

FILM MOVEMENT®

presents

## Theory of Obscurity

A film by Don Hardy

“There's plenty of eye and ear-catching stimulation in this survey of the Residents' 40-year career” –  
Dennis Harvey, *Variety*

“THEORY OF OBSCURITY is nirvana for music and film lovers alike” – *Scenester*

One of the “15 Must-See Movies at SXSW Film Festival 2015” – *Rolling Stone*



USA / 2015 / Documentary, Comedy / English  
87 min / 1.78:1 / Stereo and 5.1 Surround Sound

Film Movement Press Contact:

Genevieve Villaflor | (212) 941-7744 x215 | [genevieve@filmmovement.com](mailto:genevieve@filmmovement.com)

Film Movement Theatrical Contacts:

US: Clemence Taillandier | (212) 941-7744 x301 | [theatrical@filmmovement.com](mailto:theatrical@filmmovement.com)  
Outside the US: Maxwell Wolkin | (212) 941-7744 x211 | [maxwell@filmmovement.com](mailto:maxwell@filmmovement.com)

## Select Press for THEORY OF OBSCURITY

"Music-themed movies are resonating loudly in this year's DOC NYC festival ... THEORY OF OBSCURITY [is] a peek inside the mysterious world of San Francisco performance artists The Residents, who for most of their five decades have hidden their identities behind giant eyeball masks." – Steve Dollar, *The Wall Street Journal*

"While hundreds of bands will be struggling to emerge from obscurity at SXSW 2015, one set of oddballs will be celebrating a 40-year home there... the film delves deep into the apocrypha and mystery of the one-of-a-kind, dissonance-crazed band. Don Hardy got full access to the group's archives, filling the film with tons of footage both familiar and unseen." – Christopher R. Weingarten, *Rolling Stone*

"If you're a long-time fan of The Residents, like myself, then the rare early footage will be very exciting for you. You'll learn a few new things that will be cool, but mostly seeing that rare footage will bring you great joy. If you've never heard of them, then this is a great gateway into the strange and wonderful world of America's most mysterious band." – Mike Noyes, *Inside Pulse*

"Fans will appreciate this loving probe into the determinedly anonymous history of S.F.'s superstar art weirdos, now closing in on 50 years of seemingly bottomless inspiration." – Adrian Mack, *Straight.com*

"Stuffed with examples of the nose-thumbing spirit that has sustained their popularity despite the bandmates' refusal to reveal their individual identities, the film is a fine primer for the curious." – John DeFore, *The Hollywood Reporter*

"Don Hardy's documentary THEORY OF OBSCURITY: A FILM ABOUT THE RESIDENTS does not compromise the band's mystique of anonymity. The unshaved chin of the legendary Bay Area cult band's supposed lead singer gives his identity away as much as Charlie Cox's budding beard does for his Daredevil character." – Peter Wong, *Beyond Chron*

"THEORY OF OBSCURITY is nirvana for music and film lovers alike. [...]The film [...] sways between interviews with diverse artist and cult followers inspired by the band (Matt Groening, Jerry Harrison, Les Claypool), people who performed with them on their tours, footage of their live performances and bizarre music videos, to their Wonder of Weird Tour in 2014..." – Arthur Glover, *Scenester*

"In honoring the band and trying to present an appreciation for their sense of humor and the seriousness of their art, THEORY OF OBSCURITY succeeds." – Seth Freilich, *Pajiba*

## FULL SYNOPSIS

THEORY OF OBSCURITY tells the story of The Residents: a renegade sound and video collective from San Francisco. Their history, spanning more than 40 years, continues to be shrouded in mystery.

Many details surrounding the group are secret, including the identities of its members. They always perform wearing masks and costumes, which is part of their magic. Still, The Residents have a management company, The Cryptic Corporation, led by Hardy W. Fox and Homer Flynn. This business counterpart allowed director Don Hardy and his crew unprecedented access to the groups' archival materials and recent world tour celebrating their 40th anniversary.

The Residents have always played by their own rules, managing to release more than 60 albums and garner critical acclaim for their artistic acumen. The filmmakers followed them on their most recent world tour, bearing first-hand witness to their highly diverse legion of fans - turns out they are everywhere!

They are ultimately much more than a band that plays strange music: The Residents are multimedia pioneers. They led the way in home recording, video production, animation, CD-Rom, laserdisc, podcasts and web-series. They were also one of the pioneering groups in the music video revolution. Their short films were in heavy rotation during MTV's early days and they are now part of the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection.

The filmmakers interviewed artists inspired by The Residents such as Les Claypool from Primus and Matt Groening, the creator of The Simpsons, as well as other fans and industry leaders who claim The Residents are "the best experimental art band of all time." All of these pieces come together to form a well-rounded tale which is sure to captivate both long-time supporters and audiences discovering them for the first time.

At its heart, this story is about perseverance and passionate pursuit. The Residents never caved to convention. They never compromised. Their art is their own, and THEORY OF OBSCURITY's goal is to shine a light on what they've done over the past 40+ years, while also showing the difficulties they've faced along the way. These are hardworking, do-it-yourself, everymen who still have mortgages to pay and families to support...though they do it by wearing eyeball masks and tuxedos.

The Residents have followed their muse for decades and thousands of fans have hung on for the ride. Along the way they've also inspired countless people to be weird, take chances and find their own voice. THEORY OF OBSCURITY will surely do the same by introducing The Residents to a whole new generation.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

THEORY OF OBSCURITY tells the story of the renegade sound and video collective known as The Residents: a story that spans 40 years and is clouded in mystery. Many details surrounding the group are secret, including the identities of its members. The film takes viewers inside this incredibly private group with unprecedented access to their archives and their recent 40th anniversary tour. The Residents have released more than 60 albums, performed all over the world and inspired many people to be weird, take chances and find their own voice. The film will introduce The Residents to a whole new generation.

## LOGLINE

THEORY OF OBSCURITY tells the story of the renegade sound and video collective The Residents: a story that spans over 40 years and is clouded in mystery. Many details surrounding the group are secret, including the identities of its members.

## ASSETS

Official Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mg4nV9tQYvc>

Downloadable hi-res images: <http://www.filmmovement.com/filmcatalog/index.asp?MerchandiseID=474>



# CREDITS

## SELECT PARTICIPANTS

*(please see full list pages 7-9)*

Matt Groening  
Les Claypool  
Penn Jillette  
Jerry Harrison  
Gary Panter  
Rob Crow  
Homer Flynn  
Hardy Fox  
Jay Clem  
John Kennedy

## CREW

Director	Don Hardy
Executive Producers	Yoshifumi Okuyama The Noxious Twins
Producers	Don Hardy Barton Bishoff Josh Keppel
Screenwriter	Don Hardy
Cinematographer	Don Hardy Barton John Bishoff Josh Keppel
Editor	Don Hardy Barton John Bishoff
Sound Designer	Philip Perkins
Music	The Residents

## Biographies

### **Don Hardy (Director/Screenwriter/Cinematographer/Editor )**

Don Hardy is the co-founder of KTF Films, a documentary production company based in the San Francisco Bay Area. His films have played to sold-out audiences at prestigious film festivals and have been seen by millions of people around the world. Hardy's *THEORY OF OBSCURITY*, a film about The Residents, had its World Premiere at SXSW in 2015. In addition to finishing his film about The Residents in 2014, he also served as Director of Photography on *Batkid Begins*, which had its World Premiere at the Slamdance Film Festival in January 2015. Hardy's previous film, *The Human Experiment*, premiered at the Mill Valley Film Festival and IDFA in 2013 and was released in theaters and on VOD in the spring of 2015. *Love Hate Love*, which premiered at the 2011 Tribeca Film Festival, won several film festival awards and had its US broadcast premiere on the Oprah Winfrey Network in 2012. And his first film, *Witch Hunt*, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2008 and was broadcast on MSNBC. Over the years, Hardy has won numerous awards for his films, photography, and editing, including six Emmys, three Edward R. Murrow Awards, and seven Associated Press Awards. He is the recipient of the prestigious San Francisco Bay Area Photographer of the Year Award and more than 15 National Press Photographer Association Awards.



### **Barton Bishoff (Producer/Cinematographer/Editor)**

Barton Bishoff is a San Francisco-based filmmaker and musician. Barton began his career in broadcast journalism in Rockford, Illinois, as a photojournalist and worked at stations around the U.S. At KNTV in San Francisco Barton produced special feature stories and directed "Tech Now!," a syndicated news magazine show about Silicon Valley. Barton's broadcast journalism has been recognized within the television news industry with nine Emmy Awards, eighteen Emmy nominations, and over twenty Associated Press Awards, including The Dick Terry Photojournalist Award 4 years in a row. As a guitarist and pianist, Barton has performed and recorded with such artists as Miles Nielsen, Harlan Jefferson, The Snaggs, Kelly Steward, Erik Applegate, The Famous, The Moonlight Jazz Orchestra, Jeremy Buck and the Bang, The Gomows, and Bun E. Carlos and Rick Nielsen of Cheap Trick.

### **Josh Keppel (Producer/Cinematographer)**

Josh Keppel is an award-winning filmmaker and journalist currently living and working in San Francisco. In 2011, Keppel was a Director of Photography on *Blood Sweat & Vinyl*, a feature-length documentary about independent recording labels in a hard-to-define sliver of heavy metal music. The documentary – which includes live concert footage from over 20 bands and tells the story of three different interconnected indie-labels – has traveled the world, playing film festivals in North America, Europe and South America. Also in 2011, Keppel participated in a 3D concert shoot of The Residents performing "Talking Light" at Bimbo's 365 Club in San Francisco, as well as the group's "Sam's Enchanted Evening" performance in Berkeley. In 2004, Keppel was Co-Producer and Director of Photography on *Up for Grabs*, an award-winning documentary about the legal battle over Barry Bonds' record-setting 73rd home run baseball. After winning film festival awards in L.A., New York and Phoenix, Laemmle/Zeller Films theatrically distributed the feature film across the county with footage of "The Keppel Tape" prominently featured in the film.

## About the Film Subjects – In Order of Appearance:

**Molly Harvey** began her journey with *The Residents* as an employee of *Ralph Records*, but by the mid-90's she was contributing to virtually all of *The Residents'* many projects. She also teaches preschool.

**Joe Hasselvander** is a musician who has been playing professionally since he was nine years old. Self-taught, he began playing the violin and later also picked up drumming. He has been the drummer of *Raven* since 1987.

**Les Claypool** is an American musician and writer, best known as the bassist and lead vocalist of the band *Primus*. Claypool's playing style on the electric bass mixes tapping, flamenco-like strumming, whammy bar bends, and slapping. Many people believe Les is a member of *The Residents*.

**Matt Groening** is an American cartoonist, screenwriter, producer, animator, author, musician, comedian, and voice actor. He is the creator of the comic strip *Life in Hell* as well as the co-creator of two successful television series, *The Simpsons* and *Futurama*.

**Josh Freese** is an American drummer and songwriter. He is a permanent member of *The Vandals* and *Devo*, and formerly played drums for *Nine Inch Nails*, from late 2005 until late 2008, *A Perfect Circle*, from 1999 to 2012, and *Guns N' Roses*, from 1998 to 1999.

**Jim Knipfel** is an American novelist, autobiographer, and journalist. A native of Wisconsin, Knipfel, who suffers from retinitis pigmentosa, is the author of a series of critically acclaimed memoirs, *Slackjaw*, *Quitting the Nairobi Trio*, and *Ruining It for Everybody*, as well as two novels, *The Buzzing* and *Noogie's Time to Shine*.

**Penn Jillette** is an American magician, juggler, comedian, musician, inventor, actor, and bestselling author known for his work with fellow magician Teller in the team Penn & Teller. Penn also served as the narrator on *The Residents'* "Mole Show Tour."

**Joshua Brody** is an American musician and composer. He has collaborated with *The Residents* for decades.

**Roland Sheehan** is a musician and childhood friend to certain members of *The Residents*. He was the first person to put instruments in their hands and the rest is history.

**Homer Flynn** is a founding member of *The Cryptic Corporation*. He and his partners at *The Cryptic Corp.* handle all of *The Residents* business affairs.

**Hardy Fox** is another founding member of *The Cryptic Corporation*.

**John Kennedy** was the original President of *The Cryptic Corporation*.

**Jay Clem** was a founding member of *The Cryptic Corporation*.

**Maggie Swaton** performed with *The Residents* in their earliest appearances and in their underground epic film *Vileness Fats*. Her stage name is Peggy Honeydew.

**Leigh Barber** is an artist and frequent collaborator with *The Residents*. Her work can be seen all throughout *The Residents* work from the early 80's up to now.

**Jerry Harrison** is an American songwriter, musician and producer. He achieved fame as the keyboardist and guitarist for the pioneering new wave band *Talking Heads* and as an original member of *The Modern Lovers*.

**Steve Seid** is a video curator at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

**Graeme Whifler** is an American screenwriter and director. He has written/directed movies, television documentaries, videos, and music videos. He also worked with *The Residents* on their classic short films such as *Hello Skinny* and *One-Minute Movies*.

**Chris Cutler** is an English percussionist, composer, lyricist and music theorist. He is best known for his work with the English avant-rock group *Henry Cow*.

**Eric Drew Feldman** is an American keyboard and bass guitar player. Feldman has worked with *Captain Beefheart*, *Fear*, *Snakefinger*, *The Residents*, *Pere Ubu*, *Pixies*, *dEUS*, *Katell Keineg*, and *Frank Black*.

**Ty Roberts** is the co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer for Gracenote. Prior to Gracenote, Ty produced the industry's first interactive music experiences on CD for artists like *Brian Eno* and *David Bowie*.

**Adam Weller** is a comic book artist who collaborated with *The Residents* on *The Bunny Boy*.

**Rob Crow** is an American singer and multi-instrumentalist from San Diego, California. He is known for the long list of bands and projects he is associated with, mostly in the genres of indie rock and math rock.

**Paulie Kraynak** is the encyclopedia of *The Residents'* knowledge...whether you like it or not.

**Hein Fokker** is the longtime tour manager for *The Residents*. He keeps the trains, planes, and buses running on time.

**Carla Fabrizio** is a world-renowned musician who has collaborated with *The Residents* on numerous projects.

**Kim Andrews** is a collector of all things *The Residents*. He also likes to juggle and solve complicated mathematical equations.

**Chris Combs** is a longtime *The Residents* fan and a contributor to their website. He also plays a mean ukelele.

**Michael Nash** is a media executive who most recently served as Warner Music Group's Executive Vice President of Digital Strategy and Business Development.

**Michael "Mickey" Melchiondo, Jr.**, better known by his stage name Dean Ween, is an American guitarist, fisherman, and formerly one half of the alternative rock group *Ween*.

**Gerald Casale**, often credited as Jerry Casale, is a vocalist, bass guitar and synthesizer player, as well as a founding member of the new wave band *Devo*.

**Mark Siegel** is a model maker who has worked on several films, though his primary claim to fame is that he designed *The Residents* legendary eyeball and top hat.

**Nolan Cook** is a musician.

**Gary Panter** is an illustrator, painter, designer and part-time musician. Panter's work is representative of the post-underground, new wave comics movement that began with the end of *Arcade: The Comics Revue* and the initiation of *RAW*, one of the second generation in American underground comics.

**Tom Timony** worked with *The Residents* for many years and in a variety of roles. He served as Head of Security during *The Residents* "Mole Show Tour."

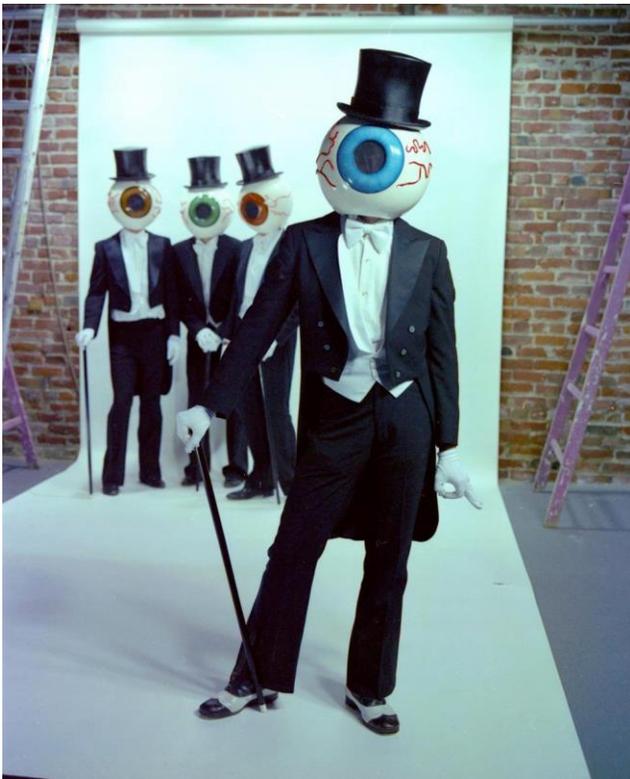
**Laurie Amat** is a vocalist who has performed all over the world. She has collaborated with *The Residents* on numerous projects.

**Barbara London** is an American curator, writer, and sound art advocate best known for establishing the video collection at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). London assembled the museum's video collection with works by Nam June Paik, Laurie Anderson, and Lynda Benglis.



## FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

2015 SXSW 2015  
2015 Chicago International Movies & Music Festival  
2015 San Francisco Film Festival  
2015 Independent Film Festival Boston  
2015 Milwaukee Film Fest  
2015 Denver Film Fest  
2015 St. Louis International Film Festival  
2015 Virginia Film Festival  
2015 Cucalorus Film Festival (Wilmington)  
2015 Sound Unseen (Minneapolis)  
2015 Doc NYC



## About Film Movement

Launched in 2002, Film Movement is a full-service North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films, based in New York City. Film Movement has released more than 250 feature films and shorts from 50 countries on six continents, including top prize winners from Sundance, Cannes, Venice, Toronto, Berlin, Tribeca and other prestigious festivals. Film Movement releases its films through numerous distribution channels, including thousands of art-house cinemas, universities and libraries; home video; television outlets; cable video on demand; digital platforms; and in-flight entertainment. For more information, please visit [www.filmmovement.com](http://www.filmmovement.com).