

# Dance Party, USA



66 minutes / 2006 / Color / 1.78 / Stereo / DVcam

Official Selection South by Southwest Film Festival 2006  
Official Selection Woodstock Film Festival 2006  
Official Selection Chicago Underground Film Festival 2006  
Official Selection Free Range Film Festival 2006  
Official Selection Atlanta Underground Film Festival 2006  
Official Selection Bend Film 2006  
Official Selection Montreal Film Pop 2006  
Official Selection San Francisco Independent Film Festival 2007

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## **Cast**

Jessica..... Anna Kavan  
Gus..... Cole Pensinger  
Bill..... Ryan White  
Christie..... Sarah Bing  
Kate..... Natalie Buller  
Andy..... Brendan McFadden  
Sam..... Chad Hartigan  
Jessica's Mom..... Lorraine Bahr  
Melissa..... Bryna Smith

## **Filmmakers**

Writer and Director..... Aaron Katz  
Producer..... Brendan McFadden  
Producer..... Marc Ripper  
Cinematographer..... Sean McElwee  
Editor..... Zach Clark  
Composer..... Keegan DeWitt  
Camera Assistant..... Andy Reed  
Boom Operator..... Martha Stephens  
Caterer..... Richard Katz

## **Synopsis**

Apathetic seventeen-year-old Gus hangs around doing nothing with his buddy Bill most of the time. Gus likes to tell half-true stories about all the girls he's slept with and all the drugs he's done. Jessica is seventeen too. She doesn't seem to have much in common with anyone anymore – not even her best friend Christie. Every year this one guy Brian throws a 4th of July party. The party's never that great, but there's free beer, so people always go. Gus and Jessica meet each other there. They watch fireworks outside and light sparklers. Gus says that he's not the sort of guy she thinks he is. He tells her a secret. Things are different after that.

## **Director's Bio**

Aaron Katz was born in rainy Portland, OR. He grew up obsessed with dinosaurs, Sherlock Holmes, and public transportation. In high school he became interested in film and acting. When he realized that he wasn't a very good actor he decided to go to film school at North Carolina School of the Arts. His senior thesis film, *Hoopla*, is a slapstick tragedy in which a man inherits hundreds of vacuum cleaners. Immediately after graduation he and two of his college roommates drove a 1963 Chevy Nova from North Carolina to Portland, OR in order to make *Dance Party, USA*. The film was shot with the help of many friends from North Carolina and Portland in August of 2004. It premiered in the narrative feature competition at SXSW 2006. Aaron is currently living in Brooklyn, NY where he is working on *Quiet City*, his second feature.

## **Director's Statement**

My goal with *Dance Party, USA* was to create a film that felt like real life. Most films about teens are filled with people who don't act how anyone really acts. I wanted to make a different kind of film. I had the idea to use some portions of overheard conversations I jotted down while riding on a train. With those as a seed I wrote what would eventually become *Dance Party, USA*. Two years later I had the opportunity to make the film. My chief objective was strip away everything unneeded and create an environment that gave the actors the opportunity to be present in the moment, really listen to each other, and really respond to each other. During the two years that followed, in which we cut the film, our constant aim was to find the moments of truth, where the actors were just real people dealing with what was going on around them. Throughout the process I have tried to remain true to my initial goal of creating something simple, honest, and direct.

## **About the Cast**

The cast consists entirely of local actors from Portland, OR (and a couple crew members). Anna Kavan, who plays Jessica, went to the same high school as writer/director Aaron Katz. Having seen Kavan act before, Katz knew she was right for Jessica even before the script was finished. The rest of the actors were found through open auditions. Natalie Buller, who plays Kate, was originally considered for Christie. During a callback Katz decided to read her for Kate as well. She was so good in the Kate role that she was cast as her instead. Sarah Bing, who plays Christie, has had a small role a number of films shot in Portland, including *Thumbsucker* and *Elephant*. Cole Pensinger and Ryan White, respectively Gus and Bill, walked in during the last round of open calls. "I knew immediately that there was something special about both Cole and Ryan," recalls Katz, "They felt like real best friends, not actors playing best friends. I knew they had to be in the movie." In White's case this almost didn't happen. White was committed to moving to Connecticut before filming was to start. With virtually no money available to either White or the production they decided to split the cost of an airplane ticket back to Portland.

## **About the Crew**

All seven members of the crew went to the film school at North Carolina School of the Arts. Prior to shooting *Dance Party, USA* they had worked together many times.

## **Fun Facts**

- The production budget for *Dance Party, USA* was \$3,000.
- During production the whole crew and one of the actors lived on the top floor of an old house in North Portland.
- The sound team constructed a makeshift clapper out of two blocks of wood with the diagonal lines drawn on in Sharpie.
- Ryan White, who plays Bill, plays guitar in the band Call it Arson.
- It took almost two years to cut the film because writer/director Katz lived in Brooklyn, NY while editor Clark lived in Alexandria, VA. Clark would send DVDs to Katz as progress was made. Throughout the editing process they were only in the same place twice.
- Composer Keegan DeWitt has been in many bands over the last ten years including All Against One, Crosstide, Roman Candle, and his own band, Keegan DeWitt and the Sparrows.
- Chad Hartigan, who plays Sam, has won two game shows including IFC's Ultimate Film Fanatic.
- The second to last scene of *Dance Party, USA* was shot on the same street as the opening scene in Gus Van Sant's *Elephant*.