

UPSTATE FILMS Presents A TIMED EXPOSURES Production  
In Association with CHELSEA PICTURES



A NEW FEATURE-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY

Written and Directed by  
RALPH ARLYCK

Produced by  
RALPH ARLYCK & MALCOLM PULLINGER

Running time: 87 minutes

For more information and to download stills, please visit  
[www.followingsean.com](http://www.followingsean.com)

**Timed Exposures**  
79 Raymond Ave.  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603  
Tel/Fax: 845.485.8489

Email:  
[ralph@timedexposures.com](mailto:ralph@timedexposures.com)  
[malcolm@timedexposures.com](mailto:malcolm@timedexposures.com)

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# FOLLOWING SEAN

## SYNOPSIS

Filmmaker Ralph Arlyck first met Sean while living as a graduate student in San Francisco's Haight Ashbury neighborhood at the height of the 1960s.

The city was awash with the trappings of America's cultural revolution—the San Francisco State University campus flooded with cops in riot gear, the Haight filled with drifters and idealists, and, on the third floor of Arlyck's building, a come-one-come-all crashpad apartment. It was from this top floor commune that the precocious 4-year-old Sean would occasionally wander downstairs to visit and talk—and one day Arlyck turned on his camera.

Sean's casual commentary on everything from smoking pot to living with speed freaks was delivered with wide-eyed sincerity throughout the soon-to-be famous 15-minute film. This First Child of the notorious decade may have shaken the audience with his simple sentence—“Sure, I smoke pot”—but it was his barefoot impishness and confidence which seemed to encapsulate the mood of the time: a promise of infinite possibility.

Thirty years, three generations, and a lifetime later, Arlyck has returned to San Francisco in search of who the adult Sean may have become. And what he finds, to his surprise, tells him as much about his own east-coast migration as it does about the Californian life he left behind—that the choices we're handed and the choices we make are, very often, quite odd bedfellows.

# FOLLOWING SEAN

## ABOUT the PRODUCTION

When Ralph Arlyck decided to go back to San Francisco to revisit the subject of his celebrated student film, 30 years prior, he had no idea how much Sean's life would reflect his own. The resulting documentary feature, *Following Sean*, brings together the stories of two families, on two separate coasts.

The original short film, titled *Sean*, had been debated and digested as a predictive document, both for Sean and for the culture he was being raised in—unsettling if you felt offended by Haight Ashbury lifestyles and reassuring if you thought 50s cultural stagnation was about to be swept aside.

*I suppose I had this bird's eye view of the birthing of a New American Culture, remembers Arlyck of his Haight days. My neighbors—radical medical students on the second floor, and Sean's family above them on the third, in a wild crashpad with a constant stream of people coming and going—were the equivalent of revolutionary vanguards. And in the midst of it all was this precocious four-year-old, Sean.*

Arlyck filmed Sean while riding behind him on a skateboard through the neighborhood streets and then sat him down on a couch in his living room for a 15-minute interview—the maximum that a four-year-old attention span would allow. Sean played with his bare feet in front of the camera and talked casually about the habits of a stream of transient visitors to his apartment—speed freaks, pot smokers, gurus—and about hating the cops who he saw busting them all. As he spoke about his present world, he revealed a mind full of thoughts about his future. The resulting movie won festival prizes around the world, was dissected in the press, and was shown at a White House conference on child welfare.

Although Arlyck moved back to New York when the film was finished, he was often asked if he knew what had happened to the kid from the Haight. There had seemed to be both promise and danger in the path that such a child could follow.

When Arlyck returned in the mid-90s his camera soon became a fixture in Sean's life—following him from 1994-2003. What gradually emerged was a deeper portrait of three generations of American utopians as told from very distinctly west and east coast perspectives.

Viewers may speculate about whether or not Sean's life is successful, what impact his childhood—and to a degree his parents—had on the choices he's made. Sean's father Johnny still cherishes his 60s freedom, and lives in the area north of San Francisco, where he took his family “back to the land” after their time in the Haight. But Sean seems to identify more strongly with his working-class grandparents, Hon and Archie Brown, important Bay Area communists and labor organizers.

*The family dynamic and influences we were trying to capture, explains Arlyck, slowly began to emerge as a west coast counterpoint to my own family background. As I listened to Sean talk about his father, and especially the inspiration brought to bear by his grandparents' strong working class, communist beliefs, I discovered I was examining my own life as much as I was Sean's.*

Arlyck's own personal history on the east coast invites a compare-and-contrast parallel to the life of his recurring film subject. Whereas Sean's Grandfather, Archie Brown, was a communist party leader and longshoreman union organizer, whose crowd-incitement got him thrown out of HUAC hearings, Arlyck's parents were fair-weather communists in New York in the 30s, attending secret meetings but never really committing to the cause. And when Sean marries the beautiful Russian immigrant Zhanna, it parallels Arlyck's early days with his own expatriate wife, the French-born Elisabeth Cardonne.

Arlyck's voice and personal reflection underscore themes found in the new film—that the complex dance of life turns on the seemingly inconsequential moments and choices we encounter every day.

*Most of us are constantly trying to figure out what we can claim for ourselves versus what we owe our families—the ones we live with, the ones that created us, and the ones that will continue after us. That was what was so wonderful about going back and finding Sean and the people around him—to see how an atypical American family—don't forget we're talking about hippies, commies, and other 'fringe elements'—can still represent major currents of what was happening in America then, and still happens today.*

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## ABOUT the FILMMAKERS

### **Ralph Arlyck, Writer / Director / Producer**

*Having people tell you later that your film stayed with them, that they thought about it the next day, or a week later...that's what feels best. Basically I'm trying to connect with people, to find some link between the daily events and random thoughts in my own life, and what I assume other people are thinking or obsessing about.*

Arlyck has played an important advocacy role for American independent producers, testifying twice in Congress and once before the Carnegie Commission on the role of independents in public television. He was centrally involved in legislation which first recognized independents as an important force within that system.

He writes on production issues for several media journals. He was a member of the Board of INPUT, the international television seminar, an active member of the AIVF, and a long-standing participant in the distribution cooperative, New Day Films. He has taught film production at Vassar College, SUNY Buffalo, and SUNY Purchase.

Arlyck's film work includes:

***Current Events*** which examines the ways in which we respond—or do not respond—to the news. It opened at the New York Film Festival, played at The Sundance Festival, was selected “Best Documentary” in the Atlanta Film Festival, and was featured at INPUT 1991 in Dublin. It aired on American public television and the BBC.

***An Acquired Taste***, called “a funny, loving movie” by *New York Times* film critic Vincent Canby, is a droll look at American culture's obsession with success. It has won first prize at festivals around the world, and is regarded as a classic of the personal-essay genre.

The highly acclaimed ***Godzilla Meets Mona Lisa*** takes viewers on a whimsical tour of Paris' controversial Pompidou Center museum, as a means of probing the fundamental question of who art is for.

### **Malcolm Pullinger, Producer / Editor**

Born in England and raised in Bay Area, Malcolm Pullinger first met Ralph Arlyck while a student at Vassar College.

*Malcolm has been an incredible part of this project, says Arlyck. He started out as an assistant, taught himself to be an editor, and then became a producer. He's turned the film around. The shape of it, what it said, what it's about, the production values. He is an absolute equal partner in the production now.*

In a serendipitous full circle, Malcolm is 25 years old making his first film—nearly the same age Ralph was when he made his. *I think it's one of the reasons why it turned out so well for us to work together*, admits Malcolm. *Part of this process has been a revisit and a remembering for Ralph. To some degree that dynamic did some good. But it's also pointed out the differences between his generation and mine. I don't know many people of my generation who would feel so free out of college to blow off working life and just move to San Francisco like Ralph did. People my age seem much more stressed about careers and the future.*

While the film originally had two editors intermittently working on it, Malcolm soon suggested that Ralph put in a Final Cut Pro system so they could edit as they went.

*I remember the first time watching it—an early 16mm cut. I remember really liking its tone, and I loved the original Sean movie. The film was a lot different then, it wasn't nearly as big as it ending up becoming and seemed a little off balance.*

*After three years of working together, I think we made the film we wanted to make. Thoughtful. Funny. Sean is charming. There is a certain sort of interesting naiveté in some places. Realistic yet idealistic. Working on it made me—being relatively young and not really having confronted these questions of work and family before—it made me think a hell of a lot about those things. Choices. Choice is a big thing that comes out of the movie for me. It still affects me when I watch it, although part of me is detached in some way. It's really bared open.*

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## CAST of CHARACTERS

### ***Sean Farrell***

– the subject of Arlyck’s original film, who at 4-years-old spoke about smoking pot and is now in his 30s living in San Francisco.

### ***Ralph Arlyck***

– the filmmaker who goes back to find Sean, the precocious 4-year-old boy he first filmed at the end of the 60’s.

### ***Johnny Farrell***

– Sean’s father, who left behind a wealthy, conservative, 50s background for the ideals and craziness of the 60s Haight Ashbury and, later, communal life in northern California.

### ***Susie Farrell***

– Sean’s mother, who grew up in a communist family, married Johnny at 14, and raised three children.

### ***Elisabeth Cardonne-Arlyck***

– the filmmaker’s French wife, now a college professor, whom he met in San Francisco at the same time he made the original film.

### ***Zhanna***

– a beautiful Russian woman, whom Sean meets and marries during the course of the film.

### ***Hon Brown***

– Sean’s maternal grandmother, an important San Francisco communist party figure and the anchor of Sean’s family.

### ***Archie Brown***

– Sean’s maternal grandfather, a communist party leader and longshoreman union organizer, thrown out of HUAC hearings, who died in the early 1990s of asbestos cancer.

### ***Debbie Farrell***

– Sean’s sister, who, like her mother, married young and now works cleaning houses in San Francisco.

### ***Kevin Arlyck, Matthew Arlyck***

– the filmmaker’s sons who appear both as wise-cracking boys and sardonic grown-ups.

### ***Alex***

– Sean and Zhanna’s son, who, by the end of the film, is the same age as Sean was in the original film.

# FOLLOWING SEAN

## CREDITS

Written and Directed by  
RALPH ARLYCK

Produced by  
RALPH ARLYCK  
MALCOLM PULLINGER

Consulting Producer  
LANCE BIRD

Executive Producers  
STEVE LIEBER  
STEVE WAX

Editor  
MALCOLM PULLINGER

Camera  
RALPH ARLYCK  
TOM TUCKER

Sound Recording  
DAN GLEICH

High Definition Post-Production  
HI-WIRE

Colorist  
OSCAR OBOZA

Online Editor/Fire Artist  
TONY MILLS

Post-Production Sound  
SOUND LOUNGE

Sound Designer  
MARSHALL GRUPP

Re-Recording Mixer  
KEITH REYNAUD

Original Music  
ERIC NEVEUX

Archival Footage Featuring

STOKELY CARMICHAEL  
ABBIE HOFFMAN  
KEN KESEY  
JERRY RUBIN

Funding

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS  
(a federal, centralized, Washington agency - God bless them)

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CHANNEL FOUR (UK)

CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

THE LEF FOUNDATION

THE DONNET FUND

THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH CULTURE

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

NEW YORK FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

GAIA FOUNDATION

ALEC STAIS

Songs

"FLYING OVER"

Written and Performed by Peter Whitehead  
Courtesy of Out of Round Records

"SLIGO RIVER BLUES"

Written and Performed by John Fahey  
Courtesy of Takoma Records/Fantasy, Inc.

"I CANNOT LIE"

Written by Cass McCombs  
Performed by Cass McCombs & Trevor Shimizu  
Courtesy of Monitor Records

"SOLD AMERICA"

Written by Michael Yonkers  
Performed by Michael Yonkers Band (1968)  
From the album "Microminiature Love"  
Courtesy of Sub-Pop Records

"ROLL CREDITS"

Written by David Schickele  
Performed by David Schickele, Nick Phelps, & David Schrader  
Courtesy of John Korty Films

"BLIND WILLY"

Written and Performed by Sonny Sharrock  
Courtesy of Atlantic Recording Corp.  
By arrangement with Warner Special Products

"DARK EYED WOMAN"

Written by Randy California & Jay Ferguson  
Performed by Spirit  
Courtesy of Epic/Legacy Records  
By arrangement with Sony Music

"LAST NIGHT I DREAMT OF MISSISSIPPI"

Written by Nicolai Dunger  
Performed by Jessica Billey, Nicolai Dunger,  
Paul Oldham, & Will Oldham  
Courtesy of Virgin Records Sweden

"SECTION 43"

Written by Joe McDonald  
Performed by Country Joe & the Fish  
Courtesy of Country Joe & the Fish

"BEULAH LAND"

Written by Mississippi John Hurt  
Performed by Gillian Welch & David Rawlings  
Courtesy of Vanguard Records

"EAT, SLEEP, MATE, & DEFEND"

Written and Performed by The Dead Jacks

"PERPETUAL NIGHT"

Written and Performed by Kelley Stoltz  
Courtesy of Jackpine Social Club

"EVIL SON"

Written and Performed by Coachwhips  
Courtesy of Narnack Records

"THE PRODIGAL SON"

Written and Performed by Reverend Robert Wilkins  
Courtesy of Vanguard Records

"EDINBURGH LAG"

Written and Performed by Michael Hurley  
Courtesy of Trikont Records

"WATCHIN' THE SHOW"

Written by Michael Hurley  
Performed by Michael Hurley & Jill Gross  
Courtesy of Rounder Records

"THE SUBWAY HOME"

Written by Owen Ashworth (of Casiotone for the Painfully Alone)  
Performed by Jherek Bischoff

"THE WELL TEMPERED CLAVIER"

(Book 1, Prelude 1 in C Major)  
Written by Johan Sebastian Bach  
Performed by Diana Arlyck

"HORSES"

Written and Performed by Malcolm Pullinger

"CLAM, CRAB, COCKLE, COWRIE"

Written and Performed by Joanna Newsom  
Courtesy of Drag City Records

"NEVER DIE YOUNG"

Written by Lori McKenna  
Performed by Lori McKenna, Richard Shindell, Kris Delmhorst,  
Brad Hatfield, & Mike Rivard  
From "Pieces of Me"  
Courtesy of Signature Sounds Recordings  
[www.lorimckenna.com](http://www.lorimckenna.com)