

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Mon Apr 23 | 8:30 pm |

Jack H. Skirball Screening Series
\$10 [students \$8, CalArts \$5]

Bill Morrison **Miners, Bridges, Lost Love and Other Retrieved Treasures**

Los Angeles premiere

The Miners' Hymns (USA/UK, 2011, 52 min, HD)

Since *The Film of Her* (1996), award-winning filmmaker Bill Morrison has completed more than 20 experimental pieces in which he poetically and rhythmically reworks archival footage in various stages of preservation or decomposition. With *The Miners' Hymns*, he teams up with Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson to celebrate the culture and political struggles of the Durham collieries in northeastern England. Weaving together stunning black-and-white footage from the early 1900s through the massive 1984 strikes, the film montages different aspects of the miners' lives—the hardship of pit work, the role of the trade unions, the tradition of the colliery brass bands and the annual Miners' Gala in Durham. A selection of earlier short films, including *Outerborough* (2005) and *Release* (2010) rounds out the evening.

In person: Bill Morrison

Bill Morrison has created a remarkable series of found-footage films that highlight the ravages of time and decay on the filmed image. These are as much celebrations of the sometimes-frightening beauty of decomposing film as laments for vanishing relics of cinema's origin." –*Senses of Cinema*

Program

Outerborough

2005, 9.5 min., 35mm, B/W, shown in HD

A trolley trip across the Brooklyn Bridge in 1899 becomes a unit for measuring time.

The Film of Her

1996, 12 min., 35mm, B/W, shown in HD

Unseen films, and unsung lives: An unrequited celluloid romance is consummated in the vaults of the Library of Congress. And primitive cinema is saved from oblivion. Music by Henryk Gorecki and Bill Frisell.

Release

2010, 13 min., B/W, HD

Al Capone's release from the Eastern State Penitentiary is eagerly awaited by a crowd in a split-screen panorama. Music by Vijay Iyer

The Miners' Hymns

2011, 52 min, HD)

"Bill Morrison's archive collage film *The Miners' Hymns*, an elegiac testament to the lost industrial culture of the Durham coalfields, takes in sweeping helicopter shots, lunaresque landscapes and pitched battles with police cavalry, not to mention the Stygian sights of half-naked termite men hacking blankly away at the underbelly of the earth. It features shades of action movie, industrial *noir* and zombie sci-fi, but true to the *Decasia* director's signature work it's also a dialogue with the ghosts of the past, those of workers and communities now permanently lain beneath Durham's remodeled landscape, yet here exhumed on film...

The film starts with flyover footage of the present-day coastal landscape, grass fields and business parks covering, the subtitles tell us, the former sites of Rhode, Silksworth and fellow collieries. A muted cacophony of brass and decaying organ notes accompanies the helicopter's landing and a fade back in time to a 1960s Gala audience in monochrome: a study of studious faces, hints of modernity (two young women in sunglasses) punctuating the sea of flat caps.

Then the earth opens up – hard-boiled men in hard hats descend to work the underworld – and the brass rumble and roar. Pick-axes are swung, pistons pumped, colossal drill-bits churned. White horses emerge from the gloom, to be succeeded by trolley carts and conveyor belts ferrying charcoal lava flows. The blacks in these restored film fragments are truly Orphean; some of the original camerawork is astonishingly dynamic: low-angles on the workers, shots of oncoming trolley carts, or from inside them, travelling with the coal.

Back on the surface, black waves lap at a beach full of sea coal. Hands, spades, sacks, cages and a huge digger took turns to collect

the debris; kids slid down otherworldly mountains of anthracite on the shore. The film follows them to their tenement homes, to Durham's flat rows of roofs and washing lines. Early in the morning down the high street, police begin diligently unpacking crowd barriers, as the musicians take up a stately, plaintive fugue. As it swells, miners' buses begin to arrive: suddenly we are in a riot of falling visors, rising shields, flying batons and hooves.

The turmoil was hard and fast after which the film retreated to the air again, to color and the present-day: helicopter shots of the former Hylton Colliery, now a business park, and the former Monkwearmouth, now Sunderland's Stadium of Light...

– Nick Bradshaw, *Sight & Sound*

"The flickering figures of history as captured on film have been creative fodder for Bill Morrison for more than a decade. The award-winning sculptor of found footage has become a contemporary ambassador of the technique largely thanks to his 2002 film *Decasia*, which literalized its title by turning physically distressed footage into quicksilver sequences of eerie beauty.

But... there's one kind of movie that Mr. Morrison feels he still hasn't made, until now. In *The Miners' Hymns*, the 45-year-old director eschews decaying found footage in favor of black-and-white archival material (courtesy of the British Film Institute) and fresh color shots (captured from a helicopter) to recount the rise, rhythms and ultimate fall of coal mining and miners in an English 'pit town.' The film serves as a requiem for an industry and a culture, framed by Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson's slow-building, six-movement score. 'I would call this my first documentary,' said Morrison. 'Everything is fairly specific here--the localization of the region, the subjects, the time frame. It spans the 20th century.'

– *The Wall Street Journal*

Bill Morrison was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1965, and currently lives in New York. He attended Cooper Union, where he studied painting and animation (the latter under Robert Breer's mentorship). After college, he worked with New York's Ridge Theater, making short film backdrops for their avant-garde productions. This work has been recognized with two Bessie awards and an Obie.

Morrison is mostly known for his use of rare archival footage in which forgotten film imagery is reframed as part of our collective mythology. His film and multimedia art has been screened at festivals, museums and concert halls worldwide, including the Sundance Film Festival, the Tate Modern, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall. The Museum of Modern Art has acquired eight of his titles for their

permanent collection. Morrison has been commissioned to create films for numerous composers, including John Adams, Laurie Anderson, Gavin Bryars, Dave Douglas, Richard Einhorn, Bill Frisell, Michael Gordon, Henryk Gorecki, Vijay Iyer, Jóhann Jóhannsson, David Lang, Harry Partch, Steve Reich and Julia Wolfe. Morrison has received the Alpert Award, as well as fellowships from Creative Capital, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and the NEA.

See: <http://billmorrisonfilm.com>

Selected Additional Filmography

The Great Flood (2012)
Tributes – Pulse (2011)
Spark of Being (2010)
Every Stop On The F Train (2008))
Dystopia (2008)
Fuel (2007)
Who By Water (2007))
The Highwater Trilogy (2006)
How To Pray (2006)
Gotham (2004)
Light Is Calling (2004)
The Mesmerist (2003)
Decasia (2002)
Trinity (2000)
Ghost Trip (2000)
City Walk 1999)

Composer **Jóhann Jóhannsson** was born in Reykjavik, Iceland. He is known for his distinctive blend of classical orchestration and electronica. Although mostly instrumental, Jóhannsson's work often involves complex narratives, which deal with humans' relationship with the world of machines and decaying and obsolete technology. His music often incorporates found recordings.

His score for the play *Englabörn* was released in 2002 on the British label Touch, and then re-released, in 2007, by 4AD. Jóhannsson's second album, *Virthulegu Forsetar* (2004, Touch) was written for a brass ensemble, pipe organ, electronic drones and percussion. His third album, *IBM 1401: A User's Manual* (2006, 4AD), involved a 60 piece string orchestra. *Fordlandia* (2008, 4AD), which combined minimalist string writing and baroque-influenced counterpoint with elements derived from Krautrock, post-rock, glitch electronics and Icelandic folk music, was voted best classical album of

2008 at the Icelandic Music Awards. His fifth album, *And in the endless pause there came the sound of bees* (Type, 2010), is comprised of his award-winning music for Marc Craste's animated film *Varmints*. Jóhannsson signed to FatCat in 2010; the score for *The Miners' Hymns* is his first release for the label.

Jóhannsson performs regularly throughout Europe and the rest of the world with his 6 piece ensemble, which includes a string quartet, piano, electronics and percussion. He currently resides in Copenhagen, Denmark.

More information: <http://www.johannjohannsson.com>

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud

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