

ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

Experimental film in Los Angeles, 1945 - 1980

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUBJECT: David Lebrun

Biography:

Filmmaker David Lebrun was born in Los Angeles in 1944. He attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon and the UCLA Film School. He came to film from a background in philosophy and anthropology, and many of his films have been attempts to get inside the way of seeing and thinking of specific cultures. He has served as producer, director, writer, cinematographer, animator and / or editor of more than sixty films, among them films on the Mazatec Indians of Oaxaca, Mexican folk artists, a 1960s traveling commune, Tibetan mythology and a year in the life of a Maya village in Yucatan. He edited the Academy award winning feature documentary *BROKEN RAINBOW*, on the Hopi and Navajo of the American Southwest. Lebrun combines the structures and techniques of the documentary, experimental and animated genres to create a style appropriate to the culture and era of each film.

Lebrun's experimental and animated works include the radical editing styles of *SANCTUS* (1966) and *THE HOG FARM MOVIE* (1970), his late 1960s work with the multimedia group *Single Wing Turquoise Bird*, the animated film *TANKA* (1966), works for multiple and variable-speed projectors such as *SIDEREAL TIME* (1981) and *WIND OVER WATER* (1983), and a 2007 multi-screen performance piece, *MAYA VARIATIONS*.

Lebrun's animated feature documentary PROTEUS premiered in January 2004 at the Sundance Film Festival and has won numerous international awards. Animated from period paintings and graphics, PROTEUS tells the story of 19th century biologist Ernst Haeckel, who found in the depths of the sea an ecstatic and visionary fusion of science and art. PROTEUS explores the sea through poetry, oceanography, technology and myth.

Lebrun's most recent documentary, BREAKING THE MAYA CODE, a film on the history of the decipherment of the ancient Maya hieroglyphic writing system, was produced under major grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation. The feature length version premiered in March 2008 at the International Festival of Films on Art in Montreal; shorter adaptations were produced for the PBS program NOVA and Europe's ARTE France.

In addition to his work as a filmmaker, Lebrun has taught film production and editing at the California Institute of the Arts. He has been the curator of numerous art exhibitions, and is the co-editor of IN THE MERIDIAN OF THE HEART, a 2001 book on his father, painter Rico Lebrun. He was for ten years (1987-1996) president of First Light Video Publishing, a production company and distributor of over 250 video titles in the field of media arts education, distributed to over half of US colleges and to educational institutions worldwide. Since 1996 he has been president of Night Fire Films, a documentary film production company. He was a founding Board Member and Treasurer of the non-profit Center for Visual Music (CVM) and is on the Advisory Board of the Chabot Space & Science Center's MAYA SKIES project.

Source: Night Fire Films, David Lebrun's production company.

Filmography:

Metamorphosis (in progress)
Breaking the Maya Code (2008)
Maya Variations (Multimedia performance piece, 2007)
Proteus (2003)
Wind Over Water (1983)
Sidereal Time (1981)
Luminous Bodies (1979)
Tanka (1976)
The Hog Farm Movie (1970)
Sanctus (1966)

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TAPE 1: DAVID LEBRUN

00:00:09

ADAM HYMAN

Today is October 30, 2009. Could you please start by saying and spelling your name for the transcriber?

00:00:22

DAVID LEBRUN

David Lebrun, D-A-V-I-D L-E small B-R-U-N.

00:00:30

ADAM HYMAN

Great. All right. Tell me, where were you born and who is in your family?

00:00:41

DAVID LEBRUN

I was born in Los Angeles, and my mother came from an old California family from Pasadena and my birth father was a composer, Serge Hovey. My mother remarried when I was a very small child – when I was a baby to Rico Lebrun, who was a very well-known painter, very influential painter in California in the '40s and '50s, especially. I was later adopted by him, took his name. My earliest years were spent in what was then called the Baldwin Hills Village, now called the Village Green, which was a kind of experimental green space community in Baldwin Hills that was designed by my grandfather, who was a well-known Southern California architect, Reginald Johnson.

00:01:41

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

We had a couple of architects in the family. So we grew up in that space and lived there until I was seven, eight years old, when we moved to Mexico and I spent a couple of years living in Mexico as a child. But all during that period, being around my father and his work was a big influence on me later on. I didn't quite figure out how until much later. When I was a very little kid, my parents would give me paints and I was [a] very wild and free painter. They would set up huge pieces of poster paper in the backyard, butcher paper, unrolled butcher paper which was like three feet high and endlessly long. and I would do these very wild murals of things and they encouraged that a lot.

00:02:34

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I remember one day there was a construction project in the neighborhood and I began to do all the construction machinery. It was very free. I remember, there's one story I just mentioned it to my mother and she said it was actually she, not my father, that at one point I was doing trees and I said, well, I need some brown to do the tree trunks. And she said, let me take you for a walk—I thought it was my dad but she said it was actually she that did this—and took me for a walk around the whole neighborhood, and we looked at the color of all the tree trunks and realized that brown would not be a good description of any of them.

00:03:07

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I think it opened my eyes to color, you know, it was every possible kind of color that we're talking about. Then when I got into the first grade, somehow the influence of school made me start doing little rigid, very tiny, very constricted drawings. I remember doing rows of cabbages in a garden and rows of carrots, very detailed, and mountains with tiny, tiny, tiny detail, and all of the spontaneity went away. I was never able, really, to draw with a great pleasure after that. I remember my dad used to give me classes now and sort of try to get my hand freed up, but I was never able to really follow in his footsteps of drawing. He was a wonderful draftsman.

00:03:57

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I did hang around his studio a lot. I remember, as a small boy, I would go up in the loft he had and climb up and then look down on the paintings of his. Like, at the time, 1950, when I was first can remember this, he was doing a big show at the L.A. County Museum, a big cycle of paintings related to Crucifixion, and he was doing a huge triptych that he could only do on the floor and then climb up above and have his assistants move pieces of collage paper around. So, we'd climb up in that attic. He would also do things with me and paintings for me. He would paint a tiger and then put a red fluorescent eye on it and hide it in the house, turn all the lights off and we'd go hunting for the tiger with flashlights.

00:04:42

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They would do wonderful, wonderful things like that. One of the memories I have as a kid is them waking me up at 4:00 in the morning. It was pitch black and they woke me up and said, put your clothes on, we're going somewhere. Didn't tell me where. And we got in the car, I was sleepy and bewildered and excited, and we drove down to this place, which I had no idea where it was, parked the car, and there were a few other cars parked there. Then we heard the train coming in, and it was Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey, the train arriving before dawn and then unloading the animals and the circus coming. They would do things like that. They were just wonderful parental things to do.

00:05:26

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Later, as I got older, my dad had a studio on San Vicente in Los Angeles. His work ethic was-- I could never equal it-- he would get up at 4:00 in the morning, make coffee and write. He would usually write for about half hour, and he was a wonderful writer. Then he would walk to the studio. He came to the states in 1925 from Naples, about 1925, I'm not sure of the exact year at the moment, but he never learned to drive a car. He would always walk. He was extremely capable, extremely physically agile and so forth. It's just certain things. He never learned to balance a checkbook, those kinds of things.

00:06:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But he would get up, he would write in his beautiful hand, and then he would walk to his studio and by the time the sun came up, he would be painting. And he'd paint till sundown, then come home and he'd have friends over and cook a wonderful meal. He was a great Italian chef. I was always part of that. I remember always being with the adults and part of the conversation and having a little wine and as a 10 or 11, 12-year-old being very much involved in whatever the adults were up to. So that was quite wonderful.

00:06:47

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Later, I remember once, sometime, maybe the 1990's, Ed Brokaw – [who] was my editing teacher and also the editing teacher of my wife Amy, and a good friend of hers-- was visiting us, and he remembered Rico from when Rico had been at UCLA, and he also knew about us as filmmakers. He asked me, he says, did you think your father had any influence on your filmmaking? And it suddenly occurred to me that-- I'd been making films for 20 or 30 years at that point--, and I realized that near the end of his life, especially, he began to make images that were organic forms, always coming out of blackness, emerging from blackness. That was the true of all my films.

00:07:32

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

That at least at some point in the film, there would be forms coming out of darkness. And I realized, oh, yeah, something was transmitted. It took a roundabout route, but it did influence the films.

00:07:48

ADAM HYMAN

Can you tell me, just briefly for facts, tell me your mother's name?

00:07:55

DAVID LEBRUN

Her original name was Constance Johnson, so she became Constance Lebrun, my father, Rico Lebrun. What was the other part?

00:08:08

ADAM HYMAN

Oh, and your birth father again was...?

00:08:10 **DAVID LEBRUN**

My birthfather was Serge Hovey.

00:08:12 **ADAM HYMAN**

How do you spell that?

00:08:12 **DAVID LEBRUN**

H-O-V-E-Y. Yeah, he was a composer.

00:08:17 **ADAM HYMAN**

So, was Constance also involved in other arts or how would she...?

00:08:24 **DAVID LEBRUN**

She was. She initially met Rico because she was a sculptor and an artist, and went to study with him, and then they fell in love. It's interesting. She put it sometimes that she felt that, like, what he did was so much greater than what she was doing that sort of furthering his career was the best thing that she could do. Lots of people thought that was very unfeminist of her, [laugh] but she never had a problem with it. She also had periods where she was doing jewelry making and other arts.

00:09:05 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

She studied photography with Ansel Adams in the latter part of her life. For many years had a two and a quarter, and had her own dark room later after my dad's death. For a long time, actually, she was using the dark room. She had a dark room in his studio and was documenting his work but then also began studying with Ansel and doing her own nature photography and so forth. So she was also a talented lady. Yeah. [technical]

00:10:40 **ADAM HYMAN**

Tell me more about, did you have much interaction with Reginald Johnson?

00:10:44 **DAVID LEBRUN**

No, not really. I mean, I was influenced by his work, I was very aware of his work, but he died in 1950 when I was 6 years old and I only have vague memories of him.

00:10:59 **ADAM HYMAN**

How long did you lived in Baldwin Hills?

00:11:03 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Until 1952. We made a trip to Mexico in 1950 when I was six, a six-week brief trip, which I have some memories of, and then we went down to live there in 1952, '53, when I was in second, third grade.

00:11:23 **ADAM HYMAN**

And, the other facts— when did Rico die?

00:11:28

DAVID LEBRUN

Rico died in 1964. He was actually born in 1900. He was 16 years older than my mom, so he died young, but a long time ago. I was 21 when he died. So, we sort of got robbed of adult time together. I always figured I'd have more time with him. I went off to high school outside of the state and went off to college. So a lot of a time when I was a teenager, I was away. Then, suddenly, he was very ill. I came back when he was ill to live with him and began collaborating on a book with him during the last six, eight months. So we spent a lot of intense time together then.

00:12:16

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

After his death, I've been involved in sort of being keeper of the flame, to some degree, put together archives of his writing for the Archives of American Art, organized all of that during the year or two after his death. Planned always to do a book of his writing since there's a great mass of unpublished stuff that is really quite wonderful. Never did that full, large book. Later collaborated with a friend and a wonderful artist, Jim Renner, on a book of his letters and drawings, which was a relatively small selection from his writings, but wonderful writing.

00:12:59

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And I've been involved in curating half a dozen shows of his work over the years at various galleries, principally the Koplín Gallery in Los Angeles. Koplín Del Rio, but other galleries before that. So, still, someday, I hope to that book of writing, but I don't know if that will happen. What else?

00:13:30

ADAM HYMAN

What was's the nature of his writing?

00:13:32

DAVID LEBRUN

It's writing about light and color and scale and art in the art world, of which he was sort of in a maverick outsider position being on the West Coast, and his relationship with other artists, with Picasso, with the abstract expressionists, with Goya, with El Greco, with all kinds of people that he wrestled and struggled with. But he was self-taught in English, learned from the dictionary and from reading Emily Dickinson and Melville. So he had this amazing vocabulary, very unusual. So his writing is immediately distinctive but incredibly eloquent, one of those people who just takes to English later in life and makes a unique voice out of it. So, it's wonderful writing.

00:14:35

ADAM HYMAN

Well, if he's talking about light and color and such, do you believe there's anything from that which you have found in your later approach to art?

00:14:44

DAVID LEBRUN

I'm sure. I read and reread his stuff, I can't make any direct lines so somebody else would have to figure that out.

00:14:53

ADAM HYMAN

Can you tell me anything in particular that's particularly memorable to you from his writing?

00:15:00

DAVID LEBRUN

From his writing? Lots of things. He was also an important teacher in California, and a lot of what he wrote about had to do with ways of making drawing and painting passionate rather than theoretical, rather than working out some kind of schema from the head is that he was always writing that it's to go from the heart through the body into the pen and onto the page, and it's got to be alive, an alive line all the time. I guess that kind of thing, in doing a shot, the notion that you've got to be alive at every moment and responsive at every moment while you're making something.

00:15:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

You can't just say, I'm going to start off here and I'm going to end up over there and in between is just getting there. So when he was, for example, teaching at Yale, where Albers was the *éminence grise* of the department, they were at the most opposite ends of the spectrum. They were sort of at war with one another because Albers was, for the most precise [DL: approach]. And he admired Albers. The way he admired a lot of people whom he was sort of put at opposites with, among the abstract expressionists, for example, because he was a figurative artist.

00:16:34

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So those who champion the figure were putting him at one side and the abstract expressionists in the other. He thought there was a lot, he learned a lot from the abstract expressionists, and they were part of his vocabulary, and he didn't draw those kinds of distinctions. But those kind of distinctions were in the air in the 1950s. He would get thrown on one side or another of the battle lines.

00:17:03

ADAM HYMAN

Did you live in New Haven as well then at some point?

00:17:05

DAVID LEBRUN

I visited them in New Haven. That was when I was in high school. Yeah. So I spent winter break there with them.

00:17:16

ADAM HYMAN

Where did you go to high school?

00:17:26

DAVID LEBRUN

In Arizona, Verde Valley School, you know, a school in the desert.

00:17:30

ADAM HYMAN

And then, do you have siblings?

00:17:33

DAVID LEBRUN

Yes and no. My birthfather went on to re-marry and moved to New York and had three kids. I never met them or him again until I was about 12 years old, briefly went East to summer camp and saw them briefly. Then we met them when we were all adults. He had three boys. My mother remarried after Rico's death, to John Crown, who was a pianist, head of the piano department at USC. He had two daughters who became my half sisters. One of those is still living, Joanie is still around and lives nearby. So, she's the one I'm closest to among siblings or half siblings or step-siblings, yeah. [technical].

00:19:13

ADAM HYMAN

Tell me briefly about your grandmother.

00:19:15

DAVID LEBRUN

My grandmother? My grandmother, on my father side, he's referring to, I mean, I was close to my grandmothers on both side. I think Amy is referring to Sonya Levien who was my grandmother, my birthfather's father. Even though they moved away, she was very much a presence in Southern California. She was a screenwriter at MGM. She was sort of the chief screenwriter at MGM for many, many years and won Oscars and did a number of well-known pictures, THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME with Charles Laughton and OKLAHOMA! and all kinds of things over the years.

00:19:54

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Actually, starting at the age of six, having left the art behind, I became a writer. When we first were driving down to Mexico, I think I began writing short stories, and by the age of 10, I was working on a short novel. So she sort of took me under her wing and would get my manuscripts printed up in the studio, in the MGM printing shops. I'd get bound copies which she could cause to happen very quickly. She was very much nurturing me as a writer and I spent a lot of time with her.

00:20:36

ADAM HYMAN

So the notion of creative expression in your household on growing up.

00:20:41

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah. It was architects and musicians and painters and photographers. Everybody was creative in one way or another, so the idea of being anything other than one of those things was moving outside actually. Although, I think when I was in college I thought I would become a philosopher or a philosophy teacher. Fortunately, I got over that. [laugh]

00:21:11

ADAM HYMAN

So no teenage rebellion where you studied business?

00:21:14

DAVID LEBRUN

No. I really didn't have a rebellion against, I mean, this was a very, very loving family and my parents were very much in love and treated each other marvelously. I can tell you a couple of stories to give you a notion of just the difference between childhood then and now, and the kind of family that I was in was, well, we were living in Mexico. We were very isolated. I remember picking up some—because I started reading very young, I remember reading Hemingway. I started to read like *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA* when I was five or six, and reading a lot of novels.

00:21:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But, I remember me being eight in Mexico and picking up like an *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, and the first scene is that's somebody's been murdered and the cops arrived and the bodies are on the floor. I remember getting really upset and saying, "But they're all standing around smoking cigarettes and talking like it's normal. There's somebody dead, why aren't they all terribly upset?" I didn't have that kind of exposure. My parents didn't have a TV when I was little, so I didn't have that constant exposure to violence that every kid has now.

00:22:32

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And the other one I find even more remarkable is when we came back to the United States, went to my grandmother's house, Sonya's house, and she had a TV and I was watching an episode of *THE HONEYMOONERS*, and Ralph Kramden's yelling at his wife, and I found that incredibly upsetting because I had never encountered a man yelling or having emotional violence with his wife. That idea of yelling at a spouse was, like, there was something really wrong here and it was very, very upsetting. I had not experienced that, which is unusual.

00:23:07

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I really didn't have anything to rebel against. Mostly, I was not always a happy kid. I was poorly socialized and a little overweight and then being in Mexico and not being good with languages didn't help, and then coming back. It took me a long time to figure out being social. I was the kid off with a book or with imaginary playmates somewhere. But I was always with my parents trying to just trying to hide any unhappiness, you know? I didn't want to disappoint them by not being as happy as they were.

00:23:42

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I would conceal any sense of misery or whatever just because I didn't want to let them down. But the idea of there being something to rebel against never occurred to me, ever.

00:24:04

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember any of your imaginary playmates?

00:24:07

DAVID LEBRUN

Not particularly. In Mexico, I remember having—because we lived on the outskirts of San Miguel de Allende, and beyond our house was just wild country—I had a red setter and we'd head off into the hills or down into the riverbank and just go play, make things up and play and I had plenty of room for solo imaginings.

00:24:38

ADAM HYMAN

So tell me about the discovery of Mexico, is it from that earlier trip or later on?

00:24:43

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah. Mexico was a recurring thing. I mean, that was the first encounter with Mexico, was that childhood encounter. I would later come back and back to Mexico. I could move to, when I went to high school. I actually went to a very progressive elementary school in L.A., Westland School, when I came back from Mexico, which was a very wonderful place. But then ended up in public junior high school in L.A. and was miserable. I hated it. Paul Revere Junior High in Brentwood, and it was a cliquy school and I just was not meant for it.

00:25:36

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Managed to be the kid who got beat up and everything else. So this opportunity came up to a couple of kids, friends of ours were going to this school in Arizona and we went out to visit it and I just fell in love with it. It was Verde Valley School. It was founded by a bunch of anthropologists actually, Clyde Kluckhohn and John Adair, and various anthropologists were involved in creating the idea for it. It was 100 to 115 kids in middle of the Red Rocks outside of Sedona in this gorgeous spot, surrounded by these rock formations, in adobe dormitories that the Hopi Indians had helped them build.

00:26:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was totally nondenominational and internationally-oriented toward world peace. So they were trying to get-- they had kids from 20 different countries. There was a Hungarian [DL: kid] —this was 1958, when I went there,—one of the kids was a Hungarian freedom fighter,[who] arrived at 16 after escaping from Hungary, and he was one of the kids there. The Dalai Lama had almost come there when he escaped from Tibet. There were just kids from all kinds of different backgrounds and there were kids from the reservations, Navajo and Hopi kids who came there. The students built a nondenominational chapel at their own instigation where they'd invite Navajo and Hopi elders to come and talk about their religion.

00:27:13

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The math teacher was a Baha'i, and the chemistry teacher, he was a Czech, who is the only living speaker of Arapahoe, an American Indian language. The required subjects in the freshman year were Spanish and anthropology, and you took anthropology from Joseph Epes Brown who was a pioneering guy who had live with Black Elk and written the book about him called THE SACRED PIPE. Later became editor of PARABOLA MAGAZINE. We did sweat lodges, and I did a Plains Indian vision quest in my freshman year as my class project. [laugh]

00:27:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Starved myself for days and kept myself awake, and then went out and walked this sacred symbol until I had the vision of my totem animal. So that was my freshman year. But it was also a rigorous preparatory school where in my class of 30, about four or five people went to Harvard. It was very high educational standards. But the other thing is we would go to Mexico every year. The entire school would get into these campers filled with mattresses, you know, co-ed. You can imagine the libido. We would drive for five days down to Mexico camping our way down.

00:28:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And then everybody was distributed among houses of families, to just live in a Mexican family for a month and come back and write a paper about your experience. Or live in Mexico City and study the federal government or various things like that. Then we'd also go spent two weeks every year living on either the Hopi or Navajo reservation, working in schools or living with— one year, I went and spent two weeks living with one of the Hopi elders in his home on one of the mesas. Would spend time in a hogan with a Navajo family, those kinds of things. It was an extraordinary experience. That really got me involved in anthropology.

00:29:16

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I didn't end up majoring in anthropology in college. I majored in philosophy when I went to Reed, but I was drawn to sort of philosophy of anthropology as it were, the philosophy of human thought. When I started making films, it was very much around the notion of getting inside the way of thinking of different cultures. That was, what it quickly came to is what I wanted to do with film, and I think that came out of that experience at Verde Valley and also a couple of very influential teachers at Reed.

00:30:05

ADAM HYMAN

What is your totem animal? Are you allowed to say?

00:30:09

DAVID LEBRUN

A raven. It was actually a raven. It came and did a dance between two mountains and answered the question I was posing at the time, which is no longer of interest. There was a question that I went on my quest with, and his dance seemed to answer it.

00:30:23

ADAM HYMAN

Does that school still exist?

00:30:27

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah, it does. Verde Valley School is still there. It struggles, and it's changed over time but it's still 100 kids out in the desert and not doing entirely the same things but still very much on the same principles.

00:30:52

ADAM HYMAN

So, in your investigations of anthropology, what other things do you remember drawing most from them? From anthropology.

00:31:07

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah. Well, let me back up in time. When I went to Reed, I was somehow drawn into becoming a philosophy major. I had a kind of miserable time with that part of the school because what philosophy was in academia at that time, it was totally dominated by British ordinary language philosophy, which was sort of the watered-down version of [Ludwig] Wittgenstein that was, in looking at, if you are studying aesthetics you were studying the meaning of the word “beauty” in ordinary language. How do people use the word “beauty”? If you're studying ethics, it's how do people use the word “good”? I was sort of not wanting to see how these things were used in ordinary language. I was looking for the extraordinary here, you know?

00:31:57

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So it was like totally against the direction I want to go in. I wanted to look at metaphysics and I wanted to look at the philosophy of consciousness. Reed was a place where you did a senior thesis, and I was aiming toward a senior thesis on the work on the philosophy of symbolic forms of Ernst Cassirer—

00:32:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

—C-A-S-S-I-R-E-R—which is looking at how the structure of language and the structure of myth and the structure of science influence the structure of thought and the forms the thought takes, particularly drawing in anthropology and how that works out in different cultures. There was nobody in the philosophy department who was even vaguely interested in that, so I was very much on my own. The people who were interested in that kind of thing were two professors who had a great influence on me. One was a guy named Lloyd Reynolds who was influential on a lot of people. For one thing, he was a teacher of calligraphy and calligraphers all over the Northwest and all over the West came out of his work.

00:32:57

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Lots of Reed students, including myself, took their class notes in italic calligraphy with Osmoroid and Platignum calligraphy pens. I actually had good handwriting for a while there. But he was also very influential as an art teacher in teaching art going back to the Paleolithic and to the tribal and also looking at the Far East. He was influential on the beats. Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder had been his students. He had encouraged Gary Snyder to go to Japan and study there, and Kerouac wrote the DHARMA BUMS about Gary Snyder doing that. So that Lloyd Reynolds' influence went out to a lot of people from that. A lot of people beginning to look toward the East came out of that.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I was taking Lloyd Reynolds' classes and beginning to— I think he assigned a short book by Ernst Cassirer on symbolic forms in art, which the title escapes me at the moment. It first introduced me to his philosophy. There was another teacher, Seth Ulman, who was the drama teacher. At that time, I was an actor, actually. I had been acting in high school and started doing acting in college and was in his plays, and continued to act until I actually got a role in a professional theater production, which was at UCLA when John Houseman had the UCLA theater group, which later became the theater group at Mark Taper Forum.

00:34:41

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I was cast in a play there. It was playing every night for six, or eight weeks at Schoenburg Hall at UCLA. I discovered that the life of an actor— if you're in high school and college theatricals, you rehearse a lot and it's interesting, and then you perform once or twice and that's it. When you do it professionally, you have some rehearsal and then you're doing the same thing night after night, and you discover that what you're doing most of the time is spending a lot of time in the green room with the other actors, and I found that actors were not the people I really wanted to hang out with. So I did that one professional production and then I never acted again.

00:35:20

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But Seth Ulman also taught a course in the history of theatre which went back to, again, the origins of theatre in ritual, He took it back to the threshing floor that becomes...where the animal is threshing the wheat around the central post, and in the middle of the village becomes the area where the dancing takes place, and that slowly becomes the Greek theater. And there's-- the sacred rituals that take place there become what happened in the Greek theatre, and then that eventually evolves into the space in the cathedral where the Mass takes place, and that all of this is of a continuity, that all of these are part of the same thing

00:36:04

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

When I went to do my first extensive film, *SANCTUS*, it came directly out of that class and out of the things I was thinking about there. So, I guess starting to answer your question about how anthropology fit in, that it was the combination of anthropology and the way that those teachers introduced me to Frazer and the *Golden Bough* and the Cambridge School of the study of myth, and Mircea Eliade, and others who were studying myth. At that point, I was very interested in the parallels among ritual and mythological things around the world.

00:37:03

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

A lot of those writers were looking in taking a given pattern and seeing how it played out in similar ways around the world. The thing that most people are familiar with is Joseph Campbell, and I know somewhere in that first year or just before I had read *THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES* by Joseph Campbell, which is looking at the hero myth and seeing how it is parallel around the world. When I went to make *SANCTUS*, this first film, I was looking at those kinds of ways in which ritual systems are parallel and in which things play out in parallel.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Later, over the years, I've maintained that interest in anthropology but I've become much more interested in the ways in which things are different rather than the ways in which they are similar. The ways in which the ritual or mythology or life ways of a particular culture will be different if it's along a river or on a coast or in a desert... depending on all those historical circumstances. The particular flavors are much more interesting to me than the parallels. But at the time, I was very much caught up in looking at these, sort of, parallel systems, which, when we get to *SANCTUS*, I can talk about.

00:38:20

ADAM HYMAN

Were there any particular cultures in those early stages? What led you to Reed?

00:38:30

DAVID LEBRUN

What led me to Reed was, I don't remember what led me to choose it in the first— yeah. I had applied in my senior year at Verde Valley to three schools. I applied to Harvard and Swarthmore and Reed. I don't know how Reed came in. I remember there was guy, a kid named Adele Foz who'd gone off to Reed and he came back to visit the school, and he had this curly hair and he had this big head, the first guy with long hair I'd ever seen. And I was like, what's that? What going on there? [laugh] It was like the first intimations of the '60s. I think that intrigued me. And I heard about the kind of curriculum they had at Reed.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Reed was a very innovative school. I should mention when you went to Reed, you took what they called Humanities 101 and 201, or something, but your first two years, you had a course that was sort of world civilization, especially Western Civilization, where you started with the Greeks and worked your way up. Not quite like the great books curriculum because you were using all original texts. But it was set up so that you would have three lectures every week, always by the person who was the expert in that field. So you'd have the whole school to draw on.

00:39:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So the guy who was the Aeschylus expert or the Homer expert would give the lecture on that topic. Then you'd have three meetings of a seminar group where you sat around with eight or nine people and discussed and debated and so forth like a graduate seminar. That's freshmen year, and it went for two solid years. So it was meeting six times a week for two years. So it was this very intensive coherent presentation or exploration of civilization. Then that was sort of the grounding there. Then those things in art and theater and other topics and my struggles with all the philosophy courses went around that. That was extremely valuable for me and greatly important to have that grounding.

00:40:53

ADAM HYMAN

What years were you at Reed?

00:40:55

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

'62. High school was '58 to '62 and then, Reed, I went, '62. I was there for a year and half and then my father became ill and I dropped out of school at Christmas, came home, spent the last few months of his life with him and then took off after his death. We'd started working together on a book on Goya and El Greco, and I took off to Europe with a friend, and we traveled around Europe and I ended up in Madrid doing research for that manuscript, and spending a month just living on my own in Madrid and going every day to the Prado and looking at the work and writing.

00:41:44

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I'd read a book by José Camillo Cela called VIAJE A LA ALCARRIA, which is just the story of a long walking trip around Spain, and I had this notion that I would take off from Paris and walk to Madrid. Made it about as far as the Paris suburbs before I began hitching rides and ended up doing it with a girl that I met in Paris. But we had an amazing trip and I'm always sorry that I had kept a journal of that trip which got lost. So I've lost a great deal of all the particulars.

00:42:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But we stayed in monasteries and convents and hostels and all kinds of places, ended up having dinner with monks and we're talking about Teilhard de Chardin with the monks, and staying in places that were built by-- Corbusier's monastery we stayed in. It was a really great experience going down the valley of the Rhone, ending up in Southern France and then down into Spain, over the course of months. That was the summer and fall of '64. I timed it so that I would come back to Reed, picking up where I left off because I left at Christmas break to go be with my dad.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then I went back to Reed to pick up the spring semester of the following year so I could finish the humanities course and so on. So then I had another year and a half there because I finished my sophomore year, which had been interrupted, and then had my junior year. Then on the summer before my junior year, I went off to a weekend at a friend's place in the country, and his dad had a 16-millimeter Bolex and some film. There were a bunch of people gathered for the weekend and he said, maybe you'd like to— I don't know why he handed it to me. He didn't give it to his own son. He gave it to me—and said, “You want to play around with the camera this weekend?”

00:44:15

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I did, I made a short 16-millimeter film. We shot a kind of slapstick comedy, THE GREAT CHASE. There was a fire engine and there were some vehicles and there was a lake and there was horses and so we had every— and there was a bunch of people and, so I was doing undercrank slapstick things and costumes. Then went to some place that had an editing bench and figured out how to edit it. Put it to a little piece by Ravi Shankar called “Fire Night,” a jazz piece with Bud Powell, a little two and a half minute thing, and I was hooked.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I got up to Reed, I don't think I had my own camera. Maybe there was a camera at Reed that I borrowed, I don't even remember it. I think I didn't have a camera. But-- Reed had no film program, but they did have an editing bench, I believe, and it was somewhere up maybe in the projection room, because they had film showings. And I didn't... [technical error; sound off]

00:45:19

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...got a camera somehow and began making little short films. I got little grants from Reed. It was like-- a \$50 grant, I made my first film. A \$100 grant, I made my second film. I think it was that same semester, maybe it was the next semester, I began going across the river to Portland State College. taking film courses. My godfather, actually, Andries Deinum was a film professor who'd been at USC and then had been kicked out because of having been a Communist Party member in the '30s. I remember having—I mentioned that I would sit around with the adults when I was a kid—

00:46:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

—I remember one dinner when Andries came over with my parent. I was a 10-year-old sitting at the table, and the four of us were discussing, and his wife Ginna, five of us-- we're discussing the fact that he was appearing before HUAC the next day, before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and trying to decide how he would testify. He was coming to us for advice, and his position, which he stuck with, was that he was going to say he had been a communist, because he had felt no problem about saying it, and that he was no longer a member of the party, hadn't been for decades, and that he would not name any other members.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

He testified the next day, and I believe the following day he was fired from USC. Then for several days following, there were student protest against his having been fired because he was a well-liked film teacher. Then he didn't work for 10 or 15 years. His wife supported him doing secretarial work, I believe. He finally got a job in Portland and founded something called The Center for the Moving Image at Portland State, and he was teaching film history and Tom... I forgot Tom's last name, was teaching a little Super-8 production course.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So, I made... I don't remember the exact sequence. I made a short film maybe for that class. I may have started doing it for that class. I remember doing a short little dramatic film in Super-8, starring my roommate in the house that I was in. Then doing a documentary called JUNK, which had to do with a ship wrecking yard on the banks, under one of the bridges across the Willamette River in Portland where you saw the ships being taken apart and all the parts were black and white, very stylized. I think those two I did in Tom's class.

00:48:16

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Meanwhile, I was going to Andries Deinum's [DL: Film History] class and being exposed to his own very progressive... He'd been a friend of Joris Ivens. He was Dutch, and he'd been a resistance fighter in the war, so he was showing Ivens' film on the closing of Zuider Zee and talking about how Ivens would work with the workers and show them the rushes in the evening and then get their suggestions and modify his shooting. So that kind of filmmaking among the people became kind of ideal.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then the third film I made was something called THE DISASTERS OF WAR, that was the first time I began to work with graphics. I had a very good copy that my dad had bought of reproductions of Goya's Los desastres de la Guerra, and I did camera moves with the close-up lens and rotating and turning shots and swish pans and tried to find a way of taking those things and bringing this invasion of Spain that he was illustrating to life and just put it to a score by Varèse.

00:49:34

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

For the JUNK film, I'd used Bartók. For THE DISASTERS OF WAR, I used Varèse. None of these exist as sync sound things, but they actually have tapes that we [laugh] would play them with. I remember that film we showed at the Portland Art Museum. That was my first public screening, I think, was when DISASTERS was finished. Then I applied to Reed for something called a Creative Scholarship, Where they actually gave a \$500 grant, and I got it. This was now the end of my junior year-- and I was prepared to come back and do my senior thesis on THE PHILOSOPHY OF SYMBOLIC FORMS [by Ernst Cassirer], although at this point, I wasn't sure I really wanted to do this.

00:50:24

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Oh, and I will mention one other thing, which was that I had been going along on this path to become a writer, and all the way through high school, I had been writing. I had been writing short stories and, beyond that first mystery novel I did when I was 10 years old, kept writing. By the end of my high school years, I was working on a big three-act historical play about The Reformation. [laugh] And I would, as a senior in high school, sit up and try to get my 10 pages done every night on the typewriter, and not going out on dates and not partying with other kids.

00:51:10

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I remember, Thomas Wolfe was sort of my ideal. "I wrote 10,000 words today!" he would shout, rushing out into the hallway. It was my idea of really producing and that you're a worker as a writer and you produce a certain amount and at a certain point, I began to freeze up. There was this white page in front of me. I sat in front of the typewriter with a white page and I was blocked, and I didn't like doing it anymore. This play was like plaguing me, and two things happened. One was that this theatre teacher whom I trusted read this play and told me it was shit. He told me just drop it, [laugh] you know?

00:51:52

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I don't know what else he said about what I should do. And the other thing was that this family friend handed me a camera, and looking through the lens, there was no white page. It led me to documentary as a starting thing, because there was always something within the frame. So it was like being liberated from the terror of the blank white canvas. My dad used to refer to Melville's white whale and the white canvas in the same breath, that the blank white canvas is the white whale, the terror of that emptiness that you've got to somehow fill.

00:52:34

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So the film frame liberated me from the white whale. So they gave me this creative scholarship to do a film, and the film that I had proposed came directly out of this experience with Ulman's class and, in particular, one of the things that he had thrown out in the class was the notion that out of the experience of the threshing floor and the sacrificial floor, into the Greek theatre, you get Euripides' THE BACCHAE, which is basically a bull god sacrifice play, in which the bull god is sacrificed. He was saying, as a direct line forward from that, on one hand to the Catholic mass and on the other hand to the bullfight.

00:53:31

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

That the bullfight is an attenuated and a changed version of the drama you see played out in THE BACCHAE. So, in looking at doing this project, it brought those ideas together, I had the notion of looking at three Mexican rituals. I should also back up and mention that psychedelics had appeared at Reed and in my life somewhere during that year. LSD had appeared on campus and mushrooms and those things. So that was around, and I was having that experience and trying to figure out how to integrate that into my understanding of the world.

00:54:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

There was an article that had appeared by a gentleman named Gordon Wasson about a woman named Maria Sabina down in Oaxaca and the mushrooms—this was in LIFE magazine—was the first description that really came out about native practices of hallucinogenic substance rituals. He had an illustrated thing in LIFE. So I wrote Gordon Wasson and contacted him and asked him for a letter of introduction to Maria Sabina down in Oaxaca. Then I also went, the beginning of the summer, I remember going to the UCLA library and finding his book. He'd written a book called MUSHROOMS, RUSSIA AND HISTORY, which was, essentially, it started from a footnote.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The story as he told it was that his wife who was Russian was doing a Russian cookbook, and she had asked him for a footnote about the historical significance of mushrooms. He began working on the footnote and then it turned into something massive, 1,200 pages or five volumes. It was this huge treatise on the role of mushrooms in history. Basically, he took the position that mushrooms lay at the origin of civilization. That when you see a transition-- that you see ancient Japanese sages holding this sacred mushroom,

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

you see that there's evidence that the Elusinian mysteries involved mushrooms, that the Maya used mushrooms. That [in] every culture, these things come up again and again as sort of impetuses to creative breakthroughs. In that book also, he goes through and gives all the detail of this ceremony that he documented with Maria Sabina and the parallels between that and the Catholic mass, because this is syncretic now. This is a ceremony that has come from pre-Columbian times, into the present, and has gotten mixed with Catholic ritual. So the mushrooms are moved in the sign of the cross.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And Tehuanacatl, the flesh of the God, is also the body of Jesus Christ, so all of those things have been combined. So my notion was to look carefully at the structure of this mushroom ceremony, look carefully at the structure of the Catholic Mass and at the structure of the bullfight, and then to shoot all of them and to intercut them to show the parallels. The mushroom ceremony and the Catholic mass were relatively easy, in a certain way.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I keep doing this to myself throughout my career, when we get to PROTEUS, I did the same thing to myself of taking something where there's things that are very parallel and then introducing something, which is a very difficult parallel, where it's really got to be wrestled with to get in there. Because as I shot the film or as I put the film together, in the preparatory stages, all three of them kind of follow—but especially the mass and the mushroom ceremony—there's this preparatory stuff of getting ready before you take the communion and then the taking of the communion wafer, the taking of the mushrooms.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But then the Mass has nothing beyond that point. Because in the Mass, you take the wafer and you go home. In the mushroom ceremony, you take the wafer and that's just the beginning. You take the mushroom and then the memorable stuff starts from there. What I did was I made the bullfight, the actual progress of the bullfight, be the struggle that is going on as you are processing and dealing with the mushrooms. It starts off with the bullfight being kind of a minor element and then the bullfight kind of takes over as you get into the later half after the mushrooms are taken and then the mass comes back in at the very end.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So they gave me a \$500 grant. I traveled down to San Miguel by car, with a girlfriend at the time. I made arrangements with the father in the church there, who allowed me in the Parroquio—which is this wonderful church in San Miguel—to get up on the high railings of the church and then climb up into the high parts of the church so I could shoot down, and also to get up on the altar and be able to shoot on the altar right next to him so that I was able to get these very privileged positions. And I had a good tripod, so I was able to get very, very close up photography of this.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

One of the things I did was shooting each of the ceremonies partly as a way of distinguishing them visually and partly by necessity. It was all in black and white negative, and I was shooting the bullfight in, what was it called... was it Double-X? It was faster than Plus-X. I think it was called Double-X, yeah, which was a very, very slow, very fine grain film. [DL: CORRECTION: The Stock was Eastman XT, ASA 25, introduced briefly and then discontinued.] Shooting the mass in Plus-X and then shooting the mushroom ceremony in pushed Tri-X, which was very, very grainy, because that was being shot by either Coleman lantern light or by another light that I'll describe. So we shot the Mass there [DL: in San Miguel de Allende]..

01:00:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I went to Mexico City-- there's this great bullfighter named El Cordobes. In a Mexico City bull ring, I shot him. Had an extraordinary experience there because it was during the years leading up to the Olympics in Mexico, and so the people were feeling that they really wanted to present their country well. At a certain point, I was in the audience with my tripod, and the bull ring cops or something like that, came over because they wanted to find out if I had a permit.

01:01:03

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

**And I had some film, which I had just taken out, and they wanted me to give it to them, and the person on the other side of me took it and then it started to go away. It just headed off. And finally, the cops left because the film was gone, and there I was, and then the film traveled back to me. It took a loop around the audience and then somebody hands, said, here, and gave it back.
[laugh]**

end of tape 1

TAPE 2: DAVID LEBRUN

00:00:37

DAVID LEBRUN

So I filmed the Mass -- very much having broken it down in the library and figured out each step of it, making sure I covered every step of it and then filming every step of the bullfight and really trying to be analytical about getting each part. Then when we drove down to Oaxaca and way up into the mountains -- and that was an adventure because this was [a] long time on a dirt road, and I remember finally it became night and we're driving through waterfalls and climbing and climbing in this little Volvo 544 that I had...

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...not meant for jungle roads, and this was very jungle. I remember just getting one last flash of radio reception as we were climbing. It was the first time I ever heard The Rolling Stones singing "Paint It Black." I remember driving into the darkness in the jungle hearing "Paint It Black" for the first time. Then arrived in this village of Huautla De Jimenez. Small town, but in the middle of that mushroom country where it was very much a part of the culture.

00:02:04

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And found out very shortly after arriving that— I remember spending the first night at something they called a hotel. It was like one room. I remember going to sleep, waking up the next morning and there was no glass in the windows, and all the windows were filled with small children looking in when I woke up. And finding out that Maria Sabina was actually ill and we couldn't see her. I never did end up meeting her. I never delivered the letter. Befriended a small boy in the town whose Spanish was pretty good, because this was a place where they spoke Mazatec, which was a version of Nahuatl.

00:02:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

These are Aztec-related people. But this kid was sort of a modern kid. His father, I think, ran a store where they repaired radios and things like that. I ended up turning him into my sound man. I had a Wollensak tape recorder. It was my only sound system. I had bought a Bolex and a tripod with a fluid head before leaving. That was part of what I did with— the \$500 went a, really a long way. I think I equipped myself, got down to Mexico, and bought a used Bolex from somebody who'd been traveling around the world doing documentaries on it. So I had that camera...

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...and the Wollensak tape recorder. The little kid was able to hook me up with an old woman who was a curandera, curing woman, who lived out this trail on a long ridge, this little hut on the end of the ridge, and we ended up filming the mushroom ceremony there. Now, the mushroom ceremony is an all-night ceremony in which you arrive, after appropriate rituals you take the mushrooms and then you're there pretty much in the dark all night while you're experiencing the hallucinogenic experience and while the person who's leading the ceremony does whatever they do, chanting primarily.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

In this case, the people inside the hut were myself and my girlfriend, Barbara, and the little boy and the old woman and an ocelot there. She had a pet ocelot. So there's this wildcat, you know, cat, pacing around the periphery with its glistening eyes. I took the mushrooms with everybody else, which I found was a mistake because I found myself somewhere about 40 feet above the hut looking down through the roof of the hut and saw my body way down there, and there was this camera, which I knew I was supposed to operate and it was a matter of how could I operate the controls from that distance. It was a problem. [laugh] So somehow I managed to do a number of shots.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

There was a Coleman lantern which was the only source of light. We were filming by Coleman lantern light. Later, got back to Mexico City and went to a film, I think. We left everything in the car to do something, and while we were gone, parked in Mexico City, somebody broke into the car, stole the tape recorder, stole the camera, left all the film -- and the camera, I believe. So it all went. At which point we went to the Mexico City airport, left the car, sort of impounded in the airport...

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...because you can't go out by plane if you've driven a car in. You have to leave by the way you came. So we had to leave it in the customs impound at the airport, flew back to L.A. Fortunately I had insurance on the contents of my car, and so out of it I was able to get a new camera and a better tape recorder and better equipment and then drove down this time with some friends from high school and college.

00:06:54

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

A guy named Larry Hirsch who'd been my room mate in college, and Larry Switzer who'd been my friend in high school, and one or two others, and we drove down together and then split up and I ended up going with Larry back to the village again in Oaxaca. We arranged for another ceremony. This time, it was with a guy who was the local Coca-Cola salesman. He had a Coke stand. So I was not sure about this. I wasn't sure it was going to be, like, is this a real shaman? He's a Coca-Cola dealer.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And it turned out he was THE guy. He was much more powerful than the woman had been. I didn't take the mushrooms. Larry did. It wasn't a ceremony that was arranged for us like the first one. This was a curing ceremony for a small baby, and the baby's mother was there nursing the baby and taking mushrooms so the baby was getting it as well. The parents were there, the grandfather who was supposedly 109 years old was there. So it was a family of seven or eight or nine people, all of them there and all of them taking the mushrooms, and Larry who was taking them, and I who was not.

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DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But again, this was in the dark and it was a rainy night, in this thatched hut. What I had done this time was I had brought a World War II inverter, which basically takes power out of a battery and converts it to AC. I took the battery out of my car, out of the Volvo, and lugged it down the hillside in the rain and mud and had that under the tripod. And on top of that was the inverter, which in the course of about 15 minutes could develop enough of a charge to power a 100-watt lamp that I had clamped to the top of my camera.

00:09:03

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So the ceremony went on and every 20 minutes, I would feel a click and then I would know, okay, now I can shoot, and I would turn the light on and film for 20 seconds what was going on in the dark and then I would have to wait for the charger to build up again. So you have these amazing 20 seconds of everybody's eyeballs like saucers from both the drugs and the light, and these things that were happening. He was moving around chanting, moving among the people and waving cloths. He had these two cloths that he was waving, creating breezes and sounds.

00:09:39

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And Larry said, you know, if he told us to die we would have died. He said, he couldn't understand a word because he didn't speak Mazatec and barely spoke Spanish, but he was totally swept up in this guy's power, and I was, too. It was very, very hard, even though I had taken no drug, to pull myself back and remember, okay, I've got to keep track of exposure and shooting and everything. Very much pulled you right in. But somehow, we ended up with the footage of that. Went back to San Miguel with the rushes. We were getting our footage processed in Mexico City.

00:10:24

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then I took the rushes back to San Miguel to where my father had taught at the art school, at the Instituto Allende in San Miguel, and I had a screening of the dailies. I hadn't seen the dailies yet. So I had a screening of the dailies at the Instituto at night. A young woman came to the screening who was living in San Miguel, whom I met that night and later re-encountered in Los Angeles, and she ended up becoming my first wife. Her name was Helena Hartshorn and she was a painter but had also been studying liquid projection with Bill Hamm and Elias Romero, who had originated the art of liquid projection in San Francisco.

00:11:13

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

She'd become the liquid projectionist for Ken Kesey and The Acid Tests, and then had headed off on her own with a truck with projection equipment in the back and was doing light shows in Mexico in bars and schools, just traveling around on her own with a four-year-old kid. So we ended up meeting that night and then making an acquaintance. The next day I left with Larry and we went back to the United States, and somehow, I don't know when I did this, but I decided over the course of the summer that I really wanted to go to film school rather than continuing with philosophy at Reed.

00:12:04

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And I had made an application—I don't know how I did it that late, but I made an application to UCLA, got into UCLA as a senior undergraduate in the film department. My intention at the time was to complete my undergraduate work, and then continue doing the MFA program at UCLA Film School. Somewhere early that summer I think, Bill Adams at UCLA took a look at my film THE DISASTERS OF WAR and agreed that I could skip Project One and go right on to Project Two. They accepted my coming in and finishing SANCTUS as a special project there because now I needed equipment to cut this thing, and I hadn't really done any intricate sound work before.

00:12:52 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

So I came into UCLA and somehow managed to finish up my other requirements. I had to take a biology course and a couple of other things, and all of the undergraduate film requirements, and the Project Two, and the special project of SANCTUS all in one year and get my BA at the end of the year. By which time my life had changed and I was not slated to go to the MFA program any more. Yeah.

00:13:27 **ADAM HYMAN**

Can you please spell the name of the woman who you met who became your first wife?

00:13:31 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Oh, Helena— H-E-L-E-N-A.

00:13:34 **ADAM HYMAN**

Mm hmm.

00:13:34 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Hartshorn, H-A-R-T-S-H-O-R-N.

00:13:39 **ADAM HYMAN**

And what was the semester that you started at UCLA?

00:13:43 **DAVID LEBRUN**

It was fall of '66. I ended up sharing a house, I think it was on Ashland Avenue or close to that, one of the streets leading away from the beach, in the first block from the beach in southern Santa Monica just above Venice, near Ocean Park. With a student named Jim Joanides and a guy from Texas, whose name skips my mind—all of us were in the film program. I remember, Joanides was filling his room with all kinds of surreal set things he was doing, shooting his film in his room. The guy from Texas, I remember helping him with something.

00:14:33 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I remember around Halloween, we got this giant pumpkin, and I remember there was something to do with spraying everything blue, and there was a woman giving birth to the giant pumpkin. [laugh] These memories are vague. So I'm in this house full of filmmakers, and I'm working on SANCTUS, and I'm contemplating getting ready to do my Project Two, which, at that time, I was envisioning making a film of CANTO XVII by Ezra Pound. It was what I was going to do for my Project Two, which involved a creature, a human that kind of forms out of plant matter.

00:15:16 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And sort of going back and forth between trees in a forest becoming the columns reflected in the water in Venice, and gondolas are involved. It would be very elaborately going back and forth between the natural and the cultural and the Renaissance. I had a whole script worked out. One thing I should mention by the way, before we leave the sequence, is that while I'd been at Reed, and while I was getting involved with film—and I'm not sure, it probably goes back to before I became involved with film—but Reed was one of those schools where they would bring in films, have 16 millimeter screenings...

00:16:08 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

...and they were cognizant of new American cinema, so they would be bringing in the occasional film by Stan Brakhage, or— oh gosh, films that I first saw there, *FLAMING CREATURES* I saw at Reed. Probably a lot of schools where you wouldn't see those films, but we were seeing them at Reed. I think that I subscribed to the, what was it called? *Film Culture*, the New York Cinematheque's...

00:17:01 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

So they had a catalogue issue, the one that had Harry Smith on the cover and had a complete catalogue of their work. I remember poring over that catalogue and virtually memorizing it, because you couldn't see any of those films. Maybe I'd seen one Harry Smith film or something. I would read those descriptions and imagine what those films were. They were just out of reach. I do remember we saw *MOTHLIGHT* and that one Brakhage sound film *Blue Moses*, I think. I remember seeing that there.

00:17:37 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Just a scattering of films, maybe a Stan Vanderbeek film. Not a lot, but enough to know that that's what I was interested in. I remember, at some point, I corresponded with Brakhage. Wrote to him and sent him a book of my father's drawings and writing. So we had some back and forth, he later sent me one of his films.

00:18:05 **ADAM HYMAN**

Do you remember, at that stage, why you connected? Can you articulate why you connected with those films?

00:18:21

DAVID LEBRUN

Why I connected was the idea of making films out of your dailiness. Because it was just being able to take a camera and using it without having a big program, being able to document your room or your house or your life. I had an idealized version of what Brakhage's marriage was like, I think, but the idea that your home and the animals around you and the nature around you and the place you were in and the light coming through your window, could be the subjects of film as poetry was very enticing, very attractive.

00:19:04

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And the idea of just playing with the stuff of film, with the frame-by-frame stuff. In the earliest films I was not doing that. I don't know the exact sequence, but I know that after '66, I remember shooting some stuff up at this ranch in Northern California also, where I would shoot things handheld moving along the ground or along rivers and then be figuring out about hand staining them with color, scratching on film. I was trying all those different kinds of things. Working with different lenses or putting things in front of the camera, and trying different kinds of alterations to the optics, sort of in a Brakhagean mode.

00:20:00

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So there was that, although that didn't end up being the direction in which I'd ended up doing major, large finished works. But I have a lot of fragments of that sort.

00:20:11

ADAM HYMAN

Were the first thing you were making at Reed, what mode were they in?

00:20:15

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah, as I say, the one little dramatic film, the film JUNK, THE DISASTERS OF WAR. There may have been one other that I can't think of. Then there's, as I say, there's a lot of short fragments of things that I've never really put out there or shown publicly.

00:20:33

ADAM HYMAN

Is that time when you could say you really started studying film?

00:20:41

DAVID LEBRUN

I don't know that I was ever a great film student. I certainly watched a lot of films in Andries Deinum's class and then in film classes at UCLA and then later just going to film. At Portland State, I did that one workshop, and I certainly wasn't an assiduous student there. Once I got to UCLA, I was too impatient to make the films to really have the time to be a really good student, I don't think. I remember I was in Floyd Crosby's camera class, and I should have taken advantage of that. He was a marvelous cinematographer.

00:21:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I think I just skipped class a whole lot and just worked on my own films. So there were resources at UCLA I didn't much take advantage of. The main thing I was focused on was getting SANCTUS made, getting my next film made, using the stuff that was there, and getting involved with other people and working on their films, as far as being a student. Yes, I took the film history courses and I certainly saw a lot of films when I was there in Howard Suber's film history classes.

00:22:10

ADAM HYMAN

So who were some of the other students that you were working with?

00:22:13

DAVID LEBRUN

The main one that I ended up working with was Burt Gershfield, who -- I'm not sure if he was in my Project Two group or not. But he was doing, NOW THAT THE BUFFALO'S GONE as his Project Two, and I was editing on SANCTUS at the same time. Also at the same time, I'd gotten a job as projectionist at the Cinematheque 16, which was this little theater on Sunset Boulevard, right in the middle of the strip. '66 was the year of riots on the Sunset Strip and go-go girls and Whisky A Go-Go.

00:23:01

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was like a wild scene on the strip, and in the middle of that was this theater where they would have the same show three times a night, like a regular theater running for a week, and it would be, you know, THE CABINET OF DOCTOR CALIGARI one week, and the next week it would be an evening of Brakhage films, or an evening John & James Whitney films, or an evening of Ed Emshwiller films, just one thing after another. And I was the projectionist. We put all these stuff on big 2,000 foot reels, so the whole program was on one big reel.

00:23:39

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was in the building where Book Soup is now. You went down a little alleyway and it was in the back, you entered from the back. That was probably my best introduction... Talk about studying film, I had a chance to look at these films, these great American independent films and others over and over and over again over the course of weeks. That was a great experience.

00:24:28

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I was just reminded this week about the Cinematheque 16 because Robert Beavers was here showing his films in L.A. and one film of Gregory Markopoulos called MING GREEN, and I had seen Ming Green, I guess, three times a night for a week during that period because that was the only Markopoulos film that I think we showed. I remember that film having a great influence on me. When I saw it this week, I realized that I didn't remember any of the content. What I remembered was the power of images coming out of blackness, of just the flashing or pulsing out of blackness.

00:25:17

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

At the time, I was working on editing SANCTUS, and one of the editing strategies I came up with was, either— I did a combination of two things. One was just cutting the blackness and having things flash in single frame, and then in slightly longer bursts and longer bursts, but in action. So you'd see a frame of something and then two frames and then four frames and then eight frames, and the action getting to be a little bit more each time and the sound going with it, which I think MING GREEN did something similar. So it would be bursting on, just picture and sound and then going to silence [makes noise and gesture] and then off.

00:25:56

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then the other was an editing technique, which came out of that, I think, where I would have a scene running, let's say a shot of the Catholic mass, and then I would put in a single frame of the mushroom ceremony, of some parallel action. Then I would put in two frames, and then I would put in four frames and then eight and then gradually it would switch over until there was only one frame, one last flash frame of the mass, and then the second scene would take over. I was doing hard-cutting of sound at the same time, so that new sound would come in successfully greater bursts, and then the second, the new sound would take over.

00:26:36

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So we had MING GREEN, we had SANCTUS, and then at the same time Burt was working on NOW THAT THE BUFFALO'S GONE, which was a film that was made out of stock footage of American Indians. He was finding stock footage in library documentaries and available stock footage which he was putting on to this— well, let me back up. There was a contact printer in the basement, not of the film department but of the art department at UCLA. A contact film printer which essentially takes a roll of film and a roll of stock and puts them together in the gate and makes an exposure.

00:27:20

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So you can't do any optical printing or changes in size or changes of speed, but you can do multiple passes and use different filters. Pat O'Neill had gotten this installed down there, I think. Pat O'Neill was teaching in the photography department at UCLA, not in the film department. He was teaching still photography and then began experimenting with stills, with solarization and those kinds of things. Then he began to work with this contact printer. I think he'd done one or two short films before that were not particularly printer-involved like *BY THE SEA* and a film of his own sculpture, I think. Or maybe there was a Las Vegas or a sign film that he'd done.

00:28:04

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But he began working with a combination of the solarization during developing and this contact printer, and began working on 7362, which was named after the film stock, the high-con film stock that he was using. Burt began working with that high-con stock as well, taking this American Indian footage and putting it through, basically posterizing it, putting different colors so that the darks would become greens and the brights become reds, and something in between. So he was putting different colors into different bands and was coming up with this mass of footage, but he'd not edited a film and he wasn't quite sure of how to structure it.

00:28:49

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Basically, we began to talk and I offered to edit the film for him. I applied the same kind of editing strategies that I was using with *SANCTUS*, and later I went and did a retrospective and I screened the two of them together. There's that thing of bringing in flashes, there were things involving the sort of very pastoral images of the Indians and then the machine age coming in, and the machines are kind of one, two, four, and then the machines take over. And using the same kind of things with sound.

00:29:26

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I think all of that kind of came out of *MING GREEN* and then went into *SANCTUS* and went into *NOW THAT THE BUFFALO'S GONE* all in that fall semester at UCLA, and out of having been projecting at the Cinematheque 16.

00:29:49

ADAM HYMAN

So tell me more, describe to me Cinematheque 16.

00:29:55

DAVID LEBRUN

Okay, it was this little theater...

00:30:05

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Yeah, Cinematheque 16 was a tiny little 16-millimeter theater, where Book Soup is now on Sunset Boulevard. The director of it or the manager of it was Lewis Teague, who had been a UCLA film student. The only thing I know about him at UCLA, he'd made a film about Jesus Christ appearing in modern Los Angeles and dragging his cross around and having a hard time, I think. But he later went on to direct a bunch of films like CUJO from the Stephen King novel, and other films.

00:30:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But at the time, he was managing this theater and was programming a mix of European expressionists, avant-garde, New American Cinema. Ron Rice and Markopoulos and Brakhage and Vanderbeek, just all that catalogue of people. Bruce Baillie. I was seeing these things three times a night while I was working there projecting. Later— well, two things happened. At one point, I gave up that job. My recall was that I sort of turned it over to Jeff Perkins, who was a fellow film artist. He somehow sort of took it over from me as I went off to other things.

00:31:26

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Near the end of the time, which is was just sort of what got me out of it, they had a big success with Andy Warhol's MY HUSTLER, and I remember that being a film that I did not appreciate running three times a night for a week. It was just not my kind of film to begin with. Not something you want to watch over and over and over. That led to a success among the gay audience in that neighborhood, and they began to discover they could run gay pictures and could do a lot better. So there was more Warhol that came in, and then they were running sort of neo-gay—

00:32:07

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I think there was one that I just couldn't stand, which was Barbra Streisand singing "People Who Love People" with people dancing cheek to cheek in a gay night club. I didn't mind the gay night club, but I hated Barbra Streisand. [laugh] And having to hear that over and over. So somewhere around there, I said, I've had enough, I'm out of here. Because the range of the films seemed to become less at that point. There were various events after that. I'm reminded, there was a poster we were just looking at over here from The Hog Farm that I was later part of did a show at the Cinematheque 16.

00:32:43

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I remember one memorable show at the Cinematheque 16 when they showed—this was after my time—when they showed a movie called GAS, which was a film in which -- a black and white documentary in which a group of people are trying to order a tank of nitrous oxide which they will take to this mansion and they'll all consume. And they're on the phone, they're trying to pose as race car drivers. They finally get the tank of nitrous oxide and they go to this place and they turn on the valve, at which point a card appears on the screen saying, “consume your nitrous oxide at this time”. Behind the bar, they had had huge balloons filled with nitrous, and the nitrous, just tanks of nitrous being dispensed.

00:33:31

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So everybody in their seats in the theater had this balloon, was waiting for that moment, and they all began sucking on their balloon of nitrous, at which point, I have no idea what the actual movie was. [laugh] These people on the screen were kind of rolling on the floor and seeming to have feedback and echo, and so was everybody in the theater. Whether it was black and white or color from that, I just can't tell you. So that film probably only screened that once, I don't know if it had any other life.

00:34:01

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But I think Jeff Perkins was involved in some programming, having to do with American Indians. There was some odd and interesting programming after that point, but I kind of lost track of it after I left.

00:34:12

ADAM HYMAN

Now, what period were you there, do you remember?

00:34:14

DAVID LEBRUN

I was there, I believe, pretty much the fall of '66. Then I had a big change in my life came when Helena, whom I had met in Mexico when I was screening the rushes for SANCTUS, called me up and said she was in town and living with some folks in Sunland and I went to visit her. We hooked up together, and at around the same time, the group of people she was living with, which was this very odd and interesting group of people, got offered this hog farm on a hilltop to take care of if we'd fix it up and take care of the hogs, and all of us moved in there, there was eight of us to begin with.

00:35:03

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So, one of them was a guy named Hugh Romney, who was a standup comedian who was also working with autistic children at the time. And his wife, Bonnie Jean, who was an actress doing the ingénue parts in GUNSMOKE and STAR TREK and things like that. Paul Foster, who was an ex-member of the Merry Pranksters, but who also worked part time for NASA, he was a computer genius. He was part of the crew that monitored the Apollo flights and were prepared to take over their computer systems if there were computer glitches.

00:35:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So there was all these kind of strange hippie-types living on a hilltop with all of these weird individual lives, and mine was still commuting from there to UCLA to finish my semester at UCLA. I dropped the idea of doing Ezra Pound's CANTO XVII as my Project Two and started making a movie about this odd group of people I was living with. Taking care of the hogs and sitting around having breakfast together and starting to paint weird images all over the place, and people beginning to come up and having events there, and Tiny Tim would show up and be singing there, collaged vehicles began to appear, people began buying buses.

00:36:35

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

All of that was going on and so that's when I began to make my film about it. But for my Project Two, I did an eight-minute starting in black and white, switching to color film, which later I developed into something that I called THE HOG FARM MOVIE, because we later went out on the road and all throughout '67 and '68, the material I gathered during that time became The Hog Farm Movie.

00:37:10

ADAM HYMAN

So, where was the farm at that time?

00:37:12

DAVID LEBRUN

It was on a hilltop in the Angeles National Forest. It was the only piece of private property deeded in to the Angeles National Forest. If you drive out to Sunland now and drive along Foothill Boulevard looking up above Sunland and Tujunga, there's one house up there with some trees around it, and that's the only house. Claude Doty was this guy who had this place, and he would have just as soon lived there himself, but his wife had no interest in living on the hilltop. She wanted to have a suburban house down below. So he had a guy named Old Saul, a Black guy, who was living there, taking care of the hogs.

00:37:52

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Old Saul died, and so vandals came and started breaking the windows and so forth. So when we arrived to take care of the place, all the windows were broken and there were the remains of Old Saul's life there which were, every room was filled to the ceiling with stacks of magazines, which turned out to be a combination of pornographic magazines and religious tracts, and every surface of the dressers and the mantle pieces were covered with kind of symmetrical altars made out of religious and pornographic artifacts. So all of that went into the dumpster, and we put in windows and then began living there.

00:38:35

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Started with eight people, and by the time we ended up leaving to go on the road across the country in the following June, a year and half later—this was in December '66 when it started -- in June of '68, we started going on the road across the country, which was the cross-country trip that I filmed in THE HOG FARM MOVIE. But I filmed the beginnings of that life on the hill in the beginning of the gathering of more and more people and doing crazy things on the hilltop, for my UCLA project.

00:39:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then, by that time, it was pretty clear to me that I was going to go off with the Hog Farm rather than go on with graduate school and pursue the film rather than the film school.

00:39:34

ADAM HYMAN

What elements of your interests in filmmaking and your concern of whatever the anthropological side of filmmaking and so forth did you incorporate into your making of THE HOG FARM MOVIE?

00:39:44

DAVID LEBRUN

It was certainly a lot of experimental things. I remember when I was first shooting, when I first moved from black and white to color, Bruce Lane had been experimenting at UCLA with trying every filter in the Rosco pack. You'd get these free packs of gels from Rosco, just as samples of their different colors for light gels. So he would cut those up and put them in the little holder that you could stick in the back of a Bolex, and tried filming on ECO stock, 16-millimeter reversal stock, with every one of these filters to see how it affected the light.

00:40:23

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I looked at his results and picked a couple of filters and tried shooting some of my initial color stuff through these various filters to get strange effects. So I was doing that kind of thing. One of the things that I tended to do was working with a very wide-angle lens. When I had my camera equipment stolen on SANCTUS and replaced it, one of the things I got was a 10-millimeter lens. Was it 10 or nine? It may have been a nine-millimeter lens. But it was a beautiful wide-angle lens that basically allowed me to work with depth of field all the way.

00:41:03

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I really liked that, working with things very close to the camera, things middle distance, things in the far distance, and also working hand-held in a very fluid way where the camera was in constant dancing motion with the subject. I think that a lot of that came out of an experimental background. As I begin to work it into the The Hog Farm. There was also, in terms of the anthropological background, it was like, I began to sort of develop this notion—

00:41:37

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Or I had begun to develop the notion. What I'd really like to do is go off and spend my life with different cultures with a 16-millimeter camera and a sound recorder and doing documentaries or films -- not quite documentaries, I mean, what I found -- doing films that were kind of experimental documentaries, trying to get inside of the visionary states of these different people, and see inside their way of dreaming, inside their way of hallucinating, inside their way of seeing, rather than inside how they cooked and what their economy was.

00:42:14

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I was more interested in what was different about their vision. So here was a culture that just sort of crystallized around me that I was able to document and document the life and get inside the way of seeing. Because it was -- this very experimental quality of what we were doing led to a very experimental quality in the editing, for example. There was a big influence of the kind of cut-up techniques that had come out of Burroughs and Brion Gysin, of cut-up and repetition and looping.

00:43:00 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And one of the things that influenced my editing in *THE HOG FARM* is—there was an overlap between the Hog Farm and the Merry Pranksters, Kesey's group of people. One of the people who joined us when we were traveling across the country was Ken Babbs, who'd been one of the major forces in the Merry Pranksters, and he did things with audio tape where he would kind of tape the audio tape, and loop it and make copies and repeat. Even using in speech things where he would repeat and repeat, and then turning them into loops.

00:43:35 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I saw that stuff happening in what he was doing in audio and I began to incorporate it in what I was doing with the editing of images, where things would kind of repeat and cycle and re-cycle differently. So it was a mix of documenting a culture that I was in the middle of, but also that culture was one which was using cut-up and light show and visual alteration techniques. We were doing light shows at the same time. So all of these different things were feeding into one another.

00:44:40 **ADAM HYMAN**

First, could you describe to me a bit more about Burton Gershfield? What was he like at that time and then a bit more of how you feel was the end result of *NOW THAT THE BUFFALO'S GONE*?

00:45:00 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Gee, let me think about that. I can't think of what I haven't already— I mean, one of the big things that was interesting about that was there I was in the film department, and he was sort of my link over to this other thing that was happening. Because in the film department, there was no optical printer, there was no real experimental stuff going on. There was no, nothing like that, and this was happening off with Pat and Burt in the art department.

00:45:44 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Then, I think through Burt meeting Peter Mays, who was another experimental feature filmmaker who was teaching at Mount Saint Mary's. So it was like I was at the UCLA film department, but through that connection was getting into a whole other kind of group that wasn't quite the people in my class. I mean, I had a bunch of interesting people in my class. Oh gosh, Willard— Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck were in my class.

00:46:19 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

They had done a film for Project Two that was *CONTEMPT* remade with Ken and Barbie dolls, which wasn't my interest, but it stuck with me. Then they went on to write *AMERICAN GRAFFITI* for Lucas and films like that.

00:46:37 **ADAM HYMAN**

Was Coppola at the school before that?

00:46:39 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Coppola, yeah, there was graffiti about Coppola in the men's room stalls, I remember. [laugh] I can't remember what it was, but he had this kind of [word?]. And Ray Manzarek and The Doors had just come through and had been the house band, and their films were still being shown in the Royce Hall screenings, which were the kind of end of year screenings. I remember Ray Manzarek's EVERGREEN was screened during the Royce Hall screening my fall year. But I just missed them. I ran into The Doors later on, but they had just left the film school.

00:47:15 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

The sort of film department band while I was there was The United States of America, Joe Byrd would come in— he was sort of the computer music guy at UCLA but gravitated toward the film school. I remember we'd have evenings where his band would be playing. He did the soundtrack for 7362. So he was the sort of music guy around the scene.

00:47:49 **ADAM HYMAN**

Was Thom Andersen there? Was...

00:47:52 **DAVID LEBRUN**

You know, he probably— I remember seeing Thom Andersen's films. I don't remember him being there at the same time or...

00:47:59 **ADAM HYMAN**

He was parallel with The Doors.

00:48:00 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Yeah, he may have been a little ahead of me.

00:48:03 **ADAM HYMAN**

And tell me about Pat at that time.

00:48:10 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I met Pat O'Neill through, I believe, Burt taking me over and showing me the printer where he was working. I didn't get in to the printing at that time. I was thinking of taking SANCTUS and starting to do color things with it, but I decided that I wouldn't go down that road, that I'd stick with my black-and-white film for the time being, that it would have been too much of a going in another direction with it. But I did toy with the idea when I saw what kind of work they were doing. But I remember meeting Pat, I remember going to his studio and seeing -- he had these kind of big strange blobby sculptures that he was doing then.

00:48:49

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And I think a film about his own, it was SAUSAGE CITY I think, or was that— no, it's Adam Beckett. It was some film he did after his own sculpture, I believe. I remember seeing him in the art department and maybe having seen photographs and so forth. Over the years, as I became part of the experimental filmmaking scene in Los Angeles, I would say my two sort of lodestars in that world were Pat O'Neill and Chick Strand.

00:49:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They were the sort of people who were sort of exemplars of doing work that was totally individual, totally them and nobody else. Also just staying with it and producing a body of work that just kept going over the length of their career. There were a lot of other people who would make an experimental film when they were in college. I know -- like in CalArts, there was a lot of examples of that. People who made some spectacular experimental film and then went to the industry and that was that. Very talented people, but it's tough to make a living as an experimental filmmaker. [laugh]

00:50:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So the fact that the two of them both stuck with it and kept producing this substantial and maturing body of work was always like, it's something that triangulated me in Los Angeles. There they were and it was something to live up to, always.

00:50:28

ADAM HYMAN

Okay, tell me about the completion of SANCTUS, and then you mention the screening of it in Cinema Theater in '67.

00:50:36

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh, yeah. The Cinema Theatre... well, the completion of SANCTUS... I edited -- I remember my advisor there was John Boehm at UCLA who gave me no help whatsoever, that was not very useful, and basically was on my own. I did a mix. I remember doing the mix there. But, basically I was just editing on my own, getting this thing done. I remember I cut the negative, which I was foolish to do. I bought actual negative and cut it in my own studio, which I would never do again. Then I put it into film programs. I sent it out to Ann Arbor.

00:51:16

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

One of my films won a prize at Ann Arbor once, but it showed at Ann Arbor. And it showed at the Cinema Theater. The Cinema Theater sort of took over from Cinematheque, or was concurrent with it, but then kept going longer, showing experimental film programs. You mentioned you did an interview with John Fles, and John Fles and Mike Getz were programming the Midnight Movies at the Cinema Theater, which they later began to tour around all over the country...

00:51:50 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

...Especially in Ohio, where I think his family had a theater chain, Mike Getz's. I was always impressed with the fact that The Hog Farm Movie had played in eight cities in Ohio [laugh]. Yeah, that would just amaze me. I remember going to those screenings, I remember seeing Thom Andersen's... the melting ice cream sundae, what's that called?

00:52:19 **ADAM HYMAN**
MELTING.

00:52:19 **DAVID LEBRUN**
MELTING. So I had seen MELTING there, and other films. I think they ran SANCTUS, which features the Catholic mass as a major component, on a double bill with a pornographic film in which a priest is raping a nun on an altar, [laugh] just to keep the Catholic theme up. It was very broad programming parameters, let us say. So, you would get some odd things. But it was this theater packed with people and excited to see experimental work at midnight, on a Friday or Saturday night. It was really in a big, big, big theater. That was exciting.

00:53:09 **ADAM HYMAN**
Where did this crowd come from?

00:53:13 **DAVID LEBRUN**
This was a period when there was no VCRs, there were no DVDs, you know? As with European film, there was this kind of double thing of this experimental -- it's like nothing that I've ever seen before, and it has sex in it, [laugh] the way American movies don't. It's like the films from Sweden, and they were definitely hotter than the films that were coming out with Doris Day in the United States. So there was that edge to it. There was certainly more excitement in that way.

00:53:54 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**
It was just a brief window when there was that there was that much excitement about experimental film. Also it was a wide range of material, it wasn't narrow. It wasn't a night of Stan Brakhage. It was in that case a broad range of stuff, and some of it was a lot of fun. They programmed it with flair, and they got a good crowd. My later relationship with the Cinema Theater, one thing I remember is that I was corresponding a little bit with Brakhage and he mentioned that he'd finished 23RD PSALM BRANCH.

00:54:44 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And I remember speaking to Mike Getz and somehow setting up for Brakhage to come to L.A. and have the screening. It was an afternoon screening of it at the Cinema Theater and he talked, and I think that his talk then was something that's been recorded and has made it into the archives. So it was nice to be responsible for that. I remember being really knocked out by that film.

00:55:08 **ADAM HYMAN**

What about, what else can you tell me about Mike Getz? Is there anything else?

00:55:13 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Mike Getz, well, later, when I finally finished THE HOG FARM MOVIE, it was also programmed through, I can't remember it being shown at the cinema in Los Angeles, but it must have been. But he put it on to his circuit. By that time, he had the circuit where it was going around the country to 15, 18 theaters. He also moved out of California. I think I remember an address that was like Star Route, Nevada or Nevada City or something. It was up in Northern California or Nevada. So he gradually moved out of the scene. He kept his distribution going at that point. I don't have any real Mike Getz stories...

00:56:04 **ADAM HYMAN**

When do you remember the Cinematheque 16 closing?

00:56:09 **DAVID LEBRUN**

I don't remember it closing. Because the Hog Farm went on the road, I think it was still functioning when we went on the road and it was no longer around when we came back. I don't remember how, just when it ended.

00:56:20 **ADAM HYMAN**

So, how long were you on the road with the Hog Farm?

00:56:22 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Well, before we getting to on the road, I should mention that we had begun to develop the notion of going on the road. What was leading to it was—this is 1968, it was a very, very polarized time in America. Hugh Romney, who -- B.B. King later gave him the nickname Wavy Gravy -- and he ended up keeping it -- but at that time he was Hugh. Had been working using the theater game techniques that he'd learned from Viola Spolin. It was Viola Spolin was a big influence on the people in Second City and the Committee and so forth, those improvisational groups. She'd written a book called IMPROVISATIONAL THEATER—

00:57:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

No, THEATER GAMES, I think it was called, and her THEATER GAMES became very influential. He was taking her THEATER GAMES, which were improvisational things for groups, and using them with these autistic children, in -- discovering that he could get autistic children to touch each other and to do things as a group in ways that they had not done, that he could get real breakthroughs. He would do things where he'd have everybody be the waves in the ocean or the grass in a plain, or things where they weren't themselves anymore...

00:57:42

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...Where they became a group of something or other, and was able to get them into contact in a way that they normally would not when everybody was being their own ego. The notion that the Hog Farm set out to go on the road with was that America was in an autistic state because we had all these different groups that were out of communication. You know, the police here, and the SDS over here, and the cops over here, and so forth and so on. So we worked with these theater games, first among ourselves...

00:58:23

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...And also began to develop a band and a light show and various other carnival, circus-esque elements. The notion that we were going to go on the road with was to come into a town and try to get all these different groups to sponsor a free show. Try to get the police and the Catholic Church and the Episcopalians and the SDS and the local university physics department to all co-sponsor a show. Then people would show up at noon. They'd announced the show for noon.

00:59:01

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

When people started showing up, there would be a whole bunch of poles lying around in the ground, and a bunch of tools, and they'd say where is the show? And says you're the show, grab a wrench, we're putting all of this together. Then the people would have the experience of putting up a geodesic dome and hanging a screen on it, and the projectors would go up, and then we'd show them how to project. By the evening there would be a thousand or 2,000 people there. At one of the shows that we did, in Boulder, Colorado, there were 4,000 people there, and by 9:00 in the evening, we realized that we were all in the bus.

00:59:35

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And the entire show was being run by the people who had come. So that was sort of the ideal, and that was sponsored by all these different, different groups. It was getting people together who had not been. But before that and leading up to it, my share in all of that was A, I was the guy documenting it, I was filming, and B, there was a light show component which was going to be part of what the Hog Farm took on the road.

01:00:06

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And that developed early in 1968. I had mentioned that my wife Helena was already a liquid projectionist and worked with a very sophisticated liquid technique based on this oil-based material called dibutyl phthalate that you mix at certain temperatures with the transparent oil colors, the transparent water colors, big clock faces, and you could get up to four or five colors going that would not mix, and so you could get a very complex color pattern, and then other kinds of filtering going on. She would work with two projectors and dimmers, and we began teaching other people within the Hog Farm these techniques.

01:00:49

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then there was this group that had formed out of the people I had met that moved from the film department to the art department, and through Burt Gershfield. There was a group of people who began living together in a house on Cresthill Avenue above the Sunset Strip. They were Terry Fourgette, who was a UCLA filmmaker, Bruce Lane, who had been a UCLA filmmaker, Jeff Perkins, who had been a New York Fluxus artist and collaborated with Yoko Ono, was living in that house and experimenting with film. Peter Mays, who had been teaching film at Mount Saint Mary's and doing very Brakhage kind of work.

01:01:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And had made a number of films, and also had a background as a painter. Was there somebody else in that house? That was pretty much it I think.

end of tape 2

TAPE 3: DAVID LEBRUN

00:00:10

ADAM HYMAN

All right. The house on Sunset...

00:00:14

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah, yeah. The Cresthill house. So I was just mentioning the people who were living in 1967 at the Cresthill house. As I was commuting from the Hog Farm to UCLA and finishing my degree and finishing my film, I was also spending time with these guys at the Cresthill house, and at some point, Pat O'Neill actually moved that contact printer from UCLA into the basement at Cresthill. I forgot to mention it was a contact printer and a developing setup where you'd have these big spiral tanks where you could develop a hundred-foot roll of film in the spiral.

00:00:57

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I think the developing stayed at UCLA but the printer got moved to the basement at Cresthill. So that was going on. And at some point during the spring, I think it was Burt Gershfield who came to— so we had a meeting. Or there was a discussion that led to a big meeting where it was found out that there were these concerts at the Shrine Exposition Hall every weekend, Friday and Saturday night. It was the biggest rock thing that was happening in L.A. at the time. The major groups would play there for dance concerts.

00:01:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And they had a light show called the Thomas Edison Lighting Company, which advertised a 360-degree light show. Now, the Shrine Exposition Hall is a great big rectangular hall that can hold five or 6,000 people, and it had a balcony running around the second floor. What the Thomas Edison folks had done was hang a whole bunch of screens or bed sheets or something at 20 different places around the periphery and maybe one behind the band. And they had a slide here and a movie there and an overhead over here. So 10 or 15 different little screens going. That was their 360-degree light show. It was very diffuse.

00:02:22

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

We went down to check it out and it was, yeah, we didn't like it much, and the people who were the promoters of it, which was Pinnacle Productions, felt the same way. It was a guy named Sepp Donahower. John Van Hamersveld, who was involved in it, had handled their poster. He did all the posters for the shows. Charlie Lippincott who was at UCLA was involved somehow. I don't know exactly the structure of Pinnacle.

00:02:55

ADAM HYMAN

USC.

00:02:56

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah, he was at USC. Caleb Deschanel was also involved. I remember Caleb showing, in that house, in the Pinnacle house, these guys lived together in one house. I remember going over there one evening and he was showing the shower scene from PSYCHO, and I don't know whether he was part of Pinnacle Productions or whether he was just involved in that house or what exactly what the deal was. Somebody else will clarify all that. But we were given to know that they were very interested in replacing the Thomas Edison Lighting Company.

00:03:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

We came down and we saw what the problem was and we decided that we would put together something to replace it. So we had some UCLA filmmakers. We had Peter, and Jeff was involved in film, I was involved in film, Burt. Then I had my connection to the folks who were liquid light artists from the Hog Farm, Helena and several of the others, Evan Engber and Rick Sullivan and a couple of other people there. And there was another very excellent liquid projectionist named Scott Hardy, who lived in downtown L.A., and he had a couple of projectors.

00:04:22

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So we began to scramble to put together a light show that was half a dozen people from the Hog Farm, half a dozen people from the Cresthill house, and that sort of experimental film community. We had a limited amount of time. I remember the last weekend before we went to start doing it, we went down to see the show one more time and it was not in the Exposition Hall. It was in the Shrine Theater. What's the theater called?

00:04:54

ADAM HYMAN

Shrine Auditorium.

00:04:55

DAVID LEBRUN

Shrine Auditorium. So -- and it was Jimi Hendrix setting his guitar on fire and we got first row seats or something and hanging around backstage and watching that, and again, watching Thomas Edison at work but knowing that although they didn't know it yet, that they were going to be out of there by next week and that we were going to be in. And we were scrambling to get material. There was a place called Industrial Photographic. A guy named Don Erkel had this company, which was a huge warehouse of large format photography stuff...

00:05:32

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...Which I made great use of during the 15, 20 years when it was around and until at last it went away. But we went down there and we found what are called Visucom and Transpaque overhead projectors, which have first surface parabolic mirrors about this big. One by two foot, gorgeous pieces of front surface coating that would then go up and go off a first surface mirror and out. So they were the primo overhead projectors that existed, the brightest and the sharpest. We bought several of those so that we actually ended up—I think between Scott's and Helena's and the additional ones we bought—we ended up with six overheads.

00:06:15

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Set them all up on dimmers in pairs so that we could— the main innovation we made was rather than having a light show scattered around the periphery of the Exposition Hall, we put in a single screen about 20-by-70 feet right behind the band, and then concentrated, instead of having half a dozen people working—or three or four, I think Thomas Edison had—we had 12, everybody projecting at once on the same surface. So there'll be two overheads on the left side, two overheads on the right side so you could fade and combine between two projectors over here and then two in the center that overlapped the whole center section.

00:07:00

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And we started for our first couple of shows, rear projecting. We had a rear projection screen and we were behind the band up on the balcony. We quickly discovered that that was a mistake, and we moved instead to front projection. The rear projection was a mistake because we used 50 percent screen, and that meant we were seeing half the image and the audience was seeing half the image but neither of us was seeing full brightness. The image was actually a little brighter on the audience side, so we were seeing a kind of crummy version of what the audience was seeing. And we didn't see the audience, we didn't see the band.

00:07:34

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The first two shows we did from behind and the first one was with Cream, and the second one was with Traffic and Quicksilver Messenger Service. Then we moved around to the front and we built a platform in the middle of the dance hall. This was the dance concerts. I pulled up, for historical purposes, one of the old posters, and the poster said, Dance Concert, Shrine Exposition Hall, The Who and Fleetwood Mac and one other major group, tickets, \$2 advance, \$3 at the door. [laugh]

00:08:14

ADAM HYMAN

When was this?

00:08:15

DAVID LEBRUN

This was 1968. So, people could come. People could afford it. It was a place where you could just come and dance and not have to think about it a whole lot. People just showed up at the door and got their tickets and danced.

00:08:35

ADAM HYMAN

Building a platform.

00:08:36

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah, we built a platform in the middle, it put us eight or 12 feet up above the audience. From that platform, we were projecting the films, and then, up on the balconies we had the overhead projectors going left to right and right to left and the screen was at a slight V. In a slight V facing the audience so that the projectors came from the left and came from the right, and then others oriented toward the center. And then, there were about 12 slide projectors.

00:09:13

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

All of our projectors had color wheels and strobe wheels so that we could alter color and so that we could cause different pulse rates. So between black and white and color and between smooth liquid motion and strobing slides and film— there was a remark made by Ray Zone at one of the recent Ken Jacobs screenings, which I really liked. He was describing why he thought Ken Jacobs' Magic...

00:09:58

ADAM HYMAN

[overlapping] Nervous Lantern...

00:09:59

DAVID LEBRUN

Nervous Magic Lantern shows were creating a feeling of 3-D. And he says, “I think what you're doing is creating a perfect storm of monocular 3D cues”. I think we did kind of the same thing, a perfect storm of monocular 3D cues so that the thing appeared to just go into space because you had color, you had black and white, you had different strobe rates, you had images that were going staccato with the same image offset.

00:10:26

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

You had all these different kinds of things happening at once within something—which was because we developed a large library of material—it was a relatively coherent composition that we were coming up with. I mean, we would commission guest artists to come up with a body of material for a show. Like we did a show with the Grateful Dead and The Velvet Underground and Doctor John The Night Tripper. So we commissioned Peter Mays—Peter Mays created the motifs for it, which had to do with flames and volcano footage and making black and white slides and transparencies out of old Dore illustrations for the Inferno.

00:11:12 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

So that sort of provided a library of raw material and then other things related to that. But we had enough of a rack of material that we could pull things out as a song would come up and be able to adapt to it. People were very much responding to one another and learning to block a part of their image to let somebody else's image through and that kind of thing. Everybody was blending very much into one another, so it became a unified image. In the weeks that were leading up to our doing these shows, I began to develop film material for the shows.

00:11:51 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And part of what we did was checking films out of the Santa Monica Library or the L.A. Public Library that were training films and science films mostly. **WONDERS IN MINIATURE** and the classics like **DREAM OF WILD HORSES** or other films, and actually taking them to a lab and duping them or copying them on the UCLA contact printer. Or even cutting them up and getting the parts that actually worked with light show.

00:12:25 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Because we were very much concerned with film that, for example, we tried using a film like Pat O'Neill's 7362, which begins with black balls against the white background. It didn't work at all because if you had large areas of white, it just wipes out everything else on screen. So what you wanted was images against the dark field. So that's why undersea footage worked great where you'd have a black sea with colored fish swimming through it. It would become the colored fish swimming through the environment created by the liquid projection.

00:13:00 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

So, it would blend in and become part of that liquid environment. Or the fire, for example, would be flames licking up into or lava flowing down into an environment that was otherwise created by the liquid. So those things would combine so that you really didn't know what was what. It was partly abstract and partly realistic and it went very much one into the other. **THE DREAM OF WILD HORSES**, where the horses are running and they go into the water especially. They're splashing into this water which is also the liquids, and so they're going into this colored material.

00:13:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The material that I began specifically developing for it was, I began doing single frame animation from books of symbols, like these Dover books, like SYMBOLS, SIGNS AND SIGNETS and so forth, that would have 75 variants on a mythological animal or on the cross or on Japanese crest motifs and so forth. I took these and figured out sequences and shot them, and -- Burt Gershfield was the one who actually suggested this, because the contact printer was available -- he suggested a technique which influenced, which I played with the consequences of through a lot of other films. He suggested punching the film with a spacing of six apart.

00:14:35

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So you'd have a punch and then another punch and then another punch, and moving ahead by that much each time. But, when I shot the original material, shooting a frame and then skipping six or five, was it five? So that every sixth frame there would be a new image. So you'd have one frame of an image A and then five frames of black, and then image B and then five frames of black. When I put them on the contact printer, I would be filling every sixth frame with an image, but then I would move it forward by seven. And so it would go A— and I would that six times.

00:15:16

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And the result after six passes through the printer—even though it was just a contact printer—I would end up with A-B-C-D-E-F, B-C-D-E-F-G, C-D-E-F-G-H, D-E-F-G-H-I, and so forth. So you'd end up with something that is repeating but continually looping but continually moving forward each time it repeats dropping the first one and adding a new one. So you'd end up with something that was a continuous dancing progression. I ended up using that method by a different technique when I made TANKA later on, and it also influenced very much the making of PROTEUS, the animation there. and in METAMORPHOSIS, which is the most recent one that I've done using that technique.

00:16:00

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I did that, and kind of in a rush. I was just talking to Peter Mays about this. It must have been in the three or four weeks between the time we discovered we were going to do this and the time we had our first show with Cream. I took that material, which was about three minutes worth of animation, and we cut it into loops and took those loops and had six or seven projectors that first night we were projecting, some of them bright and large and some of them smaller, and so you'd end up with a whole series. We made several copies of it, so we'd have animation of cathedral floor plans on half a dozen different projectors.

00:16:42 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Or cathedral floor plans on three and cathedral windows on the other two in this staggered arrangement. Later, we found that this six or seven projectors was impractical. We really restricted ourselves to two. When we got to that platform in the front, Charlie Lippincott would get from USC these very powerful arc projectors that actually had a time clock on them. We were renting them by the projection lamp hour, not by the day. We could put an anamorphic lens on each of the two projectors and fill the 20-by-70 foot screen, bright. That really unified the show.

00:17:29 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

We would take a piece of film, whether it was the lightshow material or something else—most of it with other longer things—and start on one projector, go through the gate and then loop it, leave some slack and then loop it into the other projector. So for running DREAM OF WILD HORSES, for example, you would have it going on two screens maybe 10 seconds out of sync, and then one person on each projector masking off different areas to let different things through. So you had kind of double of the same thing. So you had this double image across the entire thing over which you had a lot of control.

00:18:09 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And that time staggering that was going on. That was the tool that I mostly used during those Single Wing days [?]. It was great to have that kind of scale to work on and that kind of brightness.

00:18:26 **ADAM HYMAN**

So how long were the events at the Shrine and the Fox Venice?

00:18:31 **DAVID LEBRUN**

The days at the Shrine, that we started I think maybe in March, and we were doing it every weekend, two nights. I should go back a moment and say that when this started, as I said, it was bringing together these two groups, Hog Farm group and the sort of L.A. filmmaker group. Burt Gershfield dropped out of it very quickly because there was aesthetic differences. I know that Helena tended to work with a lot of laced doilies and things like that where you'd get frilly patterns and so forth.

00:19:10 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And Burt was much more into hard-edged avant-garde. The aesthetic, it didn't interest him as much of some of it. So I think he was there for the first show or two, then he was gone. Jeff Perkins always supplied a very hard-edge aesthetic. He would work with putting up loops, and he'd just punched holes in them during the things. So the holes would become more and more rapid and these shapes would appear.

00:19:39

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Peter Mays was always bringing in the more demonic elements and the mystical elements into things. Everybody had their own contribution.

00:19:51

ADAM HYMAN

[unintelligible] was Mays projecting with?

00:19:54

DAVID LEBRUN

Peter was doing film work and slide work. He would also be involved in slides. Jeff was involved in the film part of it. As I say, a lot of the Hog Farm people -- and then the Hog Farm would also get in a lot of other people as plate washers and we had a lot of stuff to do, to keep materials coming for the overheads. But we did it... The Hog Farm went on the road in June. We had a gig to do in New Mexico which was a summer solstice event on an Indian reservation in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains for the summer solstice, so that's how I can date that.

00:20:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And I was putting together a bus to go on the road. There were a number of people assembling busses. So we had a caravan of busses. I left late because I was still doing the light shows. I think we were still getting the bus ready. But in June some time, that'd be around June 15th, we left our house behind—we were living in Sunland at the time—and headed off to New Mexico. The light show at that point split up. We had all these materials. Oh, I should mention, when we first started, I was the business manager of the light show. We had checks printed up. Oh, one of the things was that we didn't have a name.

00:21:23

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

John Van Hamersveld was going to do the poster for the show. We were a week away from our first show, we did not have a name. Jeff Perkins and I, as I recall it, were driving down to the Pinnacle House and we had a bunch of stupid names. We didn't like any of them, and he says, okay, I'm going to take this book of, I think it was Indian Vedas or something like that. He had this big fat spiritual book, and I'm going to let it fall open at a page and there will be the name. And the sentence that it fell open on was, "You are the single wing turquoise bird".

00:22:02

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And so he said, okay, we're the Single Wing Turquoise Bird [laugh]. So I had a bunch of checks printed up that said "SWT Bird Company" because we had to sound like a business. The economics of it was we were being paid 1,200 dollars a weekend to do this lightshow, which was a lot of money at that time. The way we spent it was we paid everybody, each of the 12 people in it 25 bucks a night for doing it, which used up 600 dollars, and the remaining 600 dollars we put into development. Which was why, over the course of three or four months— it didn't seem like a lot of money now but at the time it was substantial.

00:22:43

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was paying for this lab work, for making of transparencies, for making of slides, for printing of films, for stock, for all of these things, for plates and so forth. So it was \$600 a week, half of the money we were making, we were pouring into this material. So that by after a couple of months, we were able to have a rack of things to draw on. I remember a show for example, it may have been Albert King, one of his blues shows.

00:23:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And Albert King started singing "Born Under A Bad Sign," and I was able to reach over and pick up a 16-millimeter film in which a Plains Indian wearing full war bonnet is demonstrating the American Indian sign language with all the sign demonstration, and I put that up against the background of liquids over his head as he was singing "Born Under A Bad Sign," 20 feet high. That played through the 15 minutes of his doing that song, and then, somebody flashed, on the right— that was on the left side of the screen....

00:23:57

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...On the right side of the screen, somebody began flashing the word "invasion" in this 3D receding type, like from a '50s science fiction movie poster. Somebody took the cue from that and put up science fiction footage, and we went from that into an entire science fiction modality. I had the science fiction section of Peter Mays' Death of the Gorilla which I put up, so there's flying saucers flying over. So, it was like somebody would make a suggestion and then everybody would come up with imagery that fit into that, and we had enough stuff that we could actually do that, that you could respond to those kind of suggestions.

00:24:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was there, it wasn't like, "wouldn't it be great IF we had...", we actually had it. So that was quite wonderful. But when it came June, we actually split the material in half, and all the Hog Farm folks went off at the hog farm, and my bus that I was fixing became the lightshow bus. We had a rack on top with a bunch of overheads and slide projectors and chemicals and all the stuff that we'd put together from that. I had 16mm. movie projectors and crates of films -- of all of these kinds of films, which I still have in this room now, a bunch of them.

00:25:23

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And the other half of the group stayed behind and kept doing the Shrine shows for a while. That show I mentioned of The Who was after I left. They did them at the Shrine. I think they did a Rose Bowl show. They did a couple of other big outdoor shows, and then they made a move into museums. They did a show at the Santa Barbara Museum. Then, Sam Francis the painter, whose painting was very related to the kind of things we were doing with liquids, became fascinated by it, and he became kind of the patron of the lightshow. Rented them a whole floor of the, what was it called?

00:26:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

What was the name of the hotel on the strand? Was it -- the Monica Hotel, the big old hotel on the beach that later burned down. They had a big studio in there for a while, and they were operating out of a sculptor's studio, Joe Funk's studio, for a while. Then, they, together with a couple of other people, Rol Morrow and Larry Janss who'd come into it, took over the Fox Venice Theatre, which had been, I think, a Latino local neighborhood theater. They initiated the whole practice of double bills changing every night and a poster that's all over town that tells you what the double bill is, which became a model of exhibition for a while.

00:26:59

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I mean, the Nuart picked up on it. The Rialto picked up on it. Other theaters in other towns picked up on it. But they were the pioneers of it, and they were running that theater with just tons of great films that were never seen anywhere else coming through there, great numbers of things that I saw there for the first time. They had a loft above the theater, which was called the Cumberland Mountain Film Company, and in the Cumberland Mountain Film Company, they set up a huge platform. They had the lightshow there installed on a big platform and the screen and the whole thing.

00:27:39 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And they did lightshows there for a small public. Maybe about 50, 75 people at a time could come up and watch a light show. They'd began working with recorded music. A lot of Steve Reich and Terry Riley and folks like that using this kind of trance music and would do shows there. There was a feature film made which used that as the setting, a film by Jim Bridges called THE BABY MAKER, in which Barbara Hershey comes up into that environment and watches a light show, smokes a joint and then the thing is busted by the police.

00:28:19 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

But in order to do that, they were filming the light show and photographing the light show and a piece of that light show was made as a film which still exists, about a three or four-minute section which was done in 35 and now exists in smaller formats. In that section, you can see some of that 16-millimeter animation that I did.

00:28:44 **ADAM HYMAN**

Just briefly, so the Fox Venice, you weren't involved?

00:28:51 **DAVID LEBRUN**

No. I mean, after my time on the road with the Hog Farm, I came back. The Fox Venice was going strong and the light show had been through its other incarnations and was established at the Fox Venice.

00:29:03 **ADAM HYMAN**

Oh, and what year? What dates?

00:29:06 **DAVID LEBRUN**

I went on the road with the Hog Farm in June of '68, and the real time of that cross-country trip was until that winter. We reached New York in the winter. The original motivation for the trip—or one of the original motivations—was that we were bringing the Yippie party candidate for president to Chicago. Which was going to be a pig. And so, one of the pigs from the Hog Farm named Pigasus, was the Yippie party candidate. So we had a trailer with a pig in it and we took off with our busses installed with bunks to sleep in.

00:29:56 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Ours was the light show bus and other buses, there was a band bus and there was a hog bus. The Road Hog was the main bus. We traveled to New Mexico and then we did a number of shows in New Mexico, some of which were quite wonderful, in everything from fields and Indian reservations to—we did a mental hospital show once that got an autistic girl speaking who hadn't spoken in years. It was also a current that summer where there was some belief that we were counter-revolutionaries, that maybe we're CIA plants because we were making everybody peaceful and happy. [laugh]

00:30:53 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And there was a rebellion going on in New Mexico, a guy named Tijerina had taken over a courthouse in New Mexico and there was kind of a Chicano rebellion. At one point it got a little diffuse because people began to come to our parties instead of going to the takeovers. So there was this kind of odd tension between us and the SDS. I remember we had once a big sit-down circle with the SDS, talking about whether it made more sense to encourage violence and to encourage confrontation with cops or to change people's perceptions and get people—

00:31:35 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

That was their thing, was create the confrontation because otherwise things will never come to a head, and ours was we want to get people out of their way of seeing people as stereotypes. Move people away from the stereotypes. One thing that happened was that several people, while we were in New Mexico, came down with infectious hepatitis. So while they were healing we couldn't move. We couldn't just travel around the country with a bunch of infectious people, so we had to sort of stay put until they got better, which meant that we didn't make it to Chicago.

00:32:16 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And part of our job in Chicago was supposed to be to keep the peace at the alternative convention in Lincoln Park. We were very good at that. So many of us have wondered what would have happened differently if we had made it to Chicago. Later, when Nixon's second inaugural happened, a group of about three or four people from the Hog Farm went and they were able to prevent a huge riot that could have happened. There were 10,000 people leaving a circus tent with belligerent intent to march on that, and the Hog Farm was able to turn it so that it became a peaceful event instead.

00:32:54 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

They were able to make sure— the Hog Farm was in charge of security and peacekeeping at Woodstock and were able to make sure that half a million people had a peaceful time without incident. So we've always wondered whether if we'd made it to Chicago, if we would have made a difference to that convention then to Nixon's reelection and a few more years of the Vietnam War. [laugh] But we didn't make it so we'll never know.

00:33:21 **ADAM HYMAN**

Or if the pig might have won.

00:33:22 **DAVID LEBRUN**

If the pig might have won. The pig would have been the better candidate. They substituted a different pig but they didn't win.

00:33:30

ADAM HYMAN

Were you with the Hog Farm at Woodstock?

00:33:32

DAVID LEBRUN

No. I mean, that's a later-on story. While we were traveling around, there was— well, three parts of what I was doing was I was shooting, to the limited degree I could. I didn't have a lot of money and I was buying 200 or 300 feet of film at the time. In these days of video, it's hard to recall that two minutes and 40 seconds of film was expensive to buy, process and print. So you didn't go through too many rolls of film.

00:34:05

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

You didn't shoot off an hour without thinking. I think the entire raw material for THE HOG FARM MOVIE --which is a 40-minute film -- I don't think I shot more than an hour and a half, two hours of footage over the course of that two years. But it was trying to make every second count. That was one thing I was doing was the shooting, and the second thing that I was doing was doing lightshows. So we would shoot during the day and do lightshows at night. Then the third thing was doing showings of the film, so I would be editing as I went—the work print—and editing into two screen form often and then we would show it as a double-screen film.

00:34:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I remember a show, and this was probably typical. We did a show in Boulder where I think Stan Brakhage showed up. It was a double bill with Michael Snow's WAVELENGTH. [laugh] Couldn't imagine such a thing. When we showed our thing, people in the audience were using microphones and doing an improvised soundtrack. There's footage of people putting up the domes and other people would get up on stage and sort of help the people on screen so there'd be a lot of people in front of the screen helping them push on the poles.

00:35:34

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So we kind of mixed it up that way. I was talking earlier about the editing style. The editing grew out of that process of showing it two screen, three screen, one screen, having people talk into microphones while it was going on so that when we finally did the major act of creating a soundtrack, which I did in New York that winter, we went into a recording studio, a four-track recording studio—which was a big high-tech at the time, four-track—and we had the band in one area with some sound baffling, a bunch of people with acoustic noise makers and instruments and other things in another area...

00:36:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...And Hugh in another area with a microphone narrating and Paul Foster, because I believe deeply in having a narrator with a stutter, Paul had a stutter. [laugh] So the two of them were narrating and all that was going on. It was all being done live to projection and then I took that and worked with it. So that process of doing live performance with it and live sound influenced the way the final soundtrack turned out.

00:37:13

ADAM HYMAN

The light meter story I hear is good.

00:37:15

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh, the light meter story. The light meter story is that when we went to Boulder, we did a show in— no, we did a show in Boulder and then we went to Drop City in Colorado which was a commune that had -- Steve Baer I think was the guy who was involved in that. He had created the system called Zomes, and it was basically a dome system and he figured out how to make geodesic domes out of car hoods. So you had these metal domes all made out of multicolored car hoods. So you'll see in THE HOG FARM MOVIE, there's a scene where I'm kind of animating my way around these multicolored domes while I was there.

00:37:54

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then I was taking a walk in the woods and at some point, I had a Sekonic light meter—I had two light meters, one, a little cheap Gossen Pilot and a nice Sekonic—and I put my Sekonic light meter down on a tree stump. We got back on the bus and we drove away, and somewhere in Kansas I realized that I had left the light meter behind when I went to look for it again. It was like, “it's gone”. It was in the woods, somewhere in Colorado. So, this is in July, I think. In December, we finally arrived in New York. I'm staying at my wife's father-in-law's apartment.

00:38:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

He had a place near the United Nations, 60-something street on the East Side. First morning in New York, I'm exhilarated and I had an errand to do at THE EAST VILLAGE OTHER, which was the underground newspaper at the time. So I just walked the 60 blocks or whatever it is. It was just a chilly winter morning, not having met anybody in New York, arrived at 2nd Avenue and down in the East Village to the Gem Spa, which was a kind of hang out newsstand place to get egg creams. There was an intersection where people kind of hung out on the street corner.

00:39:28 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

It was sort of a hippie hangout corner. I walked up to the first person I saw, and it was a young lady, and said, excuse me, can you tell me the way to THE EAST VILLAGE OTHER. And she said, well, I'm going that way, I'll show you. So I start walking with her that way and we started comparing notes, and she says, oh, you're with the Hog Farm? Oh, yeah. What's your name? David Lebrun. "So, I have your light meter for you". The first person I met in New York, six months later, she had my light— she'd passed through Drop City and they'd said, "Oh, you're going to New York? If you run into David Lebrun, give him his light meter".

00:40:06 **ADAM HYMAN**

Oh, somebody else on the forest had found it?

00:40:08 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Yeah, yeah.

00:40:09 **ADAM HYMAN**

Your name was on it?

00:40:10 **DAVID LEBRUN**

It may have been. But I mean, I was the guy filming with the Hog Farm and it was clear that I'd been filming, I'd left it behind.

00:40:19 **ADAM HYMAN**

So was that your first time in New York?

00:40:22 **DAVID LEBRUN**

No. I had been in New York as a kid once or twice passing through. It was the first time I spent any considerable amount of time there.

00:40:29 **ADAM HYMAN**

Did you spend any time at, well, Anthology or whatever its predecessor was at that point?

00:40:34 **DAVID LEBRUN**

No. I didn't. We'd crossed the country. We now arrived, it was the dead of winter. I had a terrible bad back at that time. I ended up spending a month in a hospital in Philadelphia. But the Hog Farm took a house in Upper New York State, in a rural area by a frozen river and we were all there for a while. I was kind of going back and forth to the city, and I ended up getting a little apartment on 2nd Avenue in The Bowery that was like a free apartment that somebody passed on. I went and would stay there when I was in the city. The previous occupant had been R. Crumb.

00:41:23 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

So, pinned up on the wall were these huge cutouts of Mr. Natural and Mr. Goodbar and Keep on Truckin' and all of those. The one over the bed was Mr. Natural, which was the only one I took with me when I left. It's over on the wall behind you. So that one I kept.

00:41:44 **ADAM HYMAN**

So when did you leave the Hog Farm as it were?

00:41:50 **DAVID LEBRUN**

I was having bad back troubles and I also, at that point, we had my son, my wife's kid when we met, who was four then, now he was six years old, Stewart, and he was not getting into school. He's now six and we were reading through a lot and doing things, but we weren't really prepared to do home—homeschooling didn't really exist as a formal thing then. The Hog Farm kept sort of saying, well, we're going to put together some sort of a schooling thing for the kids. But there were really only two small kids, so it really wasn't a focus on children yet.

00:42:36 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

The Hog Farm ended up 30 years later with their focus entirely on children. For the past 30 years, they've run a performing arts summer camp for children and their emphasis is entirely on nurturing children. But at the time, children weren't in focus yet. So it became clear that if we wanted to get schooling for our kid, we'd had to settle down somewhere and put him in school. Besides, I had been living in a bus that was shorter than I was for months and months, and it was killing my back because I had to bend over all the time on bouncy roads.

00:43:10 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

So some time around in the late part of that winter—I don't remember exactly which month—we left. I also had a small baby at the time, Roland, and we came back to California and eventually got a house in Topanga and began another phase.

00:43:34 **ADAM HYMAN**

Tell me briefly, Roland, born when...?

00:43:37 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Roland is born in '68. I had a third son, Chris, born in '70. I was going to go into all my family stuff, but I was being a father way too young, got very overwhelmed by it. It was very easy while I was with the Hog Farm because there were lots of mommies and daddies around. We got into living in Topanga and it became more and more difficult. The '70s were complicated.

00:44:08 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

But when I came back to that area, I'm trying to think... One thing I was involved in was finishing THE HOG FARM MOVIE, which [was] a lot of editing to get that completed. I was also moving into this community in Topanga, where my neighbors were Wally Berman and George Herms and Dean Stockwell. So it was a really interesting, artistic community to be moving into.

00:44:43 **ADAM HYMAN**

Have you known any of them prior to...?

00:44:44 **DAVID LEBRUN**

I hadn't known them prior to being there, but then I gradually met them over the course of the next few years. I was in Topanga from '69 to maybe '78, '79. So it was about 10 years, and so I got to know a number of people there.

00:45:12 **ADAM HYMAN**

Did you do any work with Berman, Herms, Stockwell, Hopper?

00:45:17 **DAVID LEBRUN**

No. I remember Dean Stockwell and I used to show each other our films. He made short films and I would show him mine. He had a script that he showed me, a lot of bits and things being passed back and forth. No, we didn't actively collaborate. You know, we were showing each other things. At one point, Larry Janss and I did a Topanga Canyon Film Festival, just a one night thing. We'd get Dean's films and George's films and Wally's film.

00:45:55 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

It was other people's stuff and had showings of all of them. At one point, we did light shows up there in the community house. We would do light shows in our own house, things like that.

00:46:09 **ADAM HYMAN**

Who would be involved in those light shows?

00:46:12 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Well, Helena and I could just do a light show. I got a couple of Super-8 projectors and I was doing Super-8 shooting at that point, so I could have two Super-8 projectors. We could do a small light show in our living room. So we did that sometimes, and we did other things, more public. What happened very quickly as I got back was, suddenly—I had been on the road, we'd sort of been mutually supporting. Now the Hog Farm's economy had been interesting. We would have—when we were living in one place—we had several jobs, and they were rotating jobs.

00:46:54

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So, for example, there was a job at a gas station and nobody had to work it more than one day a week because there was plenty of manpower. We had a job, a film shipping job at Paulist Productions, which was a Catholic film company down in that archway on the Pacific Coast Highway, tile-covered archway. I was one of the people who had that job, so I would go down once a week and pack and ship Catholic educational films.

00:47:26

ADAM HYMAN

And this was in '68?

00:47:27

DAVID LEBRUN

This was before we went on the road. Maybe, yeah, '67, I think. But then other people— I was at this reunion of the Hog Farm and other people were remembering doing that same job, there were maybe three or four of us that would trade off on doing that job. But when I came back in '69, now I had to go out and support the family. Basically for the next decade and a half, I was doing contract work of one kind or another, or independent work as an editor, mostly as an editor, sometimes doing camera, but very occasionally producing, writing, directing in various combinations.

00:48:22

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I can't tell you the exact sequence. One of the earliest things I got involved when I was working with Genesis Films, which was a little experimental arm of Filmways, it was Filmways' way of dealing with the '60s. They'd assigned a guy named Reg Childs to put together, first of all, packages of experimental films to be distributed under the Genesis trademark. They were hiring Pat O'Neill and Neon Park and Chick Strand and a couple of other people to create title sequences for them. So they created the beginning titles and the end titles for the Genesis packages.

00:49:10

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I don't know where those are anymore. But by this time, Pat had moved his printer into a little house on De Longpre Avenue right behind where the ArcLight is now. I remember you could see the Cinerama Dome from the front porch. So it was a little bit west of there. Pat could tell you the address. There wasn't a contact [printer], but he had bought his 16/35 Oxberry. So he had that installed in a room, and there were other rooms with light tables. I remember Neon Park was working in there, and I think a couple of other people.

00:49:47

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They were putting together these things that were combining cartoon footage, very much in Pat's kind of style of layering, for the Genesis program, and that probably is the time when they did that Sears commercial as well, I would imagine. As I was finishing THE HOG FARM MOVIE, I went over and did work on the printer at De Longpre, days when they weren't busy. So I took some Super-8 footage I had blown up to 16 millimeter that John Phillip Law had shot and then step-printed it on that printer and took footage— I was trying to find ways of showing the effect of a lightshow on a crowd, and no film existed that could properly record what that looked like.

00:50:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So what I had done instead was shooting black and white hi-con of crowds at a show we did at Yale. So I was getting the crowds and the motion of the hands and so forth. And then I had also shot just pure liquids against the screen. And I was bi-packing on the printer at De Longpre the crowd scenes in black and white with the color footage of pure liquids, or scenes from DREAMS OF WILD HORSES, some flame footage from Peter Mays, other pieces of footage that I was combining with the crowd's footage that was done in hi-con.

00:51:23

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And all that combining and bi-pack printing and step-printing was done on Pat's printer at De Longpre. Well, about the same time, they were doing the Genesis things. Somewhere in there—and I can't give you the exact sequence—two projects happened out of Genesis that I was involved in. The first one was that they decided they were going to see about making— both of these were like, let's see what happens if we put some of these together projects. The first one was to try to finish UNCLE MEAT, or the movie of the same name that we don't have enough money to finish yet, which was the title of the album.

00:52:02

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The music album was called UNCLE MEAT or MUSIC FROM THE MOVIE WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO FINISH YET. And so, Filmways came up with a little bit of money to actually make this movie. Reg Childs hired myself, Peter Mays and Bill Kerby, who was another person from my class at UCLA who later— the thing I know that he did was writing the screenplay for a movie called THE ROSE with Bette Midler. I don't know what he's done since. I don't know what his career has been since. But the three of us spent a bunch of time in Frank Zappa's basement studio with him going over his material and then taking it all down to Filmways.

00:52:55

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So we had all of this stuff that he and Captain Beefheart had shot in their youth, and films of concerts in Festival Hall and the Royal Albert Hall in London with sync, and the film of the shoot for the—I don't remember the name of the album—but his satire on SGT. PEPPER, it was all done with vegetables. So there was the album cover shoot for that. Just a lot of different things. We put together, in the course of a few weeks, about a 20-minute piece, which as I recall, was quite wonderful. It was two and three screen. This was about the time Woodstock was coming out.

00:53:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So the whole notion of taking 16 millimeter and combining it on a wide screen and doing things with multiple screens was a viable possibility, that you might have a body of 16 millimeter material and turn it into a widescreen movie was seen as a viable thing. So we put together a multi-screen thing out of this footage with a six-channel stereo soundtrack, and we showed it to Martin Ransohoff, who was the head of Filmways, at UCLA, at Melnitz, which was the only place where you could show synchronized three 16 projectors and six-channel stereo sound.

00:54:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And Frank was down in the basement in the mix room, mixing with sound live while we were projecting it up above. Ransohoff loved it and said, okay, I'll give you some more money. At which point, he fired us and hired the guy who had cut the original DRACULA, who was still alive at the time, [laugh] because he liked the idea of working with him. Also I had got and lost Zappa's favor. I mean, he was very fond of me. He gave me a bunch of albums, some of which I still have. But then it'd become Christmastime and he said, okay, we're taking two weeks off for Christmas.

00:55:05

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And I said, okay and we'll come back January 1st or January 2nd, whatever. And he said, but I'm going to be screening dailies every day up at my house. It would be great if you guys could all come up and look at the dailies. I mean, look at footage, so you'd see more footage. I sort of stood up to him and said, well, Frank, either we should be working— you know, that's kind of like work. If we're coming in and looking at this material, either we should be working and getting paid or we should be taking the time off. At which point, he sort of looked at me like, well, you're not dedicated to this for pure art, you're in it for the money.

00:55:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So at that point, we sort of lost favor and that's why after he got the funding from our labors, he hired somebody else, and that was the end of our involvement. Apparently, what I'd heard about that project was that he hired somebody to— there was a young woman who was supposed to be showing them— he'd rented the flatbed KEM, which was very fancy at that time, and had a young woman who was the operator for the KEM and then decided to film a romance between Don Preston as some kind of Jekyll and Hyde monster and the woman with the KEM, and hired Haskell Wexler to shoot that.

00:56:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

All the money that was supposed to go for editing this thing ended up getting blown on this thing spiraling out of control, so it never did get finished. I don't know if that exists in any sort of fragmentary form but...

00:56:41

ADAM HYMAN

That it does.

00:56:42

DAVID LEBRUN

Somewhere, somehow. Then the second project was getting hired— so somewhere in there I finished THE HOG FARM MOVIE, and it was just before the Woodstock movie came out. The people who were doing the Woodstock film were very much taken with the Hog Farm because they had seen what the Hog Farm had done at Woodstock, which was quite phenomenal. So they were very much inclined to support THE HOG FARM MOVIE. Mike Wadleigh had a small distribution company called Paradigm Films.

00:57:17

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And Joyce Fresh was the woman who ran that, and she was in charge of distributing Wadleigh's documentaries, these pre-Woodstock documentaries. So they wanted to distribute THE HOG FARM MOVIE. I remember going up to their offices, which were up above Hollywood Boulevard. There's an old Thai restaurant there. What's that street? I don't remember. Anyway, I remember going up while they were cutting the thing and the scenes, because they had a six-channel, six 16 projectors that would fire up at once and show their work in progress.

00:57:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was a very interesting process. But when they finished their film, they said they wanted to distribute THE HOG FARM MOVIE. They gave me a bit of an advance, and then sat on it for a very long time, and then decided they were going out of the distribution business sometime in the early '70s and gave it back to me, not having ever acquired the music rights, and I was using Beatles and Grateful Dead and other music in there. So I got it back at a time in the '70s when nobody wanted to know about the '60s. So that's why that film has never been in distribution. I still hope someday to get the music rights cleared so it can be released.

00:58:40

ADAM HYMAN

So what's its current state? I mean, do you still have all the originals and so forth?

00:58:44

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh yeah, I still have all the originals that exist. The only thing that stands between it and putting it out on DVD, which I'd like to do maybe with some additional interviews and so forth, is music clearances.

00:59:33

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Yeah. So the second project at Genesis was Kesey's bus footage. They decided that maybe they would want to try to make a feature film out of the films that Kesey had shot on his bus trip across the country on Further. So, this thing happened where two little houses were rented on the Venice canals, and one of those houses was set up as an editing place. Kesey drove his bus down, Further, to the canals and deposited in that house all the film and all the tape and everything that they had accumulated over the years.

01:00:13

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And Bill Kerby and I, again, went in and started wading through it.—Kesey stayed for a while and then left—and tried to make sense of that material. It was cans that you'd open up and there would be South American insects in there because they'd taken it to Mexico when they were hiding out in Mexico and so forth. Then sorting it out and cleaning it and separating the negative from the work print, and finally, beginning to pull things that looked like they were vaguely usable because the sort of aesthetic operation of that crew had been that -- the shooting guy was Mike Hagen, whose nickname was Mal Function.

01:00:56

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And he would often set up— they had a lot of money from all the money he made off of ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST and SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION. But he would put a 400-foot magazine in the camera and aim it at somebody's left foot three stops overexposed and forget to turn on the sound. So you'd have 1,200 feet of that, or 400 feet of that. Somewhere in there, there were these amazing glimpses of this astonishing thing that had happened. This bus full of people with crew cuts, ex-Vietnam helicopter pilots in a totally painted bus heading into the deep south and driving up and going into the ["Colored Only"] beach...

01:01:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...A bunch of white guys -- or driving through Las Vegas. It was like a cultural intersection that would never happen again. It was unrepeatably and basically it was missed on film. I put together a 40-minute roll that we showed to the Filmways people, and in that, which looked like the best of the best, sort of looked like outtakes by the time we were showing it. So that was another thing that never, never happened.

01:02:10

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It finally was edited, I think Babbs did an edit of it that was the best that it could be, which was taking all of its faults as virtues and saying, well, here we are, we're looking at somebody's left foot because we were too stoned to know where to point the camera [laugh] kind of thing, and extrapolating from that.

01:02:32

ADAM HYMAN

Who's Babbs?

01:02:35

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh, Ken Babbs, I mentioned him earlier.

end of tape 3

TAPE 4: DAVID LEBRUN

00:02:22 **ADAM HYMAN**

State and spell your name, please?

00:02:24 **DAVID LEBRUN**

What? Spell my name?

00:02:24 **ADAM HYMAN**

State and spell your name, please, for the transcriber.

00:02:26 **DAVID LEBRUN**

My name is David Lebrun, L-E- small B-R-U-N.

00:02:31 **ADAM HYMAN**

Great. We'll go through your films. Let's start first with... actually is TANKA Super 8?

00:02:41 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Yeah.

00:02:42 **ADAM HYMAN**

Okay. So, tell me the making, the ideas behind it. How you came up with it. Or should we do the work for hire first?

DAVID LEBRUN

No, let's talk about TANKA.

ADAM HYMAN

Let's talk about TANKA.

00:02:52 **DAVID LEBRUN**

So we left off, we were talking about the '70s, something about the '70s anyway, last time. During the '70s I was doing a lot of work for hire—which we can talk about later—as an editor, writer, producer, but continued to work on my own films. Out of the experience of doing the work, the Single Wing Turquoise Bird, where we had worked with Pat O'Neill's printer—contact printers, optical printers and the idea of taking existing films and manipulating them and reprinting them and doing things with them and creating original film material...

00:03:35

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...I had in my mind the idea of an optical printer as a tool that should be one of my tools. I think about '73 is when I started it. I can check this. I began building a printer in— I had a studio in my house in Topanga. It was in a separate building, lower part of the lot. I began building an optical printer down there. That was an interesting experience because it involved electrical and metal work, neither of which I was at all familiar with.

00:04:13

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I went around and saw a bunch people's printers and took notes. I remember going to Chick Strand's house, and she had a printer sent up in her living room. And David Lowery, talking to him about his printer, and a guy who's name I can't remember at this point [Bob Olodort] who was the most savvy about printers and gave me all the best advice that I got in terms of the kinds of stepping motors to use, these little Minarik stepping motors that could move the film one frame at a time.

00:04:44

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Essentially it was a process of taking my Bolex camera, which was my main shooting instrument, and divising a platform to put it on so that with its— how did that work? Anyway that was on one platform, and on the other platform was an Ampro projector, a World War II era projector that happened to have a particularly good pull-down mechanism that was for commercial movie projectors, did a fairly good job of holding the fame steady whereas some of the [others] are a lot looser in their pull down.

00:05:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I'd also gone and looked at -- Cinema Research was the place that was a commercial optical printing place, and they used a system of control that consisted of a loop of black leader, 35 millimeter black leader with holes punched in it to say: "projector forward one [frame], camera forward two". So, project forward— you know, whatever the combination was, using a combination of little lights and photocels that camera passed in front of. So a hole punch would pass so that you have the projector go forward two frames...

00:06:05 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

...the camera would go forward one; the projector would go forward two, camera would go forward one. That would be skip printing, or it'd be reversed and you get step printing. So, I borrowed that from Cinema Research, and I added a third channel which was “projector going backward” because I had the notion of having cyclical, repeating cyclical things that would evolve, which is what I had done kind of by a different method in the loops I had done for the light show, where I had done it by doing six passes of the same film with staggered start points in order to achieve that.

00:06:38 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And this was a matter of being able to do it one time through by automated control, and would allow for a whole lot of other patterns other than the ones that I started with. That part worked okay. I got an old 35 millimeter synchronizer from the 20s and mounted it with lights coming from the bottom and photo cells from the top, and those went to relays that went to the stepping motors. By the way in order to do this I was taking— I had a little “Teach Yourself Electricity 101”, or “Electronics 101”.

00:07:14 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I was going through this book teaching myself electronics that are called— I still have these volumes of this electronics-at-home course. So I was learning about capacitors and resistors and relays, and all these different things and trying to figure the equations for these things— I don't know how I did it. I have the machinery downstairs now and I stare at it and I have no idea how I figured this stuff out.

00:07:43 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

The part of that that was really difficult was the machining. Basically I was working with sheet aluminum. Or -- I'd gotten a lathe bed, a sort of a big heavy duty lathe bed kind of table and a lathe kind of motion to put the camera on where you could use wheels to move the thing. But the projector went onto a platform that had be raised up and down with set screws, and I built most of the rest of it out of maybe eighth inch aluminum sheeting.

00:08:19 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

When I got the whole thing done, and I got it working and I turned it on— there was vibration, the frames that came out were blurry. And I realized that I built it out of too light of metal, and I had to go back and start over again with quarter inch steel. The tools that I had were a hack saw and a quarter inch drill. I didn't have a machine shop.

00:08:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So, I remember these endless processes working with these inadequate tools, trying to cut through this heavy metal. The aluminum hadn't been bad, but the steel was like insane. It was crazy to be doing it this way, but I somehow did it. Second time I finished the thing, it actually locked in and made good frames. [The] Bolex was shooting it right out of the gate of the Ampro with the lens removed, and I was able to go in and adjust framing.

00:09:08

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And I was able to do all this skip printing and step printing. I did some experiments with it. Then sometime in late 1975 early 1976, a friend called up and said, "there's something over at the house. You gotta see this". And it was a guy [who] lived over in Bel Air, and a friend of his had come back from Nepal with a huge Tanka painting in his backpack. He'd unrolled it and hung it up in the living room. It was a tree of life...

00:09:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...one of these things that's almost like a Christmas tree form and instead of Christmas tree bulbs, it's hundreds and hundreds of tiny gods. 150 different wrathful deities in different armed positions and so forth. And clouds. I looked at it and I said, oh, I really want to animate this, the idea coming back from what I'd done for the light show. I said, "could you leave this hanging there?"

00:10:15

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Let me go home." I went and got the Bolex, got the tripod, got a pair of lights, and single framed my way through this one painting. Took it back and it was really the first thing I experimented with on the optical printer. And it came out great. I printed my way through it, these things were really dancing right away. It was crude but I can see that it would work.

00:10:39

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And I said, okay, I've got to shoot more of this. I went to the L.A. County Museum, which has a decent collection of Tankas. I think Pratpraditya Pal was the curator of Indian art and I never really got to know or to meet, but I had to apply to him. Most of the stuff, of course, was in the basement, and I wanted to get in the basement instead of photographing their stuff.

00:11:07

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And he said no. I've always had difficulty getting into stuff in the County Museum. He said you could shoot the stuff in the gallery, but there were half a dozen paintings in the gallery and there were maybe one or two that were appropriate for what I wanted to do, that had this kind of repetitive material on the Tanka paintings. So I shot that and then said, okay... and didn't see a lot more in Los Angeles, but I knew San Francisco was a good place.

00:11:37

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I went up to San Francisco. Looked around at a couple of private collections and a couple of western Tibetan monastery collections that were not that interesting. The Asian museum [Asian Art Museum] in Golden Gate Park—then the Asian Museum was in Golden Gate Park. It's now moved to the city—had a fantastic collection. I got down in their basement and began looking through their photographs of these things. I recall that they had a series of the... what is it? I'm blanking the name at this point [Yamantaka]. There's a bull-headed god, kind of purple bull-headed god whose background is always black with gold trim. They had dozens and dozens and dozens of these. That would have been a whole almost other movie if I'd had gotten to shoot those.

00:12:28

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I'd still love to do that someday. These were just fantastic. Great. Here's what I want to shoot. They said, well, we are just about to have the first great China show [that] was about to come in to that museum, which was a huge first exhibit from the People's from the Republic of China. It was a major thing where all the horsemen were coming in. They were like in panic and they were under pressure, and they said, when that show's gone away, a year from now, you can come back and do this.

00:13:01

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I was on a roll, I didn't want to wait a year to do it. So finally, on the advice of several people, I went to New York. New York is where I shot most of the film. I spent maybe a week, two weeks there. There was a gallery, Jane Warner Gallery, where I'd shot several things that were in the gallery. I went to the Museum of Natural History and they had a very good collection, but again, there was great difficulty in getting access to shoot there.

00:13:31

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I didn't have credentials, this wasn't a research project and you have academic credentials. So I was able to look at the photo collection, and there was one Tanka that was an amazing one that was just fantastic for what I wanted to do of the Garuda bird, which is this mythological Tibetan creature, flying in the sky. It's like an animated film in a single painting because he's flying, and then there's a second image in the painting of him looking downward, and a third image of him going into a dive, a fourth image in which he's in full plummeting dive.

00:14:13

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

This is all in the same painting. It's like boom, boom, boom. And the fifth one where he's hitting the water of a river, splashing his way in, and a sixth one where he's emerging from the water. He's coming up from the water. And the seventh one where he's gone to the bank and Padmasambhāva, the founder of Buddhism in Tibet, is sitting in the lotus position on the bank of river, and he's resting his sleeping head in Padmasambhāva's hand. So, it was like was such a fantastic sequence for animation.

00:14:47

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I just had to shoot it, but I couldn't get access. But I did find out that there was a woman named Charmian van Wiegund, who was a collector of Tibetan work. An elderly lady, she was in her 80s, amazing person whom I manage to meet. I don't know how I got the introduction. Apartment way up in a building on First Avenue, high apartment. She'd been a student of Piet Mondrian, had a bunch of Mondrian's stuff around the apartment...

00:15:19

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...a bunch of her own work. She'd also been a close personal friend of the Dalai Lama and had this amazing collection of Tibetan stuff all over the place. It was all quite interesting, and she was very interesting. But then I walked into her bedroom, and— Tibetan paintings, sometimes several are made from the same template. Once you got the design you know, it's not, everything being an original artwork, it's a matter of each one having that power.

00:15:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So you can make several in the same pattern and it still has the same power. So the duplicate from the one from the Museum of Natural History was hanging over her bed, and I animated that. That's one of the core images in the film that I ended up making. But the idea was to -- in each painting, to find serial imagery and be able to animate it using this kind of cycling, progressing thing where you would have the hands in this position— you'd have a single figure with the same costume, maybe a god with his hands at this position. Then you'd cut to one with his hands in this position, in this position, in this position, that position [makes counter-clockwise motion with arms]. Then you cycle back and you do it again.

00:16:30

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But each time you'd be changing, so it would be dancing and progressing at the same time, which meant finding paintings with 40 or 50 details, whether they were figures or clouds or flame or whatever else that fit into the structure. The structure that I was basically working with was the Tibetan Book of the Dead. I was reading [W. Y.] Evans-Wentz's translation of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, which is essentially a guidebook for... when you die you will experience great confusion after your death. You will go into a place of great confusion.

00:17:04

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then there will come before you this—I don't remember the details—but a god, a gorgeous god of the east with all his splendor and carrying bowls of jewels with the colors yellow and so forth. If you recognize that this beautiful god is only a creature of your own imagination and an illusion, or a structure of your own mind, then you will achieve nirvana and not have to be reborn, which -- being reborn is like go straight to jail, do not pass Go.

00:17:43

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But if you don't recognize, if you see that as an objective thing and an objective creature and you don't recognize this as part of your own consciousness, then you see the god of the west, who's got different colors and different beautiful things and so forth. And then the north, the south, and then it gradually goes down. Then you see lower, lesser deities and lesser deities, and then it gets worse and worse. You start seeing hideous creatures holding bowls of entrails and standing on the bodies of their victims.

00:18:14

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And it goes down and down and down. If you still, at the very end of it, have not managed to realize that this is all coming from your own mind, then you have to be reborn and start over again. So I was basically following that structure of taking you through, in the beginning of the film, a beautiful place, and then gradually descending into the hell realms, and then giving a happy ending of getting to the center of the mandala.

00:18:44

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But in the course of this time in New York I was... let's see, I photographed at the Jane Warner Gallery, at Charmian van Wiiegund's home... The other main thing that I found out about, the real break through, was discovering that the greatest collection of Tibetan paintings in the United States was in Newark, New Jersey at the Newark Museum, where they actually had five rooms set up as complete—in -- like four or five complete Tibetan temples—and a basement that looked like the basement of Macy's with long racks of coat hangers and bars on the coat hangers...

00:19:24 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

...and just hundreds and hundreds of Tankas hanging. I was down there going through them like you're going through looking for a suit. But it was looking through Tanka after Tanka, and there was one that I found there that actually occupies the largest part of the film. It was an amazing painting—I have a reproduction of it somewhere—that was illustrating the Book of the Dead essentially, which is very rare that they do that. It was populated with the pre-Buddhist Bon deities, which are animal-headed deities, so you'll have these creatures with fox heads and bird heads and various animal heads.

00:20:10 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

About two thirds of the way through TANKA, it gets into that painting. It spends a long time on that one painting, which had many, many, many figures in it. I'd go through full-body and half-body and head shots, and pairs and rotations and so forth of that one painting. It's the richest—that and the one of the Garuda were the two core pieces that made up the film.

00:20:36 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I remember when I was in New York shooting this, I would go back to this little hotel that was in New York. Unless you have a big budget, the hotel is liable to be slightly bigger than the bed. So I was in this crummy little hotel, closing my eyes to fall asleep and I would just see these things dancing, animating in front me. My head about this time was so full of these Tibetan creatures.

00:21:01 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Came back to Los Angeles, put them on the optical printer. The process of the making the film was strange and unlike any other film because the way I shot it was I would shoot a frame and then I would skip five frames. So I was working with a Bolex with a bellows that could get down as close as this, one to one frame size, and could go back as wide as the full painting.

00:21:30 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

The full paintings were generally never bigger than that or this wide, a couple feet. The structure that the film eventually took was starting with those little images that were very, very close. They were details of clouds in the very beginning, and then pulls back to where you're seeing figures that are maybe this big. Most of the film is spent in this realm, in the realm of details that are two to three inches, one and a half to three inches.

00:21:57 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Then at the very end of the film, where the film comes out -- when it gets to the mandalas at the end, it's getting out to where it fills the entire frame, pulling back like that.

The process of making the film was taking these images, which I'd shot one frame of each thing, and -- the alignment in TANKA was done by memory. I mean, I would shoot a frame of a head and then I would go and frame another head in roughly the same way.

00:22:26 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

There was no possibility later of adjusting that, it was done from memory. So, I'd do a series of head-and-shoulders close ups. Then when I fed them into the printer, what I was doing— I had taken this from the way I had done the light show films when I had done the six passes and -- with film that we'd shot one frame every six frames. It was an idea that Burt Gershfield had given me actually.

00:22:56 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And I did the same thing with this. In this case, it wasn't so that I could skip through frames—that wasn't necessary anymore with the optical printer—it was to give me handles, because if I had shot one frame of something and I decided— What I would do is I brought the material back, I would put it on the printer and I would print the frame three times because I wanted to do it on threes. I decided that, I had tried various things.

00:23:21 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

That was the rate at which, so three frames of each image meant eight images per second. So I'd shoot three frames of an image, and then I'd skip forward six to the next image and shoot that. Skip forward to the next image and shoot that. So, A, B, C, D, E, F, and then I'd go back to B. B, C, D, E, F, G. D, E, F, G, H, I. So, it went [makes noise and counter-clockwise gesture with arms] .

00:23:48 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Gradually changing and evolving. So I cut all the material together to make what seemed to me to be a possible film. This was all those single frames in sequence—it ended up being maybe a thousand of them I think. Many hundreds—and then printed it. So, basically taking the raw material, which was a little roll of one and a half minutes maybe of material, mostly black leader.

00:24:21 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Then out of that would come about eight or nine minutes of film. I'd look at it and say, “uh, huh. This image should come out because it just impedes the flow. This image needs to move over here”. So, then I would cut in and take the film—the image with its tab of three frames of black leader on either side—and move it and cut it in somewhere else. If I didn't have that, then I would have splice marks all over. Those handles allowed me to move things around.

00:24:53

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then I would print the whole film again. So, essentially when I finally achieved an order that I liked—and it took a long time, you know, adding things, removing things, reordering things. I finally arrived at a place where I had a sequence of single frames, put it on the optical printer, printed my way through it and came out with a nine minute film that was in a single pass the finished film.

00:25:22

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

As far as I know, I know of no other films, nobody's ever been able to come up with one, where because of this continual looping—and I decided that looping would never stop. There's never a place where I stopped the looping and started a new series. So it's looping all the time, looping and going back. So there's no place in the film where you can cut and there are not identical frames on either side of your cut because the looping is going on.

00:25:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Now, the looping was on sixes, and in certain places, for example where there are creatures galloping across the frame and it takes about 10 frames to happen, I expanded the loop, so it would go from a six frame loop to a ten frame loop, a ten frame loop back to a six frame loop. Not frame, but image loop. But the looping size was changing and I would experiment with that, but essentially it never stopped.

00:26:17

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So, therefore there was no possibility that I could have timing done, or color correction done in the lab, because there was no place where they could say, I'll change the light here without having— give an image, have one light correction on one side of that cut and the same image having a different correction over here. So, I had to do all the timing and color correction on the optical printer, which meant that for every image I did tests. I had color correction filters.

00:26:47

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I had 5cc, 10cc, 15cc filters that I would put in front of the lens and do slight exposure changes and color correction changes. There was just a lot of trial and error until I was happy with not only the sequence and the cycle lengths, but also the exact color correction. Then finally took it to Deluxe Lab and we did a one light print. I think maybe we then did a couple of experimentations of going up or down in the exposure.

00:27:19

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

We definitely did because the first trial print I had gotten accepted to Filmex before the film was done. I don't know how that happened. I had maybe shown them a rough version. I don't know how it got accepted before it was finished. But the first trial print was completed on the day of the screening at the Plitt [Plitt Century Plaza Theatres] in Century City. I had to rush from the lab to the Plitt with the print. They put it on the projector in that huge theater.

00:27:52

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It's was a big theater, it was like a thousand seat theater. It was full. And the print was like a full stop and a half too dark. It was like I found that out in front of [laugh] a thousand people. It was really dark. Then we did another print and it was fine, but it never had that big of an audience in one room. It was a very peculiar screening because somehow they put it as the short before a Swedish film called "Garaget", which was the sequel to I AM CURIOUS YELLOW or I AM CURIOUS BLUE, whatever that was.

00:28:28

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

One of those "art films" from Sweden that was popular mostly because there was a lot more sex than they allowed over here. This had to do with a lot of sex in a garage, in a car. Of course, my family was there and my kids were there. [laugh] It was like, "oh, no!" [laugh] Oh, the other part that had been problematic -- I've always had a fraught issue with soundtracks, with music ,because it's the one area that I don't really have as much understanding of the language and know what to ask for. There's a lot of trial and error with me and music.

00:29:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

When I was doing the animation, I used all kinds of music to run against these things. I would project them to see if the... Essentially I was trying to get these still things to dance, so I put up various dance music to see if they were dancing yet. I remember using a lot of the Staples Singers doing spirituals, barn-burner spirituals. The song I used the most was the— I was looking for different rhythms and The Beatles doing "Come Together," you know, "Here come old flat top/He come grooving up slowly."

00:29:55

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The Tibetan gods loved to dance to that. So that was the main soundtrack while I was working on it. But then that was not going to be the soundtrack because that would have limited it and made it very a strange film, so I wanted to create a score for it. For some reason I was led to the idea of having the Grateful Dead do it, and went up to Bay Area and went to see Jerry Garcia and showed it to him. I remember at the same time showing him part of THE HOG FARM MOVIE that had the Grateful Dead in it and saying, I hope it's okay that I use this, because I didn't ask permission.

00:30:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And he said fine, although I never did get the rights, which is a problem. That's part of why the film's not in release. But he said, look, we're in the middle of a bunch of stuff. I don't have time to do this myself, but Mickey Hart, our drummer, he's interested in projects like this and he's got this really interesting ensemble called the Diga Rhythm Band, which uses all kinds of strange instruments and a lot of Asian instruments and a lot of Western instruments and maybe he would take it on.

00:31:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I went to see Mickey Hart up in Novato. He had this recording studio and all these hand-made instruments. I remember they had marimbas that were 18 feet long. They -- constructed with huge pipes that ran 18 feet. So we went in there, showed them the film. They played around with it a little bit and they said, great, we'd love to do the track for it. Then I got back to L.A. and there was some correspondence back and forth.

00:31:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They were busy getting an album finished. They said, "we can do it in six months". By that time I had gotten into Filmex. I don't remember how I got into Filmex with this film with no sound. I must have shown some of it somebody. I'll never again be that unfinished in a film and get it into a festival. So now I was stuck because I was in Filmex, I didn't want to give that up.

00:32:04

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I didn't want to wait six months, and so I was scrambling. Somebody came up with the idea of Ashish Khan, who was the son of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan up in San Francisco, who was a sarod player. He came or was in L.A. or had come to L.A. for something. I showed him the film, and he says, great, I'd love to do this. He brought in his brother Pranesh Khan, who plays tabla, and a guy named Francisco Lupica, who was a drummer who had all kinds of percussion.

00:32:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

He also had something called the Cosmic Beam Experience for which he did -
-I just saw for the first in time THE THIN RED LINE. And the main part of
the score in THE THIN RED LINE is Francisco Lupica playing his Cosmic
Beam, this deep drone instrument. A very interesting musician. Anyway, he
didn't use the Cosmic Beam for this, but we went into a studio in Sunland-
Tujunga, and at that time— when I was doing THE HOG FARM in the 60s,
the latest thing was four-track.

00:33:07

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And I remember working in four track. That that was a big deal. Now, there
was -- 24 track was a possibility on tape. It was a one inch tape or something
like that. So a guy named Dave Coe had a studio in his basement of his house
in Sunland. This was somebody somehow connected via the Hog Farm I
think. He had this tiny little recording studio in his basement. He later was
co-founder of a bigger recording studio in the valley.

00:33:35

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

At that time it was in his basement. He had a little room, eight by eight room,
for musicians. So we went into that studio and recorded the soundtrack for
TANKA to playback of the film. So I had this 16 projector, and I would
project the film and Francisco laid down a drone track. Then we projected
again and he laid down another drone. He laid down drone tracks, which we
then adjusted at various speeds.

00:34:06

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So we had things were recorded at certain speed and then were doubled or
made even deeper. We got several layers of drones and then we began to put
in layers of various drums, then a tabla track came in, and then the sarod
track. And then Ashish did a mix. It had a lot of interesting elements. This
was like kind of an all night, one of these things where you had booked for
one night. It was kind of an all night session.

00:34:43

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The mixing came at the end of it. I wasn't really happy with the sound. It was
like, some of this is good but I'm not quite sure what's going on. I wasn't used
to working with 24 track and I wasn't following the procedure well enough
to... And finally after Ashish and his guys had gone away— He basically had
produced the session, and after they gone, David said to me, look, our
problem here is that all of these tracks were being recorded without—
basically they were all working off the basic drone and drum tracks.

00:35:25 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

So you had a whole bunch of tracks where you recorded not in relation to one another, but in relation to sort of a basic thing. So, you had a sarod track, and then a something else track that weren't hearing each other. So, mixing was going to be a real problem. Also, it had just kind of all— sarod playing all the way through. It had a sort of an Indian feel.

00:35:52 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

It was sort of straight-forward, but didn't have a lot of dimensionality to it. I just wasn't quite happy. And Marsha Getzler, who'd been giving me some help during the film said, look, I know an old time wind player— oh, God. Blanking his name at the moment, but it's in the credits. I'm embarrassed that I'm not remembering his name at the moment [Buddy Arnold]. He was fantastic. An elderly black man who came in— we booked a second session.

00:36:32 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And he came in with all jazz instrumentation. Basically woodwinds. He had a modified clarinet—an electronically modified clarinet—a saxophone, and a flute. He just did amazing stuff. He added to this a kind of snarling and squeaking and guttural quality that it didn't otherwise have, and really made the film. Then David [Coe] —with huge effort because of the ways in which these things had been laid down—he managed to dip and slide...

00:37:14 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

...did a masterful mix that managed to overcome a lot of the problems that had come in by the method of recording. But we did end up with something where everybody had played to the film. So it had all been people improvising directly to playing of the film, which is something I really love. And that's how the final thing was arrived at. So that was TANKA. That was finished in 1976. The optical printer -- I thought well, I will use this a lot in the future.

00:37:45 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I never really used it again after that except what I was doing PROTEUS years later. I had it set up after I moved to Venice. I had the printer set up there for years in my living room.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

[CHANGE OF SUBJECT TO SUPER-8MM. FILMS OF THE 1980S]

00:50:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

WIND OVER WATER was basically looking at the way the light went through several different “acts” in the course of the day on this pond. It’s very still in the morning, and so the light would be passing completely through and you’d be seeing what was going on underneath the water. Then as the day progressed and the sunlight hit it, you’d be getting the reflections, you’d be getting sort of doubled reflections in the course of day, of the plants being reproduced. Then as the light came up in the afternoon, you’d get refractions. So you’d get translucence, reflection, and then refraction. So -- the wind would come up and you’d get these sheets of sparkle from the sun. So it went through those three different-- then it kind of quiets down in the evening and just goes back to darkness.

00:51:05

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I cut that together and got permission to use a piece of Philip Glass, “Facades,” from Columbia, and that was the score for that. But it was done [in] live performance with these two projectors [DL: I mis-spoke here; I used one projector of a super-8 2 projector system I had built] and to make all the timing to the piece of music, I had to rehearse a lot because each thing worked really well at an exact particular speed and it was also when you’d have certain things hit notes in the music. So it was sort of like rehearsing for a violin piece or something, I had to be really “on” to do a good performance of it. And the other problem was these projectors were delicate. This problem with Super 8 was if you had a splice in there, the splice could cause it to lose the loop, or skip a frame. That one was a single screen film so it didn’t have that problem. I finally decided that as far as projecting-- let me finish the other film first, which was LUMINOUS BODIES, which was a circus film in which I went to many many performances of Ringling Bros., Barnum and Bailey.

00:52:19

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

When they were in town I went every day, set up in a different part of the audience for different angles, mostly down close with a tripod. I don’t think they’d probably let you do that now. But I brought in a tripod and set up near the front and had a very good long lens and was doing this kind [motions with hands] intervalometer filming where I was getting, say, trapeze performers with long exposures, sort of blown out and blurred by motion against really pure black and other-- the clowns and so forth. And cut that into about a 20 minute film I think, which was done to Pink Floyd’s “Dark Side of the Moon.”

00:53:10

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

That was again one of these things that was continually changing in speed and hard to perform. So finally it became clear to me that unless I practiced these things all the time, if an opportunity came up to actually show them, getting this set up-- it would only work in very small spaces and I had to be really rehearsed. I thought, you know, I have to do something to put this into a form that they can survive because ten years from now I will have no idea how to do this.

00:53:44

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So, I finally took both of those films and transferred them at 30 frames per second, straight, to one inch video. Then took the one inch video into a post house and, with the music playing, played it back and did the variable speed on a one inch machine to another one inch machine. So I was able to reproduce a performance with all the speed changes from one tape to another, and maybe did that a couple of times and got a performance that I liked from one inch tape to one inch tape. So that's how those films exist. It's not satisfactory to me because what you lose is the strobing, which was a core part of the film. So the films exist, but they don't have the same hallucinatory quality, they don't go into that three dimension that you get when you have an actual shutter coming down at those slow rates.

00:54:49

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The way video deals with the changes in rates, for one thing, video doesn't have all that analog continuity of speed changes. It doesn't have two frames per second, three, four, five, six. It can do two and it can do four, but five it can't-- four it can't do. It can do five, because that's divisible by 30. What it does in between it interpolates, it takes a field and puts in a super imposed thing that's half and half. Which is okay for conventional live action, but for what I'm doing, having something that amounts to a one field dissolve between things, cuts away at the sharpness of those transitions.

00:55:37 DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

You don't have that little bit of black in between, so the combination of those two things makes video not a really good way to take a continuously changing performance and record it. Which is also a reason why the lightshow films could never be recorded on video-- lightshow performances like Single Wing's performances, because what was going on with them was all these different frame rates of projection and strobe wheels going at variable speeds in front of projectors, having different combinations of different images projected at different rates of strobe. Plus a range of brightness that video or film couldn't capture. So those kinds of things couldn't be recorded and neither could these two films, really, property, but they do exist.

00:56:28

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The other films I did in Super 8 didn't really get finished. There's one called **SIDEREAL TIME** that I did in the 80s. We'll talk later about it, but I got involved with a project on the Maya called **LIVING MAYA** which actually took me down to the Maya region. I did a bunch of shooting down in that area, which I put into a two screen film for this projection set up with double-pairs of identical reels. So I actually edited the reel, then had two prints made, one of them through the base. I did something tricky so they would both be in focus because one of them had to be projected through the mirror and be opposite. I can't remember how this worked, but the idea was that there would be two identical prints facing one another. That was a long film, it was about half an hour, and I did it to Steve Reich's "Music for 18 Musicians" and we'd do live performances of that.

00:57:42 DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Not a lot of public performances, I mostly did it in my living room as I was working this thing out, these things never quite made it in their Super 8 form out into the public very much. I may have done one or two performances, but not really much, it was just too complicated. I created this long film based on a lot of time-lapse footage down in the Mayan ruins. I went and backpacked around a lot of different Maya ruins and was doing time lapse and also did shooting with a Maya family in their cornfield we were filming with for the anthropological film and other things.

end of tape 4

TAPE 5: DAVID LEBRUN

01:00:29

DAVID LEBRUN

So I was talking about the Super 8 films in the 1980s, and I was talking about the film I called *SIDEREAL TIME*, and I called it *SIDEREAL TIME* partly because it was two images side by side, which -- I liked the name for it, and sidereal time having to do with time based on the sun. This was all the cycles of the sun, and the sunlight moving across the temple, and it was an area of blazing white sunlight in the Yucatan, and I constructed a film that was about a half hour. Still even when I projected the double reels, I saw things that I wanted to refine, but I knew if I did further refinements, then things started hanging up in the projector, and if the projector lost a single frame,—it being Super 8 and being very sensitive to splices—one could get one frame out and spoil the synchronization.

01:01:31

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So it just became very hard to work on. So I put it on the shelf. [It] just became too hard. I thought at some point, maybe the technology would get better and I'll transfer it. So now I'm thinking about putting that material on digital, putting it on 2K or 4K digital, and being able to deal with the double, side by side imagery, and can actually finish that film in the form in which work can now be seen, because all those problems can be solved. It's basically a 16 by 9 format, or worldwide screen format. It's just a matter of, if I do it in—I thought of doing it to conventional video...

01:02:24

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...And I'm very glad I didn't. Then I thought of doing it low-res on HD, and now I'm thinking, well, do it to 2K or do it to 4K, or will I in a few years, think that I wished I had waited a little longer. But I am seriously thinking about doing that now. The other film that I did was in 1986, I was then living with Gilah Hirsch, a painter, and we traveled to Southeast Asia. Primarily, we traveled through part of Malaysia— Thailand, Malaysia, across Sumatra, and to Java, to Bali. Primarily going through Java, and in Bali, I began filming all the different forms of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Meaning, doing still photographs of sculptural representations and Super 8 using the Nizo [Super-8 camera] filming performances of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in the three forms of the theatre.

01:03:39

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The Wayang Golek, which is the shadow puppet theatre, “shadow skin” theatre. Shadow people. Wayang is person. is— no excuse me. Wayang-orang is... no, no. I'm sorry, I've got it wrong. Wayang-kulit means leather people. Essentially. Do I have this right?

01:04:18

ADAM HYMAN

It's okay.

01:04:20

DAVID LEBRUN

Wayang is definitely person. No I'm wrong, I'm wrong. Wayang is shadow. Orang is person. It's Bahasa Indonesia, which I learned a little bit at the time. I was actually getting around in the Bahasa, Indonesia. Wayang-kulit means leather shadows, because you have these things that are constructed out of leather, and they're casting shadows on the screen. Then the audience is on the far side of the screen watching this theatre. They can actually come around the other side. These are all-night performances, 12-hour all-night performances of just after dark until the morning. Never made it through an entire run, although I went through many, many, many hours of these things.

01:05:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The second one was wayang-golek, which means wooden shadows. Keeping the metaphor of the shadows, even though golek means wood, and these are wooden puppets. They're actually done in [a] more familiarly conventional puppet kind of proscenium. The third kind, which I filmed a lot of, is wayang-orang, and orang means human. As in orang-utan, which is man of the forest. I was in this Sumatran forest with one of the guys in the orangutan sanctuary deep in the Sumatran jungle. We were sitting in the middle of the orangutan sanctuaries, and he says, “You are an orang-kota. You are a man of the city, but I am an orang-utan. I am, I am a man of the forest...

01:06:07

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...like these creatures I'm taking care of.” So the metaphor of the shadows remains. The shadow is the illusion that these stories are— and when I was in Jakarta, I would go every night to the Wayang-orang performances. There were these theatres where they'll be a different 12-hour hunk of these stories every night. There was a puppetry museum in Jakarta. I went and saw the director [and said], look I want to film all these different versions of the Ramayana and the Mahabrahtha. I was carrying the books around with me. And he said, well, the Ramayana is okay, but it's a short story, it's a small thing. You can -- in a dozen nights of 10 or 12 hours, you can tell this whole story.

01:07:07

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It's a short story. But the Mahabharata, 150 nights, of all night 12 hours to really tell this story. That's the real meat. So every night, you could be performing a different 12 hour segment, or 10 hour or whatever it was. It's an all night section. You'd go to this theatre. We took a little rickshaw through the streets and go to the theatre, and we'd be the only westerners in the audience. It was not a tourist thing, and there would be a complete gamalan orchestra, and these 50 performers all elaborate costumes with dragons and sets and smoke and everything. They got used to me being there. I set up my camera in the aisle or right in the front of the theatre, and was time-lapsing these—with streaking effects in various rates—these incredible things happening in front of the camera.

01:08:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then the guy at this at the Wayang Museum had said, go to this town in central Java, where the great masters of the wayang-golek are. There was an old master who had been the great one, who was like a national treasure in Java, performed for Sukarno, Suharto, and those people. All the vicious dictators. He's now a very, very old man, but he's past by his power. He's a duduk, he's a shaman. And [makes noise and gesture]; he does this blowing thing where he passes power out, and he'd passed the power of his hands to one of his sons, and the power of his voice to the other son. Now one son is considered to be great master of moving these puppets and the other is the greatest master of all the voices, because you have to speak hundreds of different voices to do these plays.

01:09:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

One person's putting on this performance, this epic with hundreds of characters. So we went to the town... I'm not remembering the names of the towns, but it was outside the town where the theatres were. A little town where this guy lived, the old man. Knocked on his door, didn't have any invitation. There's no telephones involved, and this morning, maybe 10 a.m. or 11 am in the morning, maybe noon, and just said we'd come to pay our respects to him. We were ushered in, and the old man came out and we talked to him in our halting Bahasa, and he said, “well, thank you so much for coming to see me but the person you should really see is my son, who's now the active performer.” This is the one who was the master of the hands.

01:10:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

“He did a performance last night, so he's sleeping, but he'll be out soon.” I think somebody roused him and told him that visitors were there. It was slightly embarrassing because we didn't realize that at noon, we'd be waking people up. But the gentleman came out, the man came out in his bathrobe and sat on the couch a little sleepily. I remember he was sitting on the couch, and there was a puppet of Rama , just kind of— and these puppets are rod puppets that have like a rod at one of the elbows— or just at the arch. Only here and here, and there's something at the back of the head. There's maybe three rods controlling this thing. And he's talking about the way in which they bring— he'd done a performance the night before.

01:11:05

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

He had another performance that night. It was going to be in a boxing stadium, a huge stadium, and we were invited to come. “It starts at 9:00 p.m, will you please come and see the performance?” And we began talking about the way in which, as a puppeteer, you bring life to these things. As he was talking about it, he put his hand casually across the couch, and Rama, who's this wooden thing with three rods controlling him, starts to breath. His eyes just looking around, and you can see his chest begin to heave. There's almost no parts that control this. This somehow movement of this things, it was complete magic. And this happened.

01:11:52

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

We went to see the performance that night and it was these teenagers coming, thousands of teenagers—hundreds at least, maybe it was a crowd of over a thousand—coming to see. This was like the hot new thing, because he had managed to make that kind of performance into a new thing by incorporating kung-fu moves into what the characters did, having them smoke cigarettes, doing pyrotechnics, all kinds of ways to... and also—and they've always done this in this kind of theatre—incorporating modern references into the stories that they tell, and so forth into the [story], and all kinds of political references into the Mahabharata. So I was filming that, I was animating that, animating the shadow puppet theatre, all the way to Bali.

01:12:42

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I ended up with a considerable amount of film, which when I got back I peeked at it and then decided I'm going to put this in storage. I'm not going to put it ever into a projector, into a thing... I'm just going to keep it until I figure out what medium to transfer it into and finish it as a film. So that's again another project that I now feel like the technology is right for that I can actually take that and do the kind of stuff that I wanted to do to finish it. So that's another— having shot it in 1986, still okay, maybe now I can finish it. So that was the last— I did a few more experiments in Super-8, down in Mexico, did some shooting of fairs and Easter processions and things like that. They never really rose to the level of complete film.

01:13:44

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So that kind of ends what I have to say about that, about the Super 8. I guess the next thing would be...

01:13:56

ADAM HYMAN

PROTEUS. Let's back up slightly.

01:13:59

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah sure.

01:13:59

ADAM HYMAN

Let's go back and talk about your work then with Zappa and Ken Kesey.

01:14:07

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh yeah, outside work.

01:14:16

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

When I first began making films and I was doing SANCTUS, I sort of imagined, well, I could spend my life traveling around, living in different exotic parts of the world, making kind of half-experimental, half-anthropological films, trying to get inside people's ways of seeing and hallucinating. Then very quickly, several things happened. One was I got a bad back, which made it hard for me to lug cameras, and so it became clear that working in camera was less than desirable in terms of having big cameras on my shoulder. And I had a family. Suddenly had two and then three kids, and I needed to support them. So the work that I was doing of making my own films began to become films that were very spread apart, because I didn't go into academia.

01:15:17

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I went into the [commercial] film world. At first, into documentary film work. I think the first job that I took was at Genesis Films, I think that was the very first. Reg Childs had this branch within Filmways that was... one connection was he was producing the Genesis Film Series, which was a series of experimental films that he was sending around the country, circulating around the country that Pat O'Neill, and Neon Park, and Chick Strand, and Burt Gershfield were doing the opening/closing title sequences for those at the optical printer establishment over on DeLongpre. So that's how I got hooked up with them. I ended up doing two—I can't remember if there was anything else—the two projects that were memorable. One was that the Woodstock film had recently come out. This would've been in 1970.

01:16:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And the notion of taking stuff shot of 16mm and putting it into a format that was widescreen that maybe used 16, two images, or three images side by side, or one image centered, that you could produce a widescreen 35mm film based on 16mm material, seemed like a possibility and coming out of that same alternative world. So people were looking at— well Woodstock had done really well, so what other things could have that kind of form? So one thing that came up was that Frank Zappa had been working on this film called UNCLE MEAT. He'd already put out the album, which was called UNCLE MEAT OR “MUSIC FROM THE MOVIE OF THE SAME NAME THAT WE DON'T HAVE THE MONEY TO FINISH YET. So Filmways got a little money, and said, okay well let's see what there is here.

01:17:33

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They hired myself and Peter Mays, and Peter Kerby to work with Frank, and we'd go through his material and put something together. We spent time with Zappa at his basement studio at his house, and then got all this material and began going through it over at Filmways. Out of that, we constructed maybe a 20 minute presentation piece that was multiscreen six channel stereo, which we presented to Martin Ransohoff, the head of the studio. The only place we could do it was at Melnitz at UCLA, the only place that could do six channel studio with three synchronized projectors. With three or four, I don't remember. We were doing stuff that was two screen, single screen, different combinations. We'd put together a terrific little segment.

01:18:34

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I remember Frank was down in the mix room at UCLA doing a live mix of these six channel, stereo that we had. Ransohoff said, great, and he came up with another \$80,000 or something to continue the project, at which point Zappa fired us and hired the guy that cut the original DRACULA, which he thought would be cool. He was an old man and an the editor. The project went up and drifted off into— he was spending the money on shooting a editing room romance between the KEM [flatbed editing machine] assistant editor and Don Preston, I think. This had something to do with monster costumes comes into the editing room or something. [laugh] I don't think it ever got finished. He was hiring Haskell Wexler to shoot additional footage. It just never happened. The other project for Genesis was I was hired to evaluate Ken Kesey's footage. Kesey had been one of the people who'd been peripherally involved with the Hog Farm.

01:19:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I knew him from that, and knew some of the [Merry] Prankster folks from that. There had been the footage that had been shot on the trip to New York for the opening of ONE FLEW OVER THE COOKOO'S NEST on Broadway that was [described] in Tom Wolfe's...

01:19:59

ADAM HYMAN

ELECTRIC KOOL-AID.

01:20:01

DAVID LEBRUN

ELECTRIC KOOL-AID ACID TEST. So there was all this footage that had been shot, most of it was highly problematic because it was all shot on acid, often overexposed without the soundtrack running or the soundtrack running on a four-track TEAC, and nobody was taking notes as to where the sound was. So it was highly technically problematic, but I got Peter Kerby to work with me. Peter Kerby was a fellow UCLA guy who's mainly known for having written a script for THE ROSE with Bette Midler. So he and I were installed on a little house on the Venice Canals and we went through this 40 hours of footage. Kesey arrived at the bus and I dropped off all this material, and we would open up these film cans and find South American insects in the can of originals because they had all gone to Mexico with them...

01:20:56

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...when he was hiding from the law. So we went through it and we separated the original footage, and one problem was it most of the soundtrack had disappeared because all the tapes with Neal Cassidy were like gold souvenirs, and they had wandered off from the farm or from the bus with various people over the years, and so all that. They had had multi-track stereo running with Neal Cassidy driving the bus and speaking into the microphone while he was driving, and that was going into tape recorders and while they were filming. All that stuff had gone away. I ended up with one song that ended up in the HOG FARM that Cassidy had performed. But I eventually put together what seemed like 40 minutes of the very best material, which when you look at it in the clear light of day, looked barely like raw shoots.

01:21:53

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

We looked at it and said, there's not material here to make a commercial feature. I think various versions have been cut. I think Ken Babbs did a version of it once—that was one of the Pranksters—that actually worked as best as it could. He sort of just acknowledged all of its, well, you know, we were really flaming on acid today, and it's four stops overexposed on somebody's left foot. That's the kind of film it was. Later I went on—throughout the 70s, I went to work for the UCLA Media Center, for quite a while, and through the 70s, worked on— very strange, during the Nixon administration, they decided to give all their money for drug education films to a group breaking out of the UCLA Media Center, mostly a bunch of potsmokers and drugtakers, to make films about drugs for education for the schools.

01:22:57

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So we were all making cinema verite films about drugs in America, from one about a high school kid who smokes grass and goes to school and what his life is like, and a film about somebody who takes acid and goes and sits in Topanga and plays his flute. I don't think it's exactly what they had in mind about drug education. [laugh] But it was showing— it was also the guys in East LA who'd go sniffing glue and laying around in alleys. So it was what drug use in America was really like. It wasn't... what was it, the marijuana film?

01:23:38

ADAM HYMAN

REEFER MADNESS.

01:23:38

DAVID LEBRUN

It was definitely not REEFER MADNESS. It was what's really going on with people who are using drugs. So there was that. I edited a couple of those films, and I was co-producing another one, or co-made another one. Then went and got involved again for— that was for National Institute of Mental Health, and another one for National Institute of Mental Health was a series on innovative education in the public schools, where I produced and directed two films for them. At that time, we had offices in Royce Hall. Two of my films were on innovative classrooms, one in the Crenshaw District, one in West LA. One was called A TEACHER IN REFLECTION, and the other was called INDIVIDUALS. And I just continued to do those kinds of jobs. Worked for a company name Don Rye Productions, doing a series of films for the USIA, a little short five, ten minute films. Mostly worked as an editor.

01:24:51

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Didn't do camera work. I love shooting, but just wasn't willing to take on being a shooter, just heavy cameras in those days, and a lot of handheld. But during this period, one wonderful thing about it was really it was the height of cinema verite, and so just the default method of making documentaries was to shoot a ton of footage with a general overall plan, and then to give it to the editor and let him shape the film out of it. So as somebody coming in to the world of film production as an editor, it was a wonderful introduction, it was a wonderful way to be in it. I remember describing it as sort of like being Frankenstein in the lab, where you got all these parts that you've got to reassemble them into something that comes alive, it's the portrait of a person.

01:25:52

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It may not be the original person. It's not going to be, but it's got to have this life on the screen. I remember there was this one film called BRIAN AT 17, which was the one about the teenager. And I had never met him. I had only dealt with the black and white film. This was a half hour black and white documentary. I assembled and created what I thought was something that had a coherent life of it's own. Then he came into the screening room to see the film, and I was really nervous because like, well, in what way will he be totally different than this person that I've created? I was completely shocked because he was in color! He had bright red zits, you couldn't tell that in the black and white film. He was -- very pink face.

01:26:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Other than that, he was the same person, but that was what I was unprepared for. Later, when we did a film called *LIVING MAYA*, which was a film that I did where I was the editor and my other title was associate producer. I spent a couple of years working in an editing room in Los Angeles on 200,000 feet of 16mm footage where we had months and months and months of working with translators who were brought up from the region to try to get this material translated into English from regional Yucatec dialect. Finally went down to the village and spent a month living there in Mexico, which was when I shot *SIDEREAL TIME*. The thing that shocked me then wasn't that they were in color because it was in color, but the *SCALE* was all different than I had imagined. Don Reymundo, who's the major figure in the film was a towering figure for me.

01:27:41

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But when I arrived there, he was barely five feet tall. And these houses were tiny. They were six foot high. Their ceilings were low, they were teeny little huts. The walk from one person's house to another that on film seemed to be a very long walk when the camera actually took it in real time, when you would actually walk it and it wasn't the camera doing it, it was 75 feet of something like that. Everything was much smaller scale than you realized. But it was a marvelous experience to be able to sit in a editing room, and having really good camera people, that was the other thing. There was this great—in Los Angeles—body of handheld shooters. Peter Smokler shot the *MAYA* thing.

01:28:35

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Neil Reichline shot a lot of things for Hube Smith, whom I worked with. These were people who could walk up mountainsides backwards while filming, and it was like dolly shots. You didn't have wasted footage. I was looking at an editing project now where there are two— it's pretty easy to find projects with hundreds of thousands of feet of film in them now. But I have a feeling that the intensity of the coverage is different because in video, you can just let things go, let things run. Then it was like every second was precious. There wasn't very many seconds of wasted footage in a couple of hundred hours of coverage, it was all good. It was just a matter of choosing what fed the story.

01:29:30

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was really quite astonishing, and I think some of that has been lost in the way films are made now.

01:29:39

ADAM HYMAN

Couple quick factual things. First, where is all that footage from *LIVING MAYA* now?

01:29:46

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh, the footage from LIVING MAYA is at the Smithsonian I believe. I think it was the Smithsonian archive that has it all. It was all funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. That was a project that started in - - 1978 to '81 was the time that I worked on it. I had been doing all these various jobs. In the late '70s, about 1977, I was working—it was a very difficult time—I was working at Orange County Public Television, KOCE, commuting from Topanga. Actually I ended up taking an apartment down there because it was like an hour and a half commute. There was a series on child development. I can't remember, THE GROWING YEARS or something like that. A 30 program series. 30 half-hours, and they were all being shot cinema vérité. I was called down there by the guy who was the executive producer for the series. They were in the middle of production, they had like six different crews out.

01:31:03

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

A whole bunch of interesting directors and cinematographers. One of the directors went on to be the first director of Industrial Light and Magic. One of the guys shooting for them went onto shoot TITANIC. It was like a whole bunch of— Bob Badami_ was doing the sound stuff, he's like one of the major music editors in Hollywood now. It was a real hotbed of interesting people working on these films. But the guy called me and he says, I think we have a problem with the editing room. We have this editor who's working on it, and he says he can handle the whole thing. He's a staff editor, one of the staff editors at the station, but we're concerned that he's not going to be able to finish it. And I went into the room, and he was working on one of the films, and talked to him. I came back and said, look, this is never going to get finished.

01:31:54

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

He's basically holding on to the entire project. He was like halfway through one film, and there were 30 and it was all due in like eight months or something. I said, if you want me to take this on, I will do it, but only if you give me the freedom to hire a staff of at least eight or ten people, and this guy, I think he's got to go back to working on other stuff for the station. This is not working. So they said okay, and so I hired Bob Badami and a bunch of other people. We had maybe three or four editors working, and several assistants, and the sound and the music editor. All of those people were working like crazy to try to meet this deadline. It was like, there was no way this one guy was going to do it.

01:32:46

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I edited several of those films. Another interesting thing that was going on then was the way I would work as an editor for somebody was often with a typewriter—this was pre-computer days—with the typewriter next to the editing thing. So I would work out sequences and begin to put them together, and then trying to figure out what the narration would be. So I would be basically writing what narrative elements there would be, and doing that kind of writing as I was editing. Well, if you have this sequence and you have that sequence, you need to link them up with something, and the link might be this, and then you'd move it and change the order, and then you'd rewrite. So it would be a typewriter and an editing table back and forth constantly. As an editor.

01:33:35

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then I was at a party, a friend, David Holden, who had done the films for the National [Institute] of Mental Health films at UCLA, used to have a peach party every year in his yard, where everybody would come pick the peaches and make peach pies and everything. I was at David Holden's peach party, and he had a partnership with Verna Fields, who was one of the great Hollywood editors. They had an equipment partnership. She was at the party, and she knew that I had been trying to get into the union, get into the Editor's Guild so that I could work on other things. I was wanting to work on features, so as long as I'm being an editor to support my filmmaking, I would like to be able to make a little more money and be able to work on feature films.

01:34:31

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was a very tough union. The basic deal was you couldn't get into the union unless you had edited several features, and you couldn't edit the features unless you had been in the union, it was like Catch-22. But there was something called the "open period" that was going on, and Verna said, look, the open period is happening right now. They're very confused. If you go down to Universal this week and apply for a job as an assistant editor, you can get in. By the time they finish all this checking of past stuff and so forth, you'll be in the union and you can bump up from assistant editor. So I had this difficult thing of telling the folks down at the KOCE—we were at this point mixing the film every three or four days, which was really interesting for me. That was one of the great things was doing that many films and, you know, being in a mix.

01:35:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

This was 16mm mixes in Hollywood. Mixing was something that in my own films, I had only done... you do it very occasionally, you're making your own films, you only do it every year or two or something, going into a mix studio. But this was going in with a different film every three or four days, and really getting into the process, being able to see it through. I was loving it, but I know I needed to make that jump into the union. So I had to jump out of the KOCE project and suddenly found myself as an assistant editor at Universal working on assembling dailies. Indeed, got into the union, and I was in a routine of— I was living in Topanga, and I would get up at 5 in the morning and be down at Technicolor at 6 a.m. to pick up the dailies from the day before. They'd be ready by 6 a.m.

01:36:26

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then you'd go over to the sound department and pick up the sound that had been transferred to 16, and go sit in your editing room. This was in this little hallway in the TV editorial department, which was probably by far the worst slum condition that I had ever been in. This was where the Universal Studios rides were outside, and in these windowless, filthy rooms, where people were there seven days a week. Where there were these really ugly conditions was where the TV that going to go out all over the world was being cranked out. So I would sync up, and you'd be working with a synchronizer, you'd sync up the sync pops and remove leader and assemble into reels. About 6000 feet of film before, I think it's 9 a.m., or 9:30 or 10a.m., there would be the screening.

01:37:22

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I would go there as the assistant editor and take notes. The director might be there, whatever, and bring them back to the editor. He'd show up around 10 a.m. and I'd be there. The editor was a guy named Jim Heckert. He was a real old time professional craftsman. He was the fastest editor that I'd ever been around. This was working on an upright Moviola, and he would edit his way through those 6000 feet of film by lunch. He would have everything cut, go to a two hour drinking lunch, come back and spend the afternoon playing poker with the head of editorial and a bunch of the other guys from around the hall. Because they all did stuff kind of the same way, and their thing was, you know, you'd clock in, and you got to clock out.

01:38:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They would also clock in on weekends. Everybody was there all weekend because the weekends was where you made doubl time, golden time. They were pretty much all alcoholics, pretty much all either divorced or with marriages in terrible shape because they were in that building all the time, because they couldn't afford not to be there. As I say, on the weekend, you'd earn more than you'd earn during the week, and you had to be there during the week 9a.m. to 5p.m. So my work was kind of done around noon because the assistant editing, the way that went, I was supposed to be available to him as an assistant to get trims off the shelf or to bring him boxes and stuff. But he was done, he was playing poker. So I said, look, do you mind if I go around and cut scenes for other people?

01:38:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

He would give me scenes to cut, he would give me scenes of what he was working on, but he pretty much was able to cut most of it, so it wasn't a lot. So I would go up and down the halls and get material from other people there. So I ended up just doing a lot of cutting, and just learning the practice of cutting in 35mm. I remember when I first went in the first day, I didn't know how to do splices in 35, I didn't know how to deal with 4-perf. It was like, assemble these things, and I wasn't sure how to keep track of the frame line. It was like this was all new because I'd never touched 35. I was just learning how to do this kind of editing, how to work fast.

01:39:44

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I cut scenes for COLUMBO, for example. I remember for COLUMBO, I would go in and take the notes. So after having synced stuff up, you'd go into the screening room, and Peter Falk would be there always in the screening room and he would be giving notes. He gave notes like nobody else. His notes would be like, for this shot -- for this take of the master, take three -- this line is good and this line is good. But the second take of the master, this other line is good and this other line is good. So he was telling you from each master shot which takes he wanted. But the problem was is that he paid no attention to continuity on the set. He would have -- in one take, the script person would try to give him notes. He would have the coat over his left shoulder in one shot, the coat over his right shoulder in the next shot. In the next take, not holding the coat, in the next take, cigarette in his mouth...

01:40:53

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...no cigarette in his mouth. But he had all these things that he wanted, and so the cutting was a matter of figuring out how to cut around those things. How to cut away from the master, so when you came back, you forget where the coat had been or where the cigarette had been. The other thing an assistant editor would do is do the insert shots. They'd say, well we need a shot of Peter Falk pushing the sixth floor— or with Jim Heckert, the editor would figure out that as something to cut away to in this scene, I want a shot of Peter Falk reaching up and pressing the button for floor number six in the elevator. So I would go down to costume and ask for Peter Falk's raincoat, and then I would over to the insert stage, put on the raincoat, or put on a sleeve of the raincoat, and they'd set up a little insert shot of an elevator thing, and I'd reach in, and I'd be Peter Falk's hand pushing the thing.

01:41:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They'd get that processed and they'd take it back to for Jim to cut in. I was also The Incredible Hulk's foot. I'd put on The Incredible Hulk's foot and stomp and stepped in mud several times, because they needed a shot of his foot going into the mud. So these are the things you get. [laugh]

01:42:08

ADAM HYMAN

So they would have a stray camera person around as well to shoot that for?

01:42:13

DAVID LEBRUN

The insert stage, yeah. The insert stage had all this stuff. They had the mud, they had the elevator.

01:42:19

ADAM HYMAN

They had a camera person as well?

01:42:21

DAVID LEBRUN

Sure, sure. There was a guy in the insert stage, I mean he had to make appointments I guess. I don't remember that. There was a lot of paperwork to do. You had to fill out a lot of forms, a lot of triplicates, and there was making appointments, you'd go down and you'd have an appointment at the insert stage, and you'd pick up the stuff and go down there. I'm pleased that I had that experience. It was both demeaning and marvelous. [laugh]

01:42:48

ADAM HYMAN

Let's do one more question and then I guess is it lunch. We'll do lunch.

01:42:52

DAVID LEBRUN

Well just -- we were talking about outside work.

01:42:56

ADAM HYMAN

Yeah.

01:42:56

DAVID LEBRUN

While I was there, I gradually began to cut more and more. I remember we started doing mini-series. We were doing a mini-series with Rock Hudson called WHEELS back then. Arthur Hailey blockbuster about a motorcar manufacturer, or racing or something. Then the next thing coming down the pipe was this series called SHOGUN, mini-series, which actually at the time was a big deal. It was like a major mini-series. Jim was going to be one of the editors, and he was like, okay, now I can get you on as an editor, so now you can be an editor on a major project. Right about that time I got a call from Hube Smith, whom I'd worked with at the, at UCLA, and he said, "look, Johanna Demetrakas, who was going to be my editor on the LIVING MAYA project, which we just came back from a year of shooting in Yucatan..."

01:43:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...we have 200,000 feet of footage we've had just come back with. She's taken a job at CalArts, and she can't do it." I had written Hube before he left, I said, look—I'd been applying for, to do something with the Maya for years, do a Maya film on my own. I had written him instead or called him or something, I said, if there's anything I could ever do on that project, I'd love to be involved in it, because I knew about the project. So he called me up and said, look, Johanna's dropping out, she was booked into the project as the editor from the very beginning. Could you do it? I went to Jim Heckert and said, I'm going to leave. He was furious because he was really taking me on, you know, taking me under his wing and heading me down the path toward being a Hollywood editor.

01:44:47

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And here I was leaving to go off and work on a 16mm documentary project, and blowing my union career, which was true. I never worked a union job again. I kept my union card for five or ten years, then I finally said, you know, this ain't happening. Because somehow in the course of that time, I gradually moved into producing rather than editing, and at a certain point it was clear I was never going to be using the union editing card. So it was one of those turning points. If I hadn't done that, I probably would've never—I might have finished PROTEUS, but I certainly wouldn't ever have made BREAKING THE MAYA CODE. I certainly wouldn't have done a lot of things. I don't know what I would've done instead. But then I went off and spent three years working on LIVING MAYA.

01:45:43

ADAM HYMAN

Cool. Let's do one quick answer. How did you even get hired by Frank Zappa?

01:45:52

DAVID LEBRUN

Basically, Genesis films had taken on the project. Genesis films under Filmways had offered to take on UNCLE MEAT as a project. They brought in Peter Mays and myself, and Bill Kerby. We were associated with Genesis because we were close to Burt Gershfield and Pat O'Neill and Chick and those folks who were already the filmmakers working there. Genesis Films was sort of the underground films branch of Filmways. They were the ones who knew about the '60s generation and were connected with that. So Reg was connected to this whole UCLA crowd, and so he hired us and introduced us to Zappa.

01:46:55

ADAM HYMAN

Is he still alive?

01:46:57

DAVID LEBRUN

I don't know whether Reg Childs is still around. I'm sure there are those who know. Peter might know.

01:47:04

ADAM HYMAN

The whole Zappa story, I heard from Peter during his oral history.

01:47:08

DAVID LEBRUN

That's right. Yeah. [technical -- recorder off]

01:47:19

ADAM HYMAN

'81. You were talking about other editing work and then LIVING MAYA.

01:47:22

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah, LIVING MAYA. There's more I can say about LIVING MAYA but that's a other story, the making of that. Essentially that was the film where I was working as an editor for three years, and it provided a lot of the groundwork for later making BREAKING THE MAYA CODE, and changed my feeling about ethnographic film and documentary film to a great degree. For one thing, it was a film where everything was subtitled, and it was a huge effort to have everything be subtitled. This is a film where they crew went down and spent a year filming a single family in a single village. A village of 300 in south central Yucatan, in an area where every kind of region, every area spoke a different dialect of Yucatec, and it was all filmed in Yucatec, and then the conversation with the crew was in Spanish. It was a reflexive project, so the conversation among the crew was there. It was a separate track.

01:48:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was actually filmed in split-mono, so that one track was recording the Sennheiser output from the camera, and the other was recording the conversation between the cameraman and the soundman. So that as an editor, I can always dial that up and hear what they were saying, and if I felt like it was something pertinent, it was interesting to what was going on, I could dial it in as an editor. It was following this one family through its tribulations over the course of the year—financial, health, and also dealing with the ceremonial life and the economic life of the community. It was a very, very rich portrait, and it kind of spoiled me for... documentary was changing, and those kinds of projects just weren't happening anymore as you got in the '80s and '90s. Documentary where a crew would spend a year living somewhere in order to capture these incredible moments.

01:49:23

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It wasn't that available. But on that film, one of the jokes was that documentarians ought to have to have a license, like a driver's license. There're so many ways in which people can be sloppy or foolish or interfere with the lives of the people they're documenting. We were particularly conscious of -- the anthropologist on the project was somebody that eventually had to be kept out of the way because he was insensitive to the people and didn't speak the language well, as it turned out. They ended up getting a local interpreter to work with. I worked on that project for a better part of two years before going down and spending a month actually living in the village with the people.

01:50:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

That's when I had that experience of the difference in scale. Also this amazing experience of knowing a culture and a town so well that I dropped into this culture, which was a stone age culture originally. These were people who've farmed using wooden digging sticks in rocky terrain. I was able to drop into that village, move into a grass, a thatched hut with my hammock, and then the next day, go out to the cornfield with Don Reymundo and his sons and say, oh the corn's looking a little better than last year. I was knowing how the corn crop had been in the previous year and so forth. And really knowing everybody's names and what the relationships were, and just dropping into it. That was extraordinary.

01:51:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And then spent several days of that, went off [and] got a ride in a back of an agricultural truck and got dropped off at the head of a trail leading to the Maya ruins that would follow some of the route of Stevens and Catherwood through Labna, Xlapak, and Uxmal and sort of sleeping in the kitchen houses of the caretakers of the ruins, and filming in the mornings when the tourists weren't there and then going and hanging my hammock in the woods when the tourists were there, and coming back in the evening when they all went back to their hotels and Merida and filming more. That was what became SIDEREAL TIME.

01:52:02

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But then back to the US and spending more time on the editing. We brought a couple from Yucatan up to the United States. Got them an apartment in Venice and taught them how to operate a flatbed editing machine, taught them the international ethnographic alphabet because the dictionary team that was doing the Maya dictionary in Merida was unable to make head or tail of the local dialect and cassettes, and we needed somebody to look at the picture who knew the local dialect. So it was an extraordinary effort to get the words right, get that stuff right. It kind of spoiled me for documentaries that don't make that kind of effort. Initially, -- there was a kind of sea change in PBS around the same time...

01:52:57

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...where initially they saw what we were doing, it had been planned as a two hour series, and they encouraged us to go to four hours. We were kind of aiming toward— our vision was primetime, four nights in succession, the American people going through the year of the life of the Maya village. By the time it came out, the administration at PBS had changed, KCET had changed, and national PBS had changed. They were looking to get things that would up their ratings against the other networks, and they looked at our finished series and said, “gee, all these subtitles, we're not sure people will put up with them. Can't you just have a narrator do it instead?” And we said, no, and so they said, well we'll put it on the satellite and let individual stations pick it up.

01:53:45

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So it was scattered all over the country. It never played in Los Angeles. Played many times in other cities but people didn't know about it because there was no publicity. The director almost gave up filmmaking, it was such a demoralizing experience. Moved to Oregon and became a beer brewer. I applied the experience later in 1981 I think it was, I went to work, I spent a year working on a film called **BROKEN RAINBOW**. Again, that was interesting because Johanna Demetrakas had been the editor, and she had left and I was brought on to replace her. I seem to trail her. She also at one point left her job teaching editing at CalArts and Michael Scroggins brought me in to replace her there. Three times I filled the gap left by Johanna. She went onto other things.

01:54:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So that was, that was actually in the middle of **LIVING MAYA**. I went and spent a year teaching at CalArts teaching editing, designed a history of editing course, which was a lot of fun. It was looking at all the films, tons of films in the CalArts library, crafting a “history of editing” course that was taking two threads, one that was sort of the history of experimental and surrealist film, and [the other was the] history of mainstream film -- and the history of documentary. Three threads really. Looking at them from the point of view of editing, and assigning all the students to pick favorite scene from a film in the CalArts library and come in with an analyst projector and analyze the scene. That was each of their assignments for the semester, and it was completely wonderful.

01:55:39

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then we had a seminar class that was working on people's projects that I did, and Michael and I co-taught a class that was video production, which caused major ripples at CalArts because we were actually getting the students— we decided that there was not enough production going on at CalArts. There was a lot of theory going on, a lot of people who were talking about the films they were going to do, but they had never done a film. And we said, okay, we're going to have this class where you make a film, you shoot a film and then edit it in the first week, and then another one in the second and third weeks. I just wanted to get people to go through the process of shooting something, cutting it, finishing it, and then doing another one. Even if it's ten shots, seeing what the process is. Because a lot of people had never seen a film to its conclusion.

01:56:33

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It caused an uproar because the people who were running the video cage said suddenly that the cameras were being checked out all the time, and they were these delicate video cameras going to get worn out if the students use them so much. So, we had problems with that.

01:56:49

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I was at CalArts and was using their— they have very nice access to the optical printer, and the animation stand and things like that, and it was very tempting. But I realized I was trying to do that and do the MAYA film at the same time. It was too hard, the other film's getting slowed down and I still had ambitions to have more of a career. I didn't want to just go into academia at that point. I didn't feel like I wanted to shut things down that way. It felt like kind of closing myself off into a world, and I wasn't ready for it. So after a year I think, I left and went back to— still hadn't finished the LIVING MAYA film but that was three years altogether. Finished that. Did the BROKEN RAINBOW experience.

01:57:46

ADAM HYMAN

Well maybe you should tell me a bit more about BROKEN RAINBOW.
[technical]

end of tape 5

TAPE 6: DAVID LEBRUN

01:58:50

DAVID LEBRUN

So... **BROKEN RAINBOW** is a film produced by a woman named Tory Mudd about the Hopi-Navajo land dispute. Basically, a few hundred Hopi had tried to untangle the overlapping and disputed territory between the Hopi and the Navajo by a federal decree that moved a few hundred Hopi off of Navajo land, and moved thousands of Navajo off what was now declared to be Hopi land. It ended up with a group of—near Black Mountain—a group of elderly Navajo women sitting in their doorways with shotguns saying, federal marshals will have to kill me to take me away from the house where my umbilical cord is buried in the doorpost, and where my ancestors have lived since the creation of the earth. So this was a film about that, trying to look at both side of a very difficult question.

01:59:47

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I ended up applying a lot of the kind of experience I had with **LIVING MAYA**. I'd brought Roberta Blackgoat, who was one of the Navajo ladies, out to LA and she sat in my editing room and we did translations of the Navajo ceremonials that were in the film to make sure we had accurate things for subtitling. Making sure that the interviews in Dine were accurately subtitled. I went to the reservation, spent time living in the hogans, visiting the lawyers in Flagstaff. Even though my job was editor, I got immersed in it. Ended up doing a cut of the film, Tory Mudd came in one day and said, this is going to win the Academy Award for Best Feature, and I said, I think you're right. Then we had a kind of parting of the ways aesthetically.

02:00:50

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They were drawn much more toward voiceover, and not all this subtitling, and they had a political agenda that I felt wasn't really accurate to what I understood to be the facts, and things having to do with— I just had a different set of beliefs about how a documentary should be done. They began, it began to go in a different direction, and eventually I quit, which was very painful because I really did feel it was a very strong film. And it did win the Academy Award for Best Documentary, but I saw it with mixed feelings. I was glad it had, but it also incorporated a lot of the things that I felt was problematic.

02:01:37

ADAM HYMAN

When was that again?

02:01:37

DAVID LEBRUN

This was I think '81. '83 may be the year it won the Oscar. I think Roberta Blackgoat— well one of those women were up there on the Oscar platform accepting the Oscar. After that, in terms of the, of the commercial work, it began to get harder and harder. Eventually I found myself working for—in terms of commercial support—working for Cannon films, Menahem Globus Productions, when they were doing films like THE DELTA FORCE and INVADERS FROM MARS and MURPHY'S LAW were the films I remember working on. DELTA FORCE, I was doing all the production tracks, I was one of the people working on the production tracks. That was a pretty crazy time.

02:02:38

ADAM HYMAN

By production tracks, what do you mean?

02:02:40

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh production— actually it's technically interesting. For sound effects editing, the sound effects editors would construct stuff from scratch. Explosions and shots and car-bys and all that stuff. But the production audio that was actually done on the set—which might be compromised in various ways—the mix wanted to have that to draw on, because it might have a gritty, real quality. It might have things that they could use. So they would want to have somebody prepare the production sound, production tracks for use in the film. So those, you would be building the elements of production audio into reels so that it would be there and available. One of the things that I remember vividly about it is that we would be taking the sync production tracks, and because to have them available— You know, now the film is cut...

02:03:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...so you got let's say a ten second long shot of an action scene, and you have the scuffling sounds that were made during that shot. But then there's another shot before and another shot after it, so now you don't want to have the sound going into the shot before. So you won't chop it up abruptly because then it would be jarring coming in and out if they try to use, so you'd want to have it have a built in fade at the beginning and end of each production piece you used. Depending on the nature of the audio, it could be fast or it could be something spread out over a long time. If it was let's say a car-by, you'd want to take it out gradually. So if somebody didn't actually grab a pot and actually do the adjustment of that piece, bringing it in and out, there would be an actual fadeout.

02:04:27

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Now digitally, it'd be easy to do. In those days what we did, we had 35mm full coat mag, you would judge how long you wanted the fade-in or fadeout to be, you would take white paper tape, and lay it down over the shot for six inches or a foot or for two feet, and then you would take acetone and wet a rag with acetone and wipe off the full coat mag. So that the strip of fullcoat mag would start with nothing and then go up to full, and then go along and then go back to nothing. That's what you would cut in. So which meant that cutting production audiotracks, you were sitting there with a sopping rag full of acetone and a wastebasket full of sopping acetone-soaked rags. I'm sure that I did much more damage to my brain cells in that month or two of working on that film than I ever did during the '60s with whatever I consumed.

02:05:28

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was the most terrible, toxic environment. It was also something where because it was a film that— they were planning a Christmas release—this was the Chuck Norris film—and it was something like October, it was October already. The film was currently four hours long, and they had to get down the 90 minutes. But they had to start doing the sound editing then, or they wouldn't be done in time. So they had this four-hour version, which is 25 reels or something of 35mm, and you're given a set of reels to cut. Let's say I'm cutting the production soundtracks for reel ten. But you'd come in the next day and the editor's working, and by now, the first half of reel ten has now gone into reel nine, and the first half of reel eleven has now gone into reel ten. So everything has changed.

02:06:33

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

At one point, I was trying to keep track of this because you had to know where the pieces were, because you were having to go down and get a new reference. You were getting what they call a dirty dupe of a ten or 20 minute long piece of film and a dirty transfer of what the editor had done to work against. They were just pouring sound editors on this thing in order to get this done, and at one point I became the only person who had these notes that were able to keep track of where all the reels should be. Everybody was getting totally confused as to what they're editing because what used to be in reel 15 was now in reel 6. [laugh] It was just crazy. So did that, did again production sound editing, or foley editing or something on MURPHY'S LAW with James Garner. Scenes at the Bradbury Building, as I recall.

02:07:24

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then the last thing I did for them was, the last thing I recall—and Baird Bryant was also working on that at the time—I had to do an all-nighter cutting in all the plopping monster footsteps for INVADERS FROM MARS. It had to be done in one night. Over the entire hour and a half, all the foley of the monster's footsteps,. Cutting foley, basically people are recording foley on a foley stage, and then it's not going to be exactly accurate, so you're taking every footstep and moving it ahead a few frames or back a few frames to get it precisely synced. So it's crazy kind of work. At least if I was going to be doing this kind of work, I wanted to be a full sound editor in the sound department, where you're doing something slightly more creative.

02:08:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I let them know I wanted to do that, and I remember the next morning at 9 a.m. after I pulled this all nighter, I got home, had about half an hour of sleep, and then they got a call saying, we got a full sound editing job for you. Can you come in at 10 a.m. and start? And I said, no I can't, I need to sleep. I just did an all-nighter for you guys. And so they said, okay we'll get somebody else. I never got offered a sound editing job again! So... one of those things. So that year—that was '86—I went off to Southeast Asia, with Gilah. We were there for several months, and I did the shooting that would become the Mahabharata-Ramayana film. When I came back, I really thought, I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to do this looking for—the editing jobs are not satisfying. The cinema verite kind of jobs are not there.

02:09:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

A friend from my old Hog Farm days, Andy Romanoff, had said at one point, if you ever want to start a little production company together, I might consider leaving my job as [an] executive at Panavision and doing it with you. So I called up Andy and said, you want to do that? And he said, yes. He quit Panavision and two of us started what we called First Light Video Publishing, and spent the next ten years producing and distributing educational films essentially. Which -- that was about '87 to '96, and we were at first making educational tapes, and it was an early decision, which may have been a mistake. Because initially we said, well let's make films about things that we'll really enjoy doing. How about, you know, films about great little restaurants in the South of France? [laugh]

02:10:10

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Instead we decided to do it on the technical aspects of media production. We made a series called **ELECTRONIC CINEMATOGRAPHY** with Harry Mathias, having to do with using electronic cameras and trying to get film look, and applying Hollywood cinematographic technique to electronic cameras. We did a series called **SHAPING YOUR SOUND** with Tom Lubin, which was five parts on— they were very elaborate films. We would make these things an hour and a half long, filled with all kinds of recreations and examples and the sound things we would— we would do one on microphones in which we would actually demonstrate and show the use of every kind of microphone and every kind of instrument in the position, and what it sounded like, and what it was. We had these things with stereo tracks...

02:11:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...where you'd hear what happened if you moved the mic. So we'd do tons and tons of examples and a lot of elaborate shooting, a lot of elaborate recording. We ended up putting a lot of money into each one, and they distributed well, but we also were not making a lot of money. We ended up deciding after the first seven or eight that we made, people began coming to us and saying, I've got this tape about lighting or a tape about theatre, or whatever it was. Would you distribute it? I know people who had been distributing by making a film and then advertising it in **AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER**, and found that wasn't really a good way to make a living. If somebody takes you up on your ad and buys your tape, you don't have anything more to sell them. But if you have a bunch of things in a catalog, you do. So we ended up eventually with a catalogue of 250 films, and we were distributing to about a third of the colleges in the country.

02:12:15

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And to high schools and to libraries, and we shipped 30,000 print catalogs twice a year. Basically, by the economics of keeping this company going -- I became the president of it. I was doing marketing, and writing copy, and designing catalogs, and doing everything except filmmaking. We'd founded it in order to make films, and it ended up driving me out of filmmaking in order to make the company stay afloat. We had a two-story building and eight employees, not a lot, but still enough to— you have to keep going to support everybody, and had a health plan. So this thing brought in \$500,000 a year, and we were paying ourselves \$15,000 to \$30,000 in salary because we couldn't afford any more once all those expenses were made. So it was not a great deal.

02:13:17

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I think if we had held out a little bit longer when the internet came in, we would have had a lot easier time distributing all this great material if we didn't have the overhead of putting postage on 30,000 print catalogs and buying the list and all that. It was another world. That went on until 1986.

02:13:49

ADAM HYMAN

From 1996.

02:13:50

DAVID LEBRUN

1996, right. Initially, the question had been about PROTEUS. It's a long way back to 1981, before all this, was when PROTEUS started. During the period when I was still— I think just after the experience at BROKEN RAINBOW, when I got this creative scholarship— to go off to [a residency at the] Dorland Mountain [Arts] Colony. Sometime just before that— I tell this story, PROTEUS is out on DVD and I did a making-of documentary, which is on there because I don't want to completely repeat that because that's about a thirty to forty-five minute documentary on how PROTEUS came about. But there had been this book by Darcy Thompson on growth and form that I had filmed when I was filming for the lightshow, the animated black and white symbols. Among the things that I'd filmed from that, there was a chapter on the radiolaria.

02:15:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I had filmed ten or 20 images of the radiolaria from that book. Then later I discovered ART FORMS IN NATURE, which there was a Dover paperback of Ernst Haeckel's book, ART FORMS IN NATURE, which was done in 1905, and is these plates of various life forms. Ten of the plates are of radiolaria, which are these marvelous, glass-skeletoned, single cell creatures. Which are fantastic variants on a theme. I'd always thought those would be great to film but there weren't enough of them. There were maybe 100, and I needed more to really do something filmically with them. One day I was looking back at that book ON GROWTH AND FORM in which Darcy Thompson argues that Haeckel was wrong in saying that there were four or five thousand species of radiolaria.

02:16:15

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

That he believes they were all just variants like snowflakes, everyone's different. Actually Darcy Thompson was wrong about that. Haeckel was right, there are about five thousand species of radiolaria. But in a footnote in his argument, Thompson refers to Haeckel's images of four thousand of the radiolaria, which are in the radiolaria volume of the report of the Challenger Expedition from 1876. I had never heard of the Challenger Expedition, which was the great oceanographic expedition of the 19th century. The idea that there were 4000 illustrations of these things immediately got my attention, and I went to UCLA where I found the volume in the rare books section of the biomedical library, and I opened this book and said, wow, I can spend a couple of years animating this.

02:17:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

As it turned out, it took 22 years to finish the film [that] came out of it. I began by working with just the animation of the radiolaria. Trying in the same way that I had with TANKA, but trying to introduced a lot more precision. The way that I was doing it then was by using a vertical process camera in which I photographed from the original book. I was using a dot screen the way you'd used in newspaper photography, because I was trying to put it in something where you could introduce a black background by reversing the image from black lines on a piece of paper—which has all kinds of texture and numbers and so forth—into white lines on a grayish background, which I could then get out by doing it on to high contrast film...

02:18:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...I could get more of a black and white, and also be able to retouch and isolate the image. So it was a very elaborate process, which -- on the tape I demonstrate the process. I won't go into it now. But the result of it was that it took about an hour— about three hours for each image. Three hours or four hours work for each image to make these cells, and I made well over a thousand of them. So it was months and months and months of work with the vertical process camera to do a process which now, in doing the same kind of animation working digitally, I can do the same thing in a matter of minutes instead of hours. The process of turning something from black into white, from lining vertically and horizontally and rotating and changing scale, and fitting into another image was very elaborate and involved tracings and punched cells, and three different generations of film. A long complicated process.

02:19:19

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It resulted in something which had a subtlety in visual quality on the screen that I couldn't be able to reproduce digitally, at least with technology that exists now. But I don't think it would ever— I can't imagine doing that kind of work again, even though there's a slight difference in quality.

02:19:41

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Let me just finish about PROTEUS. Yeah so the center of the core of the thing was animating the radiolaria, and then out of that grew my interest in Haeckel, who had made the images. And then the Challenger expedition where these images had been gathered. Just as I was beginning to do the process of animation, I went off to Dorland Mountain Colony to write the script, and was sort of immersed in the Challenger narrative and in the images of that. That all these sort of pictures I was xeroxing and cutting out and doing a storyboard, and I felt like I needed something to balance—the Challenger, which represented one side of Haeckel's way of seeing it. I needed something to represent the other side. I came up with the notion of using THE RYME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER, which was an imaginary voyage that followed the same route as the voyage of the Challenger.

02:20:52

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So it as a voyage of science and a voyage of the imagination. I knew that that would create all kinds of problems. I remember taking a walk when I was at Dorland. I got up in the morning for a six mile backcountry walk and thinking I know that if I don't do it, then it's going to be a much more conventional documentary, because if I talk about Haeckel and the Challenger expedition—if that's what it is, all that can be done as a convention documentary. If I put THE RHYME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER in there, it's going to be unconventional and it also would buy me all kinds of structural difficulties and make the film much more complex to do. I remember thinking it was very similar to the decision I made to include the bullfight in the film that I made in Mexico, in SANCTUS. Because it's a straight forward correspondence between the Catholic mass and the Mushroom Ceremony.

02:21:51

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The Mushroom Ceremony—which everyone wants to give precedence to—they follow the same pattern. The Mushroom Ceremony is actually a much older pattern but it's actually been very influenced by the mass, so they move the mushrooms in the sign of the cross, and they dedicate them and people consume them. So it's a very parallel thing. Although, except the Eucharist doesn't get you high. Small detail. So in order to make that structure really work, I needed the bullfight. But that created these structural problems. In the same way that I knew that I was buying myself years of trouble, but also putting the film into a different place by putting THE RHYME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER in there. In order to make them all work together, I eventually had to also bring in alchemy as a visual way of dealing with this notion of something at the center and two opposites on each side in film, which is a linear medium, where it was almost like creating a three screen project.

02:22:55

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It had to be put onto one screen, and using alchemy as a way to visually represent what I was doing.

So... I won't talk more about PROTEUS at this point I don't think, because it's pretty much covered on that other tape. As I was working at— well it began in 1981, and I was sort of working away at it, doing a lot of the work on the radiolaria, and working in Super 8 and working in 16, doing tests. It was excruciating because in those days—in addition to the time it took to make the cells—once I started shooting the cells, I would test a sequence or a cycle. The way we were doing it, Richard Edwards was working with me as an assistant, and we would come up with a sequence and we would shoot them.

02:23:53

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Let's say in Super 8, in a single frame animation. Then we had to fill a roll. Just for economics, you have to shoot a hundred feet of animation. That takes a long time. Two -- fifty foot roll, or whatever. I guess in Super 8, it was a 50 foot roll. If you were shooting 16, it was a hundred foot roll. Took a lot of work, it was days of work to do a hundred feet worth of tests, or a few minutes worth of tests in 16. Then it would go to the lab, get processed, make a print, look at the print and say, ah ha, the sequence should be different, and we would reshoot. That would be another week or two of shooting to get it to the lab. The difference between that and what I can do now digitally, where I try a sequence out. I look at it on the computer, go, uh huh, reverse.

02:24:41

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

In ten minutes, I can try out ten things, where instead it was ten weeks. It was a huge difference, which was why going back to doing it is inconceivable, doing it the way I did it then. But I was doing those kinds of experiments in 16 and Super 8, trying to get these darn things to dance. It was much harder than getting the Tanka figures to dance, it -- being isolated on a black field. Every little error in alignment showed up and I had to work very, very hard to make these things work. Somewhere in there came the trip to Southeast Asia, and then starting the company. So I still had PROTEUS as an unfinished film, and it was something that I would work on in evenings and on weekends. It dragged on, and we'd reach a point that I'd spent so long on it that I just couldn't see it anymore.

02:25:45

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

One thing I did was I eventually shot a lot of it in 35mm. Basically, I created the storyboard, I created a script, I designed the whole thing, worked with a place called Lumini. It must have been after I was at CalArts because I remember one of the guys who'd been a student of mine at CalArts was the cameraman at Lumini [Kevin Haug]. He would come in, work with me at night, and we would shoot this stuff at night. So I basically had the whole film constructed in 35mm sometime around 1985. Then I began to look at it and realize that I wanted to make changes, lots of changes, but I'd shot all this 35. Once we started First Light, and now I had a video-editing bay -- It was a linear editing bay, 3/4 inch machines, and A/B editing, and edit controls and so forth...

02:26:50

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...I decided to transfer my whole hour-long film to video. Just doing this stuff, shooting in 35 was too difficult, too expensive. So I put it on video and I shot temporary versions of it. I would go to the library and find materials that I wanted to shoot to fill out the story, and I would bring them in and shoot them in the edit bay against the light and shoot them in and bring them directly into the film. So I ended up shooting tons and tons of new material, trying it out, trying out various things, and doing new versions of the animation. Now I found ways of refining the animation on video. So over the entire time that I was doing First Light, from '86 to '96, I was working on this in video form. When we finally sold First Light in '96, there were two things. First of all, I knew—and I'd been struggling to find a buyer for First Light...

02:27:54

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...so that I could get back to making film. I was determined that if we sold the company, that I would use the space that it gave me to devote myself full time to making my own films, because I realized I had spent way too long doing my own films as evenings, weekends, in between jobs. I wasn't getting the work done that I wanted to get done. I was not getting younger, and knew that if I didn't do it now, I wasn't going to do it. So I sold the company and had two ambitions; one was—well, to first of all to commit myself to just making my own films—and one was to finish PROTEUS, and the other was to do the film on Mayan art, or something to do with the Maya that I had had at the back of my mind since the 70s, that I had been applying for grants from the AFI to do back in the 70s. Here it was '96, and that had never happened.

02:29:00

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I began to work on finishing PROTEUS full time. Or not full time, but that was one thing that occupied me from '96 to 2003 when I finally finished it, which was a matter of refining the video version and then going back and reshooting all the stuff that was new in 35 and finally producing a finished 35mm film. Essentially this thing that started as a short animated film had turned into a frame by frame 35mm feature being done by one person without funding, so no wonder it took 22 years. It was funded out of the work I'd been doing. So I finished it and I had no idea at that point... my sense of judgment about the film had been so altered by the amount of time I had been immersed in it. Sometimes I wouldn't look at it for months and look at it and say this is great, and sometimes I would look and say this can never work.

02:30:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

When it was done, I began to send it out to festivals, and I wasn't sure whether it would just disappear, whether it would ever be seen. That was the film that ended up premiering at Sundance and being very widely seen. That really changed a lot of things for me. But meanwhile, in '86 -- in '96 when we sold the company, Amy, my wife and I, took a car trip from Los Angeles to Honduras. Took my Ford Explorer and filled it up with a lot of supplies and books and materials and we drove from LA down the Pacific, down the Gulf Coast of Mexico, visiting the Olmec sites and Maya sites, and all the way down through Palenque into Quintana Roo and Belize, and across into Guatemala and down to Honduras, and then back up on the Pacific Coast route.

02:31:20

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

We probably visited 25 or 30 different archeological sites, and 25 or 30 museums, meeting site directors and taking a lot of stills and figuring out what I wanted to do. I had very much in mind when I came back from that a film on the evolution of motifs in Meso-American art. I knew it was going to be a difficult film to fund, difficult film to get made, but I was really impassioned to do it. I had this experience with PROTEUS—described in the tape that I did on that—near the end of the process, reaching out to scholars and getting their input, which turned out to be hugely beneficial to the thing. Using the internet to go out and contact scholars all around the world who were experts in oceanography, and Haeckel's life, and the radiolaria and all the different topics I addressed in PROTEUS. So this time I decided I was going to do that at the very beginning.

02:32:24

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

There was a conference in Florida having to do with Maya iconography and Maya images. So I forked up the bucks and attended the conference. It turned out to be the wrong thing. The guy who ran the conference was very retentive of his material, he was the one who was really interested in— It wasn't going to be a great scholarly connection. But one thing that happened that weekend was that there was a space shuttle launch at Cape Canaveral, Cape Kennedy. They put out a little notice—this was near where the festival, where the conference was—

02:33:09

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Anybody interested could get up at 4 a.m. and go out and watch the dawn launch from across the water. Three of us did. The other two were a guy name Phil Wanyerka and a woman named Barbara McCloud. Turned out she was a Maya linguist and he was also a Maya scholar. He'd been involved in documenting the conference held by Linda Schele every year in Austin, and putting out the proceedings of that conference. We were sitting down and leaning on the fender of the car and trying to keep warm in the predawn light waiting for the space shuttle, and I was expressing some of my disappointment in the conference, and they were there because they had been paid to come and do presentations. They said, oh no this isn't the conference for you. You need to come to Austin, that's the great conference for people interested in the Maya. It's more to do with Maya writing, but don't worry, you'll be very happy you did.

02:34:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So that March, April, it's in the spring—this was in the winter—of '97, I went to the conference in Austin, still with this Maya Project on Mesoamerican art in my mind. The keynote speaker was Michael Coe, who had written the book, **BREAKING THE MAYA CODE**. I had a conversation with him in the hall. told him how much I loved his book. It's such a great story, somebody must have made a great documentary of that. And he said, well actually no, nobody has yet. He said, “several people have approached me but I could see they didn't know what they were doing, and I was turning down many proposals.” I said, “well, I'd like to talk to you about that”. And he said, “well, write me a letter”, and I wrote him a letter. I went back and reread the book, and wrote him a letter, and sent him a brief proposal. It was something like in that conversation in the hallway, my life changed because I realized the film that I was embarking on was one where I had no standing.

02:35:23

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Getting into museums was going to be difficult, getting permission from countries, getting funding. Everything was going to be difficult. **BREAKING THE MAYA CODE** was a story that clearly needed to be told. It was a great story. Michael Coe was clearly at the center and connected to everybody in this world, and that it was a film that would happen. It was a hugely important story. So I wrote him a letter, and made up a proposal, and he wrote back and said, come to New Haven and visit me. And I did. Walked into his office at Yale and he said, “look, you seem to know what you're talking about and you're doing your homework. I'm ready to make this film. The first thing we have to do is film Linda Schele because last week she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She won't have long to live.

02:36:20

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And she's really important to this story. What will it take to go film there?” And I said, “I don't know, \$10,000?” Now keep in mind I'm somebody who has been— I got a \$500 creative scholarship grant from Reed in 1966 and since then I've been applying for grants and not getting any of them. So I went back to my hotel room that night and did a more accurate figuring of the budget and was going to call Mike the next morning and say exactly what the budget would be, and when I got him on the line, he says, “I got the \$10,000. Somebody's written a check.” The project went like that. We put together a list of all the people of all the scholars in the Maya world, of all the people we might consider involving. All the people we wanted to have on our advisory board that would make such a strong advisory board that the National Endowment for the Humanities couldn't turn us down...

02:37:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...the head of anthropology at Harvard, the head of Mesoamerica at National Geographic, and all the major people working on the decipherment and so on and so on. The only person we didn't get that we wanted -- Michael wanted to have Octavio Paz be on the board because he thought he would really help with relations with Mexico. Octavio Paz died a few months later, so we didn't get him. But we had a list with three columns. Everybody went in on the Board, all of them said yes. Everyone we wanted to interview, all of them of course said yes. And all the people we didn't want to involve because they would be too much of a pain. I didn't know this stuff, Michael knew it. You don't want to involve so and so because they are on the outs with so and so, and they will make life difficult for us.

02:38:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So we had all those kinds of things in the beginning, and that led to a long process of fundraising, six years of fundraising, even though the stars were right for it. We got the NEH grant, spent a year scripting and researching, then submitted for grants to do the production, got turned down the first time, then got it in 2001, then took three more years to raise the funds which we finally got from NSF—the National Science Foundation. So from the time that I first said I want to talk about doing this film to the time we got the funding, was from '97 to 2004. Then by the end of 2007, to early 2008, the film was done, which was still a long time to be in production and post-production. But that's what it took.

02:39:11

ADAM HYMAN

All right. So, what is METAMORPHOSIS?

02:39:18

DAVID LEBRUN

That's the most recent film that I had actually finished. Back when I did the black and white animation for the lightshow, for Single Wing Turquoise Bird, I shot it on high contrast stock, so that again, I could take black images on a white background and flip them reverse. Then the white on black images, I retouched to get rid of using red re-touching ink, the same as I did in PROTEUS but working on the 16mm frame, to re-touch out anything that was letters and numbers and any aberrations, or pieces of other images, and then made a print from that which took it back into— either I printed reversal or I went to a negative-positive generation to get what we finally projected.

02:40:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So it was a couple of generations of high contrast, and that meant that you build up enough contrast that the fine lines began to degenerate. So what we projected was already getting funky. Some of it was marginal, although it worked as animation. Also it was single frame animation, which worked best at silent speed, worked even better if you could slow it down to 12 frames a second. I really wanted to slow it down more but silent projectors were going out. On a sound projector, it was just way too fast. What I really wanted to do—once I got into building my own optical printer and so on—was take it, step print it, refine the sequences, begin to tweak the alignment of things.

02:41:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

There was a lot that I wanted to do. It existed in the form of these loops. I wanted to make it into a finished film. I kept pulling back into the material, looking at it, trying to figure out how to do that, but it stymied me because it was already at a state of almost falling apart. The image, not the stock. But to go any further with it seemed to be taking it from— it was hard to go back to the original raw camera footage. So somewhere about ten years ago, when digital photography began to become reasonable and affordable and getting to reasonable level of resolution, when 2K cameras started coming out. I started thinking, well 2K, 2000 lines, it's better than video and pretty darn good.

02:42:17

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So essentially what I did was I went back and started re-shooting. I went back and found my original notes and went back and re-shot from the same books, my architecture books, books with plans, and books with elevations, and books with symbols and signets and design motifs and scientific drawings and so forth, that I had shot for the original animation. Reshot the ones that I had shot before from the original materials onto 2K digital stills, and set up automations in Photoshop. I'd do the image reversing and the cleaning up and turning them into high-con, and aligning them and so forth. So essentially in the course of doing it, I also expanded it a good deal, went beyond what was in the original film. Really made a film that traveled from stone axes to images of the cosmos...

02:43:19

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

...through the forms and shapes of manmade things over the past 10 or 20,000 years. So that's what METAMORPHOSIS is, and it exists as a 2K digital film to be shown.

02:43:45

ADAM HYMAN

I want to go back to that thing that I raised is often, of course, documentary or animation are set aside [as] two different genres, and I have a deep interest in illuminating that distinction. Tell me about your view of that, or philosophy of what film can incorporate?

02:44:10

DAVID LEBRUN

My dumb quick answer to “What kind of films do you make?”, I say well, experimental and documentary and animation, and hopefully all combined together. I mean it's starting off with Sanctus, for example, it felt like a real combination of ethnography, ethnographic filmmaking and experimental technique. I was using -- basically in terms of documentary shooting and experimental editing. The way that I was intercutting things, the way that I intercut using picture and sound in that film -- and in **NOW THAT THE BUFFALO'S GONE** when I cut that -- was using a whole lot of experimental technique as applied to ethnographic material. In **TANKA** and the **METAMORPHOSIS**—the black and white animation film—and in **PROTEUS**, it's all working with existing documentary material in the world, but then applying experimental animation techniques to that.

02:45:31

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

With **PROTEUS**, the combination [is] of much more conventional moving on stills and going where it comes to live animation. So I don't think too much about the boundary or trying— It's basically a matter of finding what the appropriate combination of things for each film. With **PROTEUS** it was really clear to me that I didn't want to go— What would've been obviously is if you were doing a normal film on Ernst Haeckel is go interview some Haeckel scholars and go and have some footage of the museum. I was in this museum in— this was in 1985, crossing in East Germany, having to get across into East Germany. Getting an international press pass and permission from the East German government to travel there to what was their national museum of the history of science, which was Ernst Haeckel's house.

02:46:31

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It's an amazing place with the chairs had radiolaria carved in, there were mandala murals of medusae on the ceiling, and the temptation to just do coverage of the building and what it's like now was great. But I didn't want to go there, I didn't want to see a 20th century view [of] what that building looks like in the 20th century, or talk to Haeckel [experts]. I wanted to keep it within that parameters of being a film made entirely from stills, and from images from the 19th century. There's one 20th century image in that film, which may not be entirely obvious. The only 20th century film image in **PROTEUS** is there's a pan across a bookshelf that has all of Ernst Haeckel's books. It's an endless, a minute long pan, from left to right.

02:47:28

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was a still that we set up where we got UCLA to borrow, an interlibrary loan, rare copies from all over the country of books by Haeckel in 19th century editions, so it was all nothing later than the turn of the century. We filled up a double table that was maybe 15 or 20 feet long, and we had little Styrofoam blocks under some of the books to raise them up so the titles would more or less in alignment, and we shot an 8 by 10 still of that arrangement, and then the shot in the film is a one minute pan from the left side of the 8 by 10 to the right. Other than that, all the images were shots of things that had been done in the 19th century or earlier. That was one of the things we constructed for the film.

02:48:20

ADAM HYMAN

Did UCLA come to support, I don't know, say enthusiastically— obviously when you talk about that, it sounds like they were very much willing to help you with PROTEUS.

02:48:32

DAVID LEBRUN

My experience with libraries is as years went on, things got more difficult. In the early days, when I started with PROTEUS, the volumes of the Challenger report were—thank God—in what they called the restricted room. They weren't under rare books. And the librarian let me check them out, and I was able to take that one volume and spend months on the vertical process camera at Cal State Dominguez Hills, which is where the guy who ran the photo room there let me come in on the summer and just work there for months when that room wasn't in use. If I hadn't been able to borrow that book and take it out, I couldn't have made the movie. A few years later that book was restricted and I could no longer check it out. My access was free. After a few years, to get in and shoot required paying a \$50 fee and then the fees went up more as the university became poorer, UCLA began to charge Hollywood rates for anyone who wanted to shoot in their rooms.

02:49:39

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The last things I wanted to do for BREAKING THE MAYA CODE, stills in there, it was a major deal. I had to pay, finally it was just too expensive. I had to get them to do the photography which doesn't work well for me, because part of it is being there with the books and discovering, oh, well if I'm here, I should do this close up over there. Being involved with the books changes your ideas as you work. If it's a matter of placing an order for stills, one thing, it starts to get really expensive. Same thing with the Getty. My early days with the Getty working on PROTEUS, I just asked permission, went in and did it. Now it's not allowed. Anything you want from the Getty, you have to place an order with the photo department. Things are just getting more and more restricted at libraries. So that's a real problem.

02:50:35

ADAM HYMAN

Let's go back and continue on the question we were talking about the mixing of genres.

02:50:42

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah the mixing of genres. Well, **BREAKING THE MAYA CODE** for example, I also was incorporating animation. In this case morphing animation above all, because in looking at the variance of the Maya glyph, it is really useful to say, this A and B and C are all variants of the same thing. Instead of just cutting, you morph from one to the other [and] you can see how this element is moved up over here, and this element is moved down over there, and this element is shrunken into the middle. You see how it's [a] variant by watching how one changes to the other, whereas if you just cut you say, oh, that's different. You don't know exactly how. You can't see that this is the same as that, so watching three variants slowly morph one to the other, just in terms of sheer teaching and in terms of visual understanding, it's the natural way.

02:51:39

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But **BREAKING THE MAYA CODE**, it was clear that interviews were part of it. This was a story about contemporary people, scientists trying to figure something out. It was no question from the very beginning that it would be much more in a way like a conventional documentary, although it still feels different to me, very different from most other let's say television documentaries in the density and in the amount of information conveyed, and in the complexity of the information conveyed. Just by the care being devoted to highlighting and all of those other things to convey a ton of information in a very short space of time. There's some kind of boundary that gets crossed over I think, even though all of the elements, except for the morphing animation, are the elements of conventional documentary storytelling much more than say with **PROTEUS**.

02:52:40

ADAM HYMAN

Well I think there's an underlying thing in your films about respecting your audience's intelligence, which is of course the opposite of what television documentaries strive for if they want something that's readily digestible by everybody.

02:52:52

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah, yeah. Or not just respecting but stretching. I remember with television, the early years, with NOVA for example, I remember kind of sitting on the edge of my chair in the '70s, watching early NOVAs, just trying to keep up, paying a lot of attention and trying to keep up with the ideas as they were coming at you. Now that same program and many other programs, there's sort of one idea per program, presented with variations but much less demanding on the audience. They have their reasons for that, and they're not stupid people in making those decisions to do it that way, but I don't watch much because there's other kinds of films that stretch me.

02:53:39

ADAM HYMAN

Can you tell me about making the NOVA version of BREAKING THE MAYA CODE?

02:53:47

DAVID LEBRUN

I don't think I should go there. [laugh] The short version is, in making BREAKING THE MAYA CODE, there were different demands for different audiences. We really wanted to get a full— I initially wanted BREAKING THE MAYA CODE to be a four or five part series because I thought there was plenty of material to support that. This is the 400 year story of the decipherment of ancient Maya writing. It goes through generation after generation in which people each find a different piece of the puzzle, so it's very hard to leave out big hunks of it without having the story fall apart. There's many other stories in which you can tell two minute versions of the story, 20 minute versions. You can choose to tell it in various lengths. To tell really the full scope of that story requires space and time.

02:54:50

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

We initially applied to tell it as a three hour series, and it was clear that PBS wasn't going to go for that. Evan Hadingham at NOVA said, this really ought to be two hours to get it on television. Paula Apsell, who's the head of NOVA said, well, if you do it as a one hour, it's a no brainer, we just put it on and give you the money to make it. I walked away from that, I didn't want to do it because I felt the story could not possibly told that quickly, in an hour. So I spent a lot of time raising the money to make it as a two hour, and ended up making it with complete control. It took a long time to edit because the script I submitted—and this was probably a mistake—it was a four-hour script. But that's what we shot. Then getting it down to three hours was tough, but decent editing job.

02:55:44

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Once it hit three hours, it was telling the story really well in a really compressed way. If we could've shown it in theatres with an intermission like *LAWRENCE OF ARABIA*, that would've been a good version of the story. It was not in the cards that it was going to be exhibited that way. So it was very painful to take the story from three hours down to two. It involved re-thinking the structure, initially it had been a fairly linear structure. Historically linear. In order to compress it down from three hours down to two, we had to take it apart. I ended up bringing in a new editor with a fresh eye, and she took it apart thematically so that it would have different aspects, so we were able to jump around in history more. Take the linguistic aspect and squeeze them together so you weren't having to remember for an hour something from here that things having to do with a certain aspect of the decipherment were brought together.

02:56:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But it also allowed you to leave certain things out by taking it out of time and putting it into thematic sections. Not easily described in a brief interview but... So getting it down to two hours was really squeezing it, and then PBS still would not show two hours. National Geographic had been willing to support doing it in two hours, but PBS had said that they nixed it as a two hour geographic special. They were just adamant that American people were not interested in more than an hour about the Maya decipherment. So finally when we had spent up all of our other grant money, we went back to NOVA and they said, well, like we've always said, we'll broadcast it as a one hour version. We essentially gave them the rights to cut it down to one hour. That's what they wanted was to just chop it down themselves, and they did.

02:57:42

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They took out my music and took out my narration and put in different narration, and made a version that does a journeyman-like job of presenting as much as you can about the material in one hour, and they brought in a director who had to get up to speed in a matter of weeks because they decided this in January and it had to be done by April. So she had a couple of weeks to get background on the Maya, the story on the Maya, so it was tough for her. I remember in April, they were days before mixing, I was sending them factual corrections in their script and so forth. But -- they did the best they could, but it's still a frustrating experience for me to watch it because so much had to be left out. It's compressing a two hour film that was already dense into 50 minutes. So those who see it, who don't know the two-hour version, are thrilled by it.

02:58:46

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And those who've seen the longer version understand the differences.

end of tape 6

TAPE 7: DAVID LEBRUN

03:00:24

ADAM HYMAN

So let's -- first tell me about FOUR CULTURES.

03:00:36

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So... I don't really have a name for this. Where I'm at right now is I'm still out there looking for larger projects, and I have half a dozen major projects that could keep me busy for a while if they can get funded. They're out there looking for grant funding or in other stages of development.

03:01:02

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But meanwhile, the thing that I've been working on, on my own sort of, is an outgrowth of working on METAMORPHOSIS of having moved my animation into the digital realm. For lack of a better phrase, I'm right now calling it the FOUR CULTURES project, mostly to have something to label my directories in the computer more than anything else. It's certainly not a title.

03:01:34

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It's a notion that partly goes back to the idea that I'd had of doing the film on the development of motifs in Mesoamerica, but looking at it from the point of view of everything I've been learning about digital animation.

03:01:53

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

The notion would be to do that, but to do it for, I believe, four different cultures, and to do it as a suite of films or possibly it could take some other form. I'm letting it be very open. It could be an exhibition. It could be an installation. It could be a set of films in an installation. It could be finishing one film and having the films come out in a series.

03:02:20

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

What it would be is looking at a culture, and we're talking about cultures before the signing of work, is I guess where I would put it, where it's the outgrowth of an entire culture. Mesoamerica would be one. Europe, Christian Europe would be another. The Islamic Middle East would be another, and IndianAsia would be the fourth. I believe that's the four as it's breaking down right now.

03:03:02

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Within each of those cultures, looking at the ways in which a whole set of fundamental motifs play out—plant motifs, abstract design motifs, the representation of animals, the representation of humans, the representations of gods, the representation of the cosmos, moons, sun and stars and so forth.

03:03:29 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

In each of those cultures you can see -- in folk art, in religious art, in ancient art. It's the ancient art of each of these cultures that I'm interested in. Parallels. You can look at the way that serpent is portrayed in these different cultures. There are parallels across.

03:03:56 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

What I'm doing is applying all these different kinds of animation or different kinds of techniques of bringing static artwork to life and making it dance. The techniques include single frame animation, as in TANKA, morphing animation, which I'm getting particularly involved in. There would be live action or using the intervalometer, using the change of light over time on architecture and on artwork.

03:04:37 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Moving in space around objects. Various things. Then having that grow into maybe four 15-minute films, something like that. Maybe into a set of other forms.

03:05:02 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Amy and I took a trip to Greece last year for two months, and I came back with about 5,000 high resolution stills specifically for animation. I've been working with sorting and sequencing those and starting to build sequences and build morphs and build frame-by-frame animation sequences.

03:05:32 **ADAM HYMAN**

What software do you use?

03:05:33 **DAVID LEBRUN**

After Effects and Photoshop and Lightroom and Final Cut Pro, going back and forth between them.

03:05:45 **ADAM HYMAN**

Wouldn't stuff of Greece not be Christian era, would it pre-Christian era?

03:05:50 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Yes, there's that. So, as I say, they're loose parameters. It's Europe. Yeah, yeah. That changed when I got to Greece. So these parameters are loosely defined as I say. Actually I've been spending a lot of times on Greece and Byzantine material. So the shape is— it may not be four cultures. It may take other forms, but that's what I started with.

03:06:20 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I knew that I didn't—that for the purposes of this—I didn't want to deal with South America. I didn't want to deal with China and Japan. I didn't want to deal with Africa, for example. I knew that these four general areas would be very fruitful for the specific kind of thing that I was doing and I saw the parallels between those four areas.

03:06:39 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And the non-parallels. The ways in which, for example, in the Islamic world, much more of the abstract pattern, that would be much of the development than—the floral motifs would be much more there than say the representations of humans. So there would be different emphases within the different cultures. I don't think I can say too much more about that right now because it's still in the pretty early stage of its life.

03:07:08 **ADAM HYMAN**

Great.

03:07:08 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Oh yeah, I know what I can say about it. You remember I mentioned when we founded First Light Video, that my partner and I sat around saying, well, what could we do that would be really an enjoyable way to spend your life? Well, we could go make these documentaries about the bistros in the south of France. That was our half joking first idea.

03:07:30 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And with this animation I have this sort of fantasy of traveling to all these marvelous places and doing this work and having with me a laptop. My first image was going to Chartres and hanging out in the little hotel in Chartres, going into the cathedral, animating, and going and sitting at a café or in my hotel room and feeding it into an animation program and animating and working out the imagery and saying, uh-huh, now I see what I need to change, and then going back to the church the next day and shooting some more.

03:08:01 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

The idea of being able to have that be something where travel and shooting and editing was all one. I can't imagine anything that would be more delightful. [laugh] So if I could manage to do it, that's what I would like to be doing.

03:08:21 **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah, me too.

03:08:23 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Who wouldn't? [mutual laughter]

03:08:25

ADAM HYMAN

Ok. So let's totally change gears then and go back. First, let's do a couple things more precisely and then a brief overview. But first describe for me what Filmex was, and what your vision of it was. I mean, you showed a film there once, but what was your overall view of what Filmex was?

03:08:49

DAVID LEBRUN

Gee, nothing I have a special view on. I mean, it was...

03:08:52

ADAM HYMAN

[overlapping] I know. But nobody ever gives us any views.

03:08:55

DAVID LEBRUN

Filmex was a film festival in Los Angeles put on by a great showman. Gary Essert was somebody who knew when to have a parade of elephants down the middle of the road, as it were. He knew how to do something with a certain style that really made the showing of films in L.A. an event.

03:09:16

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

He was showing often quite radical films, but in a context that got a lot of attention and made L.A. a film festival capital for a while, while he was doing it. He just had that Barnum kind of a flair that made it into a really special thing. Everything from the places that he chose and the films that he chose and just the way he managed to publicize things.

03:09:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So, it made that into a real event that. After he went from the scene, it was a long time before there was a festival in L.A. with anything approaching the same kind of buzz.

03:10:08

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I don't know if there's ever been anything quite as special since. It may just be my experience of that or the time in my life when it happened, but it was an extraordinary amount of things that I was exposed to through his festival.

03:10:29

ADAM HYMAN

When was that?

03:10:31

DAVID LEBRUN

When was it?

03:10:31

ADAM HYMAN

Um-hum.

03:10:32

DAVID LEBRUN

Well, TANKA was there in the late '70s, I guess it was in '76, '77—must've been '77 when it was in the festival. I don't remember if— it was at the Plitt Century Plaza, I remember the red carpet and all that kind of stuff. It was a snazzy theater, so it was in two huge theaters. The Plitt had two giant rooms. I don't know if it still exists that way. It's been all chopped up probably into multiplex...

03:11:06

ADAM HYMAN

Doesn't exist anymore at all.

03:11:07

DAVID LEBRUN

Doesn't exist. But it was two gorgeous giant screens, so it wasn't scattered all over the place. It was in one place. It had a huge amount of buzz, and when you'd get there there'd be great crowds. There would be the seminars, the parties, all that stuff. The place was just alive. Screenings had the gorgeous technical conditions.

03:11:32

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember anything in particular you saw there? Any experimental work, as well? But I'm opening up broader than just experimental work.

03:11:39

DAVID LEBRUN

You had me make a list of memorable screenings. In that period one of the things that was memorable to me was seeing all of Rossellini's history films, which I began to see at the Vanguard. Doug Edwards was programming films at the Vanguard Theater, and that's where I saw Rossellini's film on the the Medici, which I just found revelatory as a way of putting history on the screen.

03:12:12

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Then they began showing a ton of Rossellini's history films at Filmex. I think maybe there'd been one year where they did a festival of them or something because I remember seeing there was one on the apostles, there was one on Socrates... there was one on... THE RISE OF LOUIS XIV actually played in theaters. That was one of them, but that's the only one that had a theatrical release. BLAISE PASCAL I first saw at Filmex. Can't think of the other titles. The Pascal was the one that just knocked me out.

03:12:54

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But all of them just as a way of stretching film into the history of ideas and into the area of philosophical discourse and presentations of ideas. The way he did those was just unique, and I saw a lot of them through Filmex.

03:13:13

ADAM HYMAN

Why do you think film is an appropriate avenue for the presentation of ideas?

03:13:20

DAVID LEBRUN

Well, it's a difficult medium for the presentation of ideas, which is what makes it interesting. It's like the thing I said about by putting this in there, you buy yourself a lot of trouble. Trying to present ideas in film is like— it's so easy not to. It's so hard to do it.

03:13:38

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

One of the things that knocks me out about PASCAL is there's a scene where Descartes is in a room of 200 people, a packed room, presenting a philosophical idea. I don't know, just the way Rossellini uses the camera, the way the tension of the people in the room. You were riveted by his presentation of that idea.

03:14:02

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

And then Pascal, who's like a nobody, walks up and says, "Mr. Descartes, I think you're wrong about that. What I think is this." He talks for five minutes, and at the end of it you're totally satisfied. You've had a great cinematic experience, and it's been two guys presenting two sides of a complex philosophical notion. That's really something to pull off.

03:14:26

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I tried some of the same kind of stuff I think, in PROTEUS and BREAKING THE MAYA CODE. Really push how much complexity you could present, and trying to find ways to make things clear and make them visually exciting, but also just have a great deal of complexity impacted in there.

03:14:47

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Part of how Rossellini does it is just with the depth of texture. He's filming in the actual places. He's using people from that neighborhood. You believe Cosimo de' Medici actually has the gene pool of the Medici. He's got that face. There's nobody in Los Angeles that you could cast for that role. But then all the people in the background also look like they're from that same gene pool.

03:15:17

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They're wearing— I don't know if they're the actual costumes, but they feel like they're the actual costumes from the period. They're in all the spaces. A lot of the words that they're speaking are taken from documents. So you get the accretion of actuality that builds up that you can't fake.

03:15:36

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I tell a story about PROTEUS that when I went out and reached out to the scholars and got their input, the favorite piece of input that I got was from an expert on the Challenger expedition in Nova Scotia. It was one of the world's experts on the Challenger Oceanographic Expedition.

03:15:57

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

There was a shot in the film that was a pullback from an 1870s etching of the Challenger moored at a place called St. Paul's Rocks in the south Atlantic. It's the ship, and you pull back and it reveals some rocks in the foreground. Now, if you already didn't know the book intimately, you wouldn't know it was St. Paul's Rocks. I use it with a wave crash and we're talking generally about the Challenger heading into the south Atlantic.

03:16:27

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Eric Mills, of course, knew that that was a photograph -- that that was an etching from St. Paul's Rocks. He wrote back, he says, "You have an image of the Challenger moored at St. Paul's Rocks. On the soundtrack are the sounds of seagulls. There are no seagulls at St. Paul's Rocks." Now, Eric Mills is the only one who would know that it was St. Paul's Rocks and that there are no seagulls. I never would have not gotten away with that with anybody else in the world.

03:16:58

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But I took it seriously. I wrote back and said, "What kind of birds are there at St. Paul's Rocks?" He says, "Well, there are terns." So I went and found some terns. Now, in fact, I had too damn many seagulls in the soundtrack, and by having the terns in there... when the albatross shrieks when they catch it, I had the sound of the red tail hawk in there for a long time.

03:17:18

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

There's a recording of the red tail hawk shrieking that's in everybody's sound library. I went to Cornell. They have a library of bird sounds. Their nature sound lab, I forget what it's called. And I said, "Do you have the sound of an albatross shrieking?" They said, "Well, not in our official library, but there's this guy here who went down and made some tapes. We'll get him to go through his tapes and see if he can find one."

03:17:52

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

He went through the tapes and he found the sound of an albatross shriek, and they isolated it and made it a sample and sent it to me.

03:18:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So, the guy at Cornell found the sound of the albatross on a tape that had never been logged, and I got that and put it in the film. Not many people will know the difference between the red tail hawk and that, but some will. It's the accumulation of a thousand decisions like that, I think, that in the Rossellini films and hopefully to some degree in my work, gives things a texture and gives them the density that they don't otherwise have.

03:18:49 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I think it may have come from Jacob Bronowski. I did a film with his daughter Judith Bronowski on this folk artist. I think she had brought it up to me, and it may have come from her father Jacob Bronowski—who did THE ASCENT OF MAN—that to try to make an effort to find something so appropriate for what you're doing that it probably has never been used before.

03:19:15 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I think there's a tendency— you go to the History Channel and look at documentaries, there are shot after shot that you've seen in other documentary after other documentary. I think in PROTEUS and in BREAKING THE MAYA CODE, there aren't many things that you will see in other documentaries, especially in PROTEUS, I think. There are a few shots that you may have seen elsewhere...

03:19:39 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

...but the degree to which a documentary can just be its own world rather than a reshuffling of elements that people have seen elsewhere is a huge effort, but it also creates something which takes you to another place in a way which something that draws on stock images can't.

03:20:03 **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah, I agree. It's very rare you get the time... Can you describe Doug Edwards for me, please?

03:20:11 **DAVID LEBRUN**

I didn't know him that well.

03:20:15 **ADAM HYMAN**

Ok.

03:20:15 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Not really.

03:20:16 **ADAM HYMAN**

Or how about describing an evening at the Vanguard? Not any particular film, but just like the general nature of attending?

03:20:23 **DAVID LEBRUN**

My memory's not good enough for any of that.

03:20:24 **ADAM HYMAN**

Ok.

03:20:29

DAVID LEBRUN

I would like to talk a bit about seeing films, because now you want to see films, you can go to Netflix, you can go to video— pretty much everything is—not everything—vast amounts are at our beck and call to see when want to. You can probably see a great deal of it just by going to your computer.

03:20:52

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Throughout a lot of my life that was not true. I experienced several experiences that are common to others. When I was in high school, I was one of the organizers of the film club, so that we could rent films because I wanted to see them. So we'd bring CITIZEN KANE, or whatever other film. We'd have these catalogs, we'd pour over them and say, "Let's bring that film to school and show it in 16 millimeter at night, because I want to see the damn films."

03:21:21

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So I got to be president of the film club. I imagine there's a lot of film buffs and filmmakers who did the same thing in their high school. Because otherwise you didn't get to see this stuff. [There were] the films that were shown on television.

03:21:36

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But in terms of older films, films that were not currently coming out, unless it was being shown on one of the network television shows, there was— I remember in the '50s there as something called Afternoon Film Festival. I'd come home from school and watch Afternoon Film Festival, and that's how I got to know a lot of British films, especially. You weren't seeing European films, but you were seeing the Ealing comedies and things like that they would show on the Afternoon Film Festivals.

03:22:07

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

That's how I'd get to know some of those. There was this screening the other night of Hollis Frampton films, and the artist who was talking before –hand, his name was James Welling...

03:22:21

ADAM HYMAN

James Welling.

03:22:22

DAVID LEBRUN

James Welling, yeah. He described an experience that I also had when I was when I was at Reed College pouring over the Film Culture Catalog issue, sort of like a bible, reading over and over the descriptions of films that I hadn't seen. Trying to imagine the films of Harry Smith from the descriptions in the catalog, trying to imagine all the Brakhage films from the descriptions in the catalog.

03:22:50 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Reed was actually a school where those films were rented. I mean, they showed **FLAMING CREATURES**, which I imagine not a lot of colleges were showing. May be wrong about that, but it seemed like probably not commonly shown at colleges. That's where [I got] my introduction to Brakhage. Saw Brakhage films projected at Reed, and ended up writing him and starting a correspondence with him.

03:23:19 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Then coming back to L.A. with an interest in that kind of film, seeing them at Midnight Movies at the Cinema Theater, and then getting that experience in projecting at the Cinematheque—which I think we talked about—on Sunset and getting a big exposure to films and getting to see them over and over again. That's where the Cinematheque came in for me.

03:23:52 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I was also taking classes at UCLA, where I was at the UCLA film school, but I wasn't see experimental work there. So I saw that kind of odd selection of experimental work at Midnight Movies.

03:24:06 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Then at the Cinematheque, just seeing Whitney Brothers films over and over again, because the theater happened to own some prints of **LAPIS** and **YANTRA** and a few other Whitney films. They'd just slip them into the program all the time, so I was just seeing them over and over again. And other films.

03:24:26 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

So some that stood out for me were **MING** by Markopoulos—**MING GREEN**—which really gave me the idea of images coming out of blackness and going back to blackness, which I used later in my own work. Ed Emshwiller's **RELATIVITY** impressed me a lot at the time, just in terms of telling a story in an experimental way.

03:25:02 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I'd seen some of Maya Deren's work at Reed. So gradually getting the pieces of all that together through that kind of over and over again seeing. Then over time, continuing to see stuff at the Vanguard screenings, various festival screenings. Then the experience everyone else has, of them becoming more and more available elsewhere.

03:25:32 **ADAM HYMAN**

Great. Well, there's one other one I guess I like, which is the 1987 Chick Strand [screening at] **LAICA**. Did you see the one I'm talking about?

03:25:39

DAVID LEBRUN

Actually, one that was interesting in there was the 1973 Conference on Autobiography and Cinema. That was a real informative one for me. I actually just went there just out of a thirst to see this work.

03:25:57

ADAM HYMAN

Where was it?

03:25:58

DAVID LEBRUN

In Buffalo. Gerald O'Grady—he was mentioned the other night—hosted this conference. Jay Leyda was supposed to deliver the keynote, but he didn't make it. I think Brakhage did it instead. It was my first introduction to a lot of these people. The first time I saw... sorry, blanking out. Amy's teacher.

03:26:27

ADAM HYMAN

Hollis?

03:26:27

DAVID LEBRUN

No. No. Binghamton. Ken. First time I saw Ken Jacobs. It was a conference on autobiography and cinema, and so they were showing films that were about one's own life. I remember Ken Jacobs did a performance of his father's home movies with him up on stage with the screen.

03:26:49

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

It was a thrilling set of films and thrilling set of conversations with a whole lot of wonderful filmmakers there. I'm not going to remember the list at this point. But I remember I first became aware of the fact that there was this dichotomy between east coast/west coast.

03:27:14

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

I'd never realized that the east coast filmmakers thought of us west coast filmmakers as decadent. You know, all our enjoyment of color and optical printers and layering and all that, which seemed to me just like the natural things to be doing with film, were seen as sort of west coast decadence by the east coast more rigorous folks, it seemed to me. I was sort of like, "what?"

03:27:48

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But it was a wonderful conference, and exposed me to a lot of things that I had not seen before. I was particularly at that time impressed by Robert Pincus, who had done— it was very interesting because a lot of people were casting as autobiography material that was really abstract. Brakhage was showing one of his scenes from early childhood films, whereas Robert Pincus was showing his diaries. You ever seen those?

03:28:25 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

He was pushing the technology to the limits with stuff that he had gotten from -- [Ricky] Leacock had built some stuff for him. He basically figured out in the days before video—this is 1973—he was doing one-man sync sound diary films where he had a—because at that time if you were doing sound you had to have a sound man and somebody had to be operating the recorder.

03:28:54 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

He'd come up with a remote switch that would activate—using what that time was a miniaturized recorder with a remote switch—that would activate the recorder when you turned on the camera so that he could operate it as a one person, reel-to-reel recorder. I think he had something like an [Éclair] ACL camera, I believe, 200 foot loads. I believe that's where I got the idea of getting ACL.

03:29:24 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

He was doing a documentary about his own life as he was going through his own divorce and after. So it was extremely self-exposing, but amazing cinematography. I remember a scene in which he and his wife have an argument in the car when they're driving in the rain, and he pulls over the car—actually I think she's driving—and the windshield wipers are going. They're having an argument and the windshield wipers are going, and the car's been turned off or it's running. Maybe the car's been turned off, but the windshield wipers are still going, it's still raining outside.

03:30:06 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

And he's filming her, and then he hands her the camera and she's filming him. All this argument is going on, and it's intense. When there's these deadly pauses between them, the windshield wipers are going [makes noise and gesture] and the rain is going and it's dark—in the night, it's dark outside. I don't remember how they lit it. They had some mechanism for lighting it.

03:30:28 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

Technologically, it's astonishing that he was doing this, and it was good cinematography and good sound. Vividly brought to life. Everyone jumped on Pincus for his bad behavior in his marriage as opposed to discussing the quality of the filmmaking. Whereas nobody else was reviewing—

03:30:53 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

I mean, I'm sure if you had Brakhage's life with Jane revealed in the same way, he wouldn't look too good either. But Pincus was exposing himself in a way that— Then you'd cut to a scene where he's separated from her and he's living in a loft by himself and he's just set up the camera facing himself in the loft, talking to the camera about what's happened.

03:31:15 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

It was an amazing piece of work. I remember going to a bar with him after this screening, after everybody had jumped on him for the personal issues rather than for the filmmaking.

03:31:27 **ADAM HYMAN**

Well, this is something that's always true of documentaries when they're about observable characters [as] opposed to something historic -- is people always talk about the subject matter and not the filmmaking.

03:31:39 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Yeah.

03:31:40 **ADAM HYMAN**

Like, from Oscar winning films that are really dull filmmaking, but the topic is trendy or whatever.

03:31:47 **DAVID LEBRUN**

But this was a room full of dedicated filmmakers. Who didn't have a word to say about Andrew Noren's onanism in his films, or focus on his self-centered stuff and all these images of him with having sex with young babes. But Pincus got slammed because he was actually dealing with what was actually going on. So I found that interesting.

03:32:19 **DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)**

But generally that was a fabulous source of inspiration, that whole experience. I for a while tried to build—I was going to make a film about my kids when they were little and built a little device where I could have the camera mounted on something six inches off the ground so that I could be moving at child level with the Nagra underneath. So like the Nagra could be moving around underneath it and I could do a one-man where I'm floating around the floor on castors. I actually built this thing, but it never got used. It was, again, 16 millimeter was too damn expensive to play with.

03:33:01 **ADAM HYMAN**

Home video, though, that's what everybody needs now.

03:33:02 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Yeah, yeah. It's easy.

03:33:04 **ADAM HYMAN**

Your own little dolly.

03:33:05 **DAVID LEBRUN**

Yeah.

03:33:07

ADAM HYMAN

Are there any other still of interest to you? The 1987 Chick Strand at LAICA or [unintelligible] at UCLA?

03:33:13

DAVID LEBRUN

The Chick Strand at LAICA, you were just asking what were memorable screenings for me. I remember that one screening [with] Chick Strand, and I remember it being packed just to the gills, when LAICA was over on Robertson. She showed five or six new films that she'd completed that year, and I know she completed her films in hunks.

03:33:40

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

But I was such a slow producer, it was just astonishing to me. They were all fantastic. It was KRISTALLNACHT and SOFT FICTION and three or four other films. It was just like, oh my god, what an incredible prolific person. Just one film after another. That was one that stood out for that reason.

03:34:08

ADAM HYMAN

Did you ever make it to Filmforum in Pasadena?

03:34:11

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah, a few times. It was a long trek, but yeah, I remember it being near the railway tracks, wasn't it? We got out and put pennies on the tracks or something. Yeah, a couple of times. I don't remember to what.

03:34:30

ADAM HYMAN

Ok.

03:34:31

DAVID LEBRUN

Yeah.

03:34:32

ADAM HYMAN

And what else? Documentary, animation. ATLANTIS RISING?

03:34:43

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh, yeah.

03:34:43

ADAM HYMAN

Do you want to touch more on it or does that sort of fit into what you already said about Kesey?

03:34:47

DAVID LEBRUN

Kind of. Yeah. Yeah.

03:34:50

ADAM HYMAN

So what were you filming of Kesey?

03:34:52

DAVID LEBRUN

Oh, Kesey had gotten some money to do a film of a children's book about some children finding Atlantis. So a bunch of us got on one of the buses and went up to some beach near Aptos or something. I can't remember where it was exactly. Kesey just made this film and it was like Zappa, you know. It was just like this was never going to get finished.

03:35:20

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

Basically, with Kesey, having the camera there was a way of increasing the level of excitement. What was done with what came out of the camera was not of any particular interest to him. What happened in the future was never of interest, unless he got to his writing, where it was a different matter. But in terms of -- as a provocateur, he was interested in creating excitement in the mode or in creating a situation.

03:35:51

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So having a great scene on the set or... Having the camera there is another way of creating energy was what he was about. So he didn't really try to make anything that would ever fit together. We arrived on the beach to do ATLANTIS RISING, and as we pulled up to the beach there was a frogman—a guy with a wetsuit coming out of the water—and so, get the cameras rolling! We went down and interviewed, and asked the guy if he'd seen Atlantis while he was down there. Like an interview, you know, we understand that Atlantis is nearby.

03:36:25

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

So he's just talking to this guy, interviewing him. They began to paint all the rocks. They had all kinds of DayGlo paint, terrible ecological violation there. Gradually over the course of the time we were there all the rocks were getting covered in DayGlo. They did this scene, which I think I described to you before, where it was supposed to be a night scene with the children in the night going past demons.

03:36:49

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

They had all the cars get in a circle and painted eyes on the headlights, and then the cameras came on the scene, was being lit by the cars headlights flashing on and off and the people honking their horns to make the sounds. So I can't imagine how that would've ever come out on film, but it was a fun event to be there.

03:37:11

DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)

There was a scene where I think somebody was throwing I Ching to see whether Atlantis would come about. It was just all these different things. There were some children. There were some dancers. There was building some sort of sculpture that was going to be the ship that they were going to go to Atlantis in, building it out of driftwood.

03:37:30 DAVID LEBRUN (CONTINUED)
I just remember all these fragments. We were just filming this stuff. All of it went somewhere. You'd have to ask Zane Kesey about all this.

03:37:40 ADAM HYMAN
Ok. Well, can't do that anymore, right?

03:37:43 DAVID LEBRUN
Yeah. What's that?

03:37:44 ADAM HYMAN
Can't do that anymore.

03:37:45 DAVID LEBRUN
Isn't Zane around?

03:37:48 ADAM HYMAN
Oh, Zane's around.

03:37:48 DAVID LEBRUN
Zane. Zane. Yeah.

03:37:49 ADAM HYMAN
Oh, yeah. Ken is not.

03:37:51 DAVID LEBRUN
Zane's sort of taken charge of that material.

03:37:54 ADAM HYMAN
Right.

03:37:58 DAVID LEBRUN
We done?

03:38:00 ADAM HYMAN
Let's wrap it up.

03:38:00 DAVID LEBRUN
Sure.

end of tape 7