LOVE LETTER TEMPLATES

LOOKBOOK EPK
THE MOVIE
This feature-length movie was written, produced, directed, edited, and scored independently by myself over the past 20 years. It started as a music video project for a song I programmed during a digital music class lecture I was giving at a recording arts college in 2001. The song was titled, *A Lesson In Trust*, and was published in vinyl and distributed by Revolver Distribution when a friend handed my demo cd to a record executive after their first deal went awry. In the heat of desperation, my buddy, who helped me burn CDs for my demo, gave one that he had in his pocket to the record executive after his other artists were rejected. The record executive liked it and agreed to offer me a production and distribution deal; and that is how my first record was released, funny enough. I wanted to shoot a music video to promote it and had an idea of doing a short film, like an extended music video. A party buddy I befriended from the local pizza shop my son and I ate at all the time really encouraged me to do it and helped me get started with the much-needed shot list that eventually became the chapter, *Promise Ring*. Little did I know the photoshoot for the shot list that night at *The Rickshaw Stop* would become a two-decade-long journey into the depths of my inner angst, shadowed by my passion for storytelling, and a tribute to an old *MySpace* music blog I kept back then titled, *Love Letter Templates*, which this film is named after.

The movie soundtrack is all original music I made over a twenty-year span that includes electronic music compositions and live rock ensemble projects featuring songs from my childhood metal band, *Demented*, and my recent black/death metal project, *Food For Worms*. The thirteen chapters are a collection of short films I directed with various other collaborators and student interns whose participation and contribution progressed the overarching story forward. I have too many to thank.

The rotoscope aesthetic is wholly inspired by Ralph Bakshi, the creator of the 70’s animated film, *Wizards*, whose work across other titles such as *Lord of the Rings*, *Heavy Traffic*, and *Cool World* heavily influenced me in my youth. This rotoscope aesthetic saved the movie in that I was able to salvage footage that was shot in 240p and use it to complete the story. It also served to bring together all the different media over the last two decades and brand the film into one cohesive flow.

Other influences include films like *Jacob’s Ladder*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Hellraiser*, and of course, *Heavy Metal*. The juxtaposition of stories across a non-linear timeline is a storytelling technique I intended to use as a greater sum of all the parts. Each chapter interconnects with another to tell a bigger story.
Directors that inspired me include Vincent Gallo, Harmony Korine, Michel Gondry, Chris Cunningham, and Lars Von Trier. In the early 2000s, I volunteered as an intern for a digital film festival called RESFest. It was my way of getting in the festival in Tokyo, New York, and Bristol, UK for free and to network professionally while I was on tour supporting my new record release. At that festival, I saw the most amazing work by the directors I mention here and it gave me the encouragement I needed to pursue my vision on my own terms.

It must also be said that particular indie electronic music artists greatly influenced the music we hear throughout the film. Artists like Amon Tobin, Aphex Twin, Squarepusher, DJ Shadow, Neotropic, Kruder & Dorfmeister, Asian Dub Foundation, Massive Attack, and Bjork are just a few worth mentioning. And on the dance floor front, popular artists like MSTRKRT, Justice, Interpol, The Presets, The Faint, and many other sideways haircut bands with neckties that came after them are only obvious for those that were there and almost absent in reference in the movie. Though, my underground favorites like Death From Above 1979, Avenue D, Atari Teenage Riot, Gay For Johnny Depp, and No Condom Whatever are way too obscure to even bring up but just know I was all about it.

Underlying it all would be the hum of primal gratitude to my metal heroes, Mercyful Fate, Voivod, and Motorhead. They all get a nod in the movie in the most peculiar way as a signal to others in the know. The most interesting easter egg, if you will, is the mention of my childhood favorite local punk ensemble, RKL (Rich Kids on LSD), whose legendary record, Rock-N-Roll Nightmare, came with a comic book of the lyrics and artwork that bound the whole record together. That punk rock comic book blew away my 16-year-old budding visual art and music mind and serves as sublime inspiration for me to this day.
Nathan Fritz, Filth, and Pearl Marril, Groupie

Estelle Raskina, Doorgirl, and Francis Crossman, LaVey
MARQUEE NAMES
MARQUEE NAMES

Three marquee names are starring in the film. The collaboration with Michael Rodgers (Metatron) stemmed from a student/teacher relationship when he attended Ex’pression College at the time I headed the common core classes on digital filmmaking and media theory. Michael was key to this whole thing since we pulled off the majority of the unscripted footage in the middle of the hurricane of afterparties we attended for the sake of the documentary scenes..."ahem".

During that time, I also creative directed short films for students and took advantage of the equipment hook-up I had. We typically had open casting calls for amateur actors for student film projects. It was then that I met Beau Ballinger (Cronos), a budding young actor with director dreams of his own. He was cast for two separate short films which would later become the chapter Wake Next Stop in the movie. At that time, he agreed to come back and collaborate on a single shot improv scene which he fulfilled for the chapter Dolores Park opposite actress Emily Rued (Stella).

Emily was already doing theater at the time we met in 2002. I went and saw her perform and I was mesmerized by her eyes. I knew the moment I saw her that she would be able to do the hard scene at the park. Alas, the shoot at Dolores Park between Beau and Emily bridged together the whole arching story of the film.

She graduated from San Francisco State University with a B.A. in Drama Performance, and from Pacific Oaks College with a Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy. She is conservatory-trained at A.C.T., Berkeley Repertory, and the University of California in Santa Barbara. Emily has extensive credits, including a Series Regular on Maggie (now streaming on Amazon Prime), and an upcoming supporting role in Bad Ass 4: Sweet Revenge, opposite Danny Glover and Danny Trejo. Emily is delighted to be a part of this film and relive her San Francisco days.

Beau did something interesting shortly after filming with me. He went to the Philippine Islands where I was born and kicked off his major motion picture journey with an interesting and loving twist. I was so impressed!

After graduating from Saint Mary's College of California with a BFA in Performing Arts, Beau moved to the Philippines to work on several action and horror films produced by Roger Corman, leading him to work with Michael Madsen and Mark Dacascos. He established his own production company and lived in Asia for five years working in television and film. Upon moving back to LA, Beau produced “Uncle Nick”, a Christmas comedy sold to Netflix starring Brian Posehn, Paget Brewster, and Missi Pyle. In 2017 Beau graduated with an MFA in screenwriting from The University of Texas at Austin where a spec he wrote for Amazon’s Transparent was a Humanitas Prize top finalist. Kickass!
Featured appearances include actress, Anita Argent (Mama), young models Kai Steel Smith (young Cronos), and Tiffany Schmitz (Taj). The first chapter, No Remorse, was originally a short film I wrote and produced for Sundance Shorts. It was titled Love, Papa and was an ode to my sister. It became the genesis of Cronos’ storyline and the underlying motif for his character. Set and shot in my own home, party buddy and creative collaborator Chris Golden and student Nathan Fritz came through and handled the camera and sound to complete the project. Eventually, it got rejected at Sundance Shorts and I wish I had kept that letter. I vaguely remember reading “…you will find your audience out there”. How condescending, I thought. I should totally collect those.

I need to thank Anita for another reason. After I received the letter, I was really devastated. I remember talking to her on the phone and it was her motherly advice that encouraged me to not give up and go for it again. It was all I needed to hear. She single-handedly saved the movie at the very beginning. Thank you, Anita.
Another featured actress is Erica Taber (Nisa). She plays the girlfriend who threw a ring back to Metatron in the chapter *Promise Ring*. I remember casting her for this after she auditioned for a different short film at *Expression*.

Most notable in that scene is that she was wearing a vest that my wife IRL designed and manufactured when she had her fashion design business. That vest was super popular. So much so that a major company stole the design after she refused their offer to work for them. That always haunted us.
Ironically, Iylla Dosenbach (Quan Yin) modeled for my wife’s fashion line around the time I started writing the rest of the film. She was a graphics design student at the college I was teaching at and we immediately hit it off so I introduced her to my wife IRL who also hired her to model. She agreed to play the scene opposite Shane Wesbrock (Mac) who, in playing himself, defined the whole dive bar experience for many girls.
In the chapter, *Wake Next Stop*, I took two separate student short film projects with Beau and repurposed them for Cronos’ storyline. It worked out perfectly in that the short film, *Wake*, naturally fit into Cronos’ character build. *Wake* was written by star students Nolan Sipe and Dan Peterson, who later scored the music for *Next Stop* that same semester, a script I collaborated on with Beau. We wanted to do a shoot with no dialogue and came up with a script reminiscent of a David Lynch / Rod Serling type of plot.

We did a daring shoot on BART during Orange Alert placed at the time after 9/11. We didn’t get the permit to shoot a video at BART but we did alert the operator there what we were doing. We had a very realistic gun prop and a shooting scene. They immediately alerted SFPD who came right away. We spoke with the lieutenant-in-charge and he was very cool. Big dude. He let us keep doing what we were doing and even had two of his patrol officers warn on-lookers that we are doing a movie. It worked out in the end.

Both those short film projects were sent out to student film festivals by the digital art college and they each received Official Selection laureates at prestigious festivals like Festival de Cannes and New York Independent (according to the college) but I can’t find any proof of it online so I’ll only mention that here.
A special thanks go out to Mia Kirshner (Scarlett), a Suicide Girl model who helped me achieve the risque shots needed for the story.

The scenes involving Mia were the most contentious shots of the film. It was originally written as a masturbation scene with an extreme close-up. I needed it for the shock value and to add an ironic twist by linking the Metatron character to Cronos. Alas, too many people discouraged it as it didn’t really progress the story and would red flag the movie.

Still, Mia came through and gave me the shots that allowed me to link other characters in the film. She truly was in it for the art and I was so thankful that she believed in my project.
This is an interesting story. The chapter, *Spare Change*, was originally filmed in 2007 with student collaborators. This was a challenging shoot since the majority of the shots were single takes because we didn’t have the clearance to shoot in the iconic Clarion Alley and had to fight against the daylight. Michael Rodgers had already graduated from the school but agreed to come back and do the scene for the movie.

The other actor was a student from the previous year but I was fired for the last time at the art college (you read that right) that semester so I lost touch with the students involved in the short film including this student actor. He was an amazing young talent and I regret that we had no way to keep in contact. Over the years, the project was lost until I came across old drives that had the capture folders of my old student festival winners! Most of the files were low quality but it was enough for me to remix them for the movie. The disappointing part is that I have no record of this other student actor! No final product that has his name on the credits. None! It’s driving me crazy! I hope I find him so I can credit him properly. For now, I will call him *Unknown Actor*.
The movie ends with a background soundtrack featuring three songs from my 80’s punk thrash turned experimental metal band, Demented. Around 2005, we had the opportunity to re-record the last songs meant for the LP before the band broke up in 1991. It was also our last chance to record the songs. Damien Donnelly, the guitarist, developed carpal tunnel, and his ability to play the songs was narrowing. We invited our talented friend Frank Martell, drummer, to fill in for the drums and Chris Mayorga, lead guitar, overdubbed his guitar tracks later at Greenhouse Studios with our dear friend, Scott Green.

That particular recording holds tremendous meaning for me. The version I used in the movie were the ones mixed by my best friend, Scott, who committed suicide last year. There was a version he recorded with vocal tracks by the original member and singer of Demented, Jimbo, another childhood best friend, who also died just the year before. He was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic when we were younger and the medicine they were giving him caused liver cirrhosis. Another mutual best friend who passed away a few years ago, Craig, died in his sleep after years and years of drug and alcohol abuse. His heart just stopped. Thankfully, he slept peacefully and died happy, indicated by the smirk he wore. There are many more over the last twenty years to count so I won’t mention names here but I dedicate this movie to all of them and a portion of the proceeds from the music licensing will be donated to mental health services and suicide prevention for the homeless youth in San Francisco (and beyond).
The original concept for Metatron’s character spawned from this particular video ad I cut for some San Francisco DJ friends I met in Las Vegas during a fashion trade show convention my wife typically attended. I normally helped with the booth and took care of our 2-year-old during her busy hours while I did my drum-n-bass breakbeat party networking.

I met Steve Aoki, who was promoting a new band on his label, Dim Mak Records. While we were talking, I hear Danzig’s classic song *Mother* pumping loud out of the speakers right after a dance floor banger. I was so impressed. Those DJs were Richie Panic and Jefrodisiac who I recognized from some parties back in San Francisco.

I was writing for Mesh Magazine at the time and was doing a drum-n-bass bootleg DJ set show on the local public access cable channel but was also DJ’ing heavy metal and new wave records on a pirate radio channel called West Add Radio FM. Knowing these things, Jefrodisiac approached me about doing a fake news article on Mesh Magazine to create buzz for their upcoming NYE 2004 party. I agreed to write a totally fake story about Frisco Disco DJs breaking up violently in a fight during some fictitious set at an art gallery in the SOMA district.

I really sensationalized it and made it sound like the underground party that everyone wished they knew about. For the first time, people were reading reposts of that article in which I use words like “fashionista” to ironically describe all the poser wannabes and “debauchery” as the code word for drugs. People ate it up and started using those words in their own copycat way evident in the MySpace flyer posts promoting their own parties.

Of course, that bloody DJ set never happened but the point was to make the readers think there won’t be these ultra decadent hedonistic party orgies anymore where rich chicks with bangs and bike messenger dudes with sideways haircuts could bump and grind in the dark while they snorted their way toward best-friends-forever status. Then once everyone thought it was done and over, the NYE party announcement came and it was the talk of the party gossip scene. It totally worked! That party was hella packed and went off the hook.

The small 240p camera I used to bootleg drum-n-bass raves is the same one I used to shoot the dive bar parties. It held a special place in my heart so, ultimately, that specific camera made its way into the movie as a prop in chapters, *Dolores Park* and *Like Father Like Son*, and was used as the hidden camera in the chapter, *Afterparty*. I am stupid sentimental when it comes to cameras I guess. Someone stole it at a club eventually. I miss that camera.

The footage used in the Frisco Disco party video was documentary shots at *The Arrow Bar* that new year’s eve night in 2003-2004. I cut it to promote friends but it also became the catalyst for the Metatron character concept. For that, I have to thank Jefrodisiac and Richie Panic. Their party shenanigans opened the trap door for me to fall into an even darker underground scene full of wild escapades and nightly galavants throughout the 2000s.

The people I met through those parties took me down a rabbit hole and made me face my own self-destructive lifestyle. The existential crisis that inspired much of the movie’s underlying tone makes itself evident once all thirteen chapters are seen. I really do hope people enjoy *Love Letter Templates*. I’m very proud of it and believe it will be a cult classic one day “wink”. Just like what that Sundance Film Festival rejection letter said, “…you will find your audience out there…” Thanks. I will.

-Joselito Sering, Author
Directed by: Joselito Sering

Starring: Michael Rodgers, Emily Rued, Beau Ballinger

Runtime: 1 hr 27 min

Logline: Thirteen short stories interconnect the trauma of millennials lost in sex, drugs, and dance-punk afterparties during the 2000s in San Francisco’s seedy districts.

Release: Online Screening on 9/30/21

lovelettertemplates.movie