



Julian Goldberger's *Trans*, found in Sundance's Frontier section, uses non-actors, natural light, and an impressionistic sound score to provide a personal portrait of the changing landscape of Southwest Florida. Eugene Hernandez investigates Goldberger's richly nuanced filmmaking sensibility.

Songs of the South

With a month to go before the 1999 Sundance Film Festival, Julian Goldberger is in New York City spending a few days at DuArt weighing the options of bumping up his first feature to 35mm. *Trans*, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and also screened at the IFFM last fall, not only showcases natural performances by regional non-actors but also offers a soundtrack that incorporates ambient sounds and a stunning original score. Music is a key creative element for Goldberger, and it is his goal of maximizing the quality of the soundtrack that forces him to consider the added expense. "The only advantage in blowing it up at this point would be for optimal sound," the filmmaker explains. "Sound is so integral to *Trans* — the music, textures, the ambient stuff, the spaces, the silences."

Trans, an exploration of youth and escape set in a small Florida town, was shot in sequence using available light and a skeleton crew of six. The film tells the story of a care-free loner, Ryan Kazinski, played by Ryan Daugherty, who escapes from a juvenile detention facility and traverses the Florida landscape.

FILMMAKER: What role does music play in your creative sensibility?

JULIAN GOLDBERGER: Almost everything I've done comes out of a particular piece of music. That's where it starts. I'm interested in working from the unconscious as much as possible, staying away from a cerebral, heady approach

to filmmaking. I've always tried to allow more of an unconscious meditation to occur, and the source of that inspiration is always musical. There are instances where I've strapped headphones onto the cinematographer during a scene and played music for him to listen to so he couldn't hear what was happening outside during the scene — so his perspective and focus would be formed by this particular musical composition.

FILMMAKER: What are your thoughts about being included in Sundance's Frontier section, which focuses on the experimental and "films that challenge, provoke or invigorate the status quo?"

GOLDBERGER: When I first found out about Frontier, I was completely honored to be a part of it. Just the idea of sharing the program with a film about Brakhage, and with Jim Herbert — I was turned onto cinema through Jim's work.

FILMMAKER: How did you become aware of his films?

GOLDBERGER: It was the whole Athens, Georgia scene back when Athens was the alternative — before alternative became "alternative" in the '90s. Musically, I was very interested in what was going on there, which led me to discover Jim Herbert's work, particularly [the videos he did] with R.E.M.

FILMMAKER: You grew up in the South and one of the comments that is made in the Sundance and Toronto festival catalogues is that *Trans* is a representation of the New American South. How do you take a comment like that? Is it accurate, and what does it mean?

GOLDBERGER: The thing with *Trans* is it really

is specific to that environment, specific to that geography, specific to the people of that area. It is a regional film, it is Southwest Florida, and specifically it is Ft. Myers.

FILMMAKER: You clearly have a deep understanding of this area. The film literally places the viewer in this landscape.

GOLDBERGER: It's my hometown. It's what I know. These people that Ryan comes into contact with and his negotiation of the experience — it's what's there. For as long as I can remember, I felt like I wasn't really part of a particular place, so *Trans* really came out of a longing for a sense of place, a sense of identity. And the thing is, though the film is specific to that area — Ft. Myers and that region — it also transcends that. I think anybody from a small town or middle America, or wherever, can relate to that. I hate to be so down on a place, but the thing is, growing up there, you just can't wait to get out. [The film] is all about escaping, so the metaphor for the film is clear to me personally. I had to escape from this place that I didn't feel connected to — I didn't feel like that was where my life was going to be. But then, after years go by, you gain a perspective, so my loathing of it transformed, and it turned into more of an openness to rediscovering this place where I was the outsider, where I did feel very alienated. Now, back to the New American South, there's all this new money coming in, there's all this new development, and all the nuances of the people and the tradition is getting washed away — the epicenter of Ft. Myers is now Barnes and Noble. So that's where I think I'm coming from. ▼

ABOVE: RYAN DAUGHERTY IN *TRANS*.