

ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

Experimental film in Los Angeles, 1945 - 1980

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INTERVIEW SUBJECT: Mike Getz

Biography:

Mike Getz is a curator, theater manager and one of the key architects of the midnight movie phenomenon. Getz was originally from Ohio but eventually moved to the west coast to work in his uncle Louis K. Sher's theater chain. In 1963 he met John Fles, a young, bohemian programmer who screened art films at local coffee houses. The men immediately bonded and began to work on a regular experimental film series to be hosted at the Cinema Theater on Western Avenue. Their series, *Movies 'Round Midnight*, debuted in 1963 and quickly became Los Angeles' most important source for avant-garde film. The inaugural Columbus Day screening featured *DOG STAR MAN*, *FLAMING CREATURES* and *TWICE A MAN* and invited viewers to "Discover the New American Cinema."

In 1964 a vice squad raided Cinema Theater screening of *SCORPIO RISING* and confiscated the print. Getz was arraigned for 'exhibiting an obscene film' and found guilty.

By 1965 Getz was overseeing all of the Cinema Theater's programming and in 1967 he renamed

Movies 'Round Midnight as Underground Cinema 12. As programmer Getz shifted the series' emphasis to pulp, exploitation, comedy and cult films. He eventually developed a touring program and brought Underground Cinema 12 to the World Theatre in Columbus, the Valley Art Theatre in Tempe and the Towne Theatre in Sacramento. In the early 1970s he also began to program a series called the Midnight Movies at the World, Unicorn and Heights theaters. In 1968 he moved to Nevada City where he continued programming series of underground cinema with an increased emphasis on feature length films including the highly successful ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW. He started the Nevada Theater Film Series in 1979 and currently works as a film programmer in Nevada City.

Tape Contents:

Tape 1: Pages 3 - 4

Interview date: June 23, 2010

Interviewer: Alison Kozberg

Cameraperson: Vera Brunner-Sung

Transcript Reviewer: Mike Getz, Stephanie Sapienza

Tape 2: Pages 5 - 17

Interview date: June 23, 2010

Interviewer: Alison Kozberg

Cameraperson: Vera Brunner-Sung

Transcript Reviewer: Mike Getz, Stephanie Sapienza

Tape 3: Pages 18 - 29

Interview date: June 23, 2010

Interviewer: Alison Kozberg

Cameraperson: Vera Brunner-Sung

Transcript Reviewer: Mike Getz, Stephanie Sapienza

Tape 4: Pages 30 - 44

Interview date: June 23, 2010

Interviewer: Alison Kozberg

Cameraperson: Vera Brunner-Sung

Transcript Reviewer: Mike Getz, Stephanie Sapienza

Tape 5: Pages 45 - 57

Interview date: June 23, 2010

Interviewer: Alison Kozberg

Cameraperson: Vera Brunner-Sung

Transcript Reviewer: Mike Getz, Stephanie Sapienza

TAPE 1: MIKE GETZ

00:02:11

MICHAEL GETZ

So my name is Michael Getz. And, it's spelled M-I-C-H-A-E-L, G-E-T-Z.

00:02:21

ALISON KOZBERG

And let's start by talking a little bit about where you grew up and just family and childhood.

00:02:27

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, I grew up in Columbus, Ohio. I had an older brother, a younger sister and a younger brother. But I guess for this purpose, my most important relative I had was my Uncle Louie. And that's Louis Sher and he was responsible for me getting into the movie business later. But we grew up in a suburb of Columbus called Bexley and I went to Bexley Grade School, Bexley High School. As I look back on my childhood I would say it was pretty ordinary. But I do think that I had a love of movies from the beginning and I used to go to the movie theaters downtown Columbus often, as a lot my friends and I went together. And, of course, in those days they had the cartoons and serials before the movie started. But I wasn't really, I never really had an ambition to be in the movie theater business. But I did, I was open to it. And I can't remember any specific things that set me off in that direction as a young child.

00:16:59

MICHAEL GETZ

So the years were, okay, I graduated high school in 1956. I graduated college in 1960 in January. I went to Europe and shortly thereafter I spent that year, 1960 to '61 in Europe. Came back in '61 towards the end, I think the end of the summer. And then I went to, I stayed in Columbus for maybe another six months after that. Did that thing with the candy company. And then I must have gone to L.A. in '62, or '61, maybe the end of '61. I'm not sure of the dates, but something like that. So, but when my uncle asked me to, if I wanted to be involved with the movie theater business and I said yes, he sent me to San Francisco where he owned the Presidio Theater. That was his first purchase on the West Coast. He bought the Presidio Theater and then he, and then I worked there for about a couple of months training, learning how to run a movie theater.

00:18:23

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

Then he bought the theater in Hollywood, the Cinema Theater. And that was probably in, it must have been early '62 or late '61. Again, these dates are kind of, but that would of have to have been around then. Because shortly after he bought it I went down there to work as an Assistant Manager. He sent the manager from his theater that he owned in Denver, he owned a theater in Denver. By the way, my uncle, when, after he bought his theater, the Bexley Theater in Columbus, he... [technical]

00:36:17

ALISON KOZBERG

Then what year did you become manager of the Cinema?

00:36:22

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, it must have been about late '61 or early '62. Because I think I was there for, I know Movies 'Round Midnight started on Columbus Day of 1963. So I think I was there at least a year before that. So '62 and maybe even earlier.

00:36:48

ALISON KOZBERG

And what was the Cinema Theater like?

00:36:51

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, the Cinema Theater was a 500 seat single screen theater on the corner of, it was on Western Avenue and just north of Santa Monica Blvd., the corner of Western and Santa Monica. And that theater was a relatively straight forward simple theater. Nothing outstanding about it. But we had a nice, when I, after I got there and actually began running it, I wanted to make it look nicer. Because it hadn't been remodeled or anything. And so we did remodel the lobby. Again, we did this thing of no popcorn, which was, you know, running a movie theater now, as I do now, popcorn is like where you make your money. So how Louie did it without popcorn is a real mystery to me, but he did sell European candies, candy bars. You know, Toblerone and other kind of candy bars and other things that came in boxes. But candy was the thing he did sell. And I think he sold, I can't even remember what the drinks were.

00:38:17

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

Because I don't think we had a soda stand there at the Cinema. So it was just a little cart, like a, it looked like a European flower cart with big wheels, white wrought iron, painted wrought iron candy stand. And that was all we had for concessions. And we must have offered some drinks. I don't remember exactly what it was. And there was a box office outside on the street, a totally enclosed separate box office. You had to go out there and yeah, that's about it, you know, it was simple. [technical]

[END TAPE 1]

TAPE 2: MIKE GETZ

00:00:16

ALISON KOZBERG

Could you talk a little bit about how many theaters he was accumulating and were they all over the country. How fast he was getting them. Did the chain have a name?

00:00:28

MICHAEL GETZ

Yeah, Louis Sher's company was called Art Theater Guild, Inc. And as I say he started probably in the mid-50's with the first one, the Bexley. And then he did expand to many other cities, including, and this is very important for me, which later when I did the Midnight Movie thing in his theaters. So he had theaters in Cleveland. He had two theaters in Cleveland. He had a theater in Akron, a theater in Toledo, a theater Dayton. Of course, I mentioned The Little Art Theater in Yellow Springs. He had then a theater in Memphis, Tennessee. A theater in Louisville. He had a theater in Denver. And then a theater in New Orleans, called the Plaza Theater. He had, let's see, San Diego, he had two theaters in San Diego. He had a theater in San Jose. He had the theater in L.A., a theater in San Francisco. He had a theater in Seattle. And he had a theater in Tucson, one in Phoenix. And he had a theater in Albuquerque. And there were maybe another one or two that I'm missing.

00:02:20

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

I know when I had my Midnight Movies thing going, I think there were 17 showings. So there was at least 17. It ranged between 15 and 20 over the years. Sometimes he'd get a theater, if it didn't work out he'd get rid of it. But, yeah, that's kind of.. And so that was fairly, by the time he started the, he bought the Cinema Theater. That was one of the last theaters that he bought. So by the time he bought Cinema Theater, he had quite a few theaters around the rest of the country. And had established himself as a prominent art theater exhibitor in the country.

00:03:07

ALISON KOZBERG

Now, in San Francisco at the Presidio, that was, you said 1,000 seats.

00:03:14

MICHAEL GETZ

I think so. Maybe...

00:03:14

ALISON KOZBERG

Pretty big.

00:03:15

MICHAEL GETZ

It was big, maybe 700.

00:03:18

ALISON KOZBERG

How was business there?

00:03:18

MICHAEL GETZ

How was business there? Oh boy, you, I don't know. I don't know exactly how to answer that because I didn't have much to do with that theater after I left. I really focused mostly just on the Cinema Theater in Hollywood. But I think it was successful, you know. They at some point they, Louie hired a fellow named Les Natali to be the manager and Les was very sharp. He became very important to Lou. So I'm assuming that he was successful in his theater at the Presidio. [technical]

00:04:04

STEPHANIE SAPIENZA

Can you talk about why he chose art theaters specifically? Was that an interest of his or did see a niche to fill? And you just talk about that in general.

00:04:19

MICHAEL GETZ

So, Louie when he was developing his theater chain, I think that he was thinking about operating art theaters that showed foreign movies as a... for two reasons. One is that he personally liked those kind of movies. He was a movie buff. He was, I mean he loved movies. And he knew a lot about movies. And he loved, you know, even from the silent movies he was enamored of movies and was, and that was something as I say even as growing up, was something that I think I got from him. And I can't remember specifically but I know that, he liked movies. And I picked up on it. And it was something we had in common. And so I think that it wasn't so much that he thought this was a way to make money. I think he was financially pretty secure. He was 50 years old by the time he started the movie theaters. And so he was already a successful business person. So I think it was love of foreign movies. And his desire to show foreign movies in this country that made him, that was a guiding force behind it.

00:05:59

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And he called his business The Art Theater Guild right from the get go. So it was something that he consciously chose to do. And I think that he was successful because he had, he was in the right time at the right place with the right idea. And it was a time after war, it was a time when people, you know, when foreign directors were becoming more famous in America. I mean if you, I don't know if you know, but at that time there was Ingmar Bergman. There was Federico Fellini. There was the French New Wave with Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard and Louie Malle. And British comedies and British films. And so, and the Indian movies, Satyajit Ray (however you pronounce it). All those movies were being made. They were being, American distributors were distributing them. Looking for theaters to play them in. So Louie just fit right in. He had the theaters and that gave him the clout to get the good movies.

00:07:23

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay. Let's talk a little bit more about the Cinema Theater, specifically. And when you became manager there. At that time did you start doing all the programming for that theater?

00:07:32

MICHAEL GETZ

No, I didn't. The programming was done by Sol Shifrin, that was Lou's, the programming of the Cinema Theater was done by Sol Shifrin, who was Lou's film buyer. A film buyer is the person who negotiates the, actually works with the film distributor to obtain the film for showing in an exhibitor's theaters. So Lou Sher was the exhibitor and all these different film distributors, the most famous of course was Joseph Levine, I think Joe Levine who brought in all these Italian movies and basically made Sophia Loren a famous actress, single handedly. I mean in fact in this country he brought all those movies that she was in to this country. Joseph E. Levine. Anyway, he and other film distributors and Sol Shifrin was the man who Louie hired to be his intermediary, his negotiator. So, Sol would get the film from the distributor and then he would make the settlement or the film rental terms with the distributor.

00:09:02

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

The way it worked in those days was that, you know, films would be brought over by the distributors to this country and then they would be looking for theaters to play them in. As soon as I heard about a movie that I thought would go well at the Cinema Theater I would call Sol and say, let's try to get this. Or let's try to get that movie. And so in that sense I was, we worked together. I'd give him what I thought would do well. He would try to get those movies for me. He would tell me what he had access to. And I would try to give him feedback about how I thought it would do or not. How well it would do. We had competition in Hollywood. You know, we had the Los Feliz Theater was a big competitor. At that time it was operated by Max Laemmle and he had I think another two or three theaters. There was another guy that had theaters in the Valley somewhere. I can't remember his name. But anyway so we had to, you know, try to get the best movies that we could. And so that was, so we worked with Sol. Sol and I worked together to get those films. Yeah.

00:10:29

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay. What kinds of things were you doing at the Cinema Theater, on a day-to-day kind of, describe what a day at the theater was like? Were you screening films everyday? Were there screenings that were particular memorable? How busy would you be? And kind of what sort of things did you do on a day to day.

00:10:47

MICHAEL GETZ

That's a funny question, because my wife, as we were having lunch today, was asking me about that too. And I thought back, the thing that I remembered was going to the-- after I'd get off work around 11:00 or 12:00 at night I would go to the movie theater on Hollywood Blvd., I think it was the Pacific Theater was maybe still operating then, that ran all night long. And I would go and watch movies there. Just regular old American movies. I had, we had an office there. The Cinema Theater, you walked in and then there was these steps that went up to this sort of mezzanine or second floor, which was the access to the projection booth. And the restrooms. And my office, which was on the 2nd floor. And I would go to work and I'm trying to remember what time of the day it was when I went to work. I have a feeling it was probably like, like it is now, like around 11:30, 12:00. And I would take care of the, you know, the money. I would talk with Sol in New York about what was coming up or what was going on.

00:12:12

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

It was fairly simple running it. And I would do the ads for the newspaper, the L.A. TIMES. And I was trying to remember, there was another newspaper in Hollywood at the time that I just, I want to say HOLLYWOOD REPORTER, but that's not right. It's HOLLYWOOD FREE PRESS. No, I can't remember. Not the L.A. FREE PRESS. But there was I think the Beverly, whatever, I can't remember. Anyway, there was another, and there were actually two newspapers, two main daily newspapers. The L.A. TIMES and the L.A. HERALD I think or the L.A. TRIBUNE. And then I would talk to the film critics. I would do the ads and I would drive down and place the ads. I'd take them, in those days you had to create the ads. There was no Photoshop or anything. You had to create ads and I would set up the ads for the newspaper. Take them down. And I always went to the same guy and we became friends. I became friends with this guy at the L.A. TIMES in the Ad Department.

00:13:28

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

I might think of his name. But and then, you know, whatever other promotion thing I could be working on. But it was, and then at night I would be there to, 'cause we didn't have matinees as I recall. We just showed at night. And maybe on the weekends we might have had a matinee, I don't remember exactly. But at night I would be there and greet people as they came in. And that was fun because a lot of celebrities would come to that theater. And I got to meet some, you know, some came often. Like I remember Spike Jones, not the Spike Jonze of today but the Spike Jones that had the band, back in those days. I don't know if you know who that is? Do you know who Spike Jones is?

00:14:25

ALISON KOZBERG

Can you describe for me.

00:14:27

MICHAEL GETZ

Spike Jones had a whacky kind of satirical band. They played, I think he played a lot on television. And he had these whacky renditions of old time songs. But he was famous and I knew who he was. And he would come to the movies about once every two weeks. Because his wife had a poker, a women's poker game at her house, at their house. And she kicked him out. And he would come often to our theater. And, you know, after a while we got to say hi to each other and talk with each other. That was one guy that I kind of remember. There were others too that came. Paul Newman and his wife came a lot. And, you know, it was, being the only or one of the two or three art theaters in town. It was a special theater. And the movies that we showed were really so different from the Hollywood mainstream movies that were being shown in other theaters in town.

00:15:50 **MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)**

So, again, I have to hand it my uncle, he was in the right place at the right time with the right product. And so he was, the Cinema Theater was a successful theater.

00:16:05 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And his screenings were relatively busy?

00:16:02 **MICHAEL GETZ**

Yeah, I think we did well. We did well there.

00:16:12 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And about how long would a film run for?

00:16:14 **MICHAEL GETZ**

Well, it would run for weeks, you know, weeks at a time. Three, four, five weeks, that was not unusual. I remember, well I remember JULES AND JIM played for a long time. And, you know, we had, we played Shirley Clarke's THE CONNECTION. I think she came out for that showing. And that played for a long time. Other specific movies that I can't remember. But, you know, we played a lot of foreign movies there.

00:16:59 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And how many people were working in the theater? How big was the staff?

00:17:02 **MICHAEL GETZ**

Oh, not very big. We had a box office cashier. We had a kind of an assistant, maybe two Assistant Managers. I think we might have had, I'm trying to remember if we had a, yeah we would, I think on a busy night we would have maybe four staff people there. Like one person devoted to the snack, you know, to the candy stand. And then one person in the box, one person tearing tickets. And then maybe me just kind of roaming around or something like that. But not a lot of staff.

00:17:41 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And so during this time, aside from the theater nearby, were you going to movies many other places in Los Angeles or you were...

00:17:47 **MICHAEL GETZ**

Yeah, I did, I went to movies a lot. I went often. Everything that showed that I was interested in seeing I went to see it.

00:17:58 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Okay.

00:18:00 **MICHAEL GETZ**

I did go to movies. I am a movie nut. I love to go to movies.

00:20:55

ALISON KOZBERG

Now I wanted to talk to you about meeting John Fles and how that happened.

00:21:08

MICHAEL GETZ

So John Fles came to me one day. And I don't remember the exact moment but he came with this idea that he wanted to show unusual movies at midnight at the Cinema Theater. And he explained to me that he had been doing movie showings around Hollywood in various cultural centers and the Jewish Center and the Ukrainian, the Russian Center. I mean he showed movies, unusual movies around Hollywood and he was looking to show them in a movie theater. And he had this idea that he would like to show a series of movies at Midnight. And wanted to know if I would be interested in letting him do that at the Cinema Theater. And I have to say that we hit it off pretty nicely right from the beginning. I found him to be a really interesting person with this idea, a really interesting idea that just sort of fit right in with what we were doing. It sounded like it would be a nice addition to what we were doing. Showing foreign movies.

00:22:52

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

His thing was nobody was showing the New York underground movies in L.A. And I had been, because it seemed to be a good idea for me to be, aware of what was happening in New York City, I had a subscription to the VILLAGE VOICE. So when John came to me I'm pretty sure that I was already familiar with some of these films that were being shown in New York City. And this whole idea that I believe that The Charles, there was a theater called The Charles Theater in New York City that was showing midnight shows of these unusual films. FLAMING CREATURES was already being written about in the VILLAGE VOICE. So I was somewhat, you know, just dipped my toe in that world. And was interested in it and then John arrives on the scene with his knowledge and his desire to do this. And so it seemed like a good thing. And I checked with my Uncle Louie about it. And Louie was totally open to it. He had no hesitation, just said let's, you have my permission to do this.

00:24:24

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And, although I had, I don't think he had much of an idea of what I was going to do. But we did start it. You know, we started it out and tried it to see if it would work. And well, it did work right from the beginning. And John, who now goes by the name of Michael Fles, I should point that out. But all that time that I worked with him I called him John. So it's a little confusing. But he changed his name later. Anyway, so I could tell you about our opening show, if, are you ready for...

00:25:15

ALISON KOZBERG

Sure, that would be great. First, could you tell us a little bit about what John was like.

00:25:21

MICHAEL GETZ

Yeah. Well, the thing about John is that he's a very, to me he seemed, first of all he seemed like a very nice person. And secondly he seemed very, very knowledgeable about what he was doing, which was you know, showing, he wanted to show a lot of unusual movies. I mean that seemed to be the motivating thing. He wasn't particularly interested in it on a financial level. He just wanted to have a better venue for showing unusual and what he felt were provocative and stimulating movies. To just give the audience a whole different kind of experience at the movie theater. So he impressed me with his easygoing personality and his knowledge about movies. And his kind of fearless, "let's just do it and see what happens" kind of attitude. Which I liked. And so it really wasn't, I mean I just said, let's just do it. You know, let's just try it out. But he was just easy to work with. And very, you know, you could talk to him. I could talk to him and he was a real interesting guy for me to talk with.

00:27:09

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

Because he had a whole different, I'd never met anybody quite like that. So I was really anxious to kind of work with him. And he seemed like a good guy to work with.

00:27:21

ALISON KOZBERG

And were other Midnight Movies in Los Angeles during this time or was that the only one?

00:27:25

MICHAEL GETZ

No, there were no other Midnight Movies in Los Angeles at that time, no.

00:27:31

ALISON KOZBERG

And so how did you go about beginning to plan for these Round Midnight, thinking of what exactly it would be?

00:27:41

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, I think that in terms of, did we have a vision of what it was going to be like? I think mostly what we felt like was that we were just going to start something and see what happened. I think John had this collection, and maybe it was in his mind, of films that he wanted to show. But there were these films coming out of New York. And there were films that were now beginning to come out of San Francisco. And there were distribution companies forming, like the New York Filmmakers Co-Op and the Canyon Cinema Co-Op in the Bay area. These companies were beginning and looking for places to show the movies that they were distributing. And they, both of those companies, those two in particular, had the most wonderful approach to film distribution. Totally different than any other distribution companies that I had experience with. They basically would take anybody's film and distribute it.

00:29:04

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

No judgment. It didn't matter if they were good films or bad films. But if you made a film and you wanted it distributed, you gave it to either New York Filmmakers Co-Op or Canyon Cinema and they would distribute it. And it was kind of a-- and I'm not sure the actual financial structures of those two organizations, but they were very filmmaker friendly. And so that was, so that combined with John's other ideas about showing movies and some of the movies we got from Contemporary Films or at that time, I think it was called Contemporary Films, there were just some unusual distribution companies. There was Contemporary Films which showed, which distributed the National Film Board of Canada films. There were, there was a guy out in the Valley called Bob Pike who had the Creative Film Society. [background noise]

00:30:22

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

What was I talking about?

00:30:21

ALISON KOZBERG

Other distributors...

00:30:22

MICHAEL GETZ

Oh, so yeah, what we, John had been renting films for these, as I mentioned these cultural center showings, that were not held at midnight. By the way, they were held like on a Tuesday night at 7:00 or something like that. He had already been working with some distributors and he already had built up the relationships with some of these distributors. And I'm pretty sure that at the time he came to me he already had connections with both the New York Filmmakers Co-Op in New York City. And the Canyon Cinema Group in the Bay area. But, and he had other sources too. And there was another guy I want to mention, Murray Glass, who also had, Murray Glass had a lot of old times, old. He had the, I'm pretty sure he had the old serials and the, which we showed. Bob Pike had more of the newer films that were being made. And a lot of them were being made by L.A. Filmmakers. He seemed to have a connection with L.A. filmmakers.

00:31:39

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

Anyway, so those, I mean I think that we approached the Midnight Movie series with the idea that we had more, we had plenty films to show. And if people were going to come, we would just keep going. And it seemed to be as simple as that.

00:32:04

ALISON KOZBERG

Now how did you decide to show, to show serials?

00:32:10

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, that's another one of John's, okay, so I should talk a little bit about John's movie knowledge and his taste and eclectic kind of approach. He, you know, it was always fun to talk with him about movies. And I learned a lot and I opened, he really opened my own thinking up about movies. And introduced me to a lot of movies that I had not been aware of. It was like going to film school to be working with John. Because he knew so much about a whole variety of movies that I had no experience with. So, serials. Of course, as I mentioned, as a kid going to the downtown theaters in Columbus they would have serials. But like, by the time we started Movies Round Midnight serials weren't being shown anywhere. So, we brought back some serials. And maybe we were even thinking, oh well maybe this'll get people coming next week to see what happened with the serial. Because we would actually show a serial through all it's chapters. So most of them had 13 or 14 chapters.

00:33:45 **MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)**

And I think that we may have, I don't remember which particular one we started out with, but I know when I started after later, when John left, and I did my own thing. I started it with the Elmo Lincoln Tarzan serial which was the silent serial. And we probably showed that on the Movies Round Midnight series.

00:34:14 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Well, let's talk about the first night of Movies Round Midnight. Your first screening, what was that like?

00:34:22 **MICHAEL GETZ**

Well, that was really amazing. Because we sent out, now John did come with a mailing list. He had a mailing list that he had accumulated over the period of time that he was working, doing these showings. And he would get everybody's name and address. So he had a pretty large mailing list. And I think that the advertisement for that first show was like - 400 hundred years ago or was it 1492 was, and we were 500 years ago Columbus discovered America - On Columbus Day, 1963 you will discover the New American Cinema. And that was the approach. We showed, I'm pretty sure we showed FLAMING CREATURES. Oh Jesus...

00:35:33 **ALISON KOZBERG**

TWICE A MAN.

00:35:32 **MICHAEL GETZ**

Was it TWICE A MAN? And then it was a Brakhage movie?

00:35:34 **ALISON KOZBERG**

It was a Dog Star movie.

00:35:40 **MICHAEL GETZ**

Dog Star. It was a short, it couldn't have all of Dog, because DOG STAR MAN is pretty long. I think it was maybe DOG STAR MAN, PART 1 or something like that. So Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos and Jack Smith movie. Does that sound right?

00:35:59 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Yes.

00:36:02 **MICHAEL GETZ**

Okay. Because that's what I recollect. And he may have more recently looked at that. But that was it. And we had a full house. I think we sold every seat. We had 500 seats in that theater and we were pretty close to being full. There was a huge long line at Midnight. And I know that you interviewed John and he described the scene, which I don't know if I need to...

00:36:39

ALISON KOZBERG

Just go for it.

00:36:41

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, because I actually didn't remember this. But John reminded me that a guy, this guy Bob Alexander was a friend of John's and he and so there's all these people outside the theater waiting to buy their ticket. And this ambulance pulls up and the guys come out of the front of the ambulance, go, open the back doors. And they pull out this guy whose lying on a stretcher all wrapped up in bandages. [technical]

00:37:20

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

...wrapped up in bandages. And he comes, they carry him into the lobby and he stands up and he starts removing his bandages. And it's this guy Bob Alexander who was John Fles' friend and printer. And he's the guy that printed the postcards that we sent out to everybody. And he was kind of a real character, unusual fellow. And of course that was another extra added attraction to just set the context of that Midnight Movie. This is going to be something a little bit different. And I think that right from the beginning it had... [background noise]

00:38:04

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

So right from the very beginning the Midnight Movie series put people on notice that this was going to be something, something new and different. And I think that was good.

00:38:21

ALISON KOZBERG

Was there anyone, aside from you and John working on these projects initially? Anyone helping you, involved with doing the printing, was anyone designing any of the materials or helping you guys or just the two of you?

00:38:31

MICHAEL GETZ

Yeah, it was just the two of us. And that designed and did everything. I mean after we got going we would have help I think John had a lot of connections with the whole art world in L.A. And knew people who could recreate wonderful advertisements and I don't remember if we, my recollection is that we didn't start out with an eight-week kind of series. That we just did it week by week. But I'm not sure about that. I just don't remember so well. But I do know that we, and the thing about that first night was that Arthur Knight was there. Now Arthur Knight at the time was a film critic for I'm pretty sure it was the New Yorker and also he was, he would also write articles for Playboy magazine. In fact, he had a whole series that he did for Playboy magazine called Sex in the Cinema. Which I think he had actually even had started by then. And so he was well known. And he wrote a review of that opening night in the New Yorker. I don't know if you could get your hands on that review.

00:40:04

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

But that was a wonderful, a very positive review. And we were totally flattered that, you know, a mainstream media, such as the New Yorker would choose to print a review of our, what we thought was a small little deal, you know. But apparently it was more significant than we thought.

[END TAPE 2]

TAPE 3: MIKE GETZ

00:00:35

ALISON KOZBERG

Alright. So, how was the response by other people that night? How did the crowd respond to these three films?

00:00:47

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, I'm trying to remember on that night how the audience responded to those three movies. I think that, I think they were, there was a mixed reaction. I think of course, FLAMING CREATURES, I can't remember which order we showed them in. But if I were do it today, I would have shown the DOG STAR, the Brakhage movie first, because it was silent. And probably the most difficult to watch. Then I would have shown the TWICE A MAN, which was a narrative. It was a dramatic film, but very experimental and then FLAMING CREATURES of course, was this wild kind of orgiastic party, New York party movie that it was indescribable. And probably, so my I don't have a real clear recollection of how the audience responded. But I think people appreciated the fact that they were seeing something that they couldn't see anywhere else. And so that was the thing that kind of, the feedback that we got that made us feel like we should keep doing it.

00:02:11

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And the fact that so many people came. So I don't remember anything, I mean it would be interesting to read that article by Arthur Knight, because I think he, I think, I don't think that he thought it was the greatest movie going experience. Because they were just too unusual, two weird. But I think he acknowledged that this was maybe the first drops of a new wave of film going experience, of movie going experience that was coming along.

00:02:51

ALISON KOZBERG

Yeah. Have you seen any films like this before?

00:02:55

MICHAEL GETZ

No, no. Not, no, it was, and I don't know if I sat and watched. I don't think I sat and watched the movies. I was probably too excited. I probably watched **FLAMING CREATURES**. I probably, actually, and here's the thing that John and I, I mean I did watch those three movies. I remember them. So whether I watched them before we showed them or whether I watched them the night of the showing, I don't remember. But I do remember talking with John about how to watch those movies. And that was really helpful to me because as inexperienced as I was with that kind of movie going. He was very articulate and he could explain certain, you know, certain things about watching a movie like a **DOG STAR MAN**, which is I mean it's hard to describe it. But he would, he was able to explain to me to open my own appreciation of an unusual approach to making a film.

00:04:15

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

That so I wouldn't be stuck with the typical Hollywood mainstream approach. That there was another avenue. And another thing inside of me that could respond to what I was seeing from these filmmakers. And so it kind of opened me up in many ways. And I think I learned a whole new way of watching movies by being around John. And having him, and he was very, very, very sharp. He could explain things very well. And not in a way that he said, this is the way it should affect you. He just said, look inside yourself and see if anything is happening. You know, maybe there's something in these movies that is touching you in a way that you haven't experienced before. Because, you know, it's like abstract art or watching or looking at a Jackson Pollack painting or you know, that whole way of, you know, here's a, you know, a Mona Lisa or something that makes, you know, you can look at it, and see what it is.

00:05:39

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

These movies, you couldn't just look at it and see what it is right away. You had to experience it. And you had to be open to experiencing a movie in a different way. And a more open way. And John was really good at not telling me how to feel, but just saying, you know, this is how it affected me. And he would explain how it affected him. And then I would be more receptive to a different experience.

00:06:15

ALISON KOZBERG

So how did you feel about some of the first films you were seeing, that you had the opportunity to watch them, after talking with John?

00:06:23

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, at the time I think a lot of, and it was interesting to me that the whole sexual part of those movies appealed to me in the sense that, that was something a lot of filmmakers at the time were interested in. To explore, you know, sexuality in a different way. In a more personal way and so there was that whole aspect of this, of these kinds of movies that I responded to as a young man with lots of fantasies and stuff. I enjoyed seeing how other filmmakers would deal with that subject matter. And I think that was another thing that appealed to the audience. It was, even though there were, you know, some people may have used the word obscene or pornographic or something in talking about those movies, that really wasn't what it was about. And I think most people that saw those movies realized that that these filmmakers were exploring sexuality in a new way.

00:07:53

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And in an interesting and exciting way. And I think that was part of the appeal of those movies. So, that's, and then just the freedom that the filmmakers felt. That they could do, it didn't take, you know, a studio with lights and a hundred people standing behind the cameraman, you know, that whole Hollywood way of making movies. I think that this new wave of kind of underground movies was appealing, because anybody that wanted to could fairly inexpensively make a movie. And we would show it.

00:08:50

ALISON KOZBERG

So after that, after that first screening what happened with Movies Round Midnight after that? How did it develop when you had screenings on, what were the logistics of the series? What kinds of films did you start to play after that first night?

00:09:06

MICHAEL GETZ

Okay. Now here's the problem with that. You're asking me about what happened after that first night. And unfortunately I think I had a collection of all of our programs but I think I took them to the dump when I moved out to where I live now by mistake. And I don't have the specific programs from those early days. I do have the programs from like 1967 on. But '63 to '67 is a little bit of a blank. But I think that the programming that I did in '67 does reflect, I brought back a lot of the stuff that we had shown in those what four years before I, before John left. But I think based on the response to that first night we decided to, of course, continue and John pretty much did the booking on his own. My involvement at that time was to be kind of a support person for John's tripping out and just doing whatever he wanted to. So you, you know, have to talk to him to see what he had in mind. But we, I think that the programming ideas came from John.

00:10:43

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And I think that what one of the things that was helping him decide what to show was the very fact that these few film distributors that I had talked about earlier were sending us information about films that they had just received. And would we be interested in showing them? And I think that, I don't remember exactly when I was able to set this up. But at one point I set up with both Canyon Cinema and the New York Filmmaker Co-Op for them to send, I think this was after John left and after I had developed this circuit, but they would send me movies to look at. And I could then decide, that was when I was doing the programming. Before that I kind of think they actually were sending them to John as well. And he would look at them and sometimes we would look at them together. And then he would make some decisions about how to, what to show.

00:11:54

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then as I say, you know, some of the things that we did were, you know, just not related to the underground cinema. But they were old movies that he thought would be good to show again. Or that introduced this audience which was coming to see movies that were unusual he would bring back movies like, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* he happened to get a director's original director's cut of that movie, which was different. Had a different ending. He, I remember he showed *Way Down East*, a silent movie. Which was unusual. I think we showed, I'm almost positive we showed that *Joan of Arc* the Swedish, was it Carl Dreyer. I'm sure we showed that. *Freaks*, that old Hollywood movie *Freaks*. So, very eclectic approach. I think the common denominator was, they were all unusual in some way or other. And gave the moviegoer a kind of a movie going experience that he wouldn't normally get at any other theater.

00:13:19

ALISON KOZBERG

But did screenings continue to be so popular?

00:13:21

MICHAEL GETZ

Yeah, we were very successful. We were very, we were so successful that after about four years when I, well I think it was after about three years this man Les Natali, who was in San Francisco running the Presidio Theater, he said, well I hear you're doing well with this, maybe we should try it here in San Francisco. So we did that. We moved it to San Francisco and I believe it was while John was still involved with us. It was maybe in the '66, '65, '66. So, and then it continued to be successful and my uncle, when I approached him I said, well why don't we just put this in all of your theaters? And he said, yes. And that, that was a whole big deal. But before that, throughout that period, after we started, we were consistently successful. And I attribute it to John's selections and his unusual approach. We had, we were kind of like the hip going hip thing. I mean we had a very hip audience. And John had all these friends in the art scene in L.A.

00:15:05

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

Including one of his very good friends was this guy Wallace Berman who was kind of a central figure in the art world. And he and his friends would come a lot. And then we had also some live shows. Allen Ginsberg did a poetry reading there after he had come back from an extended trip in Europe and Poland. I remember he was voted the King of the May or something in Poland and he returned to the United States and he gave a poetry reading at the Cinema Theater. Jack Hirschman a UCLA professor and well known poet in the L.A. area gave a midnight poetry reading. Which I by the way recorded and I have both of those on CD's. If you ever want to hear them. They're really good. And then we had the, and I know at one point we had the Ken Kesey Merry Pranksters came, Ken Kesey wasn't there I don't think. But the Merry Pranksters brought their bus and parked in front of the theater. And did a whole happening thing.

00:16:40

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And there was a thing called Happenings, you know, it was a guy named Jack Lieberman, I think that's his name. A friend of ours who did, took over the theater one midnight and did a Happening thing. And John's friend, Christopher Tree had this musical group called, or musical performance thing that he did called Spontaneous Sound. And they would, this fellow Christopher would set up an array of gongs in front of the theater, in front of the stage. In front of the screen and play music after the, a little bit before the movie started and then after the movies were over. He would stay and for those interested would play this unusual very meditative kind of gong music at the theater. So, yeah, we, it was, yeah.

00:17:47

ALISON KOZBERG

And these performances also very popular?

00:17:51

MICHAEL GETZ

Yeah, yeah, well, they were popular, you know, they had their appeal. Some people really liked those.

00:18:04

ALISON KOZBERG

And were also Saturdays at Midnight?

00:18:06

MICHAEL GETZ

Yeah. They were, sometimes they were before the show started while the audience was coming in. There might be like an hour between the last movie of the night, Saturday night being over and midnight. And then there was, while people were coming in, Christopher would be doing his gongs or there would be times when, because it took him so long to set up that he would do it after the Midnight Movies were over. And people would stay, not everybody but some people stayed just to... And he would just do it because he loved to do it. He loved that music.

00:18:45

ALISON KOZBERG

And how late would these evenings often go? Like when he would be playing.

00:18:48

MICHAEL GETZ

Yeah, you know, 2 hours depending on you know what we were showing. But yeah, by the time we had a serial and sometimes we'd have newsreels and other odd things.

00:19:04

ALISON KOZBERG

What happened after the films were over? Does everyone go home?

00:19:07

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, often we went to Canter's, which was a, I don't know if they still exist.

00:19:13

ALISON KOZBERG

They do.

00:19:12

MICHAEL GETZ

We would go there and kind of have something to eat or something. And often we would see people from the movies there. So I don't know.

00:19:26

ALISON KOZBERG

Who would go over to Canter's? You and John and people who came to see the movie also?

00:19:29

MICHAEL GETZ

Yeah, yeah, just friends would go there.

00:19:33

ALISON KOZBERG

And what were the Happenings like...

00:19:35

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, the Happenings, the one that I, and I can't remember for sure if it was Jack Lieberman's or the Merry Pranksters, but one of those and maybe they were both similar. They would, there would be the people in the audience holding 16mm projectors, holding 8mm projectors and they would just be like in random positions throughout the audience. And they would be holding the projectors in their arms, in their hands and just you know, shining movies on the walls and the ceiling and just on the screen. And it was just the mishmash of stuff, lights, there would be probably a movie showing on the screen from our projector. It would be an overdose of visual experience. There would be the light show thing with the gels and the, you know what that whole thing was. With the projector, it was a slide projector, or not a slide projector but the projectors that they used for light shows. I'm not sure.

00:20:49

ALISON KOZBERG

Do remember around what year that would have been?

00:20:49

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, it would have been between '63 and '65. Yeah. And somewhere in there.

00:20:59

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay.

00:20:59

MICHAEL GETZ

Because there was a whole other cultural change happening in the '60s and in L.A. and everywhere. And we were just kind of riding that wave as well with our, you know, another, I mean we were like another experience in a big ocean of new experience that people were having. The love-in's and the Be-in's and the whole hippie thing. And the music scene and the rock and roll and all that stuff was happening. And our little movie thing was I think, you know, I just was, an image I have is that we had just installed an electric fence in our house to keep the bears out. And the way it works it's like a pulse, you know, that's going along this wire. And it just, it's this pulse and it's shocking when you touch that wire. And that's kind of how I see the Midnight Movie because it was a week, regular weekly shock, not a shock, but a jolt to the community of people who were coming. You know, they would get this hit from whatever it was we were showing. And it would always be sort of some new kind of an experience.

00:22:29

ALISON KOZBERG

Do you remember some of the other things happening during Los Angeles during that time that you might have thought were exciting or interesting?

00:22:34

MICHAEL GETZ

Well, you know, there was the, well the L.A. Free Press started. And that was a catalyst. That really made everybody feel like there was a community. Because they had reporting, they were reporting on a lot of different things, cultural, political. So that was a, kind of a checking in point. You could catch that L.A. FREE PRESS every week and see what was happening. And so, you know, in terms of exciting things going on, I, one of the most exciting things was when I got arrested for SCORPIO RISING. And that happened, I can't remember what year it was, but I think it was maybe in '65 or so. And I don't know if you would want me to talk about that, but...

00:23:36

ALISON KOZBERG

Absolutely.

00:23:37

MICHAEL GETZ

And then this is a good time to talk about that?

00:23:39

ALISON KOZBERG

Sure. And other times too. [technical]

00:23:58

MICHAEL GETZ

We were talking about SCORPIO RISING and that whole, that was a very big moment in my life. And it reminded me when I was thinking about it, it was a couple of things I wanted to maybe talk about first. And that is that, when we were doing this Midnight Movies series where John was doing all the programming, pretty much all the programming for the first few years. And I was mostly doing the support, keeping track of the business aspect of it. And he was more the creative aspect of it. But I always felt like I was in training in a certain way. Learning a lot from him. But the other thing was that the Cinema Theater's regular show continued to go on. And that I was more involved with. And one of the things I wanted to mention was that, I don't know if you know this, but there were people that would come, filmmakers would come to me and ask me if I would show their movie as part of a, as part of a, to show their movie to qualify for the Academy Awards.

00:25:10

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

Like, and a couple that come to mind are Leonard Nimoy and Vic Morrow made a movie called Deathwatch, which was based on a play by Jean Genet. This was in I think '64 or '65. And the movie starred Vic Morrow and Paul Mazursky. And Leonard Nimoy was the director or maybe co-director with Vic Morrow. They did it together. But I remember him [Leonard Nimoy] coming and asking if we would show his movie at the theater. And we had some nice exchanges over the course of a couple of weeks. And we did show his movie. And it did... [technical]

00:26:17

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

His movie was well received. It was a kind of experimental movie. But a feature length, you know, with Hollywood actors like Vic Morrow and him. I can't remember if he was already Mr. Spock by then. I don't think he was. I think it was before he became really famous. But anyway, that was one guy. Paul Mazursky, he came to me because he had made this short called LAST YEAR AT MALIBU. And it was a kind of take off on Last YEAR AT MARIENBAD. And it was a hilarious like 20 minute short that he had created. And we showed that. And then and I got to meet him. And so those are, those kinds of things are really fun for me to get to meet these young directors that were just starting out. Another guy that came was a guy named Robert Clouse and Robert Clouse later directed ENTER THE DRAGON with Bruce Lee. And he had a movie that he wanted to qualify for the Academy Awards it was called THE LEGEND OF JIMMY BLUE EYES.

00:27:35

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And I think he came to me because the set designer for that little short film was a guy named Mario Casetta who for some reason we were friends. And he was a friend of mine and a great, a really good artist. And that movie was live action with these kind of specialized cartoon kind of sets that looked like it was half animation and half real. I don't remember the movie too well. But that was fun to show that movie and then I later met Robert Clouse when he was, towards the end of his life, was running a bed and breakfast in Ashland, Oregon. And I went there just to stay. And here was this guy that I had known 20 years earlier. It was really nice to see him again. Let's see, and then other people that came to the movies a lot was, were Tony Bill, the director. He was young then, just getting started. And another guy named oh, Jim McBride. Do you who that is?

00:29:01

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

Jim McBride I think made a movie with Kit Carson. LM Kit Carson and I think it was called, it was a feature length movie where Kit, LM Kit Carson plays a guy making a movie of his life. I can't remember the name of it. But anyway, Jim McBride was the director. It was around that time that the Scorpio Rising thing happened. Because Jim McBride I know was coming to the trial. So let's go back to SCORPIO RISING. Because SCORPIO RISING was Kenneth Angers movie that he, when he finished it he and John knew each other and they were actually, I think John may have helped him get some financing to finish the movie. And John said to Kenneth, let's show it at the Movies 'Round Midnight when you get it finished. And so we showed it at Movies 'Round Midnight.

00:30:29

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then I said to Kenneth, I'd like to show this movie on my regular Cinema Theater show, as a short with another feature. I don't remember what the feature was that we did, but we did show it as a short with another film. And that probably was the thing that, well, that's what happened. I did that, let me back up a minute. And say that, all of the showings at the Midnight Movies - for one thing we set it up so that you had to be a member of Movies 'Round Midnight. You had to actually buy a membership card, because certain films that we were getting from certain distributors insisted that it be a club, a membership. You had to be a member of the club in order for them to release the film for us to show it. I don't remember specifically which companies did that. But the other thing that being a club did, it gave us a little protection from the police, so that we could show movies that maybe, went beyond the normal sexual standards of mainstream movies.

00:31:53

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And the clubness of it, the fact that you had to become a member of Movies 'Round Midnight and actually have a membership card, it cost a quarter, was the kind of a barrier so that, you know, this was a private, almost like a private showing. And they should not bother us. And they didn't. So we were able to show pretty much anything that was being brought out by these underground filmmakers. But when I went from the Midnight show to the regular show, that's when it caused a problem. And that's when the police, I don't know how, or what caused them to get interested in Kenneth's movie, but they did. And within about a week after we were showing it, they came and they took the film and they arrested me. Although only in name only, I never went to the police station. I was never, I never had a mug shot or anything like that, I was never taken down away from the theater.

00:33:00

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

But they did take the film. And I was arrested for showing an obscene movie, that was the charge. And so, so then the first thing I did was, of course, call up Uncle Louie. And say, well guess what, I just got arrested for showing a movie and I thought I better call you and tell you. So now I have to tell you a little bit about Uncle Louie and his court cases. The great thing, there were many great things about Loui Sher. But one of them was his brave American feeling about freedom of speech and the right to show movies, whatever. He just didn't believe in censorship. And he put his money where his mouth is, was. He got busted for *THE LOVERS*, *LES AMANTS*, by Louis Malle in Cleveland. And that took about five years for him to take that case all the way to the United States Supreme Court where he won. He had working for him one of the best censorship lawyers in the country, a guy from New York named Ephraim London. So when I got busted for *SCORPIO RISING*, this is something that he had already gone through, or was in the process of going through. I don't think that case had actually finished.

00:34:44

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

But without hesitating he said, Mike, if you showed it and I trust your judgment, I'm sure this movie's not obscene and let's fight it. And so he hired a great L.A. lawyer, Stanley Fleishman to take it on, and Stanley took on the case. And we strategized about how to deal with the, this case. And it ended up going to trial in the courthouse in downtown L.A. Stanley's approach was to get, at that time, it was the practice, you know, it was the theory that if you had expert witnesses, and I think so now maybe timing, I'm trying to remember. But the standard was that in the legalese that the film could not be deemed obscene if it, unless it... What is the phrase now, it's been so long. It had to have some redeeming social value. If it had any redeeming social merit or social value it could not be called obscene, that's, that's what it was. So all the lawyer had to do was to demonstrate that a movie had some “redeeming social value.”

00:36:19

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

As judged by the community standards of the existing community. So his approach was to get high powered witnesses to testify that this movie was a movie that had redeeming social value. And so he got and I wish I could remember all the witnesses that he had, but I'm pretty sure that he had Martin Ritt who was a well known director at the time. And Haskell Wexler, who was at that time working as a cinematographer for Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf. And Ruth Hirschman who was Jack Hirschman's wife and was a prominent, was I think a program director of the, I can't remember the exact call letters of this radio station, it was the non-commercial radio station of L.A. at that time. KXPR, K, I forget exactly what it was. But she was the program director. And so those three I'm pretty sure testified. And there may have been a couple of others. And another, and so I guess I should maybe talk a little bit about the movie itself. SCORPIO RISING was Kenneth Anger's movie about a motorcycle gang or motorcycle cult and it had homosexual overtones.

00:37:57

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

It was 30 minutes long. And the most wonderful sound track of any movie at the time. All these pop wonderful pop teenage bop songs that I used to, I watched that movie so many times that I would dream with that sound track, that was the sound track of all my dreams for many months. As I dealt with the court case. Anyway, so because it had some... what Stanley thought was like threatening homosexual overtones, he thought it would be a good idea to have women on the jury. And so it was an all woman jury. Is what we ended up with. But it didn't work, 'cause we lost at the, had lost that trial. And the reason why we lost I think is because the prosecuting attorney, passed around these stills from the movie that looked like guys holding erections. Actually they were riding on broomsticks but the blurriness of the movie gave you an angle of these stills that was presented to the jury, was such that they thought it was obscene.

00:39:37

MICHAEL GETZ (CONTINUED)

And they didn't buy any of the expert witness stuff at all. And even, and another funny thing about that, was that at the time I had been running at the Cinema Theater special Saturday morning shows for the Mt. Saint Mary's students. And I became really good friends with Sister Mary Corita who was a nun at the Mt. Saint Mary's school and she was also on the verge of fame as an artist. She's famous for her, I think they're called seriagraphs or these prints that she made.

[END OF TAPE 3]

TAPE 4: MIKE GETZ

00:00:19

MIKE GETZ

So I wanted to, to say that the, so during the, so during the trial, Sister Mary Corita would come with her nun friends, and they would just sit there. And then whenever there was a break, I would go out into the hallway and they would come over to me and we would talk, and, and we, I mean, actually we were friends and they were very interested and supportive.

00:00:47

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And, and, and, you know, the jury, these women saw me talking to this, to these delightful nuns, and still I, I thought, oh, well this is, you know, great that they're here talking to me, because how could anybody think I was a bad guy if the nuns liked me, you know? So that didn't work. [laugh] They still found me guilty.

00:01:15

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And, and, and so then, then, so then Stanley, who, who was really brilliant, he said, well don't worry, we're, we're going to win this on appeal. And so he appealed it to the, the, whatever the next level of appeals court was, and, and he, all he had to do basically was point out that it was by, by passing stills around to the jury was like taking a piece of art and cutting a slice of maybe a nipple or something, and, and, and then saying that the whole piece was obscene.

00:01:59

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And so it was thrown out and, and overturned. And then we brought the movie back and, and, and had a big, had a big show. And it was, it was, it got a lot of publicity in L.A. at the time. And when we brought it back, it was well received and we did, I think Louie made a lot of his money back by showing it again at the theater, and, and San Francisco and other theaters.

00:02:35

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Another thing about dealing with Kenneth Anger was we had a showing at the Movies 'Round Midnight that John talked about in his interview, about this benefit for Cameron his, the woman who was a local artist, well known artist in the community and was, had been in one of Kenneth's movies called the INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME.

00:03:09

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And so she, I guess, needed some money or something and so John decided to show, have a special showing as a benefit for her. And he wanted to show that movie, the INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME, which was Kenneth's movie. And my recollection of how that all went down was that Kenneth had lost his print.

00:03:41

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Actually the print that, they didn't have very many prints, they maybe only had a couple of prints. He didn't have a print. Curtis Harrington, another local filmmaker at the time had a print, and Kenneth, and John knew that, and John went to Curtis Harrington to get a copy of the print to show that night at this benefit for Cameron.

00:04:12

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Well these were all temperamental, fiery personalities, and, and I don't know if-- I think John thought that he had Kenneth's permission to get the print from Curtis Harrington to show that night. But the night of the showing, Kenneth appeared, I think after John got the agreement and after all the publicity had gone out, Kenneth changed his mind.

00:04:43

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And said, no, I don't want you to show it. I want my print back. So the night of the showing, again, full house, big long line waiting to get in. And Kenneth Anger had a briefcase that he was walking up and down the sidewalk with. And sticking out of this briefcase was this long, curved dagger. It must have been about, like, two feet long.

00:05:08

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And it was, you know, in the, the, the flap of the briefcase covered, covered it, part, the handle was sticking out on this end, and the curved blade was sticking out behind him. And he was just walking up and down the sidewalk carrying this briefcase with a dagger sticking out, just, you know, with this frown on his face, and looking angry and, and he was accompanied by several, three or four very husky guys in their full motorcycle garb, you know, regalia.

00:05:51

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Curtis Harrington also came to the showing with his group of sort of bodyguards. They were all dressed in suits and ties. During, so the movie starts, like I say, five, probably close to 500 people in the audience. There were a few little showings of, of other movies shown, and then I know that at one point Cameron was in the projection booth, and she was doing tarot cards.

00:06:31

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

She was reading the tarot, she was spreading out her tarot cards. She was kind of known as an, as an occult, some people called her a witch, other people called her a priestess. I mean, she had this exotic reputation. So she was up there doing something with tarot cards during the showing, up in the projection booth. And so it's a simple little room with projectors in it that overlooks the whole theater.

00:07:00

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

At some point Kenneth somehow got into the projection booth and grabbed all these cards, and threw them out into the, through the open porthole, into the audience and all these cards were fluttering down over the audience, they had no idea what it was all about. And then after the movie was shown, both teams, the, the guys in suits and the guys in motorcycle garb kind of surrounded the projection booth door to try to get the print of the INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME

00:07:43

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And they began fighting with each other. And, oh, this was actually the end, the end of the show. This was the end of the night. The movie is off, we're finished, people were starting to exit the theater. And they were, they were, these, these six guys were fighting with each other, trying to get into the projection booth to get the print, and they started fighting, and all I know is that I was downstairs in the lobby, and I see these guys kind of tumbling head over heels, fighting with each other.

00:08:24

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Blood, you know, on their faces, and blood is, you know, squirting out everywhere. Not quite like that. But anyway, it was bloody, and they came rolling down the stairs and into the lobby and continued to fight all the way out onto the sidewalk, and we called the police. My assistant manager that night, his name was Stu Fox, and he managed to get the print and swipe it, or, or grabbed it before anybody else got it, and took it and put it in our, in our office where it was, it was held safely.

00:08:59

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Until we, later, through negotiations with Kenneth and Curtis, and, you know, after all this was, all this madness, craziness was over, in a calm way with their lawyers and Kenneth, with Curtis' lawyer and Kenneth's, I think he had calmed down after a while. Finally figured out who, who would get the print. I, I don't remember actually who did end up with it, but that problem was solved.

00:09:27

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But that was pretty exciting night for, for everybody, especially for, for us who saw this battle thing coming down the, the stairs. And, and for the audience who was watching this movie and finding these things flowing down over their heads from the projection booth.

00:09:46

ALISON KOZBERG

What was Kenneth's relationship to the theater after that [unintelligible]?

00:09:50

MIKE GETZ

Well, you know, Kenneth, being a creative, talented person, I always felt that, you know, I was open to Kenneth, you know. I, he had a good argument that he presented, he's a pretty articulate fellow. He could get angry and, and mostly he was angry a lot, you know? Very critical guy, very opinionated guy.

00:10:29

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But we maintained a good relationship, because we helped him out. You know, he got a lot of fame out of being arrested and having, he wasn't arrested, his film was arrested. But it, it, it became probably more famous than it would have if it hadn't been arrested. And I think he benefited from that, and I think he felt, I don't think he would ever acknowledge it, but he certainly had nothing against us.

00:10:57

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

For me it was a little excitement in my life. And I didn't mind it. So I don't know how I would have answered that question at the, you know, back then, but in hindsight it's kind of a nice story in my life as a theater manager.

00:11:21

ALISON KOZBERG

Are there other filmmaker visits that you remember? Other times artists came with their films?

00:11:25

MIKE GETZ

Well I know that Stan Brakhage came, because we had the, I think right from the beginning, the first year that John, John and I worked together, we had something called The L.A. Filmmakers Festival. I think that's what it was called. Do, do you know?

00:11:44

ALISON KOZBERG

Yes.

00:11:45

MIKE GETZ

It was called The L.A. Filmmakers Festival, yeah. And I, and, and that was a, a thing where we invited people to submit their films and then we had three, I think we had three judges, usually it would be John and two other filmmakers. I believe the first year might have been, might have been Jack Hirschman, and I can't remember. I know Stan Brakhage was there one year as the, as a judge.

00:12:14

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I'm not sure if it was the first or second or third. We had three festivals, and one a year. The, and the festival, we, anybody could submit their film, there was no prejudging, but we just started showing them. And we showed them until we finished showing them. I mean, it's, they usually took all night long and ended up in the, like, in the early morning. I mean, late morning, like dawn.

00:12:44

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then the judges would watch them all and select the best film. Usually we just had one prize that I recall. I remember the first year the winner was Stanton Kaye's film GEORG was one of the winners. He either won the first year or the second year. Seems like one of the, one year there was a guy named [sounds like] Jet Cling who, who had made a film, but I can't remember that title.

00:13:15

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But, I know that Brakhage came out to judge that festival, and I know that while he was there visiting, we went out to Wallace Berman's house, or to Dean Stockwell's house, or somebody's house. Oh, no, maybe it was Dean Stockwell's house. In any case, Bruce Conner, filmmaker from the Bay Area, San Francisco, had made a film called BREAKAWAY. And it was a three minute film of a woman who's known now, but I can't remember her name.

00:13:58

ALISON KOZBERG

Tony Basil?

00:14:00

MIKE GETZ

Tony Basil dancing to a song. Do you remember the song?

00:14:08

ALISON KOZBERG

The song is "Breakaway."

00:14:10

MIKE GETZ

Oh, that's the name of the song, okay. So anyway, but Bruce Conner made that movie, Dean Stockwell made a movie of Bruce Conner making that movie. And, and so he invited John and Stan and, and me to come, and others, to come and look at the, at, at Dean Stockwell's movie. Which was about 30 minutes long, or 40 minutes long. I don't know why it was so long.

00:14:40

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But anyway, it was, and, and so it was, we, it was shown that night, I believe it was Stockwell's house, I'm not sure. But so I remember Stan was there for that. So he, he came out for that. You know, other, other filmmakers that came to, to our shows were, there was some L.A. filmmakers that came, but mostly not so much.

00:15:19

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

At least I didn't know, I didn't know, there may have been people that, you know, Jack Nicholson was a friend of those guys, but he wasn't well known then. So he might have been there and I wouldn't have known.

00:15:36

ALISON KOZBERG

What was Stan Brakhage like?

00:15:37

MIKE GETZ

Well, Stan Brakhage, I actually went and visited Stan at his house in Rollinsville. And he, he was a really wonderful man. I would say very intense. I mean, you know, he just, he was intense. He, he was a very serious person, I think. And, and he seemed to be operating on another level, a level, a higher level. Much more, he took, he took everything very seriously.

00:16:15

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Even joyful events, but not in a negative way, serious. Just that he was friendly, helpful. I remember when, when I started, I started a, a little film distribution company of my own back when I, after I moved to where I live now, called Woods Eye Film Programs. And it was, I had this idea of, like, distributing underground movies to colleges.

00:16:54

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And just to see if, you know, I could get it out there. Get films out there more. And I asked him if he would contribute a film, or consider letting me use one of his movies as part of the program, and, and he wrote back and he said, you know, I, he says, it's, we can't judge whether this is a worthwhile project in our life time. You know, go ahead and do it.

00:17:19

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And, you know, a hundred years from now we'll see if it, if, I mean, that's just the way he was. You know, he doesn't, he didn't, he was open and helpful to people, me. Just a good man I respected a lot, yeah. And I think his, his films are kind of, probably among the most mysterious of all these filmmakers. You know, they're really, he wrote about them himself, I know, and other people wrote about them. But they're very interesting to watch.

00:18:01

ALISON KOZBERG

And what were Bruce Conner and Dean Stockwell like?

00:18:05

MIKE GETZ

Well I really don't know them, you know.

00:18:09

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay.

00:18:09

MIKE GETZ

I spent one evening there. I know they came to the movies a lot, and, but I don't, they weren't pals of mine.

00:18:19

ALISON KOZBERG

And where, where in Los Angeles were you living during this time, when you were working?

00:18:25

MIKE GETZ

I lived in Hollywood, I had two places I lived. I lived in a place, you know, you said you interviewed Lewis Teague, he lived in an apartment above me and it was in this place in the lower Hollywood Hills, where in order to get to the apartment you had to take an elevator in this isolated tower.

00:18:48

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then you walked across this plank to enter the apartment. It was actually the apartment, either his or mine, was later used in a movie with Elliot Gould, what the hell was it called? I can't remember the name of that movie, either.

00:19:07

ALISON KOZBERG

It was an Altman movie.

00:19:08

MIKE GETZ

Yeah.

00:19:09

ALISON KOZBERG

It was an Altman movie, a noir. As you were describing it I was thinking of that film.

00:19:17

MIKE GETZ

Yeah, because it's got a beautiful view of L.A. from the, from the apartment. Small little apartment. Anyway, I lived there when I was doing this work.

00:19:32

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay, I wanted to go back a little bit and talk about, you'd said you, just about the physical plan, and the business of just [word?] in a theater. What kind of projectors did you have?

00:19:46

MIKE GETZ

Oh.

00:19:45

ALISON KOZBERG

When you say you handled the business, what exactly do you mean? Things like that.

00:19:48

MIKE GETZ

Well, the, first of all I should, I should point out that one of the reasons why we were...

00:20:02

MALE

Hold on one second.

00:20:01

MIKE GETZ

...able to do so much was that we had this wonderful projectionist named Bob Evans who worked for the, for us. And he was a, a, a great fellow, and a whiz, he built 16 millimeter projectors. And, or at least he modified them so that they would work in movie theaters in a really good way. He was our projectionist, and so we were able to, so we had this arc light projector, which means that it's not, you know, nowadays they use bulbs.

00:20:44

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But then they had arc projection with, which is two carbon arcs on these runners that, and, and as they interact they create a flame. And that's the light source for movies. Was until the Xenon bulbs were invented. So when I was running the movie theater, if you ran a movie in 35 millimeter, you had to have two projectors. And then you would run a 20 minute reel on one projector, and then there would be a moment where the projectionist would have to push the button to turn off one and turn on the second projector.

00:21:26

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Which would then continue, would continue on. And even today you see these little dots on the right hand corner of the screen to, and those, those were there to alert the projectionist when to push the button to start the next reel. Now they don't use that system anymore. But that's what we had then, and, and, and what kind of projectors they were?

00:21:51

ALISON KOZBERG

Well, 16?

00:21:52

MIKE GETZ

We had a, we had two, two 35 millimeter projectors, and then we had one 16 millimeter projector up there. Yeah. And I think I'm going to have to take a break, another, sorry, water all of a sudden. [technical]

00:22:10

MIKE GETZ

Oh, I wanted to tell you about CHELSEA GIRLS, and you asked me about projection and it reminded me that my Uncle Louie, he actually somehow ended up being the distributor for CHELSEA GIRLS, that's the Andy Warhol movie. And I forget what year, but it was probably around '60, it could have been '67, it could have been '66, but it was probably one of those two years.

00:22:39

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Because I was in, I pretty much left L.A. in January of '67. But I came back a couple times during that year. But my recollection is that Louie somehow ended up being the distributor for that movie. And that movie, I don't know if you know this, but was shown with both 35 millimeter projectors going at the same time.

00:23:10

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Because it was a double screen movie. They showed two 35 millimeter movies at the same time, that's the way it was set up to be shown. I can't remember how the sound worked, but it did have sound. And I don't know if, I think it was like one side or the other, you heard the sound for one side or the other. The other was just silent, or whatever was going on you couldn't hear.

00:23:42

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

This is, you know, just my recollection. Anyway, it was a big, it got a lot of attention because, because it was long. I think it was at least three hours long if you showed it side by side. And it was unusual in the sense that you had these two images, totally unrelated to each other, going at the same time. Andy Warhol, as a filmmaker, was certainly unusual.

00:24:11

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And we showed Andy Warhol's films, including SLEEP, which, that's another story. But, but anyway, we did show, we did show that movie, CHELSEA GIRLS, and I remember Andy Warhol came out and we had breakfast with him. My Uncle Louie and I, and Andy Warhol and his entourage of support group sitting around having breakfast one morning before, well, that weekend that the CHELSEA GIRLS movie opened in San, in L.A.

00:24:43

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

So that was, I got to meet Andy Warhol, that was kind of interesting and fun. And then prior to that, we did show Andy Warhol's SLEEP. And that was, that became a very famous showing, too. That was a thing where, alright, so Andy Warhol made this movie SLEEP. It's a six hour long movie, silent, of a man sleeping.

00:25:11

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Now at the time that we showed it, we didn't know too much about it. But we, but that's how it was described to us. It was, I hadn't seen it, but we decided to show it. John was the instigator of that. John Fles. And we advertised it as Andy Warhol's six hour movie, SLEEP. So daring it may never show again. And of course we sold out.

00:25:46

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

We just showed it one night, on a midweek. And we, so the first shot is a, basically this, you see this guy, you see this guy lying on his back, and all you can see is like from his chest to, to just below his stomach. Just, that's, that's the angle. So the camera's like here, you see his, his stomach and chest, and that's all you see for about the first 15 or 20 minutes.

00:26:22

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And nothing is happening. No sound, nothing. So after about 10 minutes of that, one of the funny things was that, well let's see, after, after about the 10 minutes of that, then I think there was a cut, so maybe it, maybe it was 10 minutes, there's a cut, and then you see the guy's face. And, and as soon as it cuts the audience bursts into applause, you know?

00:27:00

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then I remember somebody, you see, you see the guy's face and somebody runs up to the front of the, of the theater, and stands back, and yells to, yells, "wake up!" to the guy in the movie. But that, that was the light moment, because shortly after that people started coming out and asking for their money back. And they were just pissed off.

00:27:32

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Oh, I think in our advertisement we did say something like, absolutely no refunds. I'm not positive, but I think that's what we did. I know that's what I would do if I were doing it today. Anyway, so pretty soon people started coming out, asking for their money back. And I, I for some reason was really reluctant to give people their money back.

00:27:57

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I just felt like, you know, it, we didn't, it wasn't falsely advertised, we just didn't, you know, we just said this is Andy, by that time Andy Warhol was really famous. It wasn't like his first movie. He was well known, and people knew that he was odd. So I think he had, he had, didn't he make EMPIRE, a movie of, of the Empire State Building that just is a single shot of the Empire State Building for 12 hours or something?

00:28:26

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And that was also done, before, I think SLEEP. But in any case people came out and started asking for their money back, and I, I, I didn't want to do it. And then they got angry that I, I wasn't giving them their money back. And people then, one guy got really angry, and he was, like, in my face, his face was, you know, he was really upset and angry and red faced.

00:28:51

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And he says, if you don't give me our money back, I'm going to have all these people rush to the screen, just tear the, tear the thing down. And, well that got me a little nervous, so I, it was funny because the guy that was standing with me, my friend Mario Casetta, the guy I mentioned earlier who had done this JIMMY BLUE EYES movie, was with me.

00:29:17

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And he said, Mike, he said, Mike, come, you've got to get out, you know, tell, tell people that you're going to come right back and let's go out and talk about it. So this guy, Mario kind of, so I said to the people, okay, give me, give me a minute, I'm going to go out and consult with my colleague here, and I'll be right back.

00:29:37

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

So we walked, we walked out into the street, onto the sidewalk, and, and Mario was telling me, Mike, you, you got to do something because these, you know, they're, they will tear your theater up. And, and I started thinking, oh, you know, what would Uncle Louie say? And so, so we did go back in and we did, I think what we did was, we gave out passes, and we set up a thing.

00:30:04

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I'd never had that experience before, so I wasn't really prepared. But we, we managed to set up some kind of a, a thing where people would get passes to come back and see another movie. And that seemed to work. And that satisfied most, everybody actually, that was upset and wanted their money back.

00:30:26

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And, and so, but there were people that stayed, including John, and watched the whole movie. He thought it was kind of like a, an extraordinary experience. He described it to me as being really great, a great experience for him, personally. And I just was happy to sort of have survived the evening the with the theater still intact, and having shown something that was definitely unusual. So that was the, that was that story.

00:31:01

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay. Let's go ahead and talk about what happened at the Cinema Theater after John Fles left.

00:31:07

MIKE GETZ

Oh, yeah.

00:31:11

ALISON KOZBERG

And when that was and what happened.

00:31:12

MIKE GETZ

So after about three years, I guess, John was really feeling like he had kind of done what he had wanted to do. He, he was, his interest, I, I think John is a real, a real artistic soul. He's certainly not interested in pursuing, you know, a career for financial rewards. He just wanted to make sure that what he was doing was the best thing that he could be doing for himself at any given time.

00:31:54

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And a lot of that had to do with his, he was influenced by this, this man Christopher Tree, and his, the kind of music that Christopher was doing. And John really wanted to work more with Christopher. And, and develop that aspect of his artistic talent, and artistic, and not, not so much to be a show person or a performer for other people, but because that's just what he loved to do.

00:32:21

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And he felt that this was his true self. And he was interested in doing what his, you know, what was his calling, what was right for him. And I think he felt that he had pretty much played out that whole midnight movie scene, and wanted to move on. So he came to me and he said, you know, I'm, I want you to buy me out.

00:32:44

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

We made a deal and then, and, and then I think he worked, we worked together for a little bit longer, and he kind of made sure that I knew how to take it. Because it was successful, and it would have been, in my opinion, a shame to let it just go by the wayside, just because he was leaving. And I felt like I was, I had developed a lot of know how in that three year period of working with him.

00:33:16

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

So I kept it on. And I kept doing it after he left. And, and, and then after he left, and I think even before he left we started the thing in San Francisco, and then, and then I went, and then after about a year or two on my own, I realized that I could do it and create a, a circuit of midnight showings. So we changed the name to Underground Cinema 12.

00:33:57

ALISON KOZBERG

What year was this around?

00:33:57

MIKE GETZ

Well it was around 1960, late 1966.

00:34:03

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay.

00:34:02

MIKE GETZ

I think the first program of Underground Cinema 12 was in 19, was in January of 1967. Because that's when I pretty much told my uncle, I said, in order for me to set this up in all your theaters, you know, and he had about 17 or 18 theaters, what I wanted to do was to go to each theater and explain to the manager of that theater how to do this, how to work it.

00:34:28

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Because it required that we put a 16 millimeter projector in each theater, which, which Louie paid for. And, and, and it, and it required, you know, working with the managers who were used to running art movies, just like the Cinema Theater, all these managers in all these other towns were running their art theaters and, and they had been doing it the way they had been doing it for years.

00:34:59

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

They were, and so I had to kind of win them over to this new concept. But, but my feeling was that it would be successful everywhere, because it was being successful in this, in these two towns, San Francisco and L.A. And so what, what Louie did for me was, I said, well I'd like to have a car, and a trailer, and I'll just drive around to each city and set, and set this up in each town.

00:35:35

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And, and that's what I did. He gave me a really nice Pontiac convertible, and a 21 foot Shasta trailer, and I just, and, and in January of '67 I just took off. And it took me about almost a year of driving around and I had spent, you know, time in Columbus with, with my family there. And came back to L.A. We basically had it, the circuit set up in three parts.

00:36:09

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

There was, like, maybe four or five cities, and then there was a break, and then maybe a three or four week break, and then another four or five cities. And, and the way it was set up was that each city showed the movie on Saturday at midnight, and then they would take the film to the post office and send it to the next city.

00:36:30

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then they would show it Saturday midnight. And then the same, so basically I would need one print of every film, and I would, the guy in L.A. would be the first theater. He would play it on his, on his midnight show, and then it would go, he would send it to the next guy. That was San Francisco. And so on and so forth around the country.

00:36:51

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And it made this big circuit, and then came back and then he would take the films apart. You know, there would often be like seven or eight films on a 90 minute program. And then they would be sent back to either the filmmaker directly, or to the distributor, whichever, whoever I got the film from. And I started that in 1967, and, and it was during that period of setting that up that I realized I could live somewhere, anywhere, and do this.

00:37:24

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And that's when I decided to move to where I'm living now in, outside of Nevada City. And, and the whole, the whole great thing about that was, I thought, was coming from Columbus, and growing up with very little stimulus from anything outside the mainstream, I mean there really, Midwestern towns, I mean, L.A. and New York and San Francisco are, were pushing the envelope in the '60s.

00:37:59

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But that wasn't so much the case in, in the Midwest. And in smaller towns. They were still pretty, pretty much the way they had been for the previous 10 years or so. So it was exciting to me to be able to take this energy and send it to all these towns. And, and also it was a good thing for the filmmakers, because they then were able to show their films all over the place instead of just in one or two places in New York and L.A. and San Francisco.

00:38:37

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

So it worked out good for me personally, it worked out good for the towns where the audiences were exposed to these unusual films. And it gave a little bit more money back to the filmmakers, because we did pay for every showing. And, and I kept doing that from my home in Nevada City, outside of Nevada City, until probably the late '70s. By that time things had come along, and midnight movies weren't the big new thing anymore.

00:39:13

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

They were replaced by television, "Saturday Night Live" was, became a big competitor. Because people would rather see that kind of craziness. And then, you know, the films also weren't as great in the late '70s as they were at the beginning. But we had a good long run with that special, Underground Cinema 12 Program.

00:39:48

ALISON KOZBERG

Now how were you choosing which films, which films to screen in the beginning?

00:39:51

MIKE GETZ

Okay, so that, that really was a, a, a thing that I kind of got into. I would watch, I would watch all these movies. I mean, I watched literally every night. Once I started doing this, I watched all the movies. And I would, I would put them together, I would just find some way to put films together. And if you look at my programs, [laugh] I think they're kind of funny.

00:40:19

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And fun and more, there was more, I was trying to relate to the audience, I was trying to come up with stuff that would be, that would provoke them, that would make them want to come to the, to the movies. By the writing and the titles of the programs, I, I would, so... [technical]

end of tape 4

TAPE 5: MIKE GETZ

00:00:21

MIKE GETZ

One of the things that I'm really proud of is this Underground Cinema 12 Series. Because I think it's kind of unique, and the way I describe these films. I did all these descriptions myself, pretty much. Although I would take quotes and other things, too.

00:00:48

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But, then putting programs together so that films rubbed up against each other that, in a way that I thought would be provocative and, and would be, give the audience a really interesting, kind of different kind of experience. I don't know if anybody else ever thinks that, or, or thought of that.

00:01:10

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But, it did work for a while. I mean, that circuit was pretty successful. And I would get films, every night at home, and I lived in this little house out in the middle of a hundred acres, and we would just get out the 16 millimeter projector, in fact it was always out. And that's what we'd do every night, my wife and I would watch these movies.

00:01:40

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I would get movies every day in the mail from people all over, from all over the world, even. That knew that I had this circuit, and they would have a way to at least get a little bit of money for their movie. I even had a guy once come to me, his, do you know who Richard Beymer is? Does that mean anything to you? He was the star of WEST SIDE STORY.

00:02:07

MIKE GETZ

He played the lead. He made a, a kind of an underground movie after that. A feature length underground movie. He actually came up, brought his movie up to my house and we watched it. Curt McDowell from San Francisco used to come and visit. Other filmmakers, Fred Padula was, actually became a really, and still is, a very close friend of mine.

00:02:33

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

He's a filmmaker from Mill Valley area. And so, but that's what we would do, and then we would, and then I'd put these programs together. So I don't know where I was going with that, but, anyway, that's what.

00:02:55

ALISON KOZBERG

And were you mostly getting your films from the filmmakers themselves? Or from distributors?

00:02:55

MIKE GETZ

Oh, okay, that's what I wanted to mention, was the Ann Arbor Film Festival. Okay, so the Ann Arbor Film Festival, I don't know when they first started, but before John left I think they would actually, had actually been running. And that was a very important festival, along with the Foothill College Film Festival.

00:03:20

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

They were festivals that featured underground movies, or student movies, or independent short movies, or whatever. The Ann Arbor Festival was probably the oldest and the most prestigious. And it actually ran for a week. And I would go to Ann Arbor every year, and I had a deal with the director of the festival that I would make a selection of eight programs using films that were, that I saw there at the festival.

00:03:49

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And again, you know, I would put them together in my kind of wacky way, but every year I had a, a, one of the, one of the eight week series would be devoted to films from the Ann Arbor Festival. And then I would do the same thing at Foothill, Foothill College Film Festival. There was even one year I went to Belgium, they had a festival at a little seacoast town called Knokke-Le-Zoute.

00:04:24

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And it was an international film festival of experimental films. And, and actually the year that I went, which was probably 1964 or '65, Yoko Ono was there. And she, the thing that, because the festival there is held in this kind of palace. And she was there in a black bag. She would just enclose herself in this black bag, and place herself in the middle of this lobby of this incredibly ornate, old castle.

00:05:06

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

With spiraling stair steps and, and there would be this black bag and everybody knew that Yoko Ono was in there. She would be in there for, like, hours. Anyway, that was...

00:05:22

ALISON KOZBERG

Now were you screening features during this time as well?

00:05:22

MIKE GETZ

Yeah. People would send me features. I'd have to look at those programs to refresh my memories, but, but yeah, I would get features from people.

00:05:41

ALISON KOZBERG

And what was it like having [word?] in so many different kinds of places in America? How were different towns different? How was the different programming in, or having screenings in Los Angeles as opposed to Columbus?

00:05:54

MIKE GETZ

Well I, I have to say that I went to each town for the opening night, and then I never went back. So I don't know specifically how audiences reacted, except that I know that they kept coming. In fact, after that year, 1967, where I actually was at these opening nights for all these theaters, I then moved to, in 1960, January of '68 I moved to the country, and I never went back to the showings.

00:06:29

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Although we had a showing, one of the, one of the cities was Sacramento, and in fact there were two theaters in Sacramento that showed the series. And occasionally I would go there because it's like, like an hour and a half drive. But not very often. From my house, and, and I would, I would attend there. But I would get reports from the managers, and they would tell me, you know, don't play this kind of, don't play this again, that didn't go well.

00:06:57

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And I would get some feedback from, from them on a weekly basis. So that helped me decide what was good and what audiences were liking. Mostly they would send me positive things. Oh, bring that back on the next series, or, or that's, that's a winner, you know, people loved that and you could show that every week and people would love it.

00:07:22

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

You know, there would be films like that. And, you know, movie, I don't know if you ever heard of a movie called VICIOUS CYCLES. That was really popular. And that was just these guys on motorcycles and little scooters, but they were, there were no, it was stop motion animation. So there were no motorcycles, they were just in this position.

00:07:47

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And they were, it was the scooter guys, the timid scooter guys, and the big motorcycle buff guys, or, and the battle between them as they were, VICIOUS CYCLES. But there were no vehicles, just, it was just them on their stop motion thing. It was very clever. You know, some of the more popular movies with those Midwestern and, and my Underground Cinema 12 Audience were not, were, were the most commercial and the more mainstream type. But I played everything, and I, I didn't let that keep me from playing unusual movies and...

00:08:25

ALISON KOZBERG

What were some of the more commercial movies that you screened?

00:08:31

MIKE GETZ

Well, as it went on I got, I got to play feature, feature films from the major studios, like THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME, music films were really popular. Jimi Hendrix, Beatles, Stones, whatever I could get my hands on. Those movies were always popular. And as it went on, you know, the, those kind of films, and something like UP IN SMOKE, of course, would be one that I would show a lot.

00:09:11

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then along came a movie called THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW, which totally changed my life, because that was such a monster movie for me that it basically, probably wrote the death warrant for the midnight movie concept, the Underground Cinema 12 concept. Because it was so popular, and people weren't interested in, they were interested in going to see that every Saturday night. And that's what, that was one of the factors that helped, I mean, that, that, that contributed to the end of that, that whole series.

00:09:52

ALISON KOZBERG

Did you screen that film as part of that series, or...

00:09:53

MIKE GETZ

Yes.

00:09:54

ALISON KOZBERG

...not? Oh, you did.

00:09:55

MIKE GETZ

Yes.

00:09:55

ALISON KOZBERG

Did you have a live performance in conjunction with the [unintelligible]

00:09:56

MIKE GETZ

[overlapping] Yes, mostly, yeah. It was spontaneous. It wasn't, in Cleveland, I mean, in Cleveland it became really a big deal. But almost everywhere else it was, you know, there was something, it was a phenomenon, I've never seen anything like it, ever.

00:10:17

ALISON KOZBERG

Um...

00:10:18

MIKE GETZ

And that lasted like five years.

00:10:21

ALISON KOZBERG

You said before that you thought that things kind of changed between the late '60s to the late '70s. And I can, and you're kind of talking about it, you started screening more, bigger features.

00:10:32

MIKE GETZ

Yeah.

00:10:34

ALISON KOZBERG

Was that the major change that you saw during those years?

00:10:36

MIKE GETZ

Well I think they were, that combined with the, with, in my perception, the, there weren't as many underground movies being made, at least that's what I recall. Or, there were a couple of places where the audience got a little too violent, and we had to shut them down. There were two places where, there was a place in San Diego where the audience just was too wild.

00:11:08

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And we, and Lou, well we all agreed that this is not good. You know, there could be, somebody could get hurt. They were actually bringing, people would come in and bring wads of newspaper to the, to the shows, this was in San Diego at one theater. And then they would, other people would come, like a whole row of people would come early, and then another, they would take up a whole row.

00:11:41

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then, you know, another group would come, and they would move down, like, three rows down and take up the whole row. And they would ball up these newspapers and throw them, have newspaper fights. But when they started lighting them with matches, that's when we said, okay, that's, let's stop. This is just too crazy.

00:12:00

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

So that was one thing that happened in San Diego. There was another thing in Columbus, actually, where they just trashed the whole toilet, the whole restroom. Just violent, you know, tore up toilets and it was a mess. So when the audience got a little bit too wild, we, we just decided it wasn't worth it. And then, and then, you know, so that was just one of the things, but there were other things.

00:12:30

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I noticed that, I didn't bring them with me, but I saw, I think I brought, well maybe 20 programs of eight, eight shows each. But it actually went all the way up to, I know there was one I saw, the hundredth program. So that's a hundred times eight, that's eight, 800, is that right? Eight hundred programs? 800 weeks? How many years is that?

00:13:08

ALISON KOZBERG

Two and a half?

00:13:08

MIKE GETZ

Ten and a half?

00:13:10

ALISON KOZBERG

Two and a half.

00:13:11

MIKE GETZ

800?

00:13:12

ALISON KOZBERG

Oh, hundred weeks.

00:13:14

MIKE GETZ

Yeah, 800 weeks, 52 weeks a year. So that's over four, eight years. A hundred is four years, right? Over four years? So, anyways.

00:13:31

ALISON KOZBERG

So you had said that your audiences kind of changed. The people in the audience was also, were also changing during this time?

00:13:37

MIKE GETZ

Yeah, I would think so, yeah.

00:13:38

ALISON KOZBERG

And this, how about the size of the audience?

00:13:41

MIKE GETZ

Yeah, I think that they started to dwindle in the late '70s, in the mid to late '70s.

00:13:50

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay, and did you through the late '70s, when the series ended, did you continue to screen short and experimental films? Or did you...

00:13:58

MIKE GETZ

I think I kind of stopped towards the end of the '70s, late '70s I stopped. I mean, I just, I don't know why, whether it was there were, I just, as the, as the, I would lose a, a theater, I would just, it started to narrow down. I started looking about for some other work to make a living.

00:14:25

FEMALE

Can I ask a question? About anything changing within, like, the theater business also affecting your work? Or structures of them?

00:14:38

MIKE GETZ

Well, you know, another interesting thing, I don't know, you know, at a certain point, Louie's theaters went to porno. They stopped being art theaters and they went, became porno theaters. I don't, you know, for many years we continued running the midnight movies at midnight, even though during the day those same theaters were porno theaters.

00:15:05

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I think that might have contributed a little bit to the, the audience perception of the whole thing. You know, it's guilt by association sort of a thing. I mean, it didn't happen right away, but over a period of time maybe those people that had been going continued to go after the theaters went to porno policy. They would continue to go to the midnight shows. But, you know, after a while they might have thought, you know, this is not so great. I don't know, but that could have had something to do with it.

00:15:40

ALISON KOZBERG

Do you know when the theaters started to become porno theaters?

00:15:45

MIKE GETZ

I would say in the, you know, I'm guessing, but '73, '74, something like that. I, I'm not positive.

00:15:58

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay.

00:16:01

MIKE GETZ

At first I didn't really pay much attention to it, because I've never really cared. I mean, I was just focused on that Midnight Movie thing. And the managers were the same. But I think that they went to a porno policy because, again, Louie perceives it that that was a way to be more successful. He was having trouble with the business as an art theater, strictly art theater business.

00:16:33

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

The good art movies, the bigger theater chains would grab them. And then he would, you know, be, he says, I've been your customer for all these years, and now you get a movie that I could actually make some money with, and you give it to my competitor. That happens all the time. So he said, you know, these porno movies, people want to see them.

00:16:56

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I can...they're cheaper. You know, I can make, I can make more money. And so he, at that point he was more interested in making money than being an art theater owner. And then he eventually sold out to other companies, like Landmark bought a lot of his theaters.

00:17:19 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And when was that?

00:17:20 **MIKE GETZ**

I think that was towards the early '80s.

00:17:25 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Okay.

00:17:25 **MIKE GETZ**

Yeah.

00:17:25 **ALISON KOZBERG**

When you spoke with Christian, you mentioned your relationship with John Waters, or the films of John Waters.

00:17:29 **MIKE GETZ**

Uh huh.

00:17:31 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Could you speak about that a little bit?

00:17:32 **MIKE GETZ**

Well, I played all of John Waters' movies. I mean, he was a major filmmaker, and I'm probably forgetting others, too, that, that we played. You know, all those San Francisco wild guys, the Kuchar Brothers and the, and the Curt McDowell got, his movies were great, really popular. PORNODIA FOLLIES was one of the most, most popular movies that we showed. But John Waters, of course, his movies were just outstanding and perfect movies for the audience that we had.

00:18:15 **MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)**

They were just so outrageous and, so we, yeah, we played them, played them all. And, there's some that I dealt directly with him, and so we, we know each other, we, I wouldn't say we were close friends, I get a Christmas card from him every year. And I know, did you guys interview him? Or did, maybe Christian interview him or something?

00:18:40 **MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)**

But I think that he mentioned that he remembers getting letters from Allegheny Star Route, which is, was my mail, mail address for the first few years there. He said, where in the hell is that? But, anyway.

00:18:57 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And do you remember, when you were in Los Angeles, or when you were working with other communities, relationships you might have had with other programmers or curators? I know you said you knew Lewis Teague, but are there other people you were in communication with?

00:19:10

MIKE GETZ

Well I did, once I got my series going, I would write to other programmers to see if they would like to pick up the series because it was available. And many, a few did, you know, there were guys in Illinois and in Chicago, I think. Ron, there's a filmmaker, too, Ron, oh, I can't think. But there was a guy there who picked up the series on a limited basis. A guy in Dallas did. And a few other programmers around the country.

00:19:50

ALISON KOZBERG

Was it Ron Shelton?

00:19:51

MIKE GETZ

No. Ron, I can't remember. But so, my relation would be, would you like to play these? And here's how much it costs, and here's how it works. And some responded, and some tried it and some didn't. Yeah.

00:20:21

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay, and then after, after Underground Cinema 12 ended in the late '70s, what did you do?

00:20:29

MIKE GETZ

Well I kind of, I did actually make a movie. I made this movie called ULTRA HIGH FREQUENTLY. With Fred Padula who, who is my good friend. And, and what we did was we took what I thought in the late '70s was a good 90 minute collection of, of short films, and put them together. We, we created a kind of a, a spine to hang them on.

00:20:58

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

With, using the Duck's Breath Mystery Theater, and, and we ended up making this movie, and my uncle paid for it. God bless him, he was just a great fellow in my life. And I showed it at a theater in Sacramento that, I think it was the Tower Theater. And maybe one or two other places. And then I went, I took it to New York and I, and I took it around to all my buddies there.

00:21:30

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I took it to Bob Shaye at New Line Cinema, and I took it to here and there, and New York, and, and they all, you know, took me out to lunch and said, I don't think we're going to take your movie. I did know Bob Shaye pretty, we worked, he actually did, I created a cartoon, what he called THE EROTIC CARTOON CARNIVAL, and he distributed that.

00:21:57

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

That was something I put together, working with all these filmmakers. I basically became, I put them together became their, like, agent, intermediary, between them and New Line Cinema. I think you can even get that, on Ebay or something, on DVD. They called it THE EROTIC CARTOON CARNIVAL. I think I called it The Best of the New York Underground Erotic Film Festival.

00:22:28

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

They went with EROTIC CARTOON CARNIVAL. And it's little, little shorts. So I, I knew Bob Shaye then, and of course he went on to become a billionaire and, well that, he was good, because he did help John Waters get started and he's helped a lot of people. I like him, he's a good man, yeah.

00:22:54

ALISON KOZBERG

What was your film about?

00:22:55

MIKE GETZ

Well it was these shorts. I don't know if you ever saw a movie called GRAVITY.

00:23:08

MIKE GETZ

[overlapping] It's just a bunch of shorts. It's probably about 10 shorts. And it...

00:23:13

ALISON KOZBERG

Ah, I thought when you talked about that you'd moved on to something else. That was...

00:23:16

MIKE GETZ

No, that was the movie, and I think I finished it in '78. And it was a 90 minute movie, and I couldn't get a distributor for it. So I tried, but I don't know if, if you were to see it today, I don't know what you would think. I'm trying to think if it had any famous movie in it. It had that Pappa-Oo-Mow-Mow song, by, I forget who made that cartoon, it was really a funny cartoon of vegetables, I think, doing this singing this song and doing this kind of stop motion animation.

00:23:55

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

It was really funny, and but it was, but it, the gimmick was, it was a girl watching TV, actually she's asleep and the TV comes on with this Pappa-Oo-Mow-Mow song, and, and then she tries to get her remote control to control it, you know, to get it off or something, and she can't do it. And it just keeps showing these oddball movies.

00:24:25

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And then it just keeps going and, basically it was this little sequence that she would be in between each movie, and they would show her doing something with a remote control and, and then it could come on another movie, and that, that movie would show. And then, it ended with all these funny characters from the movies actually being in the room with her, like live.

00:24:58

ALISON KOZBERG

And then, well what did you do after, after New York, and after completing the film?

00:25:02

MIKE GETZ

Then I thought I should try to find another way to make a living. And so I started a film series in my town, in Nevada City, which I've been running for 31 years now. And it's a regular art film series. And then in the '80s I didn't, I must have been living off of THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW for a while, and then in 1989 a theater came open in Grass Valley.

00:25:38

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And I, and so my wife and I decided to take on that project and actually run a movie theater. Which I hadn't done since I was running the Cinema Theater, and things are a lot different now. But we started a, it's called Sierra Cinemas, and it's a four screen theater. We were up against United Artists, which owned the other two theaters in the town.

00:26:07

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

The downtown theater called The Del Oro, which is a three screen theater, and then they also owned a two screen theater called Grass Valley Cinemas. So they had those two theaters, and we had Sierra Cinemas, and eventually they ended up closing the twin, and we took that over. And then they solid us the Del Oro Theater. So now we own all the theaters in Grass Valley.

00:26:32

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And we've been operating since 1989, very successfully, knock on wood. Keeps up. We have 3D in two theaters, and we play all the first run major movies. And I still have this little Nevada Theater in Nevada City that I still play art movies in. And that's what I've been doing the last...

00:27:01

ALISON KOZBERG

What sorts of art films do you screen in that theater?

00:27:02

MIKE GETZ

Well, like last Sunday it's a, kind of a Sunday only, one night a week series because the theater is, it's this great theater, The Nevada Theater is, was built in 1865, so during the Civil War. And it's a brick theater, a single screen. And now it's owned by a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to keeping the theater alive, because Nevada City, like, has a population of 25 hundred people, it's a really tiny little town.

00:27:34

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

But they keep this theater alive and they have live theater, because that actually has a stage. So they have live theater productions that are very high quality. And then, and I've just been doing the Sunday night series, and every, once in a while, between production, live productions, I will, I'll have a three day weekend where I can run that movie Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

00:27:58

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

So, but we showed, well The Girl With The Golden, The Dragon, THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO we showed recently. Last Sunday we showed THE SECRET OF KELLS. Before that, well I'm already working on my next eight week series. As I look back on my life and I see the, on my, my gravestone will probably should say eight weeks at a time.

00:28:29

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

Because that's what I've been doing all these years, is doing eight week programs for these different series. Anyway, I'm working now on my next eight week series there, and I've got, I AM LOVE, EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP, that kind of stuff. All, all kinds.

00:28:56

ALISON KOZBERG

Was there anything else you wanted to speak about and you thought we should know, or that you want to mention?

00:29:03

MIKE GETZ

No, I appreciate that you're doing this project. It makes me look back on my life and, which I probably wouldn't have done if you hadn't done this. So, my thanks to you guys for doing this. I mean, it's great. I don't know if anybody's interested in it, but...

00:29:29

VERA BRUNNER-SUNG

I have one more question [unintelligible] if I may. You said that when you started taking your programs on the road, you realized you could do it anywhere, really. And live anywhere and kind of show these, expand the audience in that way. What did you, what were your feelings about Los Angeles as a city at that time? Is there something specific you didn't feel compelled to stay in the city anymore?

00:29:55

MIKE GETZ

Well, when I left L.A. I was thinking, first, I was motivated to want to move to the country and try country living because I'd lived in L.A. since early '60s. And L.A. was a very intense place. Politically it was going through some, you know, a lot of difficulties. I mean, people were getting busted a lot, and the, the police versus the people.

00:30:25

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

And I don't know, it just, the riots and the Watts Riots, and all this stuff was making me feel like I didn't need to be in the center of all that. So personally, I felt, I wanted to try a different kind of lifestyle. And so there was, you know, not a lot pulling, I felt that if I had stayed in L.A. I would have to become more aggressive, more of not who I was, you know?

00:30:59

MIKE GETZ (CONTINUED)

I'm not that kind of a person. I just prefer to live a simple life. I don't really even consider myself a businessman, even though I've ended up being a businessman, so the simple life is what I like. And L.A. is not a place if you want to live a simple life, I don't think. Even Nevada City is getting complicated [laugh]. But, yeah.

00:31:36

ALISON KOZBERG

Alright, I think, I think that's everything, then.

00:31:39

MIKE GETZ

Okay.

00:31:39

ALISON KOZBERG

Thank you so much. Thank you, that was wonderful.

end of tape 5