

By Jason Thomson

ASBURY PARK – There's no doubt Ken Sorensen, a.k.a. Stringbean, is the perfect subject for a documentary short film. He's the ultimate character in all the good ways. He's a man of profound thought. And one of the great musicians of our triCity area. He even has a bunch of groupies who follow him from gig to gig, some with recorders in tow capturing every moment and placing those recordings in a secret vault, perhaps under a seat in a mysterious van that roams around Asbury, to be listened to at a later time. Perhaps even never. There's an inside joke there somewhere. Only those with specific knowledge shall understand it.

Stringbean is the star, along with his band The Boardwalk Social Club, of a new film called BIKE RIDDIM by Sarah Galloway. The film follows the band as they embarked upon a summer long campaign in 2017 to ride their bikes to all their local gigs, instruments in tow. It's was a noble initiative to promote bicycle awareness and safety. And let's face it, there are just too many damn cars on the road, especially in Asbury Park, and the best way to get around in the summer is either on foot or on a bike.

Hence Kenny's "self propel" rule came in to play. He, along with his bandmates, were commanded to bike or walk to all their local gigs from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Break the rule and face the wrath of Stringbean.

Galloway followed the band on a bike of her own and filmed interviews with all the players. The film gets its name from Stringbean's reggae-influenced hit, "Bike Riddim". The film recently screened at the Asbury Park Music and Film Fest and won an Asbury Park Press award.

BIKE RIDDIM gets a redux in the most appropriate place possible, at High Voltage Cafe (808 Springwood Ave.) which resides in the same space as Second Life Bikes in Asbury Park. This all goes down on Thursday, May 17 at 7pm. The band will also play a short set after the film. Here's a short interview with Galloway.

First off how did you come about making a film about Kenny and his biking to gigs around Asbury?

Kenny asked me in March, 2017. He knew I had a background making documentaries, asked me to document his band biking to their summer gigs. I met with Kenny before I started production to understand what his ideas were and make sure it was something I could deliver. I couldn't afford a nice camera, but, I could afford a GoPro. Since much of the documentary would be from a bike, it made sense to go (that route).

Are you a biker yourself?

I never gave up biking. Part of the reason is that I never learned to drive a car until recently. Driving still scares me, but I'm fearless on a bike. I don't do 100 mile rides and I don't race. I've just always used it as a fun way to get around and as a way to commute to work.

How did you get into filmmaking?

My Dad (who passed away in 2014) was an Audio Visual professional and I definitely followed in his footsteps. He gave me a lot of advice on using a camera and taught me to take it seriously when I was a kid. My undergraduate degree is in Anthropology, but I wanted to go to film school. I had read Michael Rabiger's book, "Directing the Documentary" which emphasizes the craft of making documentaries vs. highfalutin theory. So I contacted Michael and applied to Columbia College's MFA program in documentary film. After my first year, I won a full academic scholarship. While I was a graduate student I interned at Kartemquin Films and had the great opportunity to work as an Assistant Editor on "Hoop Dreams."

After film school I returned home to New York and freelanced as an editor before I took a full-time job as a Video Producer for the Exhibition Depart-

ment at the American Museum of Natural History. Making videos for AMNH was my dream job. I stayed for 20 years. It combined everything I love: a curiosity about the world combined with art. Plus I got to collaborate with terrific people. In later years there were major budget cuts and I had to take on a huge work load, plus I was managing a team of freelancers. When my husband retired, I decided to quit my job and freelance myself.

Is BIKE RIDDIM your first film?

It's not my first film, but it is my first independent film since film school.

What is your professional background?

Since film school I've worked as a Video Producer, Director, Writer, Editor and 2D Animator. At AMNH I loved being able to come up with an idea, pitch it to the Exhibition Team / Curators and then be the one to make it happen all the way to exhibit installation. I've also freelanced for Local Projects, Science Friday and was the story consultant for Charlie Samuels' feature documentary, "Virgin Blacktop," which won the award for Best Skateboard Documentary at the Paris Surf and Skateboard Festival, 2017.

How can this film inspire others to get on their bikes more?

There are a lot of GoPro shots taken from my bike where, when you watch them, you feel like you're gliding above the boardwalk. A bike gives you that feeling of gliding, of freedom. You feel more energetic on a bike. It's a direct experience of the world. I feel like I'm missing out when I'm encased in a car. Car parking is a big problem in Asbury Park, riding a bike is obviously the way to go. For those who haven't biked in a while, BIKE RIDDIM will give you a taste of the freedom that comes from biking. As Kenny says in the video, biking is a "natural change of consciousness.....I'd like to see everybody ride bicycles."

