

THE MORE YOU KNOW...

Journalist, Author and Music Historian Harvey Kubernik interviews Hollywood Multi-hyphenate Travis Edward Pike — again!



HARVEY KUBERNIK MEETS LONG-GRIN

Having a dragon in your office might seem strange to some, but it's not at all unusual at Otherworld Cottage. In 2013, [Otherworld Cottage Industries](#) published [Travis Edward Pike's Odd Tales and Wonders 1964 – 1974 A Decade of Performance](#), an illustrated memoir of his career as a singer-songwriter, complete with lyrics to his songs and narrative rhymes in two simultaneously released albums, *Odd Tales and Wonders Stories in Rhyme* and *Odd Tales and Wonders Stories in Song*. I wrote the Introduction to the book, and I've been trying to keep up with Pike's career ever since. With all he's done and continues to do, I decided to interview him to better understand his career from 1974 to the present.

HK: You've been a composer, lyricist, independent screenwriter, 1st AD, director of production, technical director, dubbing consultant, language adapter, director, singer, storyteller, voice actor, line producer, screen actor, TV director, music publisher (Morningstone Music), president of Otherworld Entertainment, VP of the Alameda Writers Group in Glendale, Chairman Emeritus of the [New Playwrights Foundation](#) in Santa Monica, (where you continue to contribute to mentoring playwrights, screenwriters and authors), and own a development, publishing, and production entity (Otherworld Cottage Industries) — a "jack of all trades," a phrase usually concluding with "master of none," but you've managed to get awards and stellar reviews for your work in nearly all of those categories. How do you explain that?

TP: I stay busy.

HK: You've just inked a record deal for the re-release of "If I Didn't Love You Girl" with a UK-based company that is really entrenched in Northern soul. It's cool seeing you integrated into that UK music scene. Do they know that in 1964 you were widely known as "The Twist Sensation" in Germany?

TP: I don't know, but they knew that "If I Didn't Love You Girl" was released in a German compilation album a year before it was released in the UK compilation album, *Tougher Than Stains*, where they first heard it. That's what led them to contact me to license their upcoming vinyl 45 re-release.

HK: As you well know, myself and others have been watching the renaissance of your early work in music and film going back 50 years. Now you've salvaged footage from the 1966 rock musical movie *Feelin' Good*, for which you wrote ten of the eleven original songs, including the title song. You performed eight of your ten songs on screen, but not the title song. How did that happen?

TP: My father, James A. Pike, made a deal with the first Massachusetts Jaycees Battle of the Bands committee, to offer as part of the winning band's prize, a role in his upcoming movie. When the Montclairs won, my father asked me to write a couple of songs for them, particularly, the title song, "Feelin' Good." I'd already written the title song to his *Demo Derby* movie, performed by the Rondels, so he knew I could do it.

The Montclair's were mostly R & B, so I composed the two songs I wrote for them in that idiom — and they nailed them. When I did my 2014 album, *Feelin' Better*, it featured updated versions of seven of the eight songs I sang in *Feelin' Good*. When asked why I didn't record "Feelin' Good," I answered that I wrote that song for the Montclairs, they did it really well, and as far as I'm concerned, its performance belongs to them. And now that we've salvaged that music clip from the movie, I'm glad I made that choice.

HK: When your father produced the movie, he already had a respected reputation in the Massachusetts TV and film community. What in his background led to this movie?

TP: Me, I suspect. He said as much in one of the many interviews that appeared in the Boston newspapers at the time. He saw me sing a guest set at Natick High School, and when the student body went wild, it was a revelation to him. He'd never seen or heard me perform live before, and he thought if he could capture that on film, it would be a hit. And, of course, being his son, he knew he could get me to do it for scale.

TP: As for his personal background, he'd been writing radio shows and shooting silent movies in his Roxbury neighborhood since he was a kid. He loved movies and was among the TV executives that came to Hollywood and successfully negotiated getting theatrical movies shown on television. When he finally realized his dream of becoming an independent filmmaker, he started out making industrial films, commercials and political films, until, in 1963, he made his first theatrical release, the 28-minute action documentary, *Demo Derby*, which, in 1964, played in more than 6,000 screens across the country with the Beatles *Hard Day's Night*.

HK: You now have the *50th Anniversary Edition of Demo Derby* in your catalog. KROQ-FM deejay [Rodney Bingenheimer](#) and filmmaker [Kansas Bowling](#) touted the movie to me after they got a DVD copy. What's the scenario behind this movie and the music?



TP: I used to hang out with a crowd of older mechanics who worked on my 1954 Studebaker Commander Coupe. They worked at Midas Muffler, an auto parts store, a speed shop, and all three lived for hot rods and custom cars. They're the guys who used to take me around to bars where I'd sing requests with house bands for tips, which is how I could afford to have them work on my car. When I blew the souped-up engine they built for me, they took me to a demo derby at Norwood Arena. I'd joined the U.S. Navy, but before I left for Boot Camp, I told my father about the demo derby and suggested it could make a good movie.

Months later, home on leave, my father screened footage of a demo derby he'd shot at the arena. Even without sound, it was exciting. I suggested he put a rock music soundtrack to it. He told me to knock something out on my guitar to show him what I had in mind, set up a Nagra tape recorder, and left me alone in the screening room. I wanted to see my friends, so I gave it an hour, banged out a song, and left.

I was stationed in Germany in 1964, when I received the flyer for *Demo Derby* in the mail. Under the black and white

still, the text was "with a music score that will ROCK YOU . . . featuring the sensational DEMO DERBY title song (Travis Pike — Arthur Korb) — recorded by the RONDELS."

HK: Talk to me about filming and singing in *Feelin' Good*. We've talked about the songs previously, but this was a feature film. We don't hear a lot about the Massachusetts pop and rock music scene, except psychedelia-inspired bands, but you always operated in the modern song format. Singing and crooning. The movie has a cult following.

TP: I don't know that I'd say the movie ever earned a cult following, but I think that the idea that there was a movie, made entirely in Greater Boston, in 1966, featuring the pop music styles of the times, has created a cult following of people who wished they'd seen it.

I was still in the Navy, a rehab patient in Portsmouth Naval Hospital, recovering from bone graft surgery, and while *Feelin' Good* wasn't an action picture, you never see me dance in it. I had enough trouble walking, and although I tried very hard to hide my limp, I still see it in the footage.

My parts were shot on Saturdays when I had weekend liberty. I'd fly up to Boston, shoot sometimes late into the evening, get up for Sunday dinner with the family and then it was off to Logan Airport, for the flight back to Norfolk, Virginia, and I still had to get back over to Portsmouth from there. I had so little time on location that I never had a feel for what the movie was about, or how the dailies I saw shot on weekdays would integrate with my scenes. Singing wasn't a problem. I'd been doing that for years, but just trying to stand up for several takes, to get all the different angles called for in the film, could become painful and exhausting, especially because we had to finish whatever sequence we'd started on the one day, because the next day, I'd be gone and the locations, props, wardrobe and talent might not be available on following weekends for retakes.

HK: I have to ask you about working with the Montclairs. You recovered their footage, along with several of your songs.

TP: We filmed the end credit sequence shot on the Charles River Esplanade together, and of course, I saw them again at the Boston world premiere. Other than that, I only saw them in dailies. A major sub-plot of the movie was the Battle of the Bands contest, and in the story, they were our local favorite. Pike Productions shot extensive footage of the actual Battle of the Bands in Weymouth, Massachusetts, so he already had their Battle of the Bands footage when their parts were written. They played themselves, three black singers and three white musicians from Waltham, Massachusetts. The songs I wrote for them, were written after they won.

TP: My father wanted their parts in the movie to represent them, their talent, aspirations and dreams, an honest look at the real young people who made up the group. That attempt at *cinéma vérité* killed us in the South. The Montclairs frequently met after rehearsals and before gigs in a local pizza parlor, where they'd take a booth, order a couple of pizzas and talk.

I wasn't there when that sequence was shot, but I liked it. It really captured their personalities. It never occurred to me that seeing those black and white hands, reaching across the table, and sharing a pizza would be provocative. Looking back on it now, I suppose I was naïve, but mixed races dining together was not uncommon in New England. When the Southern distributor said my father would have to cut that sequence to book the movie in the South, I'm proud that he refused, even though it meant losing distribution revenues.



TP: 1966 was a tough year in the Civil Rights movement, and it was the year that Stokely Carmichael, Chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, coined the phrase, "Black Power." In such a climate, a scene of blacks and whites sharing a pizza, where they were not even allowed to drink from the same water fountains, or sit at the same lunch counters might well have been inflammatory to either side of the Civil Rights issue.

HK: You moved to Los Angeles in 1968, the year Robert F. Kennedy was slain in L.A. In 1974, you did the musical score to the movie *The Second Gun*, about the investigation of his assassination. The movie was nominated by the Golden Globes for Best Documentary Feature. What was it like, writing for the screen, as opposed to writing tunes for your group, Travis Pike's Tea Party?

TP: [Gerard Alcan](#), who produced and directed *The Second Gun*, heard me sing my song "End of Summer" at a Hollywood Christmas party in 1973. He loved it, and said it exactly captured the *Zeitgeist* of the era and wanted it for

his film. My father had made films for the Kennedys, and when I saw what *The Second Gun* was all about, I balked. My family had a history with the Kennedys. My father had shot film of their family at their house in Hyannisport, film that was used in their campaigns. I had even met JFK when he visited our house in Newton, Massachusetts. It was not only unnerving, but some part of me feared it might appear that I was trying to capitalize on their family tragedies. And I really didn't want the song I'd written for my German fans forever linked to RFK's murder or that controversial documentary.

Gerard persisted and I finally agreed to provide the melody, without the lyrics, and to record additional guitar "stingers" to musically reinforce key revelations in the film. So, although I am properly credited with the score, it was more of an adaptation of an existing melody, than music composed specifically for that film.

HK: And you've finally recorded and released that song, "End of Summer."

TP: Yes, on two albums. On the first track of Travis Edward Pike's *Odd Tales and Wonders Stories in Song*, with a simple club band feel, and the second, remixed and with the addition of a string section, on the last track of the more recent *Feelin' Better* CD.

HK: Between 1974 and the present, you worked extensively in the TV, film and live performance world. And didn't you once direct Orson Wells?

TP: I'll tell you what happened, and then you tell me if I directed Orson Wells. I had become something of a dubbing Guru, having tested the available [ADR \(automated dialog replacement\)](#) systems and rated several dubbing studios in the Los Angeles area for Sync Ltd, the dubbing company that hired me as a consultant. But when they realized the dubbing assignment they had landed for an Italian/Yugoslavian co-production, *Wagner e Venezia*, was a sprocket job, 35mm film elements (including the picture reels) and pre-mixed M&E (music and effects reels), they asked me if I would do it. The narration had been pre-recorded, so ostensibly, all I had to do was record Orson Welles for the voice of Richard Wagner, transfer it to one stripe, cut it into the dialog reel, and supervise the final mix.

I rented an editing bay, laced everything up and ran through what I had. The pictures were fine, the M&E was excellent, but English language narrator had so mispronounced the German words, that I had to replace the narration.

Then I was told that to record Orson Welles, I had to use a little studio in Hollywood that was the only place he would

record. Naturally, I went to see the studio and talked to the engineer. He understood what I needed and assured me it could all be done there. Then he gave me a set of rules for working with him and Orson Welles. The first, and most important rule was, I was not allowed to talk to [Orson Welles](#). No one directed the great director. Since I was responsible for getting the performances I needed, I told him I had to be able to talk to Mr. Welles. He said that was out of the question. If I had anything to say, it had to be said to him, and he would determine whether or not he should pass it along to Mr. Welles. If I didn't agree to those rules, I wouldn't be allowed in the studio. He conceded that I had to be in the studio, if for no other reason than to be sure all the lines had been recorded, so that would be allowed, but "talkback" would be turned off during the session. Mr. Welles' terms were non-negotiable.

I thought long and hard about whether or not I wanted to go forward with the project, but the client had insisted on Orson Welles for the voice of Wagner, and since it was all voice over, and no lip sync required, my razor and I would determine where in the film the great man's lines would be heard, so if Sync Ltd wanted to go through with it under those terms, I'd do it. They did, so I did.

On the big night (it had to be at night, another stipulation), I arrived early and had to wait outside while Mr. Welles was made comfortable in the recording booth. I was not allowed to greet him, but I did nod hello as I went to the control booth, where I made an interesting discovery. From where Orson Welles sat, he could see me clearly and I could see him. His script was before him and soon, the session began. Welles was very good, right from the first line, but I hung on each word and phrase like life depended on it, and smiled when I thought the reading was excellent, and looked a bit less enthusiastic if I wanted something more. And I got it! He watched me, and responded to my facial reactions, with second and third attempts at questionable lines. It was all a game with unspoken rules, but I kept my facial expressions subtle. Had I gone over the top, I think Welles would have been insulted, and whatever influence I might have had, would be compromised and dismissed. But I have to admit, I was enjoying myself, wordlessly getting the readings I desired. And in the end, completely pleased with the result, I placed the lines exactly where I wanted them in the final mix.

HK: And you had something to do with Ingmar Bergman's [Fanny and Alexander](#), too, didn't you?

TP: That's a bit of a stretch. When [Ingmar Bergman](#) brought his five-hour production of *Fanny and Alexander* to Rudi Fehr to have it dubbed into English, Rudi brought it to Betty Givens, President of Lingo-Tech Dubbing Services, and

Betty asked me to be her Technical Director. My job was to line up a suitable ADR studio, create a schedule and budget for the project. ADR had come of age and a film that long, done the old-fashioned way, would have been incredibly so time-consuming (and I'm talking expensive studio time-consuming), as to be prohibitively expensive.

[Rudi Fehr](#) directed the Swedish to English dubbing sessions, and I think he replaced the dialog for the entire five-hour show, although it was subsequently cut down to three hours for the U.S. release. Then, about a month after the project was delivered, [Betty Givens](#) presented me with a lovely bonus check, and thanked me for my work. The project had come in ahead of schedule and under budget.

HK: So you facilitated the voice replacement for the English language version that allowed the members of the Academy to view and understand the film that subsequently took home five Academy Awards.

TP: True, but I never thought of it quite that way before.

HK: Wasn't that about the same time you and our mutual friend, David Carr, produced the long-form music video *Ventures in Space* for Award Records and Tapes, featuring songs from [The Ventures NASA 25th Anniversary LP](#)?



Judy's still got the album. Not sure if we still have anything to play it on, but all the Ventures signed it.

TP: I'm pretty sure it was. I shot [The Ventures](#), with David playing keyboards, in the recording studio, and intercut their performance with actual NASA footage. Nike provided uniforms, so I put the Ventures in blue and David and the

studio crew in maroon, which, coupled with exciting shots of the studio's plasma readers, and a genuine rocket stage break-away matched to a shot of Mel, taken from under his transparent-skinned floor tom, gave it all an interesting, tongue-in-cheek, Star Trek feel.

HK: Let's jump ahead. At the 1999 Chicago International Film Festival, you won a Silver Plaque, Intercom Special Achievement – Writing award for your 99 minute, live performance video production of your epic narrative rhyme, [Grumpuss](#), which developed a significant cult following, garnered a slew of great reviews, and for which you are now readying a 20th anniversary re-release for 2017. I know David Carr went to England with you and conducted the orchestra for the live performance at Blenheim Palace. Did you bring the rest of your crew from the U.S., or hire local crews?

TP: I brought American cinematographer [Peter Anderson](#), because of our established working relationship, his interest in *Grumpuss*, and the fact that he was highly respected in the U.K., where he had recently filmed the 3D short, [Haunts of the Olde Country](#) for Busch Gardens. I also brought American costume designer Alice Eugenia Hughes who had submitted unique designs for the waifs' costumes, John Frick, the accountant for Grumpuss Productions, and my daughter, Lisa J. Somers as my diligent, trustworthy and loyal production coordinator.



The rest of the crew was U.K. local hire, although I knew I was going to engage [Colin Sheen](#) as my fixer (musician's contractor), before I ever left the states. Peter Anderson had met him when they were recording the score to *Pirates*, another 3D short Peter shot for Busch Gardens. And that wasn't the first time I had heard Colin's name. My friend at the British Film Commission, [Andrew Patrick](#), had recommended Colin, too. [Philip Moores](#), officially my U.K. post production manager, was a long-time friend who had worked with me on several projects here in the States, including *Ventures in Space*. He introduced me to Doug Urquart, the U.K. Unit Production Manager, who assembled

most of the rest of the U.K. crew. I am happy to report the entire U.K. crew was excellent, for which I credit the department heads, and especially [Shaun Moore](#), the Production Designer, who that same year won a prestigious Royal Television Design Society Award.

Apart from myself, the on-screen talent was [Anna Scott](#), an Australian-born actress, then living in Los Angeles, who I hired for the role of the Queen of the Sidh. I still needed three waifs for my [Save the Children Fund](#) Benefit. At the time, Riverdance was all the rage, but if I tried to go with Irish dancers, the show would look like a cheap imitation of that huge production. I decided that performances by three lovely young rhythmic gymnasts would be just as exciting, far more original and hopefully, far less expensive than importing talent from outside England. I not only wanted British gymnasts, I wanted them to live somewhere near the venue in the Midlands.

I called British Gymnastics at the [Lillishall National Sport Centre in Newport](#), Shropshire, and was directly connected to Vera (Marinova) Atkinson, twice World Champion in Rhythmic Gymnastics, former head of Bulgarian National Television Sports, and then publicist for British Gymnastics. I told her what I needed, why, and asked if she could help. She was thrilled to tell me she knew exactly where to find the young ladies I needed, that they were up to the task, and gave me the contact information for Marion Sands, coach of the Coventry RG club. When we met at the regular club rehearsal, Marion introduced me to her wonderful young girls, had them run through some routines, and won me over on the spot. Not only were they fabulous, they were natives! The three chosen to play the waifs were Yvonne Marie Hill, Aimee Johnson and Rose Meredith. Marion's daughter, [Alitia Sands](#), a former Commonwealth Games bronze medalist and seven times champion at junior and senior levels, agreed to choreograph their routines.

HK: [Lynn Redgrave](#) and [Rachael Kempson](#) (Lady Redgrave), were among your special guests at the world premiere of *Grumpuss*. How did that come about?

TP: I was virtually unknown in the U.K., so to get an audience of donors for my world premiere benefit performance for the Save the Children Fund, it was determined early on, that the best way to do that, was to make it a celebrity event, which also requires a celebrity venue. [Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire](#) was all that. Tickets were to be £1,000 each, and would include the performance, banquet after the performance, and the opportunity to rub elbows with the celebrity guests, all meant to encourage high-rollers to buy in. My wife and I were both fans of the 1966 movie, [Georgy Girl](#), and wanted to be sure Lynn Redgrave was invited, so I contacted her directly through a mutual friend. She replied

that she and her mother, Lady Redgrave, would be delighted to accept my invitation, and looked forward to an all-expense-paid trip back to England to visit friends and family.

Other celebrity guests included the [Marquis of Blandford \(now the 12th Duke of Marlborough\)](#), the Master of Ceremonies for the banquet, Mr. Raymond P. Huggins, MBE, MSM, CdeR, retired Academy Sgt. Major at Sandhurst (Senior RSM post in the British Army), and ultimately more sports celebrities and production celebrities than movie stars, but frankly, I think that made it all more interesting.

HK: And now you're planning to do a 20th anniversary release of [Grumpuss](#) on DVD.

TP: I'm considering it. If my masters have held up, I'd like to upgrade the *Grumpuss* Digi-beta masters to HD and do a widescreen release.

HK: Back in 2006 you won awards for Creative Excellence (shared with co-producer Jo Christensen), from the U.S. International Film and Video Festival for the New Playwrights Production of *Volunteers for Verdi*, a feature documentary film about a dedicated amateur opera company.



Click the photo to view the trailer

HK Is there product on this?

TP: Yes. *Volunteers for Verdi* is on [Createspace](#) and Amazon.

HK: And then there's *Morningstone*.

TP: As for [Morningstone](#), I'm still working on adapting my screenplay into a novel, but I'm making progress. Oddly enough, the direction the novel is taking may bring it back around to its original title, *Changeling*. And then, there's [Long-Grin](#), the dragon in the office, growing impatient. And the music videos from *Feelin' Good* have to go up on Youtube!

HK: You've still got a lot on your plate.

TP: I stay busy.