

Two Together Stanton Kaye & Jim McBride

program two

Saturday, April 3 at 7 pm — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Stanton Kaye, Jim McBride In Person

presented in association with Tosca Café and Cabinetic

I saw Brandy... shortly after it was completed, liked it rather well, but thought it was limited in scope and would age quite poorly. It was I, not Brandy..., however, that was limited in scope... I saw Brandy... again and it was still growing; it had qualities I had never appreciated before. It is always painful for a critic to realize that that flash in the pan he saw several years ago was gold. (Paul Schrader)

Cinematheque's cinematic pairings from these two preeminent filmmakers continues with *My Girlfriend's Wedding*, Jim McBride's *vérité* interview with his girlfriend about her pending marriage to someone else. Together with its short companion piece, the similarly themed *My Son's Wedding to My Sister-in-Law*, McBride takes the "diary film" genre and turns it inside out. Then he inverts it again. Thereafter, Stanton Kaye's stunning *Brandy in the Wilderness* tills a similar soil for an entirely different crop, cultivating a work that deliberately distorts the tenuous intersection between fiction and reality. For viewers that prefer their evening's entertainment to fit nicely within predefined definitions, beware: *Brandy...* strays well beyond the conventional borders of narrative or documentary filmmaking. (Jonathan Marlow)

My Girlfriend's Wedding (1969) by Jim McBride; 16mm, sound, 60 minutes

"In many respects, the best 'critique' of *David Holzman's Diary* that I know is McBride's [...] follow-up to it.

"...*Girlfriend's...* value as a critique of its predecessor isn't just because it inverts some of *David Holzman...* theoretical premises—by being a real personal documentary with some of the characteristics of a fiction, chronicling McBride's excited and enraptured discovery of his attractive new girlfriend Clarissa. ('At the time I made it,' he told me, 'I was fond of referring to it as a fiction film, because it was very much my personal idea of what Clarissa was like, and not at all an objective or truthful view.')

"In fact, the dialectic it forms with *David Holzman...* operates on several clearly conscious levels, starting with its possessive title, which is now in the first person, as well as an overt early reference to Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener* (which figured at the very end of the previous film) and a reintroduction of the same Éclair 16mm camera. The English girlfriend in question, in flight from her upper-class background, is indeed the ostensible focus, as is her irreverent decision to marry a Yippie activist she met only a week ago in order to remain in the states. (Perhaps for legal reasons—which also presumably accounts for some of the blipped-out names—the fact that McBride was married to though separated from someone else at the time goes unmentioned.) But in the very first shot we can also hear and then see McBride as he asks Clarissa to hold up a mirror facing him [...], prompting her until she gets it right—an apt metaphor for much of what follows. And there's a similar sense of displacement in the way he asks her to identify the contents of her purse; for much as Holzman loves to inventory his own possessions, including his attractive girlfriend Penny (Eileen Dietz), in front of his own camera, McBride is asking Clarissa to describe her own possessions while implicitly showing her off as a possession of his.

"Some of the other rhyme effects between the films are less immediately obvious, but no less telling for that. The counterpart to David's fragmented record of an entire evening spent watching television—one frame per shot change adding up to 3,115 separate shots in less than a minute—is Jim's far more

exuberant home-movie montage chronicling his drive with Clarissa from New York to San Francisco. And this points in turn to a radically redefined relation to both life and politics expressed in the two films. David virtually begins by telling us he just lost his (nameless) job and has been reclassified A-1 by his draft board, but the issue of being unemployed and potentially drafted into the Vietnam war never comes up directly again after that. By contrast, the issue of Clarissa having a job (as a coffeehouse waitress) and the impact of her father's war experience are discussed at some length, and there's hardly anything else in the film that isn't politically inflected. If *David Holzman...* explores how to think about various matters, *My Girlfriend's Wedding* fearlessly explores and even proposes how to live. (Jonathan Rosenbaum, "David Holzman's Diary/My Girlfriend's Wedding." DVD liner notes published in 2006. Accessible at www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=8270)

My Son's Wedding to My Sister-in-Law (2008) by Jim McBride; video, color, sound, 9 minutes

Brandy in the Wilderness (1971) by Stanton Kaye; 16mm, 87 min.

"*Brandy...* was directed and photographed by Kaye and cowritten by him and Michaux French, whose nickname was Brandy. It begins as an autobiographical film, ostensibly by one Simon Weiss but really about Kaye himself. Various kinds of photographic records are used to sketch his childhood in Beverly Hills and his youth, when he wrote plays and made a successful avant-garde film. He quits school and goes to New York to pursue his career, taking a job in an advertising agency and moving in with Brandy, a young woman who also works in advertising and who is financing his film. Together they drive cross-country, visiting their families en route. Midway through, the film switches from being Weiss' autobiography to his filming of Brandy's autobiography—apparently the film she is financing. Much of the same material is reprised, but the narrative is extended as she becomes pregnant and has a child.

"Kaye's two completed films are both staged simulations of cinema vérité, but whereas the fictionality of *George* is immediately apparent, *Brandy...* contains so much actual biographical material about the two leads and their relationship that in the film the distinction between fiction and vérité is jeopardized. *George's* overt Pirandellian reflexivity is much more forceful than the film's ostensible antiwar thematics and distances itself from them; but in *Brandy...* it is not possible to isolate form from content in this way. Such a reflexivity generated by the simultaneous, mutual mobilization of autobiography and filmmaking is ubiquitous in the sixties avant-gardes; the scenes in *George*, for example, where we alternately see George and his wife photograph each other are a simulation of the tropes of the interactive family cinema inaugurated in *Meshes of the Afternoon* [Maya Deren, 1943] and developed by [Stan] Brakhage in *Wedlock House: An Intercourse* (1959) and later films." (David James. *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles*. Published 2005 by University of California Press)