

The New York Times

PROTOZOA



30WEST

present

SOME KIND *of* HEAVEN

A film by Lance Oppenheim
83 Minutes | U.S.A. | English | Color

produced by:

Darren Aronofsky, Kathleen Lingo (The New York Times),
Jeffrey Soros and Simon Horsman,
Melissa Oppenheim Lano, Pacho Velez, and Lance Oppenheim

Official Selection

2020 Sundance Film Festival – World Premiere
2020 International Film Festival Rotterdam
True/False Film Festival
MoMA Doc Fortnight (Closing Night)
Big Sky Documentary Film Festival
Miami Film Festival
Florida Film Festival
Melbourne International Film Festival
Visions du Reel
Hamptons Doc Fest

A Floridian garden of earthly delights and its discontents, *Some Kind of Heaven* explores life inside the manicured lawns and meticulously crafted suburban bliss offered by The Villages, the self-described “Disneyworld for Retirees.” Every day is supposed to be a good one for the 120,000+ senior citizens of The Villages: Whether residents are interested in synchronized swimming or cheerleading, tai chi or golf cart parades, this large community of healthy retirees offers a utopian vision of a (retired) American Dream: wide, safe streets, picture-perfect landscaping, and countless activities all in service of their residents’ golden years.

While most residents have bought into the community’s blissful optimism, we meet a small group of residents – a married couple, a widow and a bachelor – living on the margins of the marketing fantasy, struggling to find footing inside the dream.

For Anne and Reggie Kincer, who have been married for 47 years, the difficulties that come with maintaining any long-term relationship are coming to a head. She’s at home in The Villages, but the wide variety of wholesome activities isn’t as good a fit for Reggie. As he experiments with drugs in search of a spiritual breakthrough, tensions build between the couple. His arrest for cocaine possession pushes the couple to the breaking point: as Reggie grows increasingly unmoored from reality, Anne has to decide whether to stay or leave.

Barbara Lochiatto never planned on living in The Villages. A transplant who moved to the community 12 years ago with her late husband, Barbara had to find employment at The Villages following his death. Four months after his passing, she’s struggling financially and emotionally. While acting classes provide an outlet for her feelings, The Villages’ dating scene is more intimidating than inviting—at least until she meets Lynn Henry, a golf cart salesman and exuberant Jimmy Buffett fan who invites her into his lively social world.

Once a handyman to the stars, Dennis Dean has floated through one relationship after another his entire life. Now, living out of his van while avoiding officials from The Villages, Dennis is determined to find a relationship that will finally allow him financial stability. But finding a wealthier woman willing to take him in, whether at the pool or the church, proves difficult, even with guidance from a friendly local pastor. But when an old girlfriend, Nancy Davis, unexpectedly invites him to stay with her, Dennis finds his desire for comfort struggling against his desire for independence.

Told together, their stories gently prick at The Villages' consumerist promise and underscore how decamping in a fantasyland like The Villages can't actually keep life's obstacles at a distance.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

45 miles from Orlando, The Villages—the world's largest residential community of senior citizens—is a world of its own. More than 120,000 seniors live here, four of whom are at the heart of **Lance Oppenheim**'s first feature, **SOME KIND OF HEAVEN**. Turning a sharp eye on this unusual location, Florida native Oppenheim's portrait peels back the community's perfectly manicured veneer with incisive wit and surprising warmth. As producer **Jeffrey Soros** puts it, it's a film both "for old people, and for everyone who plans on getting old."

Just as Belinda Carlisle was singing about heaven being a place on earth in the late 1980s, Harold Schwartz and his son Harold Gary Morse were building one in central Florida, a community they later named The Villages. They dreamed of creating a community that would resemble a "Disneyworld for retirees." An old-fashioned town center with a complete storyline of its made-up history appealed to the Baby Boomers as a sort of fantasy that reminded them of their youth. Today, "Florida's Friendliest Hometown" – as The Villages advertises itself – is larger in square mileage than Manhattan as it spans across three counties with its population totaling around 120,000 residents. Born about 225 miles southeast from The Villages, Lance Oppenheim and his sister/producer, **Melissa Oppenheim Lano**, were surrounded by retirement homes. Like most fellow Floridians, they spent most of their lives hearing and reading about the place. "I've heard about The Villages since I was a 12-year-old," Oppenheim says. "If you're from Florida, it's almost impossible not to hear about it. On a slow news day, there would be salacious articles about the place with headlines like 'Seniors Arrested for Public Sex,' or New York Post articles infamously reporting unfounded rumors about the community's growing STD-rate. The place – and its residents' sexcapades – was always treated as the punchline of a joke. To me, that missed the point. I was fascinated that over a hundred thousand retirees were uprooting their lives to cocoon themselves inside this kind of *Truman Show*-like fantasy world that was designed to remind them of their youth."

And while nationally *The Villages* may be best known for a large base of conservative residents, whose golf cart rallies for Donald Trump made national news throughout the 2020 Presidential election during the last election cycle, Oppenheim deliberately chose to focus on people rather than politics. “I wouldn’t call this film apolitical just because it does not explicitly speak to the turbulence surrounding the 2020 election. I saw an opportunity to tell a story that went beyond partisan politics and spoke to something that I found more existentially interesting and unsettlingly relatable: the absurd lengths that many Americans go to – especially those nearing the end of their lives – to live inside of a fantasy. *The Villages* – by design – offers a decidedly conservative vision of the American Dream, and my goal in making this film was to inhabit that fantasy and call it into question. By documenting the experiences of those who didn’t fit into the community’s advertised way-of-life, I was able to explore something more honest, open, and universal about how the human struggle – no matter how much you try to evade it – continues throughout the rest of life.”

Taking advantage of *The Villages*’ perfectly manicured yards and public spaces modeled on ’50s suburban Americana, *SOME KIND OF HEAVEN* is a film about “real people dealing with real problems in an unreal place,” Oppenheim continues. “We wanted to cinematically convey the marketing fantasy that the community promises, and strip it back to reveal the people on the margins of the community struggling to realize the dream.” As viewed through Oppenheim’s eyes, *The Villages* is a series of picture postcard views. Blessed with perpetual sunshine, the lavishly decorated facilities and cozy homes are captured by Oppenheim and cinematographer **David Bolen** with painterly precision, a real-life manifestation of pop Americana images. The vibrant, richly colored shots are supported by **Ari Balouzian**’s score, whose hints of lounge music and swooning strings add to the sense of pleasantly disorienting unreality.

Oppenheim began making movies in high school, short documentaries inspired by reading the local news. He would, he recalls “find the breadcrumbs of crazy stories in my newspaper.” One of these shorts, 2016’s *LONG TERM PARKING*, became Oppenheim’s first short to appear on *The New York Times*’s Op-Docs. Started in 2011, Op-Docs is the paper’s much-acclaimed platform for documentary short films. **Kathleen Lingo**, then the EP for Op-Docs and now the editorial director of the Times’s Film and TV division, encountered Oppenheim’s work through the division’s open submission process and recalls being immediately struck by the young director’s “unique eye for character and story. He’s quickly established himself as having very signature way of seeing things that sets him apart.”

Oppenheim kept making shorts for Op- Docs throughout his undergraduate years at Harvard examining human subjects in unusual settings: **LONG TERM PARKING** is a portrait of airport employees living in their workplace's parking lot, while 2018's **THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD** profiles a man who's been living on the same cruise ship for two decades. Oppenheim never lets the unusual backgrounds take over interest in the people in them—as Soros observes of **SOME KIND OF HEAVEN**, “While *The Villages* is definitely a character in itself, the human characters are pushed forward.” “Everyone expects *The New York Times* to make documentaries on big newsy subjects,” Lingo adds. “I also think the *Times* has a history of specific innovation. In the Op-Ed page, there is a piece of art that anchors that page, so there's a high level of visual storytelling that's intrinsic to the *Times*. I see Lance's work as part of that tradition of making bold and visual stories.”

Oppenheim and Lingo developed a close collaborative relationship, and the seeds for **SOME KIND OF HEAVEN** were planted during a discussion about *The Villages*, which both knew about from their Florida backgrounds. Oppenheim expressed an interest in going there to shoot for a project that could potentially be either another Op- Doc short or a feature. “I said “Great, why don't you go down there, make an Op- Doc and that can be a launching pad for your feature?”” Lingo recalls. “What ended up happening is that he jumped right into making a feature.” “I rented an Airbnb from retired rodeo clowns,” Oppenheim laughs. “Over two months, while getting to know their friends, I began to understand the social fabric of the place. I began to observe this overwhelming sense of pressure that some felt in the community to have fun all of the time. There was almost an unspoken social contract that dictated life there, tied into the idea that as you grow older, time runs out, and as time runs out, every moment has to be great. It honestly stressed me out...So I became drawn to finding people who felt something similar, residents who didn't find meaning in synchronized golf cart routines or guzzling margaritas at the Jimmy Buffett Parrothead Club.”

During this time, Oppenheim whittled down his focus to four main subjects, all of whom, he says, “are seekers who don't quite fit into the community's advertised view of paradise.” A couple on the cusp of their 47th anniversary, **Anne and Reggie Kincer**, have long drifted apart. Reggie dabbles in psychedelics and Eastern spirituality, interests which set him apart from a community Anne is much more comfortable socializing in on its own terms. “Reggie's a spiritualist who doesn't necessarily fit in *The Villages*,” Oppenheim notes. “Anne is someone who fits the profile of someone who does belong.”

When Reggie gets into trouble with the law over a drug possession charge, Reggie and Anne's relationship reaches a potential breaking point.

Barbara Lochiatto, a widow who reluctantly moved to The Villages because her late husband wanted to, is forced to work part-time to sustain her lifestyle. She yearns to move back to Boston, her hometown, but lacks the means to do so. "We met while her husband was still alive," Oppenheim recalls. "After her husband's death, she questioned her sense of identity, and looked at the world around her in a new way." After a series of failed connections, Barbara meets Lynn, a golf cart salesman who sweeps her off her feet, but the relationship may not last.

A perpetual bachelor, **Dennis Dean's** status in The Villages is even more precarious than Barbara's. Unable to afford a house, he lives out of his baby-blue van while trying to meet a woman he can move in with. Dennis, Oppenheim says, "wants to find someone to shack up with, because he doesn't have the tools to take care of himself—he craves companionship but not love, and is addicted to a life of living fast, even at 81." Running out of options, Dennis re-connects with an ex, Nancy, and is unexpectedly offered a chance to stay at her house in The Villages.

Working closely with cinematographer Bolen and editor **Daniel Garber**, Oppenheim settled upon a working method of shooting the entire film on a tripod using only one camera. "We wanted to find the right visual language to reflect the controlled Villages tableau," Oppenheim clarifies. "We were trying to do something that immersed the viewer into the headspaces of our subjects' lives, a process that danced between performative re-enactments and verite." Oppenheim's visual references ranged from Larry Sultan's photo series "Pictures from Home" to the documentary films of Ulrich Seidl and early Errol Morris, to even narrative films like Tim Burton's *EDWARD SCISSORHANDS* and Todd Haynes' *SAFE*. The goal was to capture the state's colorful, dreamlike qualities in a Technicolor sheen akin to a Douglas Sirk melodrama. "There are so many different versions of Florida — it's practically three different states crammed into one," Oppenheim observes. "I'm always fascinated by the people who moved here for reasons of escaping something else in their life — maybe it's the cold weather, an estranged family member, taxes. Who you were, where you lived—all of that is irrelevant to who you are once you're melting under the Floridian sun." The beautifully staged images are edited at a rapid tempo, with an energy that's unexpected giving the senior residence setting. "We wanted audiences to be able to watch the film much as they would a narrative film, in a mode that is more experiential and less informational than most documentaries. The challenge for us was to create that

grammar for the film while still remaining grounded in reality—staying true to the emotions and events of our subjects’ real stories,” Oppenheim observes.

Once the *Times* was officially onboard, the production team started to acquire more support and financing. Oppenheim repeatedly reached out to the office of **Darren Aronofsky**, a personal favorite whose *THE WRESTLER* had been massively influential upon the young director when he saw it in high school. “I credit his films with inspiring me to want to make films,” Oppenheim says. Aronofsky boarded the project as a producer through his company, Protozoa Pictures, and provided notes on five cuts as well as the project’s raw footage. “Lance has a singular vision of the world, and his eye for composition and visual language is very strong,” Aronofsky says. “The film he’s made is a timeless look at love and fulfillment in one’s later years, and I believe it will resonate with people across all stages of life.”

After both the *Times* and Protozoa were onboard, *SOME KIND OF HEAVEN* received funding from the Los Angeles Media Fund. Soros, the company’s co-founder and co-CEO, observes that Oppenheim isn’t “someone you would immediately think of if you were looking for a director to do a film about a retirement community just by virtue of his age, but that brought a great objectivity. Europeans make the best movies about America just because they have perspective, and I think Lance brought this perspective to *SOME KIND OF HEAVEN*.”

With shooting complete in the summer of 2019, Oppenheim and his production team rushed to complete the film in time for its premiere at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival. Aronofsky’s notes, Oppenheim says, were crucial to the film’s completion: “99% of the time, they were guiding us towards the end of the movie,” he says. “I think Darren and Lance really had a great synergy going,” Soros notes, “so we were happy to let them run with that.”

At Sundance, *SOME KIND OF HEAVEN* was one of two titles the *Times* had at the festival in its first year as a producer of feature films—the other, Garrett Bradley’s *TIME*, is widely considered one of the year’s best. “The luck of having two feature docs in Sundance in the same year, let alone our first year in the feature documentary space, is something that only can happen through pure luck,” Lingo marvels. “It’s so hard to get a film in, let alone two. It really speaks to the power of the Op Docs to identify young talented directors and build relationships with them to support their artistic endeavors, and the ability of the *Times* to lend our support to these up and coming artists to help them get bigger partners on board.”

For Soros (attending as a producer on three different films, including SHIRLEY and SUMMERTIME), the experience of the film with a large Sundance crowd was similarly thrilling, not least because, as he recalls, “it was Lance’s birthday when it premiered.” As for the birthday director, Oppenheim recalls that “it was unbelievable to see the film leave our hands and hearts and enter the minds of audiences.”

###

THE CHARACTERS

At first glance, **Anne and Reggie Kincer** appear to be a quintessential Villages couple. Anne spends her time socializing and playing pickleball. Reggie, skeptical of his wife’s cookie-cutter lifestyle, finds his own solace in tai chi and Eastern spiritualism. Though the Kincers have different interests, they’ve struck a fragile balance since moving to The Villages. As the couple’s 47th wedding anniversary approaches, a troubling development threatens to derail their marriage: Reggie’s increasingly eccentric spiritual practices have led to reckless drug use and hallucinogenic episodes. Anne blames these troubling “breaks with reality” on The Villages. Tensions rise as Reggie runs afoul of the law, and Anne is left questioning her devotion to their marriage.

Dennis Dean lives out of a baby-blue van that he illegally parks on The Villages’ property. An 81-year-old nomad on the run from legal trouble in California, he spends his days hustling wealthy widows into handing over the keys to their homes and his nights evading security guards. After a run-in with Villages police, Dennis learns that the authorities intend to expel him and his van from the premises. He grows increasingly desperate for housing, funds, and friendship. He calls dozens of acquaintances and begs for assistance. No one bites. As Dennis hits rock bottom, contemplating death, a blessing from an eccentric evangelical pastor pulls him back from the brink. He decides to make one final call to Nancy, his ex-lover of last resort. Miraculously, she offers him a place to stay. For a moment, Dennis finds paradise in The Villages. But can a perennial bachelor ever really settle down?

Ten years ago, **Barbara Lochiatto** and her husband, Paul, moved to The Villages with dreams of living out their golden years in a “magical, beautiful place.” But things haven’t worked out that way: recently widowed, Barbara yearns to move back to Boston, herhometown, but lacks the money to do so. Debilitated by grief,

still working full time at a rehabilitation center to make ends meet, Barbara struggles to fit into the relentlessly upbeat Villages atmosphere. When an unexpected heart-to-heart with her manicurist motivates Barbara to get out and meet people, she explores The Villages' offerings: bowling leagues, acting classes, and even the singles club. Still, she can't seem to shake her funk—that is, until she finds herself with Lynn, a dashing golf cart salesman. At long last, Barbara catches a glimpse of what life in The Villages ought to be. But will it last?

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Lance Oppenheim (Director, Producer, Co-Editor):

Lance Oppenheim is a filmmaker from South Florida. His films have been screened at film festivals across the world including Sundance, Rotterdam, Tribeca, True/False, and featured at the Museum of Modern Art and the Smithsonian. Lance was a 2019 Sundance Ignite Fellow, named one of Filmmaker Magazine's 25 New Faces of Independent Film and is the youngest contributor to The New York Times Op-Docs. He graduated from Harvard University's Visual and Environmental Studies program in 2019. His first feature, *Some Kind of Heaven*, premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival.

David Bolen (Cinematographer)

David Bolen is an award-winning cinematographer based out of Los Angeles, California. He is best known for his international work on feature films, documentaries and music videos. His work has screened at festivals across the world including Venice, Tribeca, SXSW and BFI. His work on BEAST was in competition at the 2018 SXSW Film Festival and won the Independent Episodic Grand Jury Prize. His latest feature film entitled *Soni* premiered at the 2018 Venice International Film Festival and Variety praised David's "unobtrusively bravura camerawork." The film was later distributed as a Netflix Original.

Daniel Garber (Editor)

Daniel Garber is a documentary and narrative editor based in Brooklyn, NY. Most recently he edited the Blumhouse/Netflix Original thriller *CAM*, which won Best First Feature at Fantasia Fest in 2018. Previously, he received a Cinema Eye Honors nomination for his work as an editor on *The Reagan Show* (CNN Films, 2017), an all archival feature documentary. His work has played at various film festivals including Tribeca, Rotterdam, Locarno, AFI Fest, Fantastic Fest, True/False, San Francisco, and BAM cinemafest.

Darren Aronofsky (Producer)

Darren Aronofsky is a filmmaker, producer and screenwriter, who is noted for his surreal, melodramatic, and often disturbing films. Under his Protozoa banner, Darren has produced JACKIE, WHITE BOY RICK, ONE STRANGE ROCK, SPHERES, and PACIFIED.

Kathleen Lingo (Producer)

Kathleen Lingo is the Editorial Director for New York Times Film and Television and is the former Executive Producer of the Op-Docs series. Since joining Op-Docs in 2013, the series published nearly 250 short films, virtual reality and interactive documentaries by filmmakers such as Errol Morris, Laura Poitras, Alex Gibney, Casey Neistat, Lucy Walker, Roger Ross Williams, Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady. Honors for Op-Docs include three Oscar nominations, nine Emmy nominations, three News and Documentary Emmy Awards, two Peabody Awards and official selections at top film festivals, including Sundance, the New York Film Festival, Telluride, Toronto and IDFA.

Melissa Oppenheim (Producer)

Mel is the Global Head of Content Development at Facebook, managing the company's B2B content marketing department and editorial efforts across multiple surfaces. Under her leadership, Facebook launched [Curated](#), the company's newest initiative, dedicated to highlighting the people, brands, and ideas shaping culture today through new and unexpected uses of technology. Mel has produced several award-winning short films with the *New York Times* Op-Docs, including “[Happiest Guy in the World](#)” and “[No Jail Time: The Movie](#).” Her first feature, *Some Kind of Heaven*, produced in partnership with the *New York Times*, *Protozoa*, and *LAMF*, debuted at the Sundance 2020 Film Festival. Mel is an avid [mixed media artist](#) and graduated from Harvard University where she studied the history of science and technology.

Pacho Velez (Producer)

Pacho Velez directs and produces nonfiction films. His most recent feature, *The Reagan Show*, explores a popular actor's defining role: Leader of the Free World. It premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival before being broadcast on CNN. His previous film, *Manakamana*, won a Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival. It played around the world, including at the Whitney Biennial and the Toronto International Film Festival. Pacho received his MFA from CalArts. He has taught filmmaking at Princeton University, Harvard University, Bard College, Parsons the

New School, and MassArt. In 2015, he was awarded a Princeton Arts Fellowship. At present, he is Assistant Professor of Screen Studies at The New School.

Los Angeles Media Fund (Producer)

Launched in 2014 by Jeffrey Soros and Simon Horsman, Los Angeles Media Fund (“LAMF”) is a multi-faceted entertainment company with a primary focus on the development, financing, and production of features, documentaries and television. LAMF sponsors storytellers who create innovative content and challenge audiences. In 2020, they produced three films at Sundance, including the Josephine Decker-directed SHIRLEY, SUMMERTIME, Carlos Lopez-Estrada’s SUMMERTIME, and Lance Oppenheim’s directorial debut, SOME KIND OF HEAVEN. The firm also has several strategic investments with partners in scripted and unscripted television, live events, and recently launched a sports management firm.

Jeff Orlowski (Executive Producer)

Jeff Orlowski served as director, producer, and cinematographer on the Sundance Award-Winning film, Chasing Ice. As founder of Exposure Labs, a production company geared toward socially relevant filmmaking, Orlowski, 32, has served as director and producer of short film projects and online/broadcast commercial work. He has worked with Apple, National Geographic, Netflix, Stanford University, and the Jane Goodall Institute among many others. His work has aired on the National Geographic Channel, CNN and NBC and has been featured in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, NPR and Popular Mechanics. He has traveled on tour representing the Sundance Institute, President Obama's Committee for the Arts and Humanities, and the National Endowment of the Arts. Orlowski most recently produced the award-winning film Frame by Frame and earlier this year received the inaugural Sundance Institute | Discovery Impact Fellowship for environmental filmmaking. He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

30West (Executive Producer)

30WEST provides capital and strategic guidance to high caliber creative projects and forward-thinking companies operating throughout popular culture. Its media practice works with filmmakers to guide every stage of creative packaging, production, sales, distribution and licensing in order to maximize production quality and audience reach. 30WEST was founded in 2017. Micah Green is the CEO and co-president, Dan Steinman is the COO and co-president, and Dan Friedkin is the Executive Chairman.

30WEST is currently in production on Kevin Macdonald's *Prisoner 760* starring Benedict Cumberbatch, Jodie Foster, Shailene Woodley and Tahar Rahim; and *Violence of Action* starring Chris Pine and directed by Tarik Saleh, with STXinternational handling international sales and distribution. 30WEST executive produced and financed *Late Night*, starring Mindy Kaling and Emma Thompson, which they sold to Amazon following its world premiere in Sundance; Karyn Kusama's *Destroyer* starring Nicole Kidman; and Peter Hedges' *Ben Is Back*, starring Julia Roberts. Other 30WEST projects include: Chris Smith's acclaimed documentary *FYRE* (Netflix); Craig Gillespie's *I, Tonya*, starring Margot Robbie and Academy Award winner Allison Janney; and Wash Westmoreland's *Colette* starring Keira Knightley.

ARI BALOUZIAR of Appraiser (Composer, Sound Designer)

Appraiser is a boutique creative studio led by Ryan Hope and Ari Balouzian. The studio specializes in music consultancy, scoring, direction, cinematography, and production. Appraiser has racked up an impressive client list including Calvin Klein, Prada, and Gucci; catching the eye of directors such as Michel Gondry, Gia Coppola, and Jonas Lindstroem. In 2018, Ryan, Ari, and their band Gabriels composed the music for Prada's acclaimed 'The Delivery Man' series ahead of shooting. The track was subsequently released on R+S records, scoring airtime from BBC Radio's Giles Peterson and Benji B, before picking up Best Original Music at the 2019 AICP Awards. Documentary-wise the studio scored Netflix's acclaimed 'They Call Us Monsters'. Currently, Appraiser are in post with Darren Aronofsky's Protozoa Pictures, working on Lance Oppenheim's 'Some Kind of Heaven' a stylish, thought provoking portrait of a unique Florida retirement home. Feature length drama is also at the heart of the studio with Appraiser in preproduction on gritty Californian neighbourhood drama 'Honor Farm' and scoring David Raboy's psychological drama *The Giant* – which recently premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival 2019 in the Discovery Program.