews with myriad Specs' denizens, including bartenders, cultural activists, bar and restaurant workers, writers, actors, travelers, artists, and others, will be interwoven with hundreds of still photographs collected from the Simmons family and from photographers documenting the happenings and habitués at Specs over the decades. Historical footage of San Francisco will carry many of the stories. Books, photographs, drawings and poems created by the denizens of the bar further illustrate the wealth of creativity that finds its home at Specs. For example, photographer Ed Brooks has chronicled hundreds of faces of North Beach over time. In a montage of these faces, we show the wide diversity of the North Beach habitués.

THE SPACE

Upon entering Specs' bar, we immediately see that the brick and richly colored walls encrusted with fascinating posters, flags, sculptures, photographs of local musicians, actors and historical memorabilia—an expression of Specs' interest in San Francisco history and world culture. These artifacts create the “museum café” of the bar's name.

At times these objects will be used as a jumping off point to begin our narratives. These include stories of bartenders' interactions with customers; activism that has fermented a change in San Francisco's political climate, and loves lost and found. In using the objects on the walls of the bar, for example we introduce a segment on the values and activism of the working class by showing images of labor related posters and buttons, then move to our interview with a labor activist. International Longshoreman Worker's Union and Wobbly stories are included in our labor segment. On each subject introduced by items in the bar, we branch out to tell stories and the larger picture of this theme. We return to the bar each time a new segment is introduced, as a reminder that it has served as haven for everything expressed in the film.

INTERVIEWS

We interview San Francisco's Poet Laureate Jack Hirschman, a long time Specs regular, Specs Simmons himself, and several others who describe the highly dramatic International Hotel struggle, where Chinese and Filipino immigrants joined North Beach activists to halt destruction of a low income housing complex. Jack is a Communist and poet and he talks passionately about his activism and how poets like to “stir up a joint.” Specs has lived for more than thirty five years on a street bordering Chinatown and knows well the history and reality of Asian immigrant life, thus activating him to protest their displacement.

We interview Elaine Katzenburger, an editor at City Lights Books who speaks about bartending

in the neighborhood when she was younger, and the variety of characters she encountered. She speaks about the political and social values spearheaded by poet Laurence Ferlinghetti, and City Lights Books which percolated to other establishments in the neighborhood. Elaine discusses the power lying within the “triangle” comprised of Vesuvio Café/City Lights Books, Tosca’s, and Specs’ where, beginning in the 50s, outcasts gathered and broke new ground in poetry, literature, and social values.

Stage photographs of Anna Sears in her various night club costumes will introduce her story. She was a stripper in the late 60’s and early 70’s in the “Garden of Eden” nightclub upstairs from Specs, and took her breaks in the bar. She explains in our interview, what it was like to work as a dancer on the streets of Broadway in the days of free love and innocence. Dancers from the only cooperative strip joint in the United States, The Lusty Lady, make Specs bar their hangout.

Sean “Jacko” Jackson, a Dubliner and one of film’s more delightful and thoughtful characters, has bartended at Specs for over twenty years. He has a grasp of the soul and spirit of the place that is unique. From behind the bar, we interview him sharing his view of the customers and the boss. Known for his warmth and ability to introduce people to each other, counsel the heartbroken and celebrate with the others, Sean taps into the more intimate nature of the connections between people.

These North Beach characters and others, share the ways in which Specs’ has impacted their lives in profound ways, and contributed to the unique flavor of this world famous neighborhood. Footage shot of the storefronts, alleyways, and classic North Beach establishments, as well as footage of North Beach’s many colorful neon lights at night, create the setting. Poets like George Tsongas and Jack Hirschman will read their poetry over these visuals to create a poetic montage that illustrates the ethos of the neighborhood.

AUDIENCE AND DISTRIBUTION

Specs’ 12 Adler Museum Café will be of great interest to audiences in San Francisco and the Bay Area. Due to the universality of the themes of the film, and the historical movements that will be explored, however, this film will be of great interest all over the United States and abroad, appealing to a diverse audience, including those interested in American culture and history; those interested in counter culture, union and working class struggles, artists, poets, those interested in San Francisco history, and in a life reflecting a classic Jewish history and love of life rooted in Jewish culture.

An aggressive and professional marketing and distribution strategy will be explored to ensure that *Specs’* receives wide recognition and is seen by as many individuals as possible. Plans include:

- Submission of the film to key local and national film festivals:

The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival has expressed interest in the Specs film. They accept new independent American and international Jewish-subject cinema in documentary form, about Jewish history, culture, and identity. They have a total attendance of over 34,000.

Mill Valley Film Festival considers all genres-features, shorts and documentaries.

Film Arts Festival receives submissions by local Bay Area artists.

The Chicago International Film Festival has added DOCUFEST to expand upon the number of documentaries that they will show.

Independent Film Festival of Boston – The 2003 festival hosted 10,000. Their mission is to exhibit artistic independent films made by directors worldwide.

Silverdocs Documentary Film Festival, Washington, DC. World View Special Category. Presented by the American Film Institute and the Discovery Channel. They accept American and international documentaries of all styles and genres.

Tribeca Film Festival. NY City. Accepts feature length documentary made by first or second time filmmakers.

New Directors/New Films, presented by New York's Film Society of Lincoln Center. All lengths and genres considered.

Sundance Film Festival receives submissions for independent documentary film.

Lost Film Festival shows engaging documentaries and absurd comedies of all lengths.

Seattle International Film Festival accepts feature length documentaries.

- Submission of the film to key international film festivals:

Cork Film Festival accepts international submissions of all forms of documentary film.

International Galway Film Fleadh –Best Feature Documentary category. European and International Documentary films are accepted. The Fleadh gives priority to World and International premieres.

Independent Documentary Festival, Amsterdam. Documentary festival for all lengths of films, featuring competitive and non-competitive sections.

Toronto Jewish Film Festival a noncompetitive event, seeking documentaries that reflect the “Jewish experience around the world.”

- Offering the film to the Public Broadcasting Service for local and national airing.
- Offering the film to the independent cable channels with a focus on independent documentary and educational films, such as The Independent Film Channel and The Sundance Channel.
- International distribution through both theatrical and broadcast mediums.
- Distribution to art centers, museums, and bookstores.

FUNDRAISING STRATEGY

The total production and post-production budget for *Specs* is \$165,060. To date, over \$18,000 has been raised by Elly Simmons, primarily through individual contributions. Over \$40,000 of in-kind donations has been secured. Funding will primarily be sought from the following sources:

- **Individuals** living in the San Francisco Bay Area and across the nation.

We will continue our successful grassroots campaign of reaching out to Elly's extensive mailing list and major donors from the San Francisco Bay Area. We will host art sales and fundraising parties, including events with the many musicians that make Specs' 12 Adler Museum Café their living room.

- **The following grants:**

The Fleishhacker Foundation, Small Grants in the Arts Program– provides funding for artists in the Bay Area.

Creative Capital Foundation– A national non-profit that supports individual artists creating in the visual, performing arts and in film and video. Focus on innovative, experimental approaches to form and/or content.

The Nathan Cummings Foundation- supports arts and cultural organizations partnering with community groups that engage in responsive processes, collective problem solving, cross-cultural initiatives or the education of a broader public about social justice issues and shared community concerns. Specifically, Objective I, Strategy 3: To develop and support a communications strategy that includes the publication and dissemination of research that substantiates the importance of the arts in influencing social change; and the dissemination of information about collaborative projects that leads to effective public education as well as social and political action.

The Fund for Jewish Documentary Filmmaking- designed to support the making of original documentary films and videos that promote thoughtful consideration of Jewish history, culture, identity, and contemporary issues among diverse public audiences. The Fund will support those works in the final stages of post- production that address significant subjects, offer fresh, challenging perspectives, engage audiences across cultural lines, and influence the way various publics understand and interpret Jewish experience and concerns.

National Endowment for the Arts, Grants for Arts Project– supports organizations that are involved in a broad spectrum of activity in the media arts.

The Lef Foundation- seeks to support work of high creative merit in the fields of film and new media, among others.

Colombia Foundation – supports art that encourages awareness of, and a focus on, the need to develop sustainable communities and economies, and to protect human rights. They also wish to support artistic activity that engages the public in the philosophical, aesthetic, personal, political and practical aspects of contemporary issues.

