

Sammy-Gate

Thee J.X. Williams Archive presents a Noel Lawrence film "Sammy-Gate"

Richard Beatty | Philip Proctor | Durga McBroom | Jello Biafra | Reggie Jernigan

Dan Carbone | Richard Tanner | Peter-Henry Schroeder | Stevens Gaston

Production Designer Priscilla Elliott | Director of Photography Stephan Wassmann

Executive Producer Peter Baxter | Produced by Karina Pyudik

Screenplay by Darius James & Noel Lawrence | Directed by Noel Lawrence



OFFICIAL SELECTION

**INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM**

2020



Sammy-Gate | 2020 | 89 minutes

A dark, political satire about how Sammy Davis, Jr. caused Watergate.

Media Contact & Inquiries

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Sammy-Gate

[Narrative Feature]

Running Time: 89 minutes

Directed by: Noel Lawrence

Executive Produced by Peter Baxter

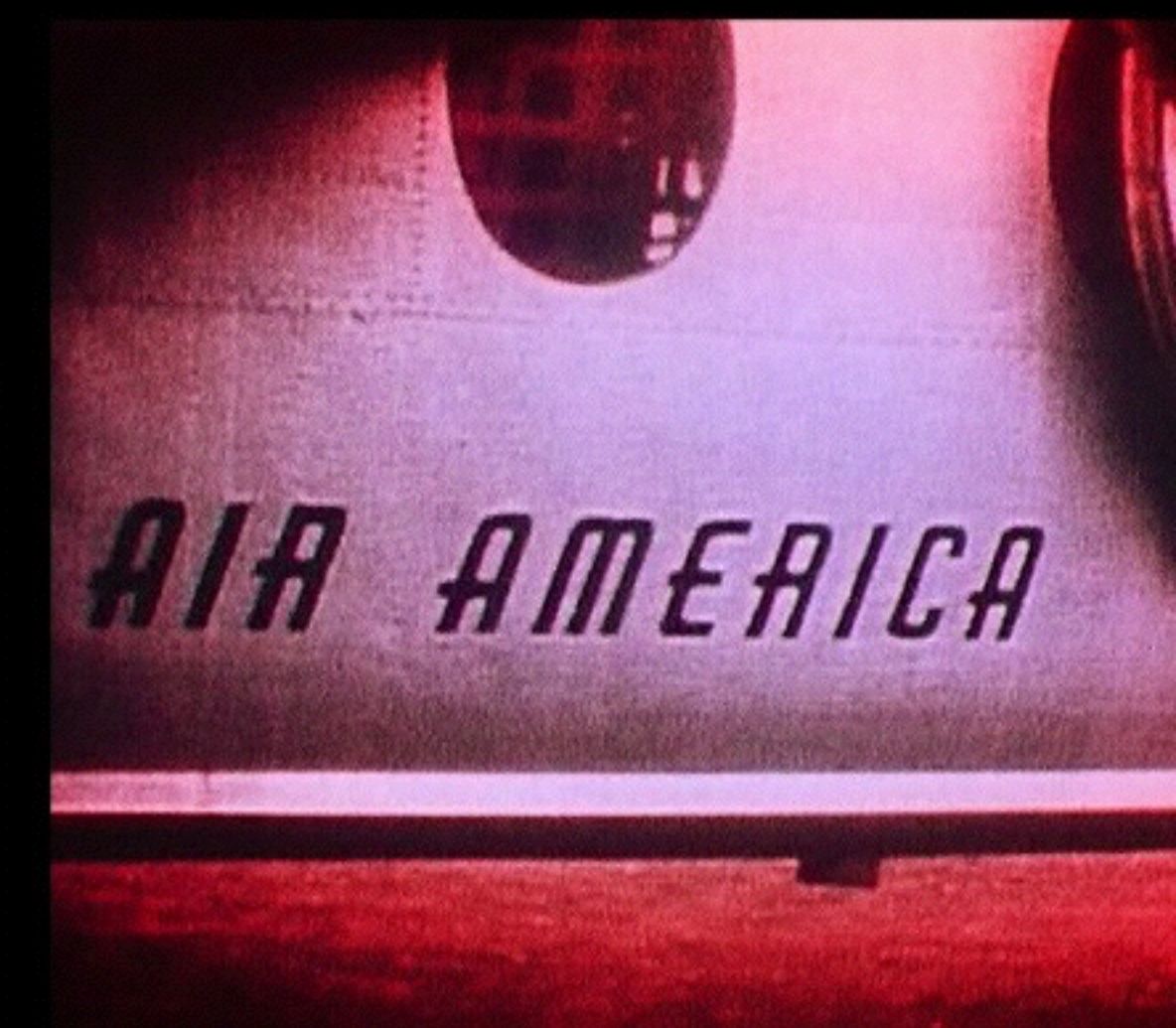
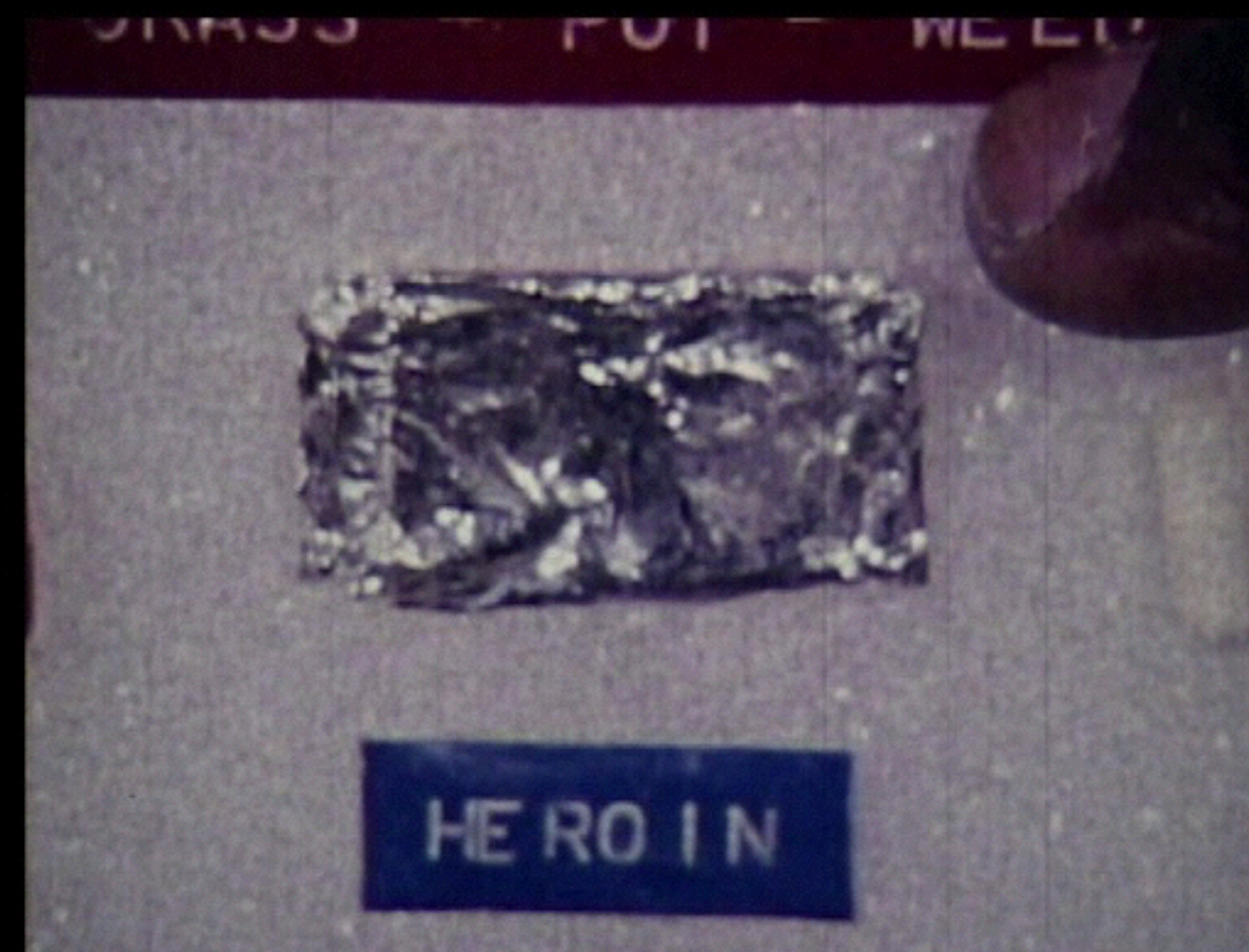
Produced by Karina Pyudik

Written by Noel Lawrence
Darius James

Music by Kirpatrick Thomas
Eric D. Clark
Brennan Johns

Richard Beatty as Sammy Davis, Jr.

Philip Proctor as Richard Nixon



Equal parts *Dr. Strangelove*, *Putney Swope*, and *Network*, *Sammy-Gate* takes you on a psychedelic trip into the 1970s polyester heart of darkness. On a USO tour of Vietnam, Sammy Davis Jr. stumbles upon a CIA-sponsored plot to smuggle heroin into the United States. Through comic ineptitude mixed with noble intentions, Davis triggers a chain of bizarre missteps by the FBI, the Mafia, and the Nixon Administration that result in the Watergate scandal.



nixon



haldeman



ehrichman



davis

The Washington Post **METRO** *Local News*
FRIDAY JUNE 23, 1972

Sammy Davis, Jr. Linked To Arrestees In Bugging Affair

By Bob Woodward
and Carl Bernstein

Bond was reduced yesterday for four of the five men arrested in the bugging attempt of Democratic National headquarters here early Saturday.

Their attorney said he expected the four to post the \$3,000 or \$4,000 now required and be released today.

Before yesterday's hearing, four of the five were required to show up for their arraignment.

into the Watergate hotel is a Florida corporation organized in 1969 to promote real estate projects. Suarez is a member of the corporation and a business associate. of one of the suspects

At the bond hearing yesterday, Superior Court Judge James A. Belson did not lower the \$50,000 surety bond for Frank A. Sturgis, also known as Frank Fiorini, identified by columnist Jack Anderson as one of the perpetrators of the



“Through its skillful mix of fact and fiction, *Sammy-Gate* transforms ‘fake news’ into a fine art. The film presages a digital age in which nothing is true and everything is permitted.” - Michael Gonzales

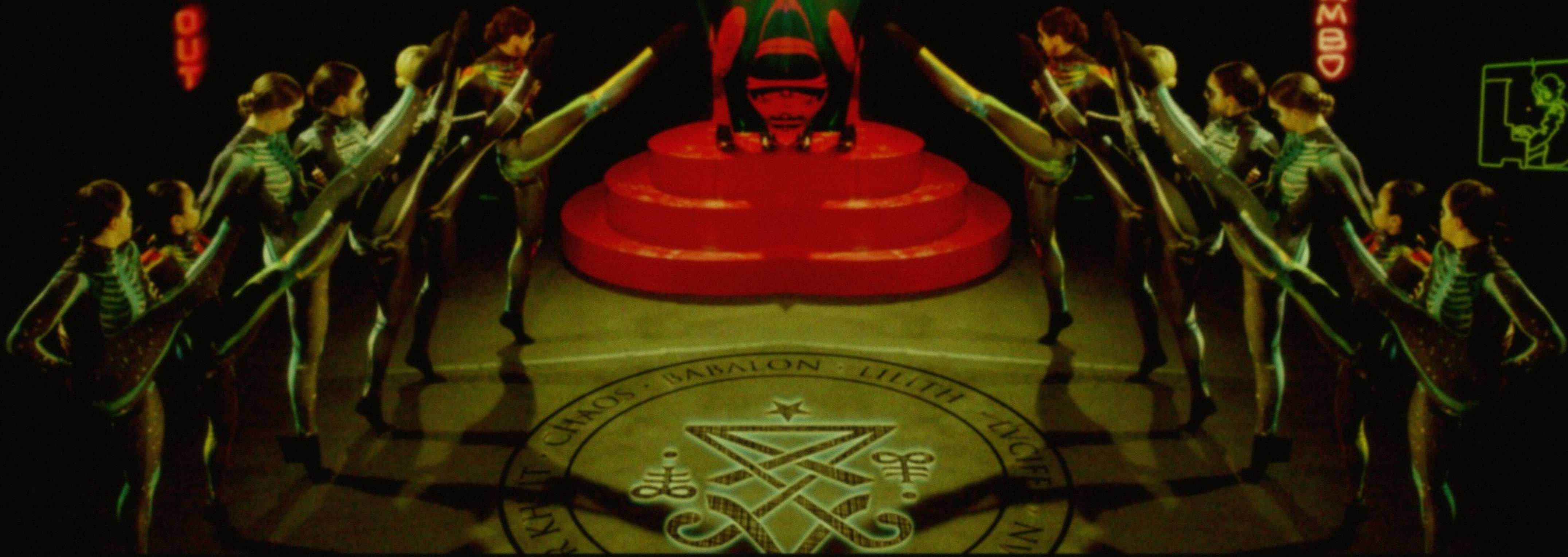
THE
Silver
Room

WILL FIND CHARLIE'S
BUT YOU DON'T



REDUCED
PRICE

The
BROWN
DERBY





About Darius James [writer]

Darius James is an author, spoken-word artist, and expert on African-American folk culture. He is the author of five books. His debut novel *Negrophobia* (NYRB Classics) was just republished by the **New York Review of Books**. His follow-up book *That's Blaxploitation: Roots of the Badaasssss 'Tude* (St. Martins) was one of the pioneering works on the Blaxploitation genre of cinema.

After two decades in New York as a freelance journalist, Darius relocated to Berlin, Germany in 1998 where he worked as a radio host and theatre director. James also wrote and hosted *The United States of Hoodoo*, a road movie that traces the influence of voodoo on daily life and pop culture in the USA. The film premiered on **Arte** (Germany) in 2012. Currently, he is completing *Aunt Katie's Tales*.

About Noel Lawrence [director, writer]

Noel Lawrence makes, curates, distributes, and writes about film.

As alter ego **J.X. Williams**, Lawrence produced a body of audiovisual work that critiqued institutions and historical discourses of cinema. His films have been showcased at **The Louvre**, **IFFR**, **Slamdance**, and **Thessaloniki**. His provocative work has been featured in **The New York Times**, **Wall Street Journal**, and **Vice** as well as a book of collected essays on his filmography, ***J.X. Williams: Les Dossiers Interdits*** (Camion Noir, 2010).

More recently, Lawrence has collaborated on projects with **Bootsy Collins** and **Iggy Pop** as well as teaming up with the **Luis Buñuel Film Institute** on a lecture/presentation on the influence of surrealism in mid-century advertising. Noel also co-curates the **Department of Anarchy** film section at Slamdance.



Director's Statement

I wouldn't be writing this statement were it not for Darius James, who did not just write this screenplay with me but has been a mentor, friend, and my guide in exploring the mysterious universe that is Sammy Davis, Jr.

About 10 years ago, we discussed the possibility of a Sammy film. As a director, I had an interest in creating alternative histories. For instance, my previous film recounted how Frank Sinatra instigated the JFK assassination. I now wanted to make a picture about how Sammy Davis, Jr. caused the Watergate scandal.

You might be acquainted with the term "drunk history." I'd like to call what I do "psychedelic history."

Biopics and other historical films tend to be serious and sober undertakings. They aren't playful. Yes, there is a time and place for bearing witness to important events and figures. But mixing fact and fiction can reveal hidden truths or what Herzog called "the ecstatic truth."

The universe of *Sammy-Gate* is an absurd one. It's a bizarro world in which Sammy gets attacked by a club sandwich while tripping on LSD. Or Richard Nixon manifests Satanic powers and speaks in tongues like Linda Blair from "The Exorcist." Or Louis Armstrong pilots a flying toilet to save Sammy from eternal damnation in Hell.



Darius proved the perfect partner for this endeavor. Mentored by Terry Southern, raised on Ishmael Reed, he brought an afro-surrealist vibe to the project. We wanted to make a film that played like the visual equivalent of a Funkadelic LP.

However, as we undertook research on the improbable “Davis caused Watergate” thesis, this project settled into a much deeper groove. Sammy might have endorsed Nixon and ’72 and served as an advisor to his administrator but he also donated to the Angela Davis legal fund. I need hardly mention how his membership in the Church of Satan thickened the plot.

In short, Davis was a complicated cat. And a genius to boot. I spent a long time talking with Darius about Sammy. While we originally had planned to write a satirical conspiracy thriller, the film became a much deeper meditation upon race and politics in America.

When we started production in 2012, a dark and angry satire about Nixon era racism seemed almost anachronistic. This was the height of Obama’s “post-racial” America. Suffice to say, most investors found the project a bit esoteric.

But we made the film anyway.

With an awesome team of seasoned studio folk, many of who worked pro bono, we slowly and lovingly shot the film scene by scene from early 2013 to late 2018. Some of it was captured on 35mm Panavision gear and glass from the 1970s. Some of it was shot on RED Monstro and Digital Bolex. And the rest of it was animated frame by frame.

The project took eight years to complete. I don’t mean we wrote a script and then waited seven years for financing. I mean dozens of people worked on the feature for years and years and years. This film was the product of creative energy and sheer willpower.

Though I hadn’t intended for this project to consume nearly a decade of my life, I realize its slow gestation may have been for the best. Trump is the bitter fruit of the seeds Nixon sowed a half-century ago. As Mark Twain put it, history doesn’t repeat itself but it sometimes rhymes.



Cast



Richard Beatty as Sammy Davis, Jr.

“I needed about six months of auditions to find the right actor for Sammy,” recounts director Noel Lawrence. “Even in Hollywood, getting a 5’2”, 110-pound, and 50-year old black actor is no mean feat. Further, playing a complex and iconic figure like Davis would require enormous preparation for the part. We got lucky in that Richard had wanted to play Sammy Davis all of his life. Notably, his “day job” involved performing a lounge act called “**Sammy and Cher**” on cruise ships where he imitated Davis. So he knew the historical figure’s idiosyncrasies and distinct personality right from the start.



Philip Proctor as Richard Nixon

“Phil played Nixon in the film,” explains Lawrence. “But he had been playing Nixon ever since his days as a founding member of the **Firesign Theatre** 50 years ago.” For those under 35, the Firesign Theatre was an American surreal comedy troupe that dominated the FM airwaves with a long string of chart-topping LP’s on Columbia Records in the 1960s and 70s.

Calling them “The Beatles of Comedy,” the **Library of Congress** recently purchased the group’s vast archive as well as adding their 1970 album “Don’t Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me The Pliers” to its **National Recording Registry**.

Besides Firesign, Proctor also has enjoyed a long and fruitful acting career. Notably, he starred with **Jack Nicholson** and **Orson Welles** in Henry Jaglom’s “A Safe Place” (1971). His impressive range as an actor allowed Lawrence to cast him in no less than five voiceover parts in **Sammy-Gate**.

Cast

“Every actor brought something special to the project,” recounts Lawrence. “For instance, finding someone to play Paul Robeson appeared to be impossible. His deep voice, sharp manner, and all-around gravitas seemed like impossible shoes to fill. Then **K.B. Solomon** came along. He had just staged a one-man show in which he played the great singer. Before that, he was a *basso profundo* who sang opera for the **Berlin Philharmonic**. ”

Other notable roles include punk rock icon **Jello Biafra**, the former singer of the **Dead Kennedys** and **Durga McBroom** who currently performs backup vocals for **Pink Floyd**.



Behind The Scenes



Shooting the flying club sandwich on vintage 35mm Panavision camera and lenses.



FG: Director Noel Lawrence.
BG: Actor Ricard Beatty.

www.SammyGate.com