

A  
SPECIAL  
PRESENTATION  
OF  
THE  
WARRIORS

a film by

BEN RIVERS + BEN RUSSELL

World sales

Rouge International  
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## Contents

4-5	Synopsis
6-7	Directors
8-9	The Film
10-11	Introducing : Robert A.A Lowe
12-13	Director's Note
14-15	Press



## Synopsis

A SPELL follows an unnamed character through three seemingly disparate moments in his life. With little explanation, we join him in the midst of a 15-person collective on a small Estonian island; in isolation in the majestic wilderness of Northern Finland; and during a concert as the singer and guitarist of a black metal band in Norway. Marked by loneliness, ecstatic beauty and an optimism of the darkest sort.

A SPELL is a radical  
proposition  
for the existence  
of utopia  
in the present.

Starring musician Robert AA Lowe (best known for his intense live performances under the name LICHENS) in the lead role, A SPELL lies somewhere between fiction and non-fiction - it is at once a document of experience and an experience itself, an inquiry into transcendence that sees the cinema as a site for transformation.





## Directors



Ben Russell

Ben Russell (born in 1976, USA) is an itinerant media artist and curator whose films, installations, and performances foster a deep engagement with the history and semiotics of the moving image. Formal investigations of the historical and conceptual relationships between early cinema, visual anthropology, and structuralist filmmaking result in immersive experiences concerned at once with ritual, communal spectatorship and the pursuit of a “psychedelic ethnography.”

A 2008 Guggenheim Fellow and 2010 FIPRESCI award recipient for his feature film LET EACH ONE GO WHERE HE MAY, Ben began the Magic Lantern screening series in Providence, Rhode Island, was co-director of the artist-run space Ben Russell in Chicago, IL, toured with film/ video/ performance programs world-wide and performed in a double-drum trio called BEAST. His recent exhibitions include: Arts sous influence, La maison rouge, Paris, 2013; PhotoCairo 5, Townhouse Factory Space, Cairo, 2013; Uh Oh It's Magic, ThreeWalls, Chicago, 2011; TRYPPS #7 (BADLANDS), Wexner Center, Columbus, 2011; 12x12: Ben Russell, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2010. Past solo screenings include: Centre Georges Pompidou, Rotterdam Film Festival, RedCat, les Abattoirs, Viennale, CCCB and the Museum of Modern Art.

### PARTIAL FILMOGRAPHY

- LET US PERSEVERE IN WHAT WE HAVE RESOLVED BEFORE WE FORGET - 2013 / 20' -
- RIVER RITES - 2011 / 11' -
- TRYPPS #7 (BADLANDS) - 2010 / 10' -
- LET EACH ONE GO WHERE HE MAY - 2009 / 135' -
- WORKERS LEAVING THE FACTORY (DUBAI) - 2008 / 8' -
- BLACK AND WHITE TRYPPS NUMBER THREE - 2007 / 11' -
- DAUMË - 2000 / 8' -

Ben Rivers studied Fine Art at Falmouth School of Art, initially in sculpture before moving into photography and super8 film. After his degree he taught himself 16mm filmmaking and hand-processing. His practice as a filmmaker treads a line between documentary and fiction. Often following and filming people who have in some way separated themselves from society, the raw film footage provides Rivers with a starting point for creating oblique narratives imagining alternative existences in marginal worlds.

He is the recipient of numerous prizes including: FIPRESCI International Critics Prize, 68th Venice Film Festival for his first feature film TWO YEARS AT SEA; the inaugural Robert Gardner Film Award, 2012; the Baloise Art Prize, Art Basel 42, 2011; twice shortlisted for the Jarman Award, 2010/2012; Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists, 2010. Recent exhibitions include: SLOW ACTION, Hepworth Wakefield, 2012; Sack Barrow, Hayward Gallery, London, 2011; SLOW ACTION, Matt's Gallery, London and Gallery TPW, Toronto, 2011; A World Rattled of Habit, A Foundation, Liverpool, 2009. Festival retrospectives include Courtisane Festival; Pesaro International Film Festival; London Film Festival; Tirana Film Festival; Punto de Vista, Pamplona; Indielisboa and Milan Film Festival.

In 1996 he co-founded Brighton Cinematheque which he then co-programmed through to its demise in 2006. He continues to programme on a peripatetic basis.

Ben Rivers



### PARTIAL FILMOGRAPHY

- PHANTOMS OF A LIBERTINE - 2012 / 10' -
- TWO YEARS AT SEA - 2011 / 88' -
- SLOW ACTION - 2010 / 45' -
- AH, LIBERTY! - 2008 / 20' -
- I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING - 2009 / 29' -
- THE COMING RACE - 2006 / 5' -
- THIS IS MY LAND - 2006 / 14' -



# The Film

Location

Estonia  
Finland  
Norway

Length

98'

Cast & Crew

## Featuring

Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe  
and Hunter Hunt-Hendrix  
Marten Kaevats  
Iti Kaevats  
Merit Kask  
Kadri Kontus  
Taraka Larson  
Nimai Larson  
Iko Malikin  
Leo Malikin  
Polina Malikin  
Marko Martinson  
Nicholas McMaster  
Okeiko  
Katri Sipiläinen  
Paul Sturtz  
Marie Teppart  
Tuomo Tuovinen  
Nick Turvey  
Erko Valk  
Weasel Walter

## Cinematographer

Ben Rivers & Ben Russell

## Steadicam

Chris Fawcett

## Edit

Ben Rivers + Ben Russell

## Sound Engineer

Chu-Li Shewring, Nicolas Becker  
+ Philippe Ciompi

## Sound Edit

Nicolas Becker + Philippe Ciompi

## Sound Mix

Gérard Lamps

## Music

Veldo Tormis  
Lichens (Robert AA Lowe)  
Queequeg (Hunter-Hendrix  
+ Lowe  
+ McMaster  
+ Walter)

Production



## Rouge International

Nadia Turincev & Julie Gayet

Rouge International is a production company founded in July 2007 by Julie Gayet & Nadia Turincev producing full length feature & documentary film such as: 8 Times Up by Xabi Molia (San Sebastien, 2009) Fix Me by Raed Andoni (Sundance, 2010), Bonsai by Cristian Jimenez (Cannes, 2011).

Co-production



## Black Hand - Indrek Kasela

Black Hand is a distribution & production company founded in February 2010 by Indrek Kasela. Black Hand is mainly focused on art-house film distribution in the Baltic States; it also operates the cinema Sopro in Tallinn that has served its audience for 55 years and has earned its street credibility as a cinema where no compromises are made.

TV Pre-sale



In association with ARTE France - La Lucarne  
Unité Société et Culture - Martine Saada  
Chargé des programmes - Luciano Rigolini

Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/32750656>



## Introducing: Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe

Robert A.A Lowe is a Brooklyn-based musician and performer who is best-known for his solo project Lichens. Utilizing a microphone, a loop pedal and sometimes little else, Lichen's performances are both trance-induced and transformative. The resulting music exists as a real-time reflection of internalized experience; a near-mystic illumination of symbiosis, serendipity and synchronicity. In addition to his work with Ben Rivers & Ben Russell on A SPELL to ward off the darkness, Lowe has worked in collaboration with Patrick Smith, White/Light, Michael Zerang, Joshua Micah Abrams, Alan Licht, Hisham Bharoocha (Black Dice / Soft Circle), Rose Lazar, Bird Show (Ben Vida), Doug Aitken, and Om.





## Directors's Note

Beginning with a fire song and ending with a scream. A SPELL TO WARD OFF THE DARKNESS is cinema-sorcery of the most embodied sort. It is a proposition for cinema as both a way forward and a way for the present. This is the light that brings us out of the shadow.

Intended as an elaboration upon themes that have been present in our individual works (ritual and ceremony in Ben Russell's LET EACH ONE GO WHERE HE MAY and BLACK AND WHITE TRYPPS NUMBER THREE; nomadism and post-industrialization in Ben Rivers' AH, LIBERTY! and I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING) and as an opportunity to move our own practices forward, A SPELL is a partnership in the fullest sense of the word.

From conception to execution, from initial camera position to final edit, every decision that has been made is one that we have made together.

Three years in the making, this film collaboration pushes ever harder at the rapidly expanding boundaries of documentary and non-fiction filmmaking. At its center, A SPELL is a proposal for a dynamic and visceral approach to contemporary media, one that refuses to maintain the borders between art and cinema and art-as-cinema.

By shifting between fiction and document, between ideological inquiry and contemplative engagement, A SPELL asks its viewer to participate in a dialogue that is especially relevant to our present moment

- where do we find belief in the backward glance towards modernism?

What is the place of uncertainty, of mystery, in an existence that has been overdetermined by understanding? What glow remains in the ash of cinema, and how can it be ash if the aura persists?

**A SPELL is a provocation in that it is an argument or presence and vitality.**

In focusing our lens on the various markers of a spiritual existence, we seek to produce experience itself - for cinema should not simply be leashed to representation, it should create reality.

Inasmuch as A SPELL TO WARD OFF THE DARKNESS is a film about the transcendent, our goal is transcendence itself.





## Press

### « Two Directors, Three Movements »

« During Rivers and Russell's film, in the transition from the first to the second part, and then to the third, a triangle appears, scratched onto the film itself, branded into the black. The two filmmakers, one British and one American, sharing a first name and initials as though predestined to double and reflect in each other, have often shared similar creative journeys, which grew closer, intersected and have now joined together.

Two directors for a film in three movements, and the union of the segments in the closed and continuous shape of this triangle stands for the journey of the project and its main character. He leaves a community of which he is a member and a mute witness. Alone, he passes through forests, lakes and memories, before arriving at a new community, this time musical, completing a journey from silence to shout. The film is inspired by the luminous colours and social utopias of Rivers, slides towards a common enchanted ground in which the visions of both meet, and arrives at an long and mysterious performance sequence, with the Dionysian charge typical of Russell's work.

During the final concert, the camera lingers on the faces of the audience, mirroring on screen the faces of the film's audience, us, like them, part of an experience that has transformed the room into an autonomous space, and listening and seeing into a progressive liberating alteration of the senses. »

Sergio Fant - Locarno Film Festival

«With its very title, A Spell to Ward Off the Darkness is a film that announces itself as being in league with forces not entirely of this world.»

—  
Michael Sicinski - Cinemascope



« a tapestry of beautifully rendered concepts... impressively committed to its poetic design. »

—  
Eric Kohn - Indiewire



«elegantly artistic and engagingly challenging... It is a film that aims to challenge and provoke and succeeds on that score.»

—  
Mark Adams - Screen Daily





Festival del film  
Locarno

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**tiff.** toronto  
international  
film festival