

## On Screen

Films & DVDs



Top: Lee Sexton; and below: Lee reading his own 2007 interview to Opal Sexton

### **Linefork**

**Vic Rawlings & Jeff Daniel Silva (Directors)**

Silva-Rawlings Films DCP/BluRay 2016, 98 mins  
Slowly and individually, we're introduced to Lee and Opal Sexton, the elderly couple at the centre of Vic Rawlings and Jeff Silva's film. After an eloquent opening shot of an empty coal train barreling through the frame for what seems like forever, we see Lee silently working in the garden and Opal cooking in the kitchen. We hear chickens and the incessant, high pitched barking of small dogs. Nearly 20 minutes pass before we see Lee Sexton play the banjo.

Rawlings first travelled to Linefork, Kentucky to find Sexton in 2004, intrigued by the four cuts made in 1959 that appeared on Folkways' *Mountain Music Of Kentucky* compilation. He returned a year later and then again in 2012, when he had the idea to make the film. He and Silva spent the next three years completing it.

That the film is titled *Linefork* and not *Sexton* is significant. It is more a portrait of a lifestyle than just another story of discovering an old musician. The couple make trips to the thrift shop, they buy dog food and reading glasses, they speak on the phone, they visit with friends. Throughout there are scenes of Lee playing his banjo in a variety of contexts, but the only hard biographical information comes an hour into the film when Lee reads his own bio from a book of photographs of musicians. The restraint of the mostly still camera combined with the deep patience of the editing makes watching these scenes a mesmerising experience. Far from an exploitative voyage into an antiquated existence, what emerges is an empathetic step into the pace of everyday life in this corner of America, coloured by music.

There are enigmatic references to events we never see. Lee tells a tale of his son

running over one of the dogs, and Lee's crude yet effective triage procedure. Upon being handed a CD transfer of an old eight-track tape, he's asked if he still plays fiddle. He says that he sometimes does, but then admits quickly that he hasn't played the instrument since Phil got killed. We never learn who Phil is, nor do we ever hear Lee play fiddle, but the moment looms over everything around it. We want to know what's being talked about, because we expect access to such information in a documentary. This time we are never granted it. Nor should we be. It's none of our business.

Ernst Karel handled sound design, turning many of the incidental noises into characters in their own right. The chime of a clock, the rumble of a washing machine, the incessant barking of the dogs, and the barrage of weird sounds from the chicken coop occupy the film in a more present way

than its human subjects at times.

The television is the loudest character of all. Lee watches *The Price Is Right* and *Maury Povich* at excruciating volume, presumably due to the hearing loss so evident in many of his interactions. The programmes seem like alien invaders into the film's still landscape. The sensationalised anger of the Povich show and the monetised fantasies offered by *The Price Is Right* might intrigue Lee, but he makes no effort to chase these dreams himself. Perhaps they exist as a narcotic influence, much like the high-proof liquor he reminisces about when describing his time playing square dances in his younger days.

The lack of flash is not a gimmick, nor is it pretentious. It's essential, integral to the subject. The slow exposition is there for a reason – it attunes us to the rhythms of life in Linefork.

**Matt Krefting**

Vic Rawlings & Jeff Silva



## On Site

Exhibitions, installations, etc



Evgenij 'E-E' Kozlov, *KINO* (1985)

### Notes From The Underground: Art And Alternative Music In Eastern Europe 1968–1994

Muzeum Sztuki MS2, Łódź, Poland

Like Dostoyevsky's Underground Man, many of the composers, musicians, groups and artists gathered here operated beneath the floorboards of society, "thumbing their noses" at the state vision of technocratic utopia and the restrictions it entailed. These diverse examples share attributes of inventiveness, self-sufficiency, absurdity and irony (or *stioib* in Russian) born of necessity in a society where freedom of expression was curtailed. But conditions, no less than modes of practice, were far from homogenous across place and time.

Where Western countercultures often assumed outsider status (and indeed also faced forms of censorship), tightened restrictions across the USSR after the late 1960s obliged artists and musicians to operate in covert zones of autonomy: in studios and communes, apartments and the countryside, and via *magnitizdat* home-recordings and *samizdat* mail distribution. Flamboyant masks and headgear (seen in images of noisy Czech improvisors *Kilhets* or East Germany's *AG Geige*) expressed both artistic intent and the pragmatics of anonymity.

Formed in the years after the 1968 Prague Spring, *The Plastic People Of The Universe* even held weddings to get around censorship. A Czech state TV show

commissioned to justify the arrests of their members on charges of "nihilism, decadence and clericalism" in the later 1970s is a handy primer to their absurdist and provocative concerts, theatrical collaborations with designers and artists, and rural 'actions'. In the same yellow-walled section dedicated to the Czech underground, Milan *Křižák's* early collaged and hand drawn scores for the music, art and publishing collective *Aktual* sarcastically enjoin listeners to "be a piece of meat", to worship "*Bolshevik Gods*", or more directly still, to "fuck 'em!".

The largest section of the exhibition maps a tendency towards a new primitivism across multiple regions and subcultures in the 1980s. While globally influential, the reductive forms of punk and explorations of ritual and shamanism had extra bite and local character among Eastern Bloc youth, increasingly disenchanting by the stagnating rhetoric of progressive, technological society. Vivid images – such as posters for Hungarian group *AE Bizottság's* punk-inflected concerts and voodoo-esque paintings by their Hungarian contemporaries *Zuzu-Vető* – crowd the walls. On a circular platform, fellow Hungarian artist and gallerist *György Galántai's* percussive sculptures, wrought from industrial machinery, are included in a display of customised instruments. These are interspersed with related video documentation, including footage of

the loose, ritualistic grooves of Warsaw collective *Pracffdata's* collaborative and charged public performances in the mid-1980s. A display case collects various Polish zines that drew on and disseminated the wider DIY culture of the early 80s. *Artpool* Radio cassettes from Hungary in the 1980s, with English titles like *Ambient Musics & Suffixes*, represent models of distribution which, like the wider mail art movement, connected practitioners with the outside art world.

*József Robakowski's* video loops footage shot from the TV of Leonid Brezhnev's state funeral into a forensics of power and spectacle, cut to a clanking *Laibach* track, whereas *Ljubljana EBM* outfit *Borghesia* revelled in deploying the forms of the ubiquitous MTV video medium to explore taboo club culture from the mid-80s onwards. Two dedicated media archive rooms, offering a further selection of videos, trace contrasting impulses within moving image technologies. A videotheque of self-produced 8mm films and VHS works for music includes the aforementioned *GDR* group *AG Geige's* creepy hand-modified filmstrips. A cinema area examines the inverse influence of underground cultures on state-controlled film productions like *Assa* (1988), which drew heavily on the ideas and aesthetics of the so-called *New Artists' scene* of 1980s Leningrad, and was named after one of their gallery spaces.

The *New Artists*, whose members worked

across media and disciplines (often incorporating a dandy-esque flamboyance into dress and performance), are allocated their own more focused section of the show. It is dominated by brightly painted portraits, LP covers and collages produced by one of the scene's best known figures, *E-E* aka *Evgenij Kozlov*. In this section, one senses different relations at work under *Perestroika*. Composer *Sergei Kuryokhin's* riffing on the links between Lenin and hallucinogenic mushrooms on a popular 1991 TV show might have been unthinkable a few years earlier. Yet he's at pains to reaffirm the importance of October 1917, just as his group *Pop-Mekhanika* fused Soviet ideological references with unofficial ones in performances.

As Sovietism collapsed, sound artists *The New Composers* were among the first to use planetaria – the sacred spaces of an earlier era of genuine Soviet technological achievement and anti-superstitious public education – as rave venues. But this repurposing of the old sites of space dreams (which became explicit in the famous 1991 *Gagarin Party* in Moscow even as the USSR collapsed) highlights the ambiguous legacies of communism in the post-Soviet era. Simple oppositions of repression and freedom, East and West, or before and after, fail to account for the shifting conditions in which these disparate practices emerged, and which still mark our uncertain present.

*Al Cameron*