



as slow as possible

60 minute documentary

**PRESS KIT
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"A beautiful, mindful, philosophical film..."



(out of four)

Chris Knight, The National Post

"If you've ever wondered what its like to go through life without your vision this film provides great insight...Smith creates an emotional connection that results in some extraordinary moments."

Marsha Lederman The Globe And Mail

"...a revelation of the aural variety...a moving pilgrimage....time well spent".

Jason Anderson, Eye Weekly

What do the strange musings of a famous 20th century composer have to do with the desire of a man going blind?

These two seemingly separate stories come together in *As Slow as Possible* - the story of an affable 33 year-old philosopher (Ryan Knighton) who sets out on a pilgrimage to a small town in the former East Germany. His pursuit - to listen to a single note change in the 639 year-long organ performance of the John Cage composition, *As Slow as Possible*. As Knighton prepares to relinquish his last sliver of eyesight, he has turned his ear to the experience of one note, giving away to another. In search of a window into his own uncertain future, Ryan hopes the experience will allow him, as he puts it, "to leave my eyes behind."

First, however, he must get there.

Ryan's experience unfolds like a Cage piece itself - a series of chance encounters with people who line the path - many of whom offer assistance, some of whom don't believe he's blind at all, and finally one who may offer Ryan something profound. It all converges at an ancient monastery in Halberstadt, Germany, where a ceremony is about to begin - and these two disparate stories become one.

www.as-slow-as-possible.com

logline

A story about our relationship to change, as heard through the sound of one note giving away to another, and as seen through the eyes of a man going blind.

synopsis

(350 words)

In 1985, John Cage wrote a composition called, *As Slow As Possible*. He intended it be performed, as slowly as possible. Originally written for piano, Cage later rewrote the piece for organ, so that notes could be sustained even longer.

After his death in 1992, a group of people in Halberstadt, a small town in the former East Germany, asked the question - "*What would be as slow as possible?*" They determined it would be to use the entire life of the instrument to play the song. They built a pipe organ in an old monastery, and stretched this four page composition over the life span of the organ – some 639 years.

The organ plays continuously. Note are sustained for months or years, and on occasion, according to the score, and at the hands of humans, the notes are changed.

Fifteen years ago, on his 18th birthday, Ryan Knighton was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, and told he would slowly go blind. After 15 years Ryan has less than 1% of his vision left, and in only one eye. He waits for the day when this last sliver of sight will go, and he will be left completely blind.

As Ryan adjusts to what he calls 'the new social order' of his body, he proposes to venture beyond the familiar streets of his own neighbourhood on a journey to Germany, to find the John Cage organ. The organ's signal has found a listener in Knighton - who in turn has found a personal metaphor in the promise of a note change. One thing gives away to another, the past, present and future all at play in the ritual.

While caning his way into the uncertainty-riddled experience of a road trip, Knighton contemplates his own change – the challenge of letting go of his old identity, while waiting for the new one to emerge. The experience unfolds like a Cage piece itself – a series of chance encounters in the form of airports, train stations, the unfamiliar hubbub of foreign cities, and people - some of whom don't believe he's blind at all, and one who offers him something profound.

SCREENING HISTORY

April 2008 - Hot Docs International Film Festival (World Premiere)

- Jury nomination for Best Canadian Feature Film
- shortlisted for 2008 Don Haig Award
- tied for top spot (of 170 films) in audience website voting.
- additional screening added

May 2008 – Special Event Screenings

Auckland Writers Festival – Auckland, New Zealand
Ryan Knighton in attendance.

Sydney Writer’s Festival – Sydney, Australia
Ryan Knighton in attendance.

September 2008 – Abilities Arts Festival – Toronto

September 2008 – Moving Images Film Festival

October 2008 – Vancouver International Film Festival

November 2008 – St. Louis International Film Festival

December 2008 – Guangzhou Int'l Doc Film Festival

February 2009 - Big Sky Documentary Film Festival

Director's Statement

It was in the spring of 2006 (and over drinks) when Ryan told me about the Cage composition and the organ playing in Germany. He wanted to experience the changing of the tone, but the next change was only four weeks away. The one after that wasn't for another two years. We needed a champion, or two, right away. That came the next day when two allies emerged – and Triptych Media and Gary Marcuse at the CBC both signed on. Three weeks later Ryan and I were on our way to Germany, nary an idea of where we were going or what we would find. He would have a cane in hand. I would have a camera.

All Ryan and I knew when we left was that we had fallen hard for the experience of a note change as a metaphor for the experience of change itself. It was absolutely pure and almost banal in its expression and, at the same time, oddly unimaginable. To imagine what a note change might be like is like trying to see into the future. Add to this the gesture of the organ itself, the question of what the year 2639 was going to look like, and the understanding that the performance was bigger than any one lifetime, and we knew at least that we had some good cards. With the fascinating character of Ryan and the promise of a journey literally tapped out by his cane, I was compelled to follow.

A week before the note change, Ryan, who lives in Vancouver, was doing a book launch for his memoir *Cockeyed*, in Toronto. After we left Toronto for Germany, the entourage of people surrounding Ryan evaporated. It was just the two of us (beyond a German speaking assistant who joined us for the Berlin – Halberstadt portion of the journey). It was a challenge to shoot, since with my eye to the camera so to speak, I became peripherally blind as well, my field of view limited to the few square inches of the viewfinder. I began to navigate as Ryan did, using sound for orientation, and we'd often laugh about who would bump into things more frequently.

After missing a flight, we arrived in Berlin - only to discover that our bags had been left behind, and that we would have to wait for them, along with the camera. We decamped to the bar, and in talking discovered that whatever we found important in the journey we were on so far had happened by accident. There had been talk about the notion of Desire as that which guides you, but we were beginning to see that often, the fates provided us a valuable partner in Chance. Chance was as determining a factor in the narrative of any experience as Desire, let alone for discovering the story in a documentary. In other words - "How do you make God laugh? You tell him your plan...." Upon receiving our bags, and our camera, we proceeded – leaving ourselves open to happenstance, to the unexpected, to Chance.

We were rewarded. A man in a bear costume told us his story of experiencing a miracle in India. An encounter with a woman who thought Ryan was a rock star, and that he wasn't blind at all. A hole in the seemingly endless Berlin Wall that revealed the Berlin of the future, hidden behind the tired symbol of its past. Even

the criss-crossing, topsy-turvy corridors of the Holocaust memorial, which we wandered into out of pure curiosity, became a symbol of Ryan's predicament. How does one let go of that little sliver of eyesight, the umbilical cord to the past, when still instinctually using it to navigate?

By the time we left Berlin and embarked on the three hour long trip (on 2 trains) to Halberstadt, a more significant weight had developed for Ryan. As we got closer, the trip itself, once almost a lark, an odd journey of curiosity, had become much more personal. The ritual had taken on a new meaning. It was as if Ryan needed to physicalize the desire to let go of his eyesight by traveling to hear the organ, and now that he was getting closer to its sound, the reality of his future was actually settling in.

While it would have been virtually impossible for Ryan to get to Halberstadt entirely on his own, we both thought it important to photograph how he moves in the world – his vine-to-vine contact with the physical and other people, to use his Tarzan metaphor. It was also through these encounters en-route that our accidents would happen, the ones we hoped would lead us somewhere interesting in this quest. Would there be a sum to these parts?

Halberstadt was a dusty town at first. The train station was in the industrial section of town, and the smell was a mix of steel and pork flesh. We weren't immediately impressed. On the cab ride into the heart of the village we were told the story of a town being rebuilt over the past decade, recovering from Post - Unification, when most of the young people left and went to West Germany in search of fortune and something different. It was mostly West Germans here now, lured by cheap real estate and the desire to rebuild a town. All that was here were the long-standing sausage factories, still churning out the apparently famous Halberstadter sausage. The cab driver had never heard of the John Cage Project or the organ playing in the church. It turned out that there were a lot of churches in Halberstadt.

The hotel clerk, however, did know of the organ, though she'd never heard the tone. She gave us directions. All we really knew was that we were looking for a river, and would see it after that. Sometimes, a pond looks like a river, especially to the blinded subject, and semi blinded (but optimistic) camera operator. As we set out to find it, Ryan and I were talking about the past. Going back to the moment Ryan was diagnosed, and his reaction. Soon we were lost.

I hadn't noticed him at first, the boy whose name was Justus. Watching the footage later, I discovered he had emerged long before I spotted him curiously trailing Ryan. He seemed to want to help, and he could obviously tell we were lost. I waved at him and smiled, signaling that it was OK for him to approach us. He walked right up to Ryan with the line – "Sorry, can I help you?"

Such a simple event, a stranger offering assistance, landed in front of me with all the power of the otherworldly, the ordained. A pattern had emerged, of chance, to be sure, but also the repetition of simple goodness, with Ryan as the point of contact for that goodness. It was as if, in that one moment, our own desire, the signal we sent out into the world, was met. In that one moment, Ryan's future

became a little clearer, and I think at the same time, the generational question posed by the organ might have been answered as well.

It clearly made an impact on Ryan, too. Something as simple as the feel of a child's hand in his, guiding him past the hidden river, and on to the destination that had accumulated so much meaning for him. It's ten minutes from my life I won't soon forget, and I think it is evident in the film that it was the same for Ryan.

To bring it back to the note change, perhaps Ryan's relationship to letting go of a past identity, while still waiting for a new one to emerge could be applied to us as well. Our relationship to the Church, our propensity for war, so many of the shifting courses of our collective psychology can be found in the Ryan's rather universal metaphor.

The rest, I think, is summed up in Ryan's line after the note change:

"When the note changed, it had all that feeling of drama, like something was going to happen, and something did happen. And when it was changed, I listened to it, it sounded different, and it didn't take very long, and then suddenly - I couldn't remember the note before."



Participant Biographies

Ryan Knighton - subject

Ryan Knighton was born on September 19, 1972, in Langley, British Columbia. On his eighteenth birthday, Knighton was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a congenital disease marked by a progressive pathology of night-blindness, tunnel vision and eventually total blindness.

In 1995 he completed a B.A. (Honours) in English at Simon Fraser University. Abandoning graduate studies, he moved to South Korea and became one of the country's many poverty jetset English teachers (a bad one, too). When he returned to Canada, Knighton resumed his MA, again at SFU, and completed it in 1998. Despite his rapidly failing eyesight, Knighton was hired just days shy of his twenty-sixth birthday by Capilano College's English Department. He continues to teach literature and creative writing at the school's nicest campus. For two years he also served as editor of **The Capilano Review**, even curating the magazine's visual art spread. Good descriptions helped.

In 2001, Anvil Press published his first book, *Swing in the Hollow*. The following year he co-authored *Cars* with George Bowering, Canada's first poet laureate (Coach House Books). Since then, Knighton has written numerous satirical and comic essays for **The Globe and Mail**, **The Vancouver Sun**, **the Montreal Gazette**, and for such popular magazines as **Self**, **The Utne Reader**, **Saturday Night** and **Geist**. He has also contributed to **CBC radio**'s celebrated pop-culture show, "Definitely Not the Opera", writing and performing radio monologues and documentaries. His darkly comic memoir about going blind, entitled **Cockeyed**, was released in April 2006 by **Penguin Books** and was shortlisted for the Stephen Leacock Award for Humour. Ryan is currently working on a screenplay adaptation, and was recently invited to attend the 2008 Sundance Screenwriters Lab.

Now in the final stage before total blindness, only 1% of Knighton's visual field refuses to quit. As for interests, he has many, but none involve sports or sudden movements. Every year he adds another tattoo to his collection, and hopes it comes close to what he imagines. East Vancouver is home, and everybody agrees that Knighton's wife, Tracy, is something else. You can often find him walking his seeing-eye pug, Cairo.

For more information, please visit www.ryanknighton.com

Scott Smith - director

Born in Edmonton, Alberta, and raised in Vancouver, British Columbia, Scott is a graduate of the film program at Simon Fraser University (1994), and in 1995 was invited to attend the **Canadian Film Centre** as a Director Resident. His resulting short film, *Sshhh*, was screened at several international festivals and won the prize for Best Short Film at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in the Czech Republic. In 1997, *Sshhh* was nominated by the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television for a **Genie Award for Best Live Action Short**.

In 1998, Smith made his first dramatic feature film, *rollercoaster*, which premiered at the **1999 Toronto International Film Festival**. *rollercoaster* was screened at over 35 film festivals worldwide, winning several awards, including **Best Narrative Feature** at SXSW in Austin, Texas, and **Most Popular Canadian Film** at the Vancouver International Film Festival. Stephen Holden from the **New York Times** wrote – *‘astounding...captures the crude anarchic language and daredevil vulnerability of teenagers with a scary accuracy.’* **Todd Haynes**, in selecting *rollercoaster* to open a festival in Portland wrote – *“A remarkably assured first feature - engrossing but restrained with extraordinary performances from its teenage actors.”*

rollercoaster was distributed in the U.S. (DVD) and Canada (theatrical), and has been included in several books, including Katherine Monk’s historical analysis of Canadian film (*Weird Sex & Snowshoes* (Raincoast), and Robin Wood’s *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond* (Columbia Univ. Press), in a chapter devoted to North American teen movies.

In 2003, Smith completed his second feature, *Falling Angels*, an adaptation of Barbara Gowdy’s novel, starring Miranda Richardson, Callum Keith Rennie, Mark McKinney, and Katherine Isabelle, and produced by Robin Cass and **Triptych Media**. The dark comedy tells the story of the war-torn Field family in 1969, and premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2003 to glowing reviews. **Variety** wrote *“Smith handles complex, troubling agenda here with quiet skill...confirms soph helmer as a keen observer of character drama.”* Ken Eisner of the **Georgia Straight** described it as *“a marvel from beginning to end...flawless performances.”* Since its premiere, *Falling Angels* has been screened at over 75 festivals and cities worldwide, and has been acquired for distribution in over 15 countries, including the **U.S., Netherlands, Scandinavia, Japan and Mexico**. It was nominated for virtually every major award in Canada in 2004, winning 2 Genies (for production design and original song), and a Leo Award for **Best Director**. It was also selected by the Toronto Film Festival Group’s annual Top Ten for 2003.

As Slow as Possible marks Scott’s first foray into feature documentary. It combines his first love of camera with an interest in following real characters into real situations. Scott continues to develop both drama and documentary projects through his production company Giraffe Productions.

Scott Smith - filmography

2008	<i>As Slow As Possible</i>	Documentary	60 min.
2007	<i>Playing the Role</i>	Comedy Short	17 min.
2003	<i>Falling Angels</i>	Narrative Feature	109 min.
	winner of 2 Genie Awards (production design, original song)		
	winner Leo Award for Best Director		
	winner Best Ontario Feature – Sudbury Film Festival		
	winner Top Ten 2003 – Toronto International Film Festival Group		
1999	<i>Rollercoaster</i>	Narrative Feature	86 min
	winner Best Narrative Feature, SXSW 2000		
	winner Most Popular Canadian Film, Vancouver Int'l FF 1999		
	winner Best Canadian Feature, Victoria Film Festival		
	winner Best First Feature, Victoria Film Festival		
	winner Best Ensemble Cast, Phoenix Film Festival		
	winner Vancouver Film Critics Circle, Best Actor – Brendan Fletcher		
	winner Best Drama – Ojai Film Festival		
	winner Best Feature – Saguaro Film Festival		
1996	<i>Sshhh...</i>	Short Drama	15 min.
	Genie nomination for Best Live Action Short 1997		
	Best Student Short Film – Karlovy Vary FF 1997		

Robin Cass / Triptych Media - producer

Robin Cass brings to Triptych Media a diverse background that includes work as photo and electronic-based visual artist as well as a decade of experience in series television as a writer, director and field producer for CFT0 and Global. He is a graduate of OCAD. He is also an active board member and executive board member for the Canadian Film and Television Production Association (CFTPA), and the About Face organization.

For Triptych Media, Robin's credits include **LILIES** (1996 Genie, Best Film) and **FALLING ANGELS**, the award-winning 2003 Toronto International Film Festival hit, adapted from the novel by Barbara Gowdy, directed by Scott Smith and starring Miranda Richardson.

Triptych with Canadian distributor Union Pictures is currently set to release director Gary Yate's **HIGH LIFE** adapted from the play of the same name with Tim Olyphant, Stephen MacIntyre, Rossif Sutherland and Joe Anderson. Previously, Triptych released the feature film **EMOTIONAL ARITHMETIC** (Closing Night Gala at the 1997 Toronto International Film Festival) by Paolo Barzman. Based on the novel by Matt Cohen, the film stars Susan Sarandon, Christopher Plummer, Gabriel Byrne, Roy Dupuis and Max von Sydow. Triptych also serves as Executive Producer for Richie Mehta's award-winning first feature **AMAL**.

Triptych Media's other productions include 1997's **THE HANGING GARDEN**, Most Popular Film and Best Canadian Feature at the Toronto International Film Festival, as well as Deepa Mehta's **THE REPUBLIC OF LOVE**, and Tim Southam's first feature **THE BAY OF LOVE AND SORROWS**. The company's television credits include CTV's **THE BOOKFAIR MURDERS** and CBC'S **TALE OF TEEKA**, winner of the Banff Rockie for **Best Children's Program** and the Telefilm Canada Prize for **Best Canadian Program** in addition to being nominated for the prestigious Prix Italia. Triptych's **LUCKY GIRL** won two **Gemini** awards, including one for its young star, Elisha Cuthbert. Most recently, **HEYDAY!** which premiered in 2006 on CBC, won the **Silver Hugo Award** For Feature Length Telefilm - Drama, presented by Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival.

For more information, please visit: www.triptychmedia.ca