

Four Decades After L.M. Kit Carson Birthed Dallas's Modern Film Scene, His *Diary* Returns

By Robert Wilonsky

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From time to time we'll name-drop L.M. Kit Carson, perhaps the most influential local-born filmmaker, with good reason: The Irving-born actor (*Running on Empty*, great on *Miami Vice*) and writer (*Paris, Texas* with Sam Shepard; that *Breathless* remake) was co-founder of the USA Film Festival, feted at the first Deep Ellum Film Festival in 1999, mentor to Roman Coppola and Wes Anderson and co-conspirator with Jim McBride on the 1967 mockumentary *David Holzman's Diary*, which was hatched on the University of Dallas campus and sits between *Daughters of the Dust* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* on the Library of Congress's National Film Registry, where it's been for 20 years. For starters.



L.M. Kit Carson in David Holzman's Diary

He remains active, of course: Carson's loooooong-in-the-making *Africa Diary*, made with wife Cynthia Hargrave, will finally premiere on the Sundance Channel in the fall; here he is talking about it -- and everything else mentioned above -- with Gadi Elkouf at the Dallas International Film Festival a couple of months back.

But tomorrow, for the first time in decades, *David Holzman's Diary* makes its full-on re-premiere on Fandor.com, where, in advance of the occasion, you'll find **Kevin B. Lee's** two-part video essay series on the influence of the film -- "one of the first films to use the first-person approach to documentary filmmaking," Lee writes, "a technique we now take for granted in the era of Michael Moore and Morgan

Spurlock." Only, of course, it was all made-up. Straight-up fiction. Turned facton filmmaking up to 11 before *Spinal Tap*. That's but one of myriad looks-at *Holzman* on the Fandor blog; it's hardly a "best-kept secret" over there.

On influential indie film producer Ted Hope's blog, Carson writes of the movie's origins:

OK, fact is - 1967: Me and Jim McBride were writing the first-ever book about cinema-verite - it was an interview/theory book for New York City's Museum of Modern Art; we were calling it: THE TRUTH ON FILM. We were interviewing the roster of new-documentary filmmakers from Robert Drew to Leacock and Pennebaker to the Maysles Brothers - including interviewing Andy Warhol for his pop-verite. Halfway through the book-writing, McBride says to me: "There is no Truth on Film. Basically as soon as you turn the camera on - everything changes - to not real - gets like unreal." So we decide it's more quote/unquote "un-truth-ful" to write this book - we decide not to write this book.

Instead they spend 10 days and \$2,500 on their little movie, which *Hannah Takes the Stairs* director Joe Swanberg writes is the first ... everything we take for granted now:

I hate the term "ahead of its time," because it lets people off the hook for not recognizing themselves in their own time. *David Holzman's Diary* is one of the rare, great films that's of its time. Jim McBride recognized that small, affordable film equipment would become both a mirror and a megaphone for filmmakers. The film is a blog. It's a Facebook page. It's a Twitter account. It's also the sharpest critique of, and deepest investigation into, those media that I know of.