

Putty Hill

A FILM BY MATT PORTERFIELD



Revue
 **60** Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Forum



The Hamilton Film Group presents

Putty Hill

Written and Directed by
Matt Porterfield

From a Scenario by
Matt Porterfield & Jordan Mintzer

Produced by
Jordan Mintzer Steve Holmgren
Joyce Kim Eric Bannat

Starring
Sky Ferreira
Zoe Vance
James Siebor, Jr.
Dustin Ray
Cody Ray
Charles "Spike" Sauers
Catherine Evans
Virginia Heath
Casey Weibust
Drew Harris

87min | Color | DVCPRO HD | 1.78:1 | Stereo | USA | 2010

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SELECTED PRESS

“Porterfield infuses the film with a distinct voice, a unique eye for the beauty of everyday, a sly humor, and great love and appreciation for his characters... It was, and is, a cinematic experience that I gladly lost myself in, finding myself afterward reinvigorated with a new sense of profound hope for American art cinema.”

– Ted Hope, Producer

“Porterfield’s sophomore effort is remarkable, not least for the results it achieves from extremely modest means.... there are moments here of startling compositional grace, flashes of awkward honesty and discomfiting intimacy.”

– Shane Daniels, *indieWIRE*

“Matt Porterfield’s *Putty Hill* is many things simultaneously: an enigmatic teen-film, a study of America, a subtle social drama – Porterfield doesn’t judge anyone, not the old nor the young, not the middle class nor the US sub-proletariat that people insist on dismissing as ‘white trash.’ *Putty Hill* is not a story in the traditional sense. But that is exactly the strength of this film: in the fragmented and the enigmatic lies the only chance for realism.”

– Stefan Grissemann, *Profil*

“*Putty Hill* is visually an incredibly beautiful film, made out of lights, colors, voices, and is practically impossible to describe with words.”

– Elena Meilicke, *Schnitt Magazine*

“Among the more adventurous films in the [Berlinale] Forum section... Matt Porterfield’s *Putty Hill*, set among alienated kids in suburban Baltimore, also subverts its realist aesthetic with formal trickery, encouraging its actors to break the fourth wall.”

– Dennis Lim, *The New York Times*

“In short, the film reminded me of Pedro Costa and Van Sant... It’s realistic in terms of atmosphere and characters, lower class Americans, and has a sadness expressed well by everyone. One of this year’s most beautiful scenes that I saw in Berlin this year shows us a visit to an empty, dark house, something that stayed with me for a week.”

– Kleber Mendonça Filho, *CinemaScópio*

“There is a very clear trend to be noticed at this year’s Berlinale: very strong American indie films. *Putty Hill* by Matt Porterfield and *Winter’s Bone* by Debra Granik, heavy-handed and serious in the [Berlinale] Forum section... All to be recommended wholeheartedly.”

– Sascha Wolters, *Style Mag*

“Matt Porterfield grew up [in Baltimore] and he knows exactly what he wants and how he wants it. How well his plans pay off, how the small stones of the mosaic that seem unrelated at first eventually come together, and how close you end up to the characters, I suddenly realized in the scene of the unconventional wake: Cory’s sister sings a song on the karaoke machine, while small children are dancing. The knowledge that everything can end at any moment hovers over the scene. Today, tomorrow, in 50 years time. More tears.”

– Markus Keuschnigg, *Radio FM4*

“A triumph of salvage. Not to be missed.”

– Avery Hudson, *Ground Report*

SELECTED 2010 FESTIVALS

Berlin International Film Festival – Forum (*World Premiere*)

SXSW Film Festival – Emerging Visions (*North American Premiere*)

BAFICI Buenos Aires International Independent Film Festival – Competition

Thessaloniki International Film Festival – Competition

Era New Horizons International Film Festival – Competition

CPH PIX International Film Festival – Competition

Atlanta Film Festival – Competition

Viennale International Film Festival – Official Selection

Independent Film Festival Boston – Official Selection

Maryland Film Festival – Official Selection



LOGLINE

A young man's untimely death unites a fractured family and their community through shared memory and loss.

SYNOPSIS

Cory dies of a heroin overdose in an abandoned house in Baltimore. On the eve of his funeral, family and friends gather to commemorate his life. Their shared memories paint a portrait of a community hanging in the balance, skewed by poverty, city living, and a generational divide, united in their pursuit of a new American Dream.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT - MATT PORTERFIELD

I was raised in a Baltimore suburb wild with unkempt hedges, disheveled lawns and porches, yards full of car parts and swimming pools, and a church or a bar on every corner. This neighborhood, located just inside the city line, is the inspiration for much of my work and sets the scene for *Putty Hill*.

From 2007 through 2009, I was at work writing and developing an original screenplay, *Metal Gods*, a coming-of-age tale about a group of metal-heads skirting the fringes of Baltimore city. It was a timely script. And we were poised to make it in the summer of '09, but financing fell through. In its wake, I developed another scenario, using many of the actors cast for *Metal Gods* and others I'd found along the way and wished to work with. On paper, it was a five-page treatment anchored by one line of written dialogue and 15 precise locations in which I wanted to shoot. During production, however, it became something else entirely: a work of intense collaboration and magic.

Putty Hill is not quite like anything I've ever seen. On a most basic level, it is an amalgam of traditional forms of documentary and narrative realism. But it is an approach to realism in opposition to the anthropological, lyrical, and romantic currents present in most of the genre. More importantly, though the structure of the film was plotted, the details of individual scenes were largely improvised, breathing life into the dialogue and bringing an enhanced degree of naturalism to the relationships between characters. I had already established firm bonds with my cast working with them on *Metal Gods*, so they trusted me enough to take risks and bring a level of emotional honesty to the material that will resonate with audiences.





PRODUCER'S STATEMENT - JORDAN MINTZER

Culled together from the aborted cast, crew, and locations of *Metal Gods*, and then conceived, shot (in 12 days), and edited in the span of only four months, *Putty Hill* is guerilla filmmaking in its purest state. Neither wholly fiction or documentary, but constantly switching between the two in a seamless, freeform fashion, the film is at once about the characters and the actors playing the characters, about a real and fictive Baltimore, about a story invented for the screen but true to life, and one in which the director himself plays a pivotal role. Most of all, it's about an artist using limited resources to synthesize his ideas into a work that reflects an honest fascination, and love, of the people and places depicted on screen.

Putty Hill is therefore moving on two levels: on an emotional level, as the audience witnesses characters grieving and coping with the death of a loved one (a death which, however fictitious, managed to touch all the actors personally), until such mourning transforms itself into a greater understanding of the world and one's place within it. It is also moving on an aesthetic level, as we marvel at the raw creative energy and cinematic beauty that comes from a project built purely on desire -- a project that, like his micro-budgeted first feature, *Hamilton*, reveals Matt to be a director who makes movies like nobody else.





INTERVIEW WITH MATT PORTERFIELD

In the summer of 2006, the *New Yorker's* film critic Richard Brody called Matt Porterfield's *Hamilton* "one of the most original, moving, and accomplished American independent films in recent years," one that "leaves the viewer astonished, hungry for more, and eagerly anticipating what Porterfield, who is still in his twenties, will do next." I happened to have been at that same screening as Brody, at the Anthology Film Archives in lower Manhattan, and left with the same sense of wonder. How had Porterfield and his fellow filmmakers made something so moving, with so little money, in such a short amount of time? Three years later I was invited to a screening of Porterfield's newest film, *Putty Hill*, in some ways a companion piece to *Hamilton*—it, too, takes place in a working-class Baltimore neighborhood, was shot in a matter of days, and is populated largely with non-professional residents of Baltimore whom Porterfield met and invited into his film. But it also represents, in addition to a broadening of Porterfield's portrayal of Baltimore, a maturing of a vision that one imagines is hard to maintain, given the realities of the business of filmmaking. What's on display here is truly independent art, and a devotion to a kind of storytelling that is more artful and more "real" than we're used to seeing onscreen. In January, Porterfield agreed to take time out from preparing his film for its international premier, at the Berlin Film Festival, to answer some questions from GQ about the creation of his new film, *Putty Hill*.

—Joel Lovell, Features Editor of GQ

The film has both fictional and documentary qualities—actors who are clearly playing characters and whose parts, to some extent, are "written"; then individual people who, it seems anyway, are on camera talking about their own real lives. Would you be willing to explain how this kind of lyrical hybrid, for lack of a better way of describing it, emerged in Putty Hill?

We had shot a camera test with two of the principles, Sky Ferreira and James Siebor, in April 2009, back when we were casting *Metal Gods*. It was a chance to see them together on screen, and, because nothing was at stake, we had the freedom to play a little. Sky had prepared some journal entries in the voice of her character and she incorporated them into her screen test. It was nice, because her performance showcased the character she had developed but also displayed her own mannerisms and characteristics, which are so compelling on camera. I decided to do a straight interview with James and weave the two segments together with a more traditional but incidental narrative.

We were all very pleased with the results. There was tension and surprise in the switch between documentary and narrative technique. So when *Metal Gods* fell through, I developed a scenario that expanded on this structural relationship and fused scenes based in reality with scenes of pure fiction.

Related to that, could you describe the process with your actors—how much of the script was nailed down before you started shooting and how much evolved in the process?

For the documentary-style interviews, I encouraged my actors to answer questions as themselves, and I asked them questions about their lives that only they could answer. At the same time, I gave them all a biography of the fictional character, Cory, which functioned as the main narrative element threading their stories together. They were given enough to expand upon, but aside from the basic "facts" there were no wrong answers relating to Cory. There was no written dialogue and no time to meet with the actors for rehearsals, so everything was developed on location. The crux of each scene and the basic actions each character would play out were on paper, but the meat and magic of the scene came about in the moment.

Your films aren't very interested in showing obvious cause-and-effect relationships—this thing happens in this character's life, which leads to this plot point, which leads to this dramatic conflict, etc. etc. This can throw your average contemporary American filmgoer, like me, say, a little off balance, at least until I sink into the rhythms of the film.

Can you talk about your ideas of storytelling in film and what, ideally, you're hoping an audience brings to one of your film's? Who in your mind is the ideal viewer?

My ideal viewer is some kid in middle America catching a matinee at the multiplex. That's what I'm shooting for, anyway. I think people want to see themselves in the stories they encounter, so I celebrate the daily life of characters considered too average to warrant screen time in popular, Hollywood cinema. Subsequently, when crafting stories I place emphasis on the everyday routines and actions of my characters and give precedence to mood, color, and the passage of time over traditional plots and story arcs. I keep exposition to a minimum because I think audiences like figuring things out. In the absence of big plot twists, there is mystery and tension inherent in the relationships between characters, especially if conflict is communicated through ways other than words.

It's a perfectly cast film—Sky Ferreira, of course, as Jenny, but really the entire web of characters that surround her, or that surround Cory. Could you explain the casting process, not just how you learned of Sky and what you saw in her, but also the local casting that took place in Baltimore?

Really, we began casting *Metal Gods*, and we cast the net wide starting in November 2008. Locally, we held auditions at area high schools, churches, museums, and other cultural centers. My friends and I plastered the city with postcards and blasted open calls on the internet. I read an article about Sky Ferreira on a friend's blog. I had never heard of her before, but she's an aspiring pop vocalist with an impressive fan base. She's only 17. I talked to her and her Mom on the phone and we figured out how to set up an audition. Eventually, my friend Mike Ott met them at CalArts and recorded Sky reading the sides. When he sent me the tape, I was very impressed. She seemed to have an effortless screen presence and a real grasp of the character, Jenny.

When I decided to make *Putty Hill*, I felt freedom to shape the scenario around the cast I wanted to work with. I incorporated friends, acquaintances, and people I met on the street. I met Spike in front of a tavern across from where he lives. That night, he took me up to his apartment and told his story. The story he told turned out to be crucial to the very essence of the movie and I decided to write him into the picture as Jenny's father. I found Cody on MySpace. His twin brother, Matt, contacted me about auditioning. He never made it out, but Cody and their brother, Dustin, showed up instead. Eventually, I met the whole family and cast them all in the film. We even shot a scene in their home. That's how a lot of the film came together, through connections and coincidences, and lots of time spent looking around.

Despite its being a small to mid-sized city, Baltimore's inspired some great film making—Barry Levinson and John Waters, of course, and on TV David Simon's "The Wire." And now you're exploring a territory completely different than the Baltimore we see in the work of any of those artists. Can you talk about the city as a character, or about how and why it speaks to you as a filmmaker?

Though I don't explore conflict overtly in my films, they are infused with the dialectic present in the very fabric of this city, which is felt by everyone living and working here. The disparity between rich and poor, the stratification of the population along lines of race, all the little neighborhoods historically isolated from one another by a single city street – there's a diversity of experience here, yet the lines of communication are blocked. So, in addition to all the aesthetic and cultural fascination Baltimore holds for me, I see an imperative here to explore our subjective realities, communicate differences, and bridge gaps through the exploration of our shared experience. Such conditions make art in this city vital and necessary, especially film, which is collaborative and has real potential to approach a kind of populist realism.

It's your second film with cinematographer Jeremy Saulnier, who has a great gift for capturing the shabby beauty of Baltimore. Is there an individual shot—or maybe a couple—that you're especially fond of?

I'm obviously fond of wide masters, and Jeremy's a great lighting cinematographer, so instances where we're able to nail a scene in a single shot are usually my personal favorites. As much deliberation goes into setting them up, they often contain the most spontaneity. My single favorite shot in *Putty Hill* is the second scene in Spike's apartment, where he's hosting a tattoo party. We did it in one take, after hours and hours of setup, and it's all there, and more.

I also love the shot of Jenny and her friends in Ashley's bedroom, that long, slow pan which reveals Ashley's room and Jeremy's skill as an operator. It's like *Putty Hill's* equivalent of the 360° pan in *Hamilton*. Tough stuff. And the scene at Hemlock Gorge—which isn't even in Maryland but in Pennsylvania—that scene contains a lot of gorgeous cinematography.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Matt Porterfield - *Director*

Matt studied film at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and teaches screenwriting and production in the Film & Media Studies Program at Johns Hopkins University. His first feature, *Hamilton*, was released theatrically in 2006. *Metal Gods*, his second feature script, was selected to participate in the Emerging Narrative Program at IFP's Independent Film Week, where the screenplay won the Panasonic Digital Filmmaking Grand Prize. *Putty Hill* is his second feature film.

Jordan Mintzer - *Producer*

Matt and Jordan, the operating managers of The Hamilton Film Group, met their first year at NYU, in 1995, through the 16mm film series Jordan developed and operated out of his dorm room. Before producing *Hamilton*, Jordan worked on projects by directors such as Hal Hartley, Amir Naderi, Tony Bui and Wojtech Jasny. Currently based in Paris, he works both as an international tax consultant and as a film critic for *Variety*.

Steve Holmgren - *Producer*

A graduate of Boston University's School of Management, Steve is now a New York-based independent film producer and sales agent. Steve previously worked in production at HDNet Films (*Redacted*, *Bubble*, *Broken English*), and handled international sales of documentaries for Cactus Three (*LoudQUIETloud: A Film About the Pixies*, *Sketches of Frank Gehry*). Currently head programmer at Union-Docs in Brooklyn, NY, Steve has also worked with several film festivals, including Telluride, Sundance, Sound Unseen, and the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar. He was integral in developing *Metal Gods*, as well as *Putty Hill*, and continues efforts to distribute Porterfield's first feature, *Hamilton*.

Joyce Kim - *Producer*

Joyce earned her BFA in Film/Video from the Maryland Institute College of Art. Since graduating in 2007 she continues to live and work in Baltimore, where she is involved in the production of documentary films, collaborates on various art projects and focuses on her photography. Joyce began her collaboration with Matt Porterfield and the Hamilton Film Group as Art Director on *Metal Gods*. *Putty Hill* is her first feature film as Producer.

Eric Bannat - *Producer*

Eric grew up in New Holland, PA, and earned his BA in Film from The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He began his career in Washington and Baltimore, working as a cameraman, associate producer and editor for numerous reality television series and documentaries. After an editing stint in New York, Eric returned to Baltimore, where he served as location scout for the final three seasons of *The Wire*. He continues to work as a scout and manager for feature films and television series, and currently resides in Annapolis, MD.



Jeremy Saulnier - *Director of Photography*

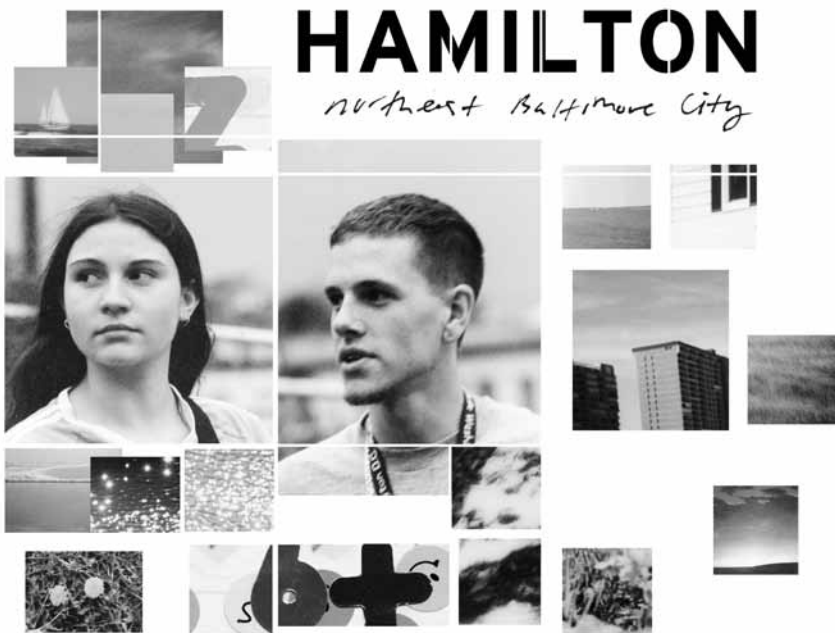
A graduate of NYU, Jeremy received the Undergraduate Cinematography Award in his senior year and went on to study with John Toll, ASC. Jeremy's work on *Hamilton* proved a monumental asset, and won the film many admirers and an award for "Best Cinematography" at the 2007 Atlanta Film Festival. Since *Hamilton*, Jeremy has directed two shorts (including the award-winning *Crabwalk*), numerous commercials, and another feature, his own directorial debut, *Murder Party* (2007), released by Magnolia Pictures.

Marc Vives - *Editor*

Also an NYU alumnus, Marc lives in Brooklyn, creates abstract videos and short documentaries, and edits films. His first feature as editor, the documentary *The Painter Sam Francis*, enjoyed a successful run at New York's Anthology Film Archives, and played internationally at festivals and museums including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and the Louvre in Paris. *Putty Hill* is his first narrative feature.

Sophie Toporkoff - *Art Director*

Sophie creates magazines (*Rendez-Vous*, *Agenda*), collaborates with great brands (including Colette, Kiehl's, and as the new Communication Art Director for Maison Martin Margiela), artists (for Palais de Tokyo and Galerie Kamel Mennour), and musicians. She also draws a lot. Always in search of a new idea or impulse, her eclectic body of work has continued to gain exposure over the last few years, with solo exhibitions and installations at Allodi-R (Toyko), Colette (Paris) and galerie La Bank (Paris).



ALSO BY MATT PORTERFIELD

Hamilton

67min | Color | 16mm | USA | 2006

Directed, written and edited by Matt Porterfield

Produced by Jordan Mintzer

Photographed by Jeremy Saulnier

Sound Design & Mix by Scott Martin

Starring

Stephanie Vizzi, Chris Meyers, Sarah Seipp-Williams, Gina Mooers, Megan Clark, Madeline Saar Reeser, Jasmine Bazinet-Phillips, Tiffany Boone

Synopsis

Two summer days in the life of a young family: Lena, 17, and Joe, 20, two recent and accidental parents residing in a diverse, suburban neighborhood in northeast Baltimore City.

Selected Festivals

Viennale International Film Festival
Stockholm International Film Festival
Bradford International Film Festival
Atlanta Film Festival
Denver Starz Film Festival
Maryland Film Festival
Wisconsin Film Festival

Selected Screenings

BAM (Brooklyn, NY)
Anthology Film Archives (New York, NY)
Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, France)
AFI Silver Theater (Silver Spring, MD)
Facets Cinematheque (Chicago, IL)
International House (Philadelphia, PA)
Baltimore Museum of Art (Baltimore, MD)

Selected Press

“A minor miracle. [...] One of the most original, moving, and accomplished American independent films in recent years.”

– Richard Brody, *Top 20 Films of the Decade*, *The New Yorker*

“...astonishing in its simple beauty, amazing performances, and hypnotic pace. The real thing.”

– John Waters, *Top Ten of 2006*, *Artforum*

“Matt Porterfield directs in a near subliminal style...his frequently wordless images capture mood and emotion with surprising effectiveness.”

– Jeanette Catsoulis, *The New York Times*

“Visual poetry aside, what makes *Hamilton* a treasure is its thoughtful, unsentimental fleshing out of lives often glimpsed (in movies and elsewhere) but rarely considered.”

– Mark Holcomb, *Time Out New York*

“*Hamilton* is a tribute to the power of observation and mood.”

– Vincent Musetto, *The New York Post*

Currently available on Amazon.com and Netflix.com

CAST

Starring

Sky Ferreira as Jenny

And introducing

Zoe Vance

James Siebor, Jr.

Dustin Ray

Cody Ray

Charles "Spike" Sauers

Catherine Evans

Virginia Heath

Casey Weibust

Drew Harris



CREW

Written and Directed by Matt Porterfield

From a Scenario by Matt Porterfield & Jordan Mintzer

Produced by Jordan Mintzer, Steve Holmgren, Joyce Kim & Eric Bannat

Cinematographer / Jeremy Saulnier

Editor / Marc Vives

Art Director / Sophie Toporkoff

Costume Designer / Sara Jane Gerrish

Location Sound / Phil Davis & Nick Rush

Assistant Director / Jordan Mintzer

2nd Assistant Director / Joyce Kim

Unit Production Manager / Steve Holmgren

Assistant Production Manager / Annie Holstein

Location Supervisor / Eric Bannat

Script Supervisor / Devon Deimler

Gaffer and 1st Camera Assistant / Rommel Genciana

Key Grip / Carlos Valdes-Lora

Digital Technician / Aljosa Zovko

Best Boy / Josh Gleason

Grips / Isaac Diebboll and Daniel Schwartz

Set Photographer / Andrew Laumann

Wardrobe Assistant / Diana Peralta


Boom Operator / Alexandra Byer

Additional Audio Recording / Jay Hoffman

Sound Mix / Ben Goldberg

Visual Effects Artist and Colorist / Chris Connolly

Titles / Bruce Willen

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Illustrations & Lettering / Sophie Toporkoff
Photos / Joyce Kim, Andrew Laumann & Sophie Toporkoff

“...if there’s an independent cinema, this movie is it, and if there’s a new director, here he is.”

– Richard Brody, *The New Yorker*