



presents

# Happy Valley

a film by

**Amir Bar-Lev**

98 min., 2014

**Rated TBD**

Press materials:

<http://www.musicboxfilms.com/happyvalley-press>

Official site:

<http://www.musicboxfilms.com/happyvalley>

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Amir Bar-Lev's documentary HAPPY VALLEY takes an unflinching look at an iconic American institution in the wake of unthinkable scandal. Nestled in the idyllic area known as Happy Valley lies the town of State College, home of Penn State University. For over 40 years, Joe Paterno was the celebrated head coach of the school's storied football team. Lauded not only for his program's success on the field, but also for students' achievements in the classroom, Paterno was a revered figure in a town where team loyalty approached nationalistic fervor. Then in November 2011, everything changed when longtime assistant coach Jerry Sandusky was charged with 40 counts of child sex abuse, setting off a firestorm of accusations about who failed to protect the children of Happy Valley. Filmed over the course of the year after Sandusky's arrest as key players agreed to share their stories, HAPPY VALLEY deconstructs the story we think we know to uncover a much more complicated and tragic tale. Director Bar-Lev creates an indelible portrait of a wounded community and an engrossing investigation into the role big time football played in both the crimes and their aftermath.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

I came to this story thinking that the real truth of the matter-- the bottom line about Joe Paterno and the town—would be there if you pushed hard enough to find it. I found a different truth--a town that was internally torn apart by questions of responsibility and blame, a town marked as having a “culture problem” by the rest of the country.

I realized that my job here as a filmmaker was not to join the finger-pointing, but, rather, to figure out the narrative that would make sense of all of the different versions of the truth that I was hearing around the town and outside of it. The master narrative of what happened in Happy Valley, I realized, was a kind of moral parable of our time.

I want audiences to come out of the film feeling the complexity of it all in a way that we can often miss when these stories wash over us every day on the news. And I hope that this complexity leaves people feeling oddly hopeful, more human, with more of a sense of the possibilities of change than a narrative that took comfort in easy answers.

## **FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES**

### **AMIR BAR-LEV (Director)**

Amir Bar-Lev's directorial debut *Fighter* was named one of the top documentaries of the year by Newsweek, Rolling Stone, and The Village Voice and won six international festival awards. His second film, *My Kid Could Paint That*, was released internationally by Sony Pictures Classics in 2007, with broadcast on Starz, A&E and BBC.

Bar-Lev traveled to New Orleans nine days after Hurricane Katrina and began filming a young married couple, both crack dealers, with a heroic story of survival during the storm and an uncertain future ahead. Bar-Lev served as co-producer on the resulting film, *Trouble The Water*, which was a 2009 Academy Award Nominee. *Trouble the Water* also took the Grand Jury Prize at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, the Grand Jury Award at Full Frame, a Special Jury Mention at Silverdocs, the IFP Gotham Award for Best Documentary, and was nominated for the PGA Documentary award, and the NAACP Image Awards Best Documentary.

Bar-Lev also directed *The Tillman Story*, a feature documentary about NFL safety Pat Tillman, who joined the Army Rangers in 2002 and was killed in a friendly fire incident two years later. *The Tillman Story* was named the top documentary of 2010 by The San Francisco Critics' Circle, The Florida Critics' Circle, and The St. Louis Critics' Circle, and was nominated for ten additional critics' circle prizes, the National Board of Review Documentary award, the PGA Documentary award, and the Cinema Eye Audience Choice award.

Bar-Lev has directed two music documentaries: *The Re:Generation Music Project*, featuring collaborations by artists such as Erykah Badu, Mos Def, Scrillex, and Mark Ronson, among others, and *12.12.12*, a concert film starring The Who, The Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, and Bruce Springsteen, among many others. He is beginning work on a documentary about The Grateful Dead.

### **JOHN BATTSEK (Producer)**

John Battsek runs Passion Pictures' film department and is one of the most successful and prolific feature documentary producers in the industry. In 1999, Battsek conceived and produced the Academy Award-winning *One Day in September* and he has since been involved with over thirty high profile feature documentaries, including: *Searching for Sugar Man* (Academy Award winner 2013); *The Imposter* (BAFTA winner 2013); *Restrepo* (Academy Award nominated 2011); *Sergio* (Academy Award shortlisted 2010) and *The Tillman Story* (Academy Award shortlisted 2011). Battsek and Passion Pictures will launch four new feature films at the January 2014 Sundance Film Festival: Jeremiah Zagar's *Captivated: The Trials of Pamela Smart*, produced by Hard Working Movies for HBO and Sky; Amir Bar

Lev's *Happy Valley* for A&E IndieFilms; Greg Barker's *We Are The Giant*, a co-production with Motto Pictures for Corniche, Bertha Foundation and Screen Pass Pictures; and Nadav Schirman's *The Green Prince*, based on the New York Times Bestselling memoir *The Son of Hamas* by Mosab Hassan Yousef. New projects include: Margaret Brown's *The Great Invisible* for Participant Media - a longitudinal character driven film about the unfolding effects of the BP oil spill on the Gulf Coast; a new film about *National Lampoon* for A&E IndieFilms, directed by Doug Tirola. Battsek has been twice nominated for a PGA Award in 2010 and in 2011 for *Sergio* and *The Tillman Story* respectively, and was the recipient of the prestigious Grierson Trustees Award for Outstanding Contribution to Documentary.

### **KEN DORNSTEIN (Producer)**

Ken Dornstein has been making documentaries for almost twenty years, following a brief career as a private investigator in Los Angeles.

Dornstein has been involved in the production of over fifty films, including Emmy-award winners such as *Sex Slaves*, a unique, inside look at the international trafficking of women, and *A Death in Tehran*, the story of the failed Iranian Revolution as told through the story of a lone protester gunned down by the regime. As a longtime Senior Editor and Senior Producer at FRONTLINE, the PBS investigative documentary series, Dornstein has also received a Columbia DuPont award, an Overseas Press Club Award and other major industry honors.

In addition to filmmaking, Dornstein is the author of several works of non-fiction, including *The Boy Who Fell Out of the Sky: A True Story* (Random House), which has been optioned by Warner Brothers as a feature film.

Dornstein is currently completing a feature documentary about his twenty-five year search for the men who bombed Pan Am Flight 103—a flight that killed his older brother and 269 others. The search ultimately leads to a manhunt into the lawless territory of Libya after the fall of Qaddafi, and an unprecedented confrontation with one of his brother's murderers.

### **JONATHAN KOCH (Producer)**

Jonathan Koch is President and Chief Creative Officer of Asylum Entertainment. He came to Asylum with an impressive track record in marketing, as former founder and CEO of Gravy Train Productions, a marketing, licensing and touring company for top child actors. He was on the forefront of the celebrity branding industry, teaming popular young stars with major companies like Hasbro, General Mills, FAO Schwarz and Six Flags. In 1996, Koch co-created CelebritySightings.com, an internet sensation that he sold to Alloy in 1999. His roots were in entertainment at the Barbara Cameron Talent Agency, a leader in the discovery and development of young talent, where he quickly rose to partner.

Since teaming with Steve Michaels in 2003, Koch has guided the rapid growth of the company's programming slate, having created and executive produced its dozens of series, documentary and event projects. He is known for a remarkable ability to identify and distill what makes a project sell—and then sell it to a rapt audience. He enjoys creating entertainment across myriad genres, from the hit reality show *Beverly Hills Pawn* to the Emmy-winning documentary series *Beyond the Glory*. Koch's first two television long-form originals, *Ring of Fire* (Lifetime) and *The Kennedys* (Reelz), garnered 14 Emmy nominations between them.

*Happy Valley* is a deeply personal film for Koch, who grew up in State College spellbound by its football program and was a counselor at The Second Mile Summer Camp as a teen.

### **STEVE MICHAELS (Producer)**

Steve Michaels is President & Chief Executive Officer of Asylum Entertainment. Since founding the company in 2001, Michaels has executive produced more than 700 of hours of series and event programming, including the recent four-time Emmy-winning *The Kennedys* miniseries. The company is a major supplier of programming to a vast array of networks including Fox, AMC, NBC, TNT, History, A&E, Lifetime and Reelz, and has produced more than 40 unscripted series. In addition to its robust slate of reality programs, Asylum has expanded into scripted fare, including movies, limited series and features.

Michaels began his career under the tutelage of major filmmakers including James Cameron and Scott Rudin, and went on to work in sports programming, for which he won Emmy and Peabody awards. Michaels' documentary *Tyson* is considered the standard of excellence in sports-themed documentary, while his 30 for 30 ESPN series, featuring films by the likes of Peter Berg and Ron Shelton, set the bar for sports series. Michaels, who directs on occasion, worked on the Academy Award-winning short film *Dear Diary*, and recently executive produced Asylum's first full-length feature film, *Small Time*, which Anchor Bay will release in 2014. Ever the executive producer, he enjoys juggling multiple concurrent productions.

A Los Angeles native, Michaels graduated from the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, and is both a proud Trojan and rabid Kings fan.

### **MOLLY THOMPSON (Executive Producer)**

Molly Thompson launched and runs A&E IndieFilms, the network's feature documentary division. A&E IndieFilms' productions include the Oscar-nominated, Sundance Award-winner *Murderball*, the Oscar-nominated *Jesus Camp* and the Emmy Award-winners *The Tillman Story* and *Under African Skies*. Thompson executive produces the division's original productions including: *American Teen*, *The September Issue*, *The Tillman Story* and *The Imposter*.

## **CREDITS**

A&E ANIMATED LOGO

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PRODUCED BY JOHN BATTSEK AND KEN DORNSTEIN

CO-PRODUCED BY EZEKIEL MORGAN

DIRECTED BY AMIR BAR-LEV

HAPPY VALLEY

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PRODUCED BY JOHN BATTSEK AND KEN DORNSTEIN

PRODUCED BY JONATHAN KOCH AND STEVE MICHAELS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

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GENE WILLIAMS  
MOTT WILLIAMS

"COUNTRY DISAPPEARED"  
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY WILCO

"OLD & IN THE WAY"  
Recorded Live at the Boarding House 10/8/73  
Usage courtesy of Acoustic Disc  
Fiddle & Vocals: Vassar Clements  
Banjo & Vocals: Jerry Garcia  
Mandolin & Vocals: David Grisman  
Bass: John Kahn  
Guitar & Vocals: Peter Rowan

**Produced by Asylum Entertainment for A&E Indie Films.**

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## **About Music Box Films**

Founded in 2007, Music Box Films is a leading distributor of international, American independent, and documentary content in North America along with the best in international TV series and mini-series.

Releases in 2014 included Roger Michell's LE WEEK-END, written by Hanif Kureishi and starring Jim Broadbent; the Emmy Award winning French-language series "The Returned"; Pawel Pawlikowski's IDA, the official Polish submission to the Academy Awards®; and the Sundance Audience Award-winning documentary THE GREEN PRINCE.

Upcoming releases include award-winning documentary WATCHERS OF THE SKY, Dominik Graf's BELOVED SISTERS, Germany's official submission to the Academy Awards®, and Shlomi and Ronit Elkabetz's GETT: THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE AMSALEM, Israel's official submission to the Academy Awards®.

Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates The Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premiere venue for independent and foreign films.