

# A CIGAR AT THE BEACH

Year: 2006, Length: 15min., Format: 35mm, Origin: USA, CA

Producer: Daniel Dubiecki, Director/Writer: Stephen Keep Mills, Cinematographer: Michael Alba, Editor: Tamera Martin, Composer: Milen Kirov, Art Director: Ron Pereira, Costumer: Jessica Torok, Sound Designer: Gerald Albright, Cast: Billy Gillespie, Svetlana Efremova, Cathy Shim, Rumi Bunya, Martin Clark, William Joseph Hill, Jermaine Jackson, Radu Vlad, Stephanie Nash, Charlie Schmidt

## Synopsis (long):

On a family trip to Florida to visit his sick father, The Smoker (Billy Gillespie) leaves his napping, pregnant wife (Stephanie Nash) and his iPod addicted step-son (Charlie Schmidt) in the motel room for a cigar at the beach. As a storm approaches, The Smoker pulls up a chair to the water's edge, smokes his cigar, and begins to pretend. At once, two high-octane Bikini-clad Asian tourists (Cathy Shim, Rumi Bunya) catch him off-guard and on-camera as they play and pose for the drugstore Kodaks they carry. As they begin to undress, The Smoker conjures up a more mature romance, The Woman in White (Svetlana Efremova) for an exotic and erotic encounter. As they begin to make love, The Smoker gets the call from a distant Freighter and is instantly playing poker in the ship's belly with four Mariners from distant lands (Martin Clark, William Joseph Hill, Jermaine Jackson, Radu Vlad). The insight that their obsession with women echoes his own and has rendered them all quite mad drives The Smoker from the game. He quickly retreats into a fleeting fantasy of his own family and then he sees—The Wave. Huge, swelling, mystifying, the wave grips The Smoker in a wish for release. The Smoker walks into the towering wave which crashes over him. The sea becomes calm. The Smoker's chair is empty.

## Synopsis (short):

Surreal, satiric, lightly erotic, and surprisingly spiritual, A Cigar at the Beach is a modern tale starring the male psyche, as a married man escapes the demands of domestic life through fantasy. High-octane bikinis! A Gypsy Siren! Adventure on the high seas—until The Wave washes everything clean.

## Synopsis (short):

A man withdraws to an empty beach to smoke a cigar and fantasize. An approaching storm out across the water mirrors the storm inside him as his fantasies propel him the very edge of himself and to a surprise yearning greater than flesh or adventure.

## Synopsis (one line):

A modern tale of the Mid-Life (married) Male.

## Log line:

“We are on film”



### **Filmmaker Bio:**

Stephen Keep Mills (Writer/Director/Executive Producer) started out as an actor. Graduating from the Yale School of Drama in 1969, he began his professional life with The Guthrie Theatre and performed with many leading regional theatre companies in the US and Canada, appeared in three Broadway productions, and worked on new plays at the Public Theatre in NYC in the time of Joe Papp. Much of his TV and film work can be found on IMDb by searching for Stephen Keep. Mills began writing, directing, and producing his own plays in 1985, and in 2003, turned one of them, *Hotel Lobby*, into a digital feature. He is following up that effort by making his debut as a film director with *A Cigar at the Beach*.

### **Production History:**

Mills wrote this piece over the span of two late nights in Delray Beach, Florida, when he took his family there to visit his aging father who was suffering from depression. Ping-ponging between the needs of his pregnant wife, his step-son, and his dad, Mills took a look at his own roles of husband, son, father, and the issue of mortality. Out of a yellow note-pad full of scribbles, erasures, and diagrams, *A Cigar at the Beach* was born. The screenplay is adapted from Mills' award-winning stage play (same title). When the stage version opened in Hollywood the LA Press called it: "A gem. Mills' script is succulent and vivid with imagery and deposits silent, delicate jewels with the audience." (Drama-Logue). "Mills takes us on a funny and wistful saunter through the male psyche. He succeeds as a writer with beguiling, wry wit and ultimate gentleness." (Los Angeles Theatres Magazine) Though the reviews were positive, Mills still had a wish: "One of the main characters was missing," he says, "the storm. The story has very cinematic needs. Its presence on stage was partial, representational. Now it feels complete."

### **Film Bio:**

*A Cigar at the Beach* was completed in January, 2006. It was shot over a span of 11 days in Ormond Beach, CA (30 miles north of Los Angeles) and in Delray Beach, Florida, using 35mm Kodak film and Arriflex cameras. It has been an official selection of over 167 festivals and 31 countries worldwide. Cigar has so far garnered 48 awards in the "Best Of" categories for Narrative Short and Cinematography. All casting was the result of postings on Now Casting, LA Casting, and SAGIndie websites. The contract is SAG Limited Exhibition, the total running time is 15 minutes, and the budget's a secret.



### **Filmmaker Statement:**

Here's my version of the mid-life male with a surprise spiritual component lurking beneath the apparent eroticism of the fantasies. None of the fantasies are strong enough to complete or to satisfy, driving the Smoker (protagonist) off the mainland and onto the high seas in search of distant horizons. What he finds aboard, however, is his own reflection, enacted by four Mariners who voice the Smoker's own compulsions from a madness he will soon acquire if he doesn't jump ship, which he does. And what catches him? What answers his quest for fulfillment? The great Mother Sea which comes to snatch him up and purify him and rinse him clean and restore him. The old life recedes and loses its grip, while a new birth comes upon him unawares and takes hold.

There is, too, the "Odysseus" element. The hero is grounded or as unemployed Merchant Mariners put it: "on the beach". The modern domestic man, engaged as Zorba would say in the "full catastrophe" of wife and children, must find a new goal. The Sirens are no longer an option. The horizon is for others to explore. Here in this moment and on this earth with these people—wife, son, father—what is the hero's response? Perhaps it's the Hero Imago itself which must be washed out by the monster wave.

I had to get permission from my wife to make this film. In trying to convince her, I emphasized the more symbolic and spiritual elements of the story. But she focused on the more physical aspects and, though she relented, remains unconvinced this piece is anything other than pure autobiography.

I believe that drama does urgently exist in moments of stasis, those in-between times where we are fogged and without answers and paralyzed. Mine is the drama of privacy.

