

LITTLE BOY PICTURES AND
HEARTLESS ROBOT PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

THREE HAMS IN A CAN



A FILM BY KENTA McGRATH

PRESS KIT

WWW.THREEHAMSINACAN.COM

2009 / 79 MINS / AUSTRALIA

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THREE HAMS IN A CAN

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PRODUCTION DETAILS

2009 / Australia / 79 minutes / Documentary
In Japanese (with English subtitles) & English
Colour / Stereo / 1.78:1

Directed, Produced, Shot & Edited by Kenta McGrath
Featuring Chris Cobilis, Predrag Delibasich, Stina Thomas

Acquisition HDV
Exhibition HD CAM, Digibeta
Production Little Boy Pictures / Heartless Robot Productions

OFFICIAL WEBSITE

www.threehamsinacan.com

SCREENINGS / AWARDS

Revelation Perth International Film Festival - World Premiere
Bradford International Film Festival - International Premiere
The Biennale of Sydney 2010

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SYNOPSIS

Three Australian experimental musicians (Chris Cobilis, Predrag Delibasich, Stina Thomas) travel to Tokyo for a tour. There they perform their music and do what all tourists do: eat, drink, go sightseeing, take photos, befriend strangers and battle the gruesome humidity. The camera quietly observes these goings-on, occasionally straying off path to witness the tiny and magical moments of everyday Tokyo.

Told in a series of fragments and full of heart and humour, *THREE HAMS IN A CAN* adopts a minimalist approach to documenting the tour and the strange, yet familiar world the musicians enter. Part music documentary, part home movie and part meditation on friendship, loneliness and the strangeness of life.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In July 2008 I was offered a chance to fly to Tokyo and shoot a tour diary about three Australian musicians (Chris Cobilis, Predrag Delibasich, Stina Thomas). Thrilled at the idea of shooting a film in my home country, and in the company of musicians I admire, I jumped at the opportunity.

I wasn't, however, so keen on the 'tour diary' format. They are always far too exclusive; of interest only to those who know and appreciate the music. I argued my case to the producer: shoot a documentary that could stand on its own two feet, one that would be more universal and accessible to those who couldn't care less about the music these people were playing. A film in which music would play an important part, but not necessarily a film about music. Okay, he said. So in August I flew to Tokyo with plenty of ambition but no real clue, nor plan, as to what kind of film I was going to make.

Three Hams in a Can is the final result. In the end I simply followed my subjects around like a bad odour and pointed the camera at whatever interested me. There is no plot, no driving narrative, no story arc as such. Just a series of fragments depicting the precious little moments that made up my weeklong stay. Sometimes it was exciting, sometimes it was boring. Sometimes the boring things were the most exciting, and vice versa.

At a base level it's a snapshot of an overseas trip and how we spend each day, alone and in the company of others, both friends and strangers. It's also a film about communication and miscommunication, how friendships can be more genuine, and easier to forge, when two individuals don't share the same tongue. And of course it's a peek into the Tokyo underground, one of the most vibrant music scenes on the planet.

I think the film, in the end, articulates my own feelings about being a Japanese/Australian returning to Tokyo - a city that makes me feel pathetically small but excessively alive; a city in which I'm both a tourist, and very much at home.

Kenta McGrath

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SELECTED PRESS QUOTES

“An artful, unromanticised treatment of both the travel and band documentary genres... as unromanticised a travel doco as it is, it still manages to give an alluring, humanising whiff of Japan.”

- Matt Giles, THE WEST AUSTRALIAN

“Part music documentary, part home movie, part meditation on the nature of friendship, this gentle, humorous film sees McGrath following his subjects to concerts, to after show drinks, to tourist sites, and to a barbeque in their honour. Along the way no chairs are thrown, no hotel rooms are smashed, and nobody is arrested.”

- REVELATION INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

“Arrestingly fresh and original from the very first frames, *Three Hams in a Can* is as deadpan-offbeat as its title suggests.”

- Neil Young, BRADFORD INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

“Fascinating... Mesmerizing... *Three Hams in a Can* is the anti-travel and concert documentary, yet more genuine and truthful about both those topics than familiar exercises in the genres.”

- Mike Everleth, BAD LIT

“The film’s images are lyrical and subtly humorous – almost dreamlike, but with a distinct verite earthiness... *Three Hams in a Can* presents a version of the concert tour film that not only disrupts its dominant narratives, but also offers many subtle and insightful glimpses into the way in which both travellers, and hosts make connections with the constant risk of something being lost in translation.”

- Adam Trainer, THE DRUM MEDIA

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SELECTED PRESS QUOTES

“It is the uneventfulness of the film that provides its charm... The strength of the film is its authenticity.”

- **Gail Jones, REALTIME ARTS MAGAZINE**

“A slow, subtle and quiet meditation.”

- **MESS AND NOISE MAGAZINE**

“As much highly entertaining as it is frankly banal. In other words much like life itself. If that kind of creative fidelity means something to you then you’re probably going to find *Three Hams in a Can* highly congenial.”

- **Bernard Hemingway, CINEPHILIA.NET**

“A fantastic documentary.”

- **Jack Sargeant**

“Just as you’re beginning to get fidgety, *Three Hams in a Can* slowly goes to work on your senses, sewing a gentle rhythm as it hits its very subtle stride... It’s then that *Three Hams* starts to segue from one great scene to another.”

- **Matt Shea, 20/20 FILMSIGHT**

“A humorous, philosophical music documentary.”

- **JAPAN AUSTRALIA NEWS**

THREE HAMS IN A CAN

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REVIEW: BERNARD HEMINGWAY, CINEPHILIA.NET



Three Hams In A Can follows three Australian “experimental” musicians to Tokyo where they are taking part in a festival of like-minded souls making a god-awful racket in the name of art, or something similar. Given the off-the-wall nature of their musical endeavours it is entirely appropriate that director/producer/videographer/editor Kenta McGrath does not take a conventional approach to his task. As such, to call the result a documentary is somewhat misleading and if one approaches it with the expectations of being informed about its apparent topic, probably frustrating. There is no exegetical narration, no to-camera interviews and only the bare bones of a narrative structure. But for those who are happy to shift mental gears this will be precisely the charm of the film.

Rather than being a document of a real life music tour, **Three Hams In A Can** is better seen as a parallel perception as McGrath, a kind of non-participatory fellow-traveller, takes us on a journey that is both connected to and disconnected from its protagonists and their putative mission. In fact the film works much better if viewed as a fictional construction, with questions about who, what and why being set aside. I could not help but think of those films of Gus Van Sant that resolutely refuse to buy into character-centred, plot-driven story-telling and dramatic action but rather embeds their subjects in the oblique, haphazard nature of the everyday that only the non-discriminatory camera can see. Which is not to say that this is in any sense a point-and-shoot exercise. McGrath shapes his material both in the camera and in post-production and the result is as much highly entertaining as it is frankly banal. In other words much like life itself. If that kind of creative fidelity means something to you then you’re probably going to find **Three Hams In A Can** highly congenial.

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THREE HAMS IN A CAN

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FEATURE ARTICLE: THE DRUM MEDIA

THREE HAMS IN JAPAN

A NEW FILM BY DIRECTOR KENTA McGRATH, THREE HAMS IN A CAN, PUTS A TWIST ON THE FABLED DOCUMENTARY GENRE. ADAM TRAINER SPOKE TO THREE LOCAL MUSICIANS AND A FILMMAKER.

Going on tour is one of those rock'n'roll clichés populated by its own distinct and equally hackneyed imagery of TVs hurled from hotel windows, seas of writhing groupies and overdosing in the bath. But when Perth documentary filmmaker Kenta McGrath followed three local musicians on tour to Japan, the film he came away with – *Three Hams In A Can*, which screens at this year's Revelation Film Festival – broke the mould of your typical tour diary. The three musicians in question are Predrag Delibasich (or Pex to those who know him, bass player with Bamodi and Abe Sada and an established solo musician in his own right), Stina Thomas (much revered purveyor of melodic laptop electronica and sometimes member of Fall Electric) and Chris Cobilis (The Tigers' frontman and veteran local experimentalist).

The film is not a documentation of rock'n'roll excess but a gentle and absorbing meditation on the nature of friendship, travel and art, and the ways in which the three can intersect. Having grown up in Tokyo, McGrath accompanied the trio as a friend, part-time translator, and tour documentarian, although he maintains that the film came about very organically. "Although I made a lot of mental preparations beforehand I really had no idea what kind of film it was going to be until a few days in. It was scary and unpredictable, but that's also the fun and beauty of documentaries." However, his existing relationship with Tokyo was the key in allowing him to exert his own directorial sensibilities. "If I was filming in a huge, vibrant place like Tokyo and wasn't familiar with it, I'd simply be filming like a tourist, responding in a knee-jerk manner to everything I see and hear. Because I felt like I understand the character of the city, I could shoot in a more controlled and disciplined way. I knew what kind of images to look for and what to avoid."

For all three musicians, the tour wasn't necessarily all about the music. Pex's in-laws live in Yokohama, with one of the film's key sequences taking place at a barbecue at their house. "It was awesome going there this time with five of my friends, spending time together, doing the usual touristy things, buying records, eating, drinking and playing gigs," says Pex. Cobilis agrees that the trip held other important goals for him: "Junk food and shopping first, music second. Playing music overseas is really just an excuse to visit new places and meet new people." None of the trio placed particular importance on the supposed success of the tour

from a financial or career perspective. Cobilis maintains this, “Basically all I do with my life is watch bands and talk to people in bands, and it’s great if I get to do it overseas too. I measure success by the amount of ‘good times’ I have, which I had plenty of on this trip. Both musical and food related.”

Very little of *Three Hams In A Can* even takes place in the venues within which the three plied their trade, instead focussing on sequences set in parks and on shopping expeditions and visits to temples. There’s a sense of space to the film, with much of it devoted to the passive silences involved in waiting and travelling; in the limbo state of being in a foreign place. From a creative perspective, McGrath treasures this silence. “I always try to make films with as much silence as possible. Films for me are an opportunity to reflect and contemplate and I think silence has always been a very important – though much underused – element in film. I don’t like the feeling of being manipulated and it’s something I always try to avoid, or at least keep to a minimum, as a filmmaker. So I did make a conscious decision to keep my mouth shut, and keep it strictly observational for the most part.”

McGrath’s camera never interferes; we never feel its presence overtly on his subjects. In one particularly memorable sequence we follow the trio passively through the humid heat of a Japanese summer as cicadas hammer out their own distinctive sonic mayhem, and in another Pex conducts a roadside conversation in broken Japanese with a drunken train driver. The film’s image are lyrical and subtly humorous – almost dreamlike, but with a distinct verite earthiness. Stina recalls another experience that didn’t quite make it into recorded form, “Walking through Koenji, absolutely bucketing down with rain, seemingly flooded streets drenching all of us. I felt like I was at a swimming pool in summer. I know Kenta didn’t film it because I was walking behind him watching him try to keep the camera dry, tripping over in his thongs and slipping on the occasional decorative tile on the road.” What comes across from speaking with all four is the fondness they feel for the trip, not as an exercise in self-promotion or creative indulgence, but as a shared experience. If moments like this are what going on tour is about, who needs trashed hotel rooms?

As for the musical element of the trip, although all three conceded that communication did prove taxing at times, music does provide a huge point of connection that can override language barriers. Pex insists, “Where there’s love there’s no miscommunication! All the acts we played with were different and three of us played different music, so there was a lot to enjoy.” Cobilis also shares a fond memory, “I had a conversation with a dude in a really wussy indie rock band about Slayer. I believe Slayer is the universal language of love.”

Three Hams In A Can presents a version of the concert tour film that not only disrupts its dominant narratives, but also offers many subtle and insightful glimpses into the way in which both travellers, and hosts make connections with the constant risk of something being lost in translation. For McGrath, the barbeque at Pex’s in-laws is representative of the film’s driving theme. “For me it’s the heart of the film and also offers a glimpse of Japan and Japanese people that you rarely see. The family can’t speak any English, the musicians can’t speak any Japanese but they communicate so beautifully. I think it’s very universal.”

THREE HAMS IN A CAN

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SIX QUESTIONS WITH KENTA McGRATH:

AN INTERVIEW BY THE FILM & TELEVISION INSTITUTE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

How would you describe your film *Three Hams in a Can*?

A quiet look at the little moments experienced by three Australian musicians (Chris Cobilis, Predrag Delibasich, Stina Thomas) during their tour of Tokyo. Part travelogue, part rockumentary, and part meditation on friendship, loneliness and the strangeness of life.

Who else was involved in making the film?

Scott Bishop – who runs the record label Heartless Robot – was Executive Producer and is the man who gave me the opportunity to make this film. Noah Norton from Balthazaar Media is grading the colour and Matt Bairstow – a local musician and sound nerd – is mixing the sound. As for the filming it was just myself, which was both liberating and a pain in the ass.

What was the production process like?

All in all, a pleasure. In the end I got to simply follow my friends around in a city I love and film whatever interested me. There was no schedule, no shot list, no crew. I shot what I wanted, when I wanted and where I wanted. I quite literally made up the film as I went along; there was complete freedom in every sense.

The downside to this rather loose way of shooting was that I was frequently anxious about whether I was going to end up with a good film, or a film at all. This is a natural feeling for any project but more so when you have exactly one week to make a documentary feature, one that is primarily observational – with no captions, voiceovers, cutaways and other manipulations – so I was slave to whatever happened in front of the camera. But I knew that I was filming interesting people in interesting places and situations and that if I stuck to my guns, something would emerge and thankfully I wasn't wrong. For example, watching two individuals who don't share the same tongue attempt to communicate with each other is in itself a beautifully human – and often comic – experience which I could happily observe for hours on end. As soon as I saw this happen I knew I had a film.

While I had little idea of what kind of film I was making until a few days in, that's not to say I didn't make any sort of preparations beforehand. I looked at the musicians' itineraries, found out where they'd be going, whom they'd be meeting, what kind of artists they'd be performing with; I knew I wanted to use their music in the film so I really immersed myself in it for weeks before the shoot; I made a lot of mental notes about the kinds of themes and images that might become apparent. I was born and raised in Tokyo and know the city well – I knew the kind of images I might want and the kind of images I wanted to avoid. For example, I wasn't

interested in tall buildings, neon lights, the cosplay girls at Harajuku – the typical images of Tokyo which are so overused and one-dimensional. I mainly wanted to focus on people, and the ordinary, unseen things.

As for the one-man-crew shoot – as I said, both liberating and a pain in the ass. It gave me a lot of freedom in the kind of places I could go and I could film without being too obtrusive. The final scene in the packed train, for example – I could never have shot that with crew present, even if there was just another sound recordist. Generally, no one batted an eyelid when I walked around and filmed because I was on my own and besides, *everybody* is filming in Tokyo. The downside of course is that I often had to lug around equipment in the gruesome Japanese summer by myself, and it was sometimes frustrating and stressful not to have creative and technical support, and someone to just discuss the progress of the film with. There were also some technical aspects which no doubt would have been stronger if there were other crew assisting. It was a worthy compromise, though, and one that's appropriate for this kind of film.

Which filmmakers are you inspired by?

I love a huge number of filmmakers – some great and some awful – but as a director I'm particularly inspired by great minimalist filmmakers – Abbas Kiarostami, Tsai Ming-liang, Kelly Reichardt, the Dardenne brothers, Bruno Dumont, Jacques Tati and the like. During the filming of *Three Hams in a Can* I always had Kiarostami and Tati in mind, and their dedication to capturing the little moments of everyday life.

What advice would you give to someone about to make their next film?

Lose the fancy equipment, lose the unnecessary crew, try and surround yourself with the people you know and love. Make it personal and dare to be simple. Exfoliate regularly.

What's next on the cards for you and Little Boy Pictures?

We're currently in post-production on another feature documentary called *House of Blue* which was shot way back in 2005, during the week of the Cronulla Riots. It observes the last five days of a Chinese man in Australia before he is deported. We're hoping to unveil it sometime later this year. I'm also writing and developing a couple of narrative features and about to begin pre-production on a short called *Cabbage*.

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ABOUT THE MUSICIANS

CHRIS COBILIS

Chris Cobilis began performing music in 1997 with guitar, samplers, tapes, toys, radios and anything else he could find that could make sound. Through time he incorporated elements of pop music into his performances, forcibly juxtaposing indie rock and serious improvisation; one thumbing its nose at the other and vice versa. Primarily, Cobilis is the singer and guitarist of renowned Australian avant-pop band The Tigers. As a solo performer he has played around the world and has performed alongside the likes of Ikue Mori, Jon Rose, Kenneth Goldsmith, Awesome Color and Damo Suzuki.

PREDRAG DELIBASICH

Predrag Delibasich, often known simply as Pex, is one of the staunchest supporters, and most prolific creators, of truly avant-garde music in Perth. He performs in bands Abe Sada, Bamodi and smRts and as a soloist under the names Bassta! Pex and Gutter Guitar, and each of these fundamentally challenges both rote methods of music composition and basic listenability. Abe Sada build walls of noise with nothing but four bass guitars, Bamodi mix 70s New York post-punk with 90s Japanese, and as both Bassta! Pex and Gutter Guitar he uses a lone instrument, a bass in the first case and a guitar in the second, to create ambient, blobby noise.

STINA THOMAS

If you obliterated a music box with a wood chipper then reassembled it into a cracked but basically accurate shadow simulacrum of its former self, one that sounded a bit messed up and could only play for a few moments before it had to stop and take a rest, you would have a serviceable but clichéd description of Stina Thomas's music. She, a woman-Korg-laptop matrix, composes sound art, ambient IDM, lush arrangements, pretty glitch and chunky beats on a round-robin basis. You'd have to be a mix between Handel and Pikachu not to be surprised by her.

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ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Kenta McGrath is an independent filmmaker based in Perth, Western Australia. He has directed a number of short and medium-length narrative works, including *Welcome to Pipe Mountain* and *Hole in the Ground*; *Three Hams in a Can* is his first feature-length film. He currently teaches film and media studies - and is a PhD student - at Curtin University of Technology.

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY:

House of Blue (83 mins, in post-production)

Voltaire Twins - D.I.L. (3 mins, 2009)

Three Hams in a Can (79 mins, 2009)

Recording Foley (9 mins, 2009)

Hole in the Ground (39 mins, 2008)

Welcome to Pipe Mountain (24 mins, 2007)

Please visit www.littleboypictures.com for more details on these films.

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CREDITS LIST

DIRECTED, PRODUCED,
SHOT & EDITED BY

Kenta McGrath

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
SOUND DESIGN
COLOURIST
POST-PRODUCTION CONSULTANT
TRANSLATION ASSISTANT
EQUIPMENT
NON-ORIGINAL MUSIC

Scott Bishop
Matt Bairstow
Noah Norton
Matt Osborne
Setsuko McGrath
Location Equipment
Chris Cobilis
Predrag Delibasich
Stina Thomas

BANDS/ARTISTS FEATURED
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE,
INDOORS ONLY)

Chris Cobilis
Stina
Gutter Guitar
Seven That Spells
Tokyo SS
Conti
Bon no Kubo
Kawasemi House

SPECIAL THANKS

Rachel Kuan	eM Seven
The Fukuda Family	Penguin House
Atsuko Delibasich	Erin Madden
Glen Adams	Benjamin Mulvey
Steve Hughes	Adrian McFarlane
Yoshiko Noma	Mark Seman
Howard Worth	Hugh Thomson

Shot on location in Tokyo, Japan

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