

# The Adults In The Room

A film by Andy Blubaugh

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[theadultsintheroommovie.com](http://theadultsintheroommovie.com)

# Loglines And Synopses

## **LOGLINE 1:**

A filmmaker explores a relationship with an older during his teen years by producing a narrative film, recalling the past and examining the present. [25 Words]

## **LOGLINE 2:**

As a teen, Andy's boyfriend was Peter, 30. Now 30 himself, Andy wonders if he is destined to become Peter, or if he already has. [25 Words]

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS:**

The Adults In The Room explores a relationship during the director's teen years with a man twice his age, while examining the man he has become since through the production of a narrative film about those events. These two storylines—the past relayed through narrative, and the present through documentary—inform and support one another, exploring adulthood's true meaning. [60 Words]

## **FULL SYNOPSIS:**

In 1995, Andy Blubaugh—then a curious and lonely fifteen-year-old—began a sexual relationship with Peter, a successful but deeply closeted man nearly twice his age. The affair put them both in peril, though in different ways. While Peter gambled with the prospect jail time, Andy exposed himself to an emotional obstacle course, longing for a lover to acknowledge his existence to the world. When it became clear that this might never happen, Andy did what teenagers do: he rebelled. In 2008, Andy Blubaugh—then an independent filmmaker known for self-reflexive work—took on the task of scrutinizing the last unexamined part of his life; the strange affair with Peter during his teen years. In writing a script based on those events, he found himself struggling with Peter's character, so he did what all filmmakers do: He did research.

In The Adults In The Room, these two story lines—the past relayed through scripted narrative, and the present through vert documentary—inform and support one another, painting a rich tableau of the ways that two men have intersected each other's lives over the course of a decade, and the true meaning of what it means to be an adult. [202 Words]

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

The narrative portion of the film focuses on a single month in the course of Andy and Peter's tumultuous affair. While balancing a fractured family life, a secret love affair, and an isolated existence at a boy's prep school (where Peter's nephew is one of his classmates), young Andy chooses Peter as the topic for a personal essay in English class, despite warnings from his friends, Peter, and the teacher himself. Meanwhile, the documentary portion of the film chronicles the writing and production of that narrative film, including the repercussions caused by re-connecting with Peter fourteen years after he and Andy first met. As these two stories unfold, analogues are revealed between the reconstructed world of the past and the documentary world of the present. In casting a young actor to play Andy as a teen, the director unwittingly places that actor into a sexually charged situation not unlike one from his own past, and finds himself questioning the ability of of that—or any—young person to truly consent. In his life as a high school educator, he encounters young people in desperate situations, attempting in their own ways to make sense of their complex lives through storytelling much like he did then (and is doing now).

Woven throughout is an additional real life drama: the confession by Portland's mayor of a sexual affair between himself and a teenaged legislative intern, and the subsequent campaign for his recall. Though the details may be unfamiliar to those outside of Portland, the scandal becomes a proxy for the sexual transgressions of all public figures, and provides an incitement for those around Blubaugh to voice their own opinions on the thorny issue of sex between adults and children.

### **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:**

"I often shudder at the term "experimental film," since I know that it carries associations with formal cinematic exercises that are often just an endurance test. But in trying to describe *The Adults*, the definition of experiment clearly applies: "a method of investigating causal relationships among variables to test a hypothesis." When I began making this film years ago, I didn't know whether I was making a documentary or a narrative, I didn't know how the main character would change throughout the story (even though the main character is myself), and I didn't know how the film would end. Instead, I had a handful of observations about the unique circumstances of my life, and some theories about how they might relate to one another, and to the universal human experience. I am forever thankful to the army of supporters that went out on a limb to help me conduct my experiment, and I hope you find the resulting discoveries to be enlightening, thought-provoking, and entertaining."



## Andy Blubaugh: Director

Over the course of eight years and four award-winning short films, Andy Blubaugh has emerged as an insightful and innovative storyteller. Whether showcasing the unintentional hilarity of the dating world through personal ads, or exposing the injustice of mandatory minimum sentencing, Blubaugh has developed a unique style of filmmaking, connecting the events of his own life to the greater human experience.

Blubaugh's compelling perspectives led the editors of *Filmmaker* magazine to name him one of the "25 New Faces of Independent Film" that are reshaping the medium. His work has been screened at over 100 film festivals worldwide, including Sundance, the Margaret Meade, the Edinburgh, Hot Docs, and the gay and lesbian film festivals in Toronto, Los Angeles, Barcelona, and Turin. His films have also been showcased on the PBS program *P.O.V.* and the LOGO Television Network's *The Short List*.

Blubaugh is a recipient of the prestigious Media Arts Fellowship established by the Rockefeller Foundation (currently The Tribeca Film Institute). He has served as the associate director of the Portland Documentary and Experimental Film Festival and as Coordinator of the Northwest Film and Video Festival. Blubaugh is also an instructor at the Northwest Film Center School of Film in Portland, Oregon.

*The Adults In The Room* is his first feature film.

### Selected Filmography

#### **The Pull** (2007)

Official Selection: Toronto International Documentary Festival, Edinburgh Film Festival,

#### **Scaredycat** (2006)

Official Selection: Sundance Film Festival, Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival, Margaret Meade Film Festival, Milan Film

#### **Hello, Thanks** (2005)

Official Selection: Sundance Film Festival, Seattle International Film Festival

#### **The Burden** (2001)

Official Selection: Northwest Film & Video Festival, Bend Film Festival

## **Erin Donovan:**

### **Producer**

Erin Donovan received her degree in Political Economics from the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. In 2000 she co-founded and was a lead organizer of the Ladyfest arts festival. As project coordinator for Kill Rock Stars records, she put together retrospective albums for punk luminaries Essential Logic and the Delta 5.

She spent an alternately very cold and very hot year in New England cutting her teeth on documentary film at the Media Education Foundation before going back to the west coast to work with independent film producers as an investment researcher.

Erin is the founder of A Million Movies a Minute, an independent documentary distributor specializing in short films whose inaugural release *After the War: Life post-Yugoslavia* featured 9 short documentaries from 5 award-winning, international film-makers including Jasmila Žbanić, winner of the Golden Bear award at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival. In the Fall of 2009 AMMAM will release a compilation of animated documentaries that cover a wide spectrum of subject matter and a feature-length documentary entitled *Radical Act* about the role women played in the 1990's NYC punk rock music scene.

## **Phoebe Owens:**

### **Producer**

Phoebe Owens has returned to Portland (where she grew up) after living and working in Olympia, WA. She won the Women In Film/Seattle award for her short documentary film *STITCH* in 1998, shortly after graduating from the Evergreen State College where she studied fine arts, experimental documentary film and optical printing techniques. After spending months traveling and working in Europe- mostly Estonia, she returned to Olympia to form her own production company and took on the role of Producer for a number of commercial, educational, and industrial productions. She enjoyed shooting and later managing the distribution of the experimental feature film *Group* directed by Marilyn Freeman & Anne de Marcken, as the experience proved invaluable when she embarked upon writing, directing and producing the feature film *Tammytown*. She also earned a Master of Library & Information Science from the University of Washington—out of “pure curiosity.” She shoots Super-8 film for fun, has random gear in her basement, but loves Producing above everything else. She is also currently working on a small series of experimental music videos with local director Sarah Shapiro.

## **James Strayer:**

### **Producer**

James Strayer is a filmmaker based in Portland, Oregon. The day jobs he has held to fuel his filmmaking endeavours are screenwriter for Smith Group, antiques appraiser, record label mogul and personal assistant to Gus Van Sant. Over the past several years he has produced and directed a series of narrative shorts, music videos and theatre production films including *Too Much Coffee Man: The Opera* and *Thom Paine: Based on Nothing* by Will Eno.



Andy Blubaugh is the kind of character that grows on you; an endearing concoction of the comedic, the eccentric, the lovable, the smart (the very smart), the obsessed and the shrewd storyteller -- all rolled into one. His new feature project *The Adults in the Room* promises to be a genre-busting cinematic tour de force, mixing dramatic reenactment, documentary interviews, behind the scenes (“the making of”) verite footage, autobiography, lyrical cinematography (and who knows what else he has up his sleeve), into a film project unlike anything we’ve ever seen before. A film with a delicate, even controversial subject, *The Adults in the Room* will be an important cultural milestone, one that makes people think and reflect, before they rush to condemn and judge. I encourage you to support his groundbreaking endeavor and help Andy

bring his unique talents (and his unique character) to an exciting new plateau in his career.

--Alan Berliner, Award-Winning Director, “The Sweetest Sound,”  
“Wide Awake”



I write as an unabashed fan of Andy Blubaugh’s honest, witty, smart, and fresh movies, which I’ve been enjoying one by one the last couple of years. They are unique because they arise from the human idiosyncrasy of the filmmaker himself: the sort of grassroots creativity that feels very now and very Portland to me. I first met Andy in his capacity as an employee of the Northwest Film Center, where his intelligence, politesse and efficiency were striking.

But I was bowled over when I first saw his film work: there were lashings of playfulness, confession and wryness that he hadn’t revealed in any of our prior professional dealings. Now that he’s becoming a more confident artist, I’m eager to see what else

he’s been hiding from the rest of us.

If I can be of any further assistance in your consideration of support for Andy and his work, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

--Shawn Levy, Author and Film Editor, *The Oregonian*



In a city known for independent and experimental film, Andy Blubaugh’s work stands out. It is, uniquely, Andy. He is both film director and protagonist. In the tradition of the personal essay, Andy’s stories are an invitation to explore a personal experience in a search for broader meaning. Andy’s work addresses bold social topics (seeking love through personal ads, confronting violence and racism, and recalling a relationship between an older man and a teenage boy). In doing so, Andy borrows from the traditions of documentary, narrative, and experimental film; he blends interviews with reenactments, cinematography and animation. Although based on actual events, the stories are not reported, rendered, and reenacted for a factual Truth—rather they are journeys filtered through his sensibilities, a search for a deeper, emotional au-

thenticity. Seen together, Andy’s work shows his growth as an artist, each film takes on a slightly deeper, riskier subject matter, and becomes bolder and more confident in its expression. Andy’s current work, *The Adults In The Room*, marks Andy’s next step forward. All of us in the film community are eager to see the results.

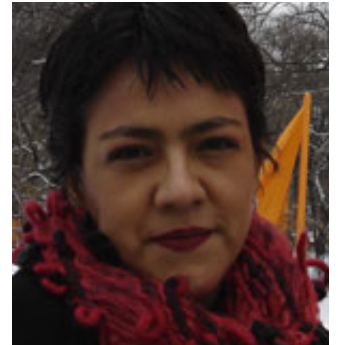
--Ian McCluskey, Executive Director, NW Documentary Arts and Media

Andy Blubaugh's filmmaking is sui generis - an improbably effective blend of documentary, experimental narrative, and, at times, animation that, though about him somehow resists coming off as self-involved. Intellectual without being inaccessible, his films demonstrate an ability to make the personal public, and the individual universal in a playful obsessive-compulsive manner. I always look forward to seeing another film from Blubaugh, and his new feature project's trailer suggests that he will realize the promise shown by his short works in an expanded form.



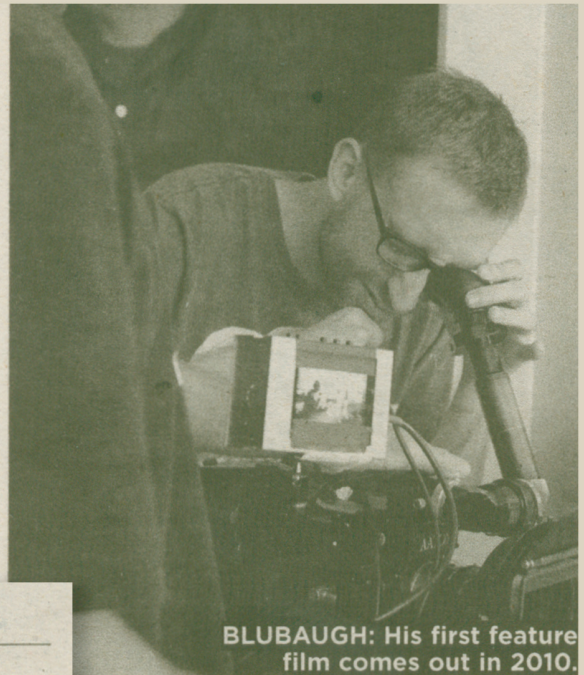
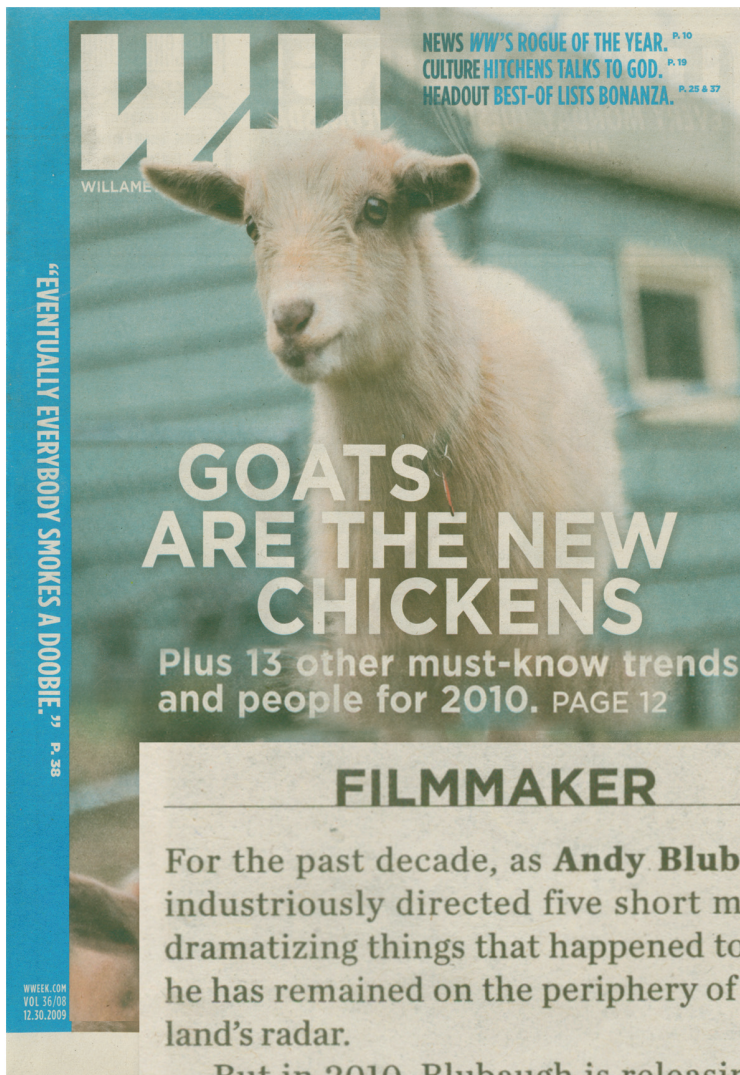
-- Basil Tsiokos, Programming Associate,  
Documentary Features, Sundance Film Festival

Andy Blubaugh has an acute ability to take distance from his own preconceptions and is not afraid of exploring the legitimacy of his own beliefs. In Scaredycat, Blubaugh faces his own vulnerability as a young white man after being attacked by a group of teenagers. With candid bravery he confronts one of his perpetrators and realizes the paradox is that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. As a true filmmaker, Blubaugh's voice has a profundity that resonates far beyond his own personal story.



--Lucila Moctezuma, Director of Media Arts  
Fellowships, Tribeca Film Institute

# From *Willamette Week* January 2, 2010



BLUBAUGH: His first feature film comes out in 2010.

## FILMMAKER

For the past decade, as **Andy Blubaugh** industriously directed five short movies dramatizing things that happened to him, he has remained on the periphery of Portland's radar.

But in 2010, Blubaugh is releasing his first feature: *The Adults in the Room*, a film that considers the sexual relationship he started at age 15 with a man almost twice his age. This may get him a little more attention.

"It's been exceptionally hot-button in ways that I did not recognize at all," Blubaugh says, sitting in the dining room of his three-bedroom home in Northeast Portland's Grant Park while waiting to hear back from film festivals. "People are either appalled that one could make a film about a man that has sex with a 16-year-old boy and not portray him as a monster, or alternately, they're appalled that I could even suggest that anything is wrong at all."

The movie is even more certain to inflame viewers in a city still paralyzed by eerily similar mayoral misdeeds. "You couldn't have a conversation about my situation without hearing comparisons to Sam Adams," says Blubaugh, now 29. "There's a sex-scandal-shaped hole in our psyche that will constantly be filled."

So Blubaugh incorporated the City Hall uproar into his movie. *The Adults in the Room*, made for less than \$100,000, is both a drama about Blubaugh's affair as well as a documentary in which the director talks with various people about what he should think about the experience. (One of the participants is *WW* reporter Nigel Jaquiss.) That kind of metatextual experiment chafes against the formula of innocence-lost movies like *An Education*—no surprise coming from a director who sighs when asked if he identifies as a queer filmmaker.

Blubaugh, who teaches filmmaking to teenagers at the NW Film Center, says the real subject of his film is what makes a person an adult. "My take on it is that I got my heart broken. But if you can find a 16-year-old that didn't get his heart broken, I'd like to meet that person. Actually, I'm not sure that I do want to meet that person."

—AARON MESH



# From *Just Out* July 7, 2009

OREGON'S GAY/LESBIAN/BI/TRANS NEWSMAGAZINE

FILM

## The Elephant in *The Room*

### Portland Filmmaker Andy Blubaugh's Feature Debut Intersects with Headlines

By AMANDA SCHURR

Late last year, Portland filmmaker Andy Blubaugh began production on *The Adults in the Room*, his feature debut. His two shorts had screened well at Sundance; *Filmmaker Magazine* named him one of the "Top 25 New Faces" in 2007. As with his previous efforts, Blubaugh planned a uniquely personal approach in order to what he calls "make connections to a larger human experience and explore a more common thread."

This time around, that meant telling the story of his first love, a clandestine affair as a teenager with a man twice his age.

And then came January.

Some seven months later, *The Adults in the Room* has taken on a relevance and timeliness Blubaugh couldn't have imagined when the project was accepted at New York's Independent Film Week in September 2008. Blubaugh admits he'd been watching the initial headlines concerning Mayor Sam Adams and Beau Breedlove and, "when it really blew up, was a mixed bag" for the production.

"It created a great opportunity for me as a filmmaker to observe the way that everyone in the city was reacting to the events," explains Blubaugh, a Cleveland native who moved to Portland in early 2000. "Suddenly this idea of what it means to be an adult, what metric we use to measure adulthood, was on the tip of everyone's tongues, and that's ultimately what my film was about."

Other dialogues all but halted—a significant problem for Blubaugh since his story is told in a hybrid of documentary and narrative formats, intersecting in the present day. "This is not an exposé. I'm not attacking anyone,"



Filmmaker Andy Blubaugh (left), seen here with actors Ryan Findley and Calvin McCarthy, explores questions about youth and intimate relationships he encountered in his own life in *The Adults in the Room*. The film, now in production, is a mix of documentary and narrative storytelling.

notes Blubaugh, who says the Adams "issue" has nonetheless been incorporated. "There are no ultimate conclusions to be made—what I'm interested in is the discussion and when the discussion dries up, it makes it very difficult to continue with the film."

According to producer Phoebe Owens, the film's financing took a hit as well. "We've had people who were originally interested in investing that won't now because they just don't want to be involved with something that they feel can so easily connect to [the Adams scandal]," she says.

Modestly budgeted at about \$75,000, *The Adults in the Room* has eight days of shooting at month's end to capture the narrative half of the film. Blubaugh and Owens hope an

August 9 benefit at Montage will raise the funds necessary for this, what Blubaugh describes as "the most labor intensive and the most money intensive part of the project."

The documentary portion, now wrapping up and featuring interviews with columnist Dan Savage, among others, was captured on digital with a small crew; the upcoming narrative shoot, which traces Blubaugh's formative relationship via actors and dramatic recreations, will be shot on Super 16 mm with a crew of about 35. Plans are to submit a rough cut to Sundance by October 1.

Blubaugh, who teaches at Northwest Film Center, says that while the Adams-Breedlove debate has put his own journey in a very public context, the questions he set out to address haven't changed, the individual matters of accountability no less simple. "At what age are we comfortable saying that a young person has the agency to make their own decisions, but also at what age do we trust ourselves with the young people?" he asks.

"That's why I'm making this film now. I'm the age that this man was when our relationship began and I teach children that are the age that I was when our relationship began."

Blubaugh hopes the film will transcend headlines and catalyze an "internal discussion," one that both he and Owens view in shades of gray—a marked contrast to the seeming black-and-white, for-or-against opinions regarding Adams. "[Blubaugh] has all these mixed emotions," Owens says, "but when he looks back on his relationship... it's first love and for him that trumps everything. So it's very messy and complex."

And in progress. Blubaugh says he hasn't yet arrived at an answer to his question, to whether or not "I [became] the grownup that I thought I was going to be." "I go back and forth," he admits. "Right now I'm at my most observant point. I'm just trying to take in the entire experience and analyze it and make sure that the film is responding to what is happening every single day."

# From *Filmmaker Magazine* Summer 2007

NEW FACES OF INDEPENDENT FILM

25



## andy blubaugh

### ANDY BLUBAUGH MAKES FILMS QUITE

unlike anyone else, but it was not always this way. Things changed when he was sent a camera belonging to his late mother. Blubaugh conceived an idea for a fictional short film based on this event but felt he was “hiding behind the narrative.” What was really interesting to me about it was my own reaction, and it felt insincere to try to cloak that within narrative,” he says.

The resulting film, *The Burden*, saw the emergence of Blubaugh’s distinctive documentary style, which blends interviews, reenactments and “symbolistic imagery.” Blubaugh’s films are about exploring subjects, and his ideas “come from identifying unique phenomena and seeing how they relate to me personally, and then on a broader scale.” Blubaugh’s two most recent shorts, *Hello, Thanks* and *Scaredycat*, both Sundance selections, have employed and built upon this method, with the latter also incorporating animated sequences.

*Hello, Thanks* is a playful examination of lonely-hearts ads, Blubaugh’s identity as a gay man, and language, but *Scaredycat* is much darker, and was prompted by an incident in which he was attacked and robbed by a gang of youths. “I knew that it would be my next film within a day,” says Blubaugh. “There’s nothing more confusing and baffling than being the victim of a random crime, and I used the film to understand what was going on.”

Though he expected it to be an angry film, after Blubaugh interviewed one of his attackers, *Scaredycat* evolved into a brutally honest examination of his own rational and irrational fears and also his most accomplished and powerful work yet.

Blubaugh is now developing a feature about his relationship with an older man that began in his teens, a subject he has previously attempted to tackle. “I’ve always failed because I found it difficult to separate myself from the material enough,” he explains. “So I’m going to incorporate that difficulty into telling this story. I freely admit I don’t know how it ends — by producing the film it’s going to produce its own ending.” — *N. D.*

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# Photo Gallery

Download in 300 DPI resolution at the web address listed under each still.



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