

Rediscover a lost icon.



# Special When Lit

STEAM MOTION AND SOUND PRESENTS A WIDER LENS FILM "SPECIAL WHEN LIT"  
FEATURING TIM ARNOLD JOHN BROUGHTON STEVE EPSTEIN SAM HARVEY JOSH 'PINGEEK' KAPLAN PAT LAWLOR STEVE RITCHIE ROGER SHARPE LYMAN SHEATS JR. RICK STETTA AND MORE  
PRODUCED BY EMILY RICKARD BY CLAYTON JACOBSEN AND BRETT SULLIVAN DIRECTED BY BRETT SULLIVAN [WWW.SPECIALWHENLITMOVIE.COM](http://WWW.SPECIALWHENLITMOVIE.COM)

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STEAM

GENERAL AUDIENCES  
All Ages Admitted

# Special When Lit

## SYNOPSIS

Special When Lit rediscovers the lure of a lost pop icon - pinball. This American invention made more money than Hollywood through the 50s and 60s. Its success swept the world making it the epitome of 'cool'. Today pinball is all but forgotten.

This is the definitive story of the rise and fall of pinball as told by the fans, collectors, designers and champion players from across the globe. A game, a sport, a lifestyle - pinball takes this eclectic bunch of self-confessed 'pinheads' back to their youth as they open up passionately pinpointing the attractions of the 'world's funnest toy'.

Archive footage of former US news anchorman, Dan Rather, opens the film from a 1977 '60 Minutes' segment on pinball.

'I spent an incredible amount of time at gas stations, honky tonks and other off the beaten path places trying to appear cool...while obsessively following the descent of a steel ball down the playing surface of a garishly lit machine...a pinball machine.'

Dan Rather captures a past time repeated by thousands across the world. 'I used to steal pop bottles to get dimes'; 'it was the place where parents told you not to go'; 'my parents used to think I was going to church Sunday...but I'd be at the corner store playing pinball'; 'all the back lot ma and pa store's had a machine'. Pinball was everywhere. Simply everywhere.

Now pinball is virtually nowhere. Kids don't even know what a pinball machine is. People stay home for their entertainment and kids hang out online, not at the arcade or corner store. The fate of pinball seems decided yet there exists a passionate sub culture keeping the dream alive. Whether it's down at their local bar for a game, or choosing which game to play from a basement collection, pinball is a reality trip to a universe in a box. The ball is wild and can't be controlled, but the challenge to tame it never stops. It's a world that's special when lit.

Roger Sharpe, tells the story of Pinball's early rise to prominence in the Depression era, its banning by the US Government for 30 years, its comeback in the 1970s, and eventual defeat to video games. Living through the industry ups and downs, legendary game designers Steve Kordek, Steve Ritchie and Pat Lawlor reveal the inner workings of a game that fuses the mechanical and electrical ages. Starting with a primitive steel ball rolling around on a flat piece of wood, designers craft a game based on the simple premise - easy to play, but hard to beat.

Collectors who feed off the designer's devilish imagination, all crave one thing - more space. 'It starts with one...' is the opening line from any collector. Ron Shuster built another house for his games, Steve Keeler built more sheds and Sam Harvey shares his bedroom with his. For Sam, who works on his collection full-time, pinball is 'like an extension of my arm...I wake up and do it everyday.' A walk around Sam's house reveals meticulous games, schematics, images, and spare parts...all catalogued in his pinball bibles, handwritten, as Sam doesn't do computers yet. And Frenchman, Raphael Lankar, owner of the Paris Pinball Museum, admits he would never sell any of his 350 pristine games, 'They are like my children...but of course I like some of my children better than the others.'

But pinball is a game with a score. And where there are scores to settle there are competitions. 'The Storm', a stockbroker from New York City, confesses that you have to 'build up your pinball muscles' to compete at the highest level. From the European championships in Amsterdam and Sweden, to the World Pinball Championships in Pittsburgh, and a smattering of amateur backyard tournaments in between, we share the tension, dreams and disappointments of pinball's tournament players. Rick Stetta, former World Champion, entertains with his flamboyant playing style, while current legend Lyman

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## SYNOPSIS

Sheats counters with ice-cool precision. Each in a contest that is as much a mental game as physical battle.

It is the story of former arcade owner, Steve Epstein, who ran the famous Broadway Arcade in midtown New York City, that draws the inevitability of pinball to a close. A man who 'had a lot of life wrapped up in' pinball saw his arcade close in 1997. Describing pinball as 'a lot like life - you never know what is around the corner', Epstein took the arcade closure hard and struggles knowing those days are gone forever. As Professor John Broughton from Columbia University describes, 'the machine knows when you should go home'.

At a time where we can instantly access any song or movie from our past, pinball offers a throwback to an tactile experience that can't be digitally reproduced. Special When Lit captures the passion for a game that inspired generations. But it also recounts the loss of a certain way of living and playing. Perhaps pinball deserves a better fate than simply a nostalgic footnote. Whatever the future, Special When Lit will leave you searching for an arcade to line up your coins to master the silver ball. Will the machine always win?

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## PRODUCTION NOTES

Director and Editor Brett Sullivan  
Producers Clayton Jacobsen & Brett Sullivan  
Co-producer Julian Chow  
Line Producer Emily Rickard  
Graphics Art Direction Luke Carvell  
Sound Design Luke Mynott  
Motion Graphics Luke Carvell  
Jeremy Mansford  
Mike Williamson  
Gavin Davis  
Assistant Editor Marko Keser  
Sound Foley and Assistant Mixes Craig Sainsbery  
Joseph Carmel  
Assistant Sound Effects Editor Andrew Simmons  
Original Music Brett Sullivan  
Production Manager Naomi Stevens  
Cameras Brett Sullivan, Clayton Jacobsen  
Emily Rickard  
Post Production Steam Motion & Sound UK

Format: HD  
Audio: Stereo

Feature Length: 88 mins and 25 secs  
TV Version: 52 mins

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# Special When Lit



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## DIRECTOR'S COMMENT

I was a video game kid. I would ride my bike to the arcade and line up my paper route money on Pac-man. The arcade would be packed with kids and I could play all day on one dollar by accumulating free games. Occasionally some older guy would go in the back room. That's where the pinballs were, but I never played them. They weren't cool in 1982.

Pinball didn't cross my radar for decades. Not until my producing partner Clayton Jacobsen suggested we make a drama about a pinball player. I didn't think anyone played pinball anymore and was surprised to learn that there was a UK Pinball Show. So we drove to Birmingham to research. We arrived into a convention room blazing with a cacophony of noise. Here middle aged men braced themselves against a hundred or so machines doing battle for the weekend. Our drama idea quickly became a documentary.

In researching the subject I was surprised to see how little information there was. For a phenomenon that once swept the world there were only a handful of books and even less archive footage. Pinball had a story to tell and I felt it deserved a better fate.

Our research led us to pinball networks discovered by our inspired line producer Emily Rickard. One contact led to another and our crew of three made guerilla spurts to America, Australia, France, Italy and Sweden to capture our story. We met truly wonderful and generous people. Many times I thought to myself that I would never meet someone like this if I had not discovered pinball. And many times I thought - you're a regular guy, sane, intelligent, articulate - but you've built a house to store 150 machines! We found a common language between the collectors, tournament players, designers and the fans.

This is my first documentary. My 'day' job is making commercials. Thirty seconds that sell a promise. Every frame analysed to be positive. Every light deliberated over. Every camera move choreographed. Special When Lit was the exact opposite. Unrehearsed footage about a subject matter that the world really doesn't care about. I was often asked 'why pinball'? Surely there is something less niche? But I was fascinated with a invention that became the 'world's funnest toy'. It made more money than the movies at its height. It was so popular it was considered a social menace and made illegal in American for over 30 years. Today most kids have never even played, let alone seen, a pinball machine. It's a nostalgic footnote. What happened?

The grand days of what is a truly remarkable blend of the mechanical and electronic ages are over. With the fading of pinball we have lost a special tangible experience. So much of our lives revolve around a 2D screen - tv, computers, ipods, phones. It's a relief to interact with something 'real'. It feels good to hold something, shake it, bump it, and see it react to your own physical control. As pinball pioneer Harry Williams said, the ball is wild'. And boy does it feel good.

How can a ball rolling on a flat piece of wood feel good? Initially in our filming I couldn't really understand how our cast described how it felt to play a game. It was surprising to see middle aged men (and lets face it there aren't a huge amount of women on the scene) talking passionately about a subject matter that wasn't sport. Grown men making analogies to life, reminiscing about youth, wondering where pinball all went wrong. With further investigation I got to understand that the sound, artwork, and gameplay in full synchronicity creates a compelling experience. Harmless fun. Intense competition. Zen-like concentration. Bitter grief. But no matter what, the machine always wins. Personally I think it is the ultimate way to waste time.

With the film now finished Clayton and I have 'invested' in nine pinball machines between us. You could say we have become our own subject matter. Pinheads? You could now call us that.

Brett Sullivan

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## CAST

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**Roger Sharpe:** Roger is one of the most idolized people in the pinball community. He is most famous for his work with legalizing pinball by proving it was a game of skill before the New York City Council in 1976. Roger's interest in pinball came from the Broadway Arcade in New York City. He was then a journalist and later wrote the 1976 book 'Pinball'. He then worked in the pinball industry in marketing and licensing. His sons, Zach Sharpe and Josh Sharpe are world top ten players.

**Gary Stern:** Owner of the last remaining pinball manufacturer - Stern Pinball in Chicago. Gary is the son of pinball entrepreneur Sam Stern, who with partner Harry Williams, built the Williams empire.

**Rick Stetta** - Rick devoted his life to becoming a world champion in something. He decided it would be pinball and achieved that in the early 90's. Rick lives with his wife in California and is still active on the pinball tournament circuit.

**Steve Epstein** - inherited his family business, The Broadway Arcade, located in midtown New York City in the 1960s. The Broadway Arcade was a famous games arcade where celebrities, politicians, kids, college students, and workers all mixed under the one roof. It closed in 1996. Steve was also instrumental in developing the PAPA pinball tournaments along with Roger Sharpe.

**Lyman Sheats Jr-** arguably the greatest pinball player in the world. Lyman works at Stern Pinball in Chicago as a pinball programmer.

**Tim Arnold:** He started in the arcade business and left for Vegas, with 1000+ pinball machines, to realize his dream of creating a place where they could be shared with the public. He now runs the Pinball Hall of Fame.

**Pingeek:** Josh Kaplan, known as 'Pingeek', produces self made pinball DVDs. He documents many old and rare games and is a regular on the pinball show scene.

**John Broughton** - Associate Professor of Psychology at Columbia University, New York City. John specialises in social studies, no doubt helped by his heavy pinball playing through college.

**Pat Lawlor** - Game designer responsible for some of the most popular pinball machines ever made.

**Steve Ritchie** - the designer's designer. Innovative and maverick designer who started at Atari and went on to produce classics such as Firepower, Black Knight, High Speed, Getaway, Star Trek

**Steve Kordek** - legendary game designer for 60 years. Was a designer before flippers were invented. Steve was the first to put 2 flippers on a machine to make it as we know it today.

**Ron Shuster** - lives in Pennsylvania in two houses - one of them is for his pinball collection.

**Steve Keely** - part of the Orange County Pinball Club in Middletown, New York. Steve has 70 machines spread through his house.

**Raphael Lankar** - owner of Paris Pinball Museum. His collection consists of vintage games from the 1930s-1950s - often known and woodrail games and wedgeheads.

**Sam Harvey:** Sam lives in California and spends his days working on his collection. He used to work in the bowling industry until the lanes closed 12 years ago. He lives alone surrounded by his collection of 400 machines.

**Koi Morris:** Koi is an avid pinball tournament player and synthetic chemist by day job. Koi lives in New Jersey and likes to solve maths puzzles and ride subways.

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## FILMAKERS

### **BRETT SULLIVAN - DIRECTOR/PRODUCER**

Brett Sullivan was born in Sydney, Australia, 1971. He graduated from the University of Technology in Sydney with a BA in Communications after being banned from the television studio for making too many pop promos.

He was one of the early adopters of computer graphics writing a book on the subject at age 19 and subsequently lecturing on emerging technologies at NSW University, Sydney University and Australian Film Television Radio School. As a technician Brett freelanced in motion graphics before founding a studio in 1995 with Julian Chow, later to be called Steam Motion & Sound. Steam is now a successful commercials production company in Sydney and London.

In 2005 Brett swapped Sydney for Soho, relocating to London to expand Steam's commercial production business as Creative Director. He has directed and produced hundreds of international commercials for major brands and entertainment companies including Pepsi, Reebok, Vodafone, Coca Cola, artists such as Phil Collins, Michael Buble, Natalie Merchant, Eric Clapton, Madonna, Green Day, REM and theatrical productions such as Phantom of the Opera, Les Misérables, The Lion King, Jersey Boys, Oliver!, Wicked and many more. Special When Lit is his debut feature length film.

Brett is an accomplished musician and provides the original score to Special When Lit. He lives with his wife and four children in South London and still has his original Star Wars action figures from 1977.

### **CLAYTON JACOBSEN - PRODUCER**

Clayton trained as a graphic artist with pens and pencils when they were still fashionable, before transferring to digital with the advent of desktop publishing in the early nineties.

A move into account management with advertising agency George Patterson Bates Dorland and then commercial TV production culminated in the opening of his own full service agency Digital Empire, encompassing print, post and digital. In this time he produced several tv documentaries and DVD releases.

Digital Empire merged with award winning studio Steam Motion and Sound in 2003 with Clayton relocating to London to open the UK office of Steam. He and partner Brett Sullivan lead the creative team producing commercials for entertainment and corporate clients.

Clayton dreams of one day having his own pinball arcade or joining the SAS.

### **EMILY RICKARD - LINE PRODUCER**

With dreams of becoming a journalist, Emily Rickard studied politics and Broadcast Journalism at the University in Sydney, Australia, before realizing that what she really was interested in was telling stories. Spending nine years working in the Australian film industry as an Assistant Director of feature films and television drama, Emily honed her skills in the art of storytelling, and decided to take herself to London where her love of pinball was discovered. Researching and interviewing the colourful characters in Special When Lit has cemented her love of the game, and her love of telling a good character led story.

Now back in Sydney working as a Producer and Content Developer for Steam, Emily will be moving to LA in 2010 to further develop those stories.

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## SCREENINGS

Special When Lit premiered at the Raindance Film Festival in London, UK, in October 2009 where it was nominated for BEST DOCUMENTARY. It won BEST DOCUMENTARY at Los Angeles United Film Festival.

Raindance Film Festival - Nominated Best Documentary  
Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival - Official Selection  
Atlanta Docufest - Official Selection  
Big Sky Documentary Film Festival - Official Selection  
Calgary International Film Festival - Official Selection  
Buffalo Niagara International Film Festival - Official Selection  
Los Angeles United Film Festival - Winner Best Feature Documentary  
Bronx International Film Festival - Official Selection  
Indianapolis International Film Festival - Official Selection  
Da Vinci Film Festival - Official Selection  
Tallahassee Film Festival - Nominated Best Documentary  
United Film Festival - Tulsa/San Francisco/Chicago/New York/London  
USA Film Festival - Official Selection  
Wisconsin Film Festival - Official Selection

Up to date screening dates available on [www.specialwhenlitmovie.com](http://www.specialwhenlitmovie.com) and Facebook.



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## COMMENTS

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"....Special When Lit is reminiscent of that other great documentary Spellbound. Both draw the audience into a world of obsession, impress upon you the level of devotion, and charm you with the people in that world...."

EYE FOR FILM UK 18/10/09

"Masterfully shot, Sullivan brings out something nostalgic in his documentary, intriguing in some ways, also fascinating in others, it seems at time like an emotional and sensitive area, with pinball's fans describing of the game like a relationship, their faces lighting up as if they were recounting their first kiss.... Special When Lit is an encapsulating and absorbing watch, retracing the passion of pinball followers, but also the sad dissolution of, what could be described as a certain way of living and playing."

RAINDANCE FILM FESTIVAL UK Raindance Festival Director Elliot Grove 20/9/09

With a gripping intro, the film draws you in and keeps your attention with its larger-than-life characters. Names like "The Storm" and "Pingeek" exemplify the way the game has even created alternate personas for some players. The result of a train wreck, mixed with an epic saga and baked in an oven of special effects, is enough to make viewers dropping video game remotes, hankering to get their hands on nostalgic mechanical games.

Montana Kaimin - Big Sky Festival, 22/2/10

Anyone familiar with The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters—Seth Gordon's mesmerizing documentary about "King Kong" fanatics—can appreciate the appeal of a film steeped in obsession and nostalgia. Special When Lit, director Brett Sullivan's trek through the depths of pinball culture, boasts a similar cast of arcade addicts and pasty dorks set to the most intriguing history lesson this side of the BBC. Sullivan's characters paint the demise of pinball as an oddly personal dilemma. There's no place in the console-centric world of the Xbox and PlayStation for the strategic dance and gyration unique to the flipper-button set. Special When Lit leaves you feeling as sorry for the likes of geeky world champion Lyman Sheats as for American tradition in general. "Pinball is slowly dying," says pinball designer Steve Ritchie. And Sullivan makes you feel it. (AS)

Big Sky Festival

Special When Lit sometimes treads a fine line. It's easy to laugh at the characters as oddballs, social misfits and obsessivecompulsives. Yet by embracing their eccentricities and the way they use pinball to construct meaning in their lives, the film never loses sight of their humanity. Sydney Morning Herald/West Australian syndicated from AAP.

4/1/10

★★★★★

"....Did I enjoy it? Hell yes, it was great! Everyone was absorbed by this film. It was amazing to see everyone so engaged with it!"

Just One More Game.com.au

23/12/09

Special When Lit is the definitive story of the rise and fall of pinball as told by the fans, collectors, designers and champion players from across the globe. Shot all over the world, though predominantly in America, by London-based Australian filmmakers Brett O'Sullivan, Clayton Jacobsen and Emily Rickard, and edited in the UK with the final sound mix completed in Australia, the film truly is an international production with worldwide appeal. Film Ink 20/11/09

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