

One-Stop Shopping

Master of Many Mediums Gill Holland Cultivates Art Farm with New Management Company

By Brad Balfour
New York Resident Contributing Writer

Producer/record-label owner Gill Holland is really a master of media convergence who has shifted from one end of the spectrum to the other. After working in a Paris law firm and moving on to October Films (now Focus Features) and the French Film Office, Holland was at the crossroads of the independent film world.

He went on to produce more than 30 indie circuit films, including *Hurricane Streets* (which won three Sundance Film Festival awards in '97) as well as the Cannes selection *Inside/Out*, the Spirit Award nominee *Dear Jesse*, and the Gotham Award nominee *Spring Forward*, in addition to *Bobby G. Can't Swim*, *Spin the Bottle*, *Revolution #9*, and the upcoming *Benny Mardones Story*.

In '99, Holland was nominated for the Independent Spirit Award for Producer of the Year. He has served on many film festival juries and been a frequent contributor to magazines such as *Filmmaker*. An NYU film school professor, he was a producer of IFC's *Greg the Bunny*.

Having acquired such experience — running counter to the withering mainstream music industry — Holland started sonaBLAST! Records in 2001, issuing Mark Geary's debut, *33 1/3 Grand Street*, which hit the Irish top 40. Now Holland has joined forces with the Lasalle Management Group, which will not only vet actors but directors, screenwriters, and other cinematic talents, whether in their own productions or others.

New York Resident: What made you decide the time was right for a new record label?

Gill Holland: When 5 conglomerates control 95 percent of the music industry,

it's time for the indies to step in. We saw this 15 years ago with the rise of indie cinema. People got tired of having the Clear Channels of the world dictate what they listen to and what choices they have.

The music industry 2 and 3 years ago seems to me to be where the film business was 15 years ago when *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* blasted onto the scene and showed the establishment that they had misread consumer needs and tastes over the years. Now it is clear that the indie filmmakers won the battle. The major labels don't have time for development of artists; they have to bank more and more money on fewer and fewer marquee names. The [Bob] Dylans of today need to be developed by people like us.

NYR: How did you decide on Mark Geary as your first artist?



Alexie Gilmore: LasalleHolland client

GH: A friend gave me his tape — I get them all the time, like head shots. Though [it was] rough, my whole office

listened to it every day for six months and became obsessed with him. Then, one day, my assistant said that Geary



Michael Esper: Moving up with LasalleHolland

was playing the Mercury Lounge. The whole office went down and it turned out he was Mark the Bartender at Botanica, my local bar.

After the show, he was like, "Hey, Gill, want a scotch and soda?" I was dumbfounded; I couldn't believe that he was not famous. Finally he said, "You want to help me put out a record?" So I bought a book on the music biz and started a label.

NYR: You serve many functions for your clients.

GH: We like hyphenates — actors who also write and direct. We want to create opportunities for our clients, and our most recent productions have three of our actors — Michael Esper, Craig Walker, and Jeff Billak — in supporting roles.

We also coproduce with other production companies and for them, it's one-stop shopping. We have 40 great actors that we can hook them up with, which saves time and money. We want to corner the New York City market for production management. I went from managing the creators of *Greg the Bunny* and helping develop that show on IFC to selling it to Fox, so they then produced 13 episodes.

My track record is good. *Hurricane Streets* had Edie Falco before [*The*

Sopranos]. *Desert Blue* was Kate Hudson's first starring role. We are also actively developing some scripts for our people to star in, even though they are not names yet. We can bootstrap each other up and educate the industry as to our clients' talent. The next step will be for the industry to educate the public; we will have a couple of brand-name actors within three years.

NYR: What are the current trends in the entertainment industry?

GH: Music is getting more real again. People are tired of the manufactured Britney Spears of the world and want something real to hang their hat on. I see roots music and Americana growing.

As for film, the indie scene as we knew it from the '80s is over, but with digital video, everyone is capable of telling stories in pictures. There will be lots of people coming from nowhere with compelling stories. For years, it cost so much to make a film that there were huge barriers to entry, and films were made primarily by rich white men. Now filmmaking — oops, "moviemaking" — is like any other art form. If you've got a pen and piece of paper, you can draw or write; a piece of clay, you can sculpt; with some friends to help, you can make a movie.

There are more Hollywood films being made that look and feel "indie." They are inherently indie films with edgy subject matter that happen to have "stars" in them. And there are more films made using indie methodology.

NYR: What do you prefer to do yourself?

GH: I like producing, creating something from nothing, putting all the pieces together, seeing the relationships between things and people that may not seem evident at first and bringing it together. I see Leo Castelli as an influence, having a stable of talent and nurturing that — an art farm, if you will. And since I could not direct my way out of a paper bag, it is a mystery how directors get those subtle performances from actors. ■

More information is available at sonablast.com and lasalleholland.com. E-mail responses to editor in chief Mark Rifkin at markr@resident.com.

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