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# Profiles

DAVID WILSON IS A DO-IT-YOURSELF media entrepreneur. What does that mean, exactly? The 26-year-old Columbia, Missouri native is the co-founder and manager of the Ragtag CinemaCafé, a showcase of international and alternative motion pictures and video; he is the creator and director of Kinofist Image-works, a distribution company for DIY media artists; and is an organizer of The Columbia Media Resource Alliance, a resource group for Missouri-based media-makers.

"These projects," Wilson explains, "collectively represent my attempts to create avenues for DIY media to exist in the Midwest, from production through to distribution and exhibition...to maintain control over what is ours, and, through that control, to maintain a more personal relationship with the media that we make, sell, or buy."

In addition to producing and exhibiting work in the Columbia area, Wilson travels around the country showing his own work and films by other DIY artists in all types of venues—most of them off the beaten track. "I know a lot of filmmakers travel to screenings or festivals, but it seems like at best they're flying to five cities or doing, like, six screenings in two weeks," he says. "But I've got to make every day count, so, I'll book 29 shows in 31 days in 25 cities. To do that, I end up realizing that I need a show between Salt Lake City and Denver. And boom! I'm in Laramie, Wyoming playing to a living room of 12 kids for whom my movie is real life, or to 45 kids in Twin Falls, Idaho, who've just come from the prom and are like, 'Yeah, we feel trapped in our town, too.' Those moments, for me, are why I made *Magic City*, and they couldn't have happened if I'd stuck to the festival circuit."

Wilson's work seems particularly suited to this renegade approach to distribution and exhibition. His first film, *Kansas Anymore*, is a 30-minute short about a punk band travelling through Kansas in

the days following the end of their tour. Although relatively little happens on-screen, Wilson's decision to focus on the ever-changing emotional dynamics between group members transforms what might have been, in less talented hands, an uninspired little riff on the faux documentary into a thoroughly engaging story about four people searching for happiness. Wilson cleverly employs visual clichés of life in the Midwest to tell his story, imbuing these familiar images (e.g., truck stops, oil wells, and wheat fields) with a person-



## DAVID WILSON

### *Magic City*

BY ROBERT L. CAGLE

sincere love letter to the highways of Kansas and Missouri.

Wilson began working on the film when he was a student at Hampshire College, and finished it just before graduating in 1996. "I didn't really start making films or videos until I got to college," he explains. "And even then everything I made was pretty much just like a science experiment. I'd try and focus on a single aspect or idea and work through it, letting everything else just happen. This was a great way for me to work without the pressure of making something 'important,' but it resulted in some truly awful videos—namely, a horribly painful interpretation of Heiner Müller's *Medea* play

with stunning special effects."

Wilson's second film, *Magic City* (2000), documents the filmmaker's misadventures in Moberly, Missouri—a typical American small town where the generation gap between longtime residents and their children (and grandchildren) seems more profound than ever. What is particularly refreshing about the project is that it is decidedly nonjudgmental. Wilson clearly sympathizes with both the frustrated despair of Moberly's youth and the comfortable apathy of its adult population. The understanding allows him to craft a picture of one turn-of-the-century American town in which the channels of communication between groups have seemingly broken down. It is, at the same time, a documentary of the various subcultures that have arisen in small towns across the U.S. Wilson's latest project is a docu-narrative about similar youth

subcultures in Branson, Missouri, a place he calls "one of the most culturally oppressive pockets of America."

For his spring/summer 2001, 28-show "PunkNotRock" tour, Wilson ingeniously paired screenings of *Magic City* and other short works with live music shows by local bands.

"For me, the future of DIY cinema is in molding it to the model of DIY music, where filmmakers will actually traverse the country with their work, not just on the festival/college/museum circuit, but also playing basements and backyards and community centers and music venues," he says, adding, "Wanting to be a filmmaker today is like wanting to be a rock star 25 years ago. Film is the dominant popular art and provides the dominant star culture, but DIY gives us the tools to dismantle this star culture in the same way that punk rock did [with music] 25 years ago. We created it, let's take it over!"

Robert L. Cagle writes about media and popular culture from Fisher, Illinois.

To learn more visit [www.ragtagfilm.com](http://www.ragtagfilm.com).