“BROTHERS HYPNOTIC”
U.S. Theatrical Premiere March 24-30, 2014
at the Maysles Cinema, Harlem NYC

A film by Reuben Atlas about the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble
U.S. Broadcast Television Premiere on PBS’ Independent Lens April 7, 2014

"Brothers Hypnotic will restore your faith in humanity, bring a tear to your eye, a heavy stomp to your right foot and, possibly, make you curse your parents for not forcing you to wake up at the crack of dawn for tuba practice." –CBS Local

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SYNOPSIS

At 6:00 a.m. sharp, the children of jazz musician Phil Cohran began band rehearsal. A family of 24 living on Chicago’s South Side, the “brothers” of the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble were brought up by their father and three mothers on a strict diet of jazz, funk and Black Consciousness. Today, as they raise eight brass horns in a blend of jazz, hip-hop, and funk—whether filling the streets of New York City, collaborating with Mos Def, or headlining a European tour—they struggle to uphold their family values.

SELECTED FESTIVALS

World Premiere, 2013 South by Southwest Film Festival
International Premiere, 2013 HotDocs Film Festival
Best Documentary, 2013 Savannah Film Festival
Best Documentary, Honorable Mention, 2013 Urbanworld Film Festival
Best Documentary Jury Prize, 2013 Indie Memphis Film Festival
Best Documentary Jury Prize, 2013 Sound Unseen Film and Music Festival
Official Selection, 2013 Los Angeles Film Festival
Official Selection, 2013 Sound & Vision at the Film Society of Lincoln Center
Official Selection, 2014 Stranger Than Fiction at IFC Center

IN THE PRESS

VARIETY
June 21, 2013. Reviewed at the Los Angeles Film Festival by Andrew Barker.

Lively, funny and at times philosophical, Reuben Atlas’ debut docu chronicles the rise of the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble with great sensitivity.

After spending several years chronicling the rise of fiery eight-member brother band the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, first-time filmmaker Reuben Atlas manages to capture most of the elements that make the group such a sui generis force. Lively, funny and at times philosophical, Brothers Hypnotic tackles the challenges of maintaining an independent music career, as well as some knotted generational conflicts, and handles it all with great sensitivity. Docu premiered at SXSW earlier this spring, and ought to have continuing life at fests and on VOD.

Above all else, the film does an excellent job of capturing and contextualizing the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble’s brand of sinewy musical magic. An idiosyncratic fusion of jazz, funk, Afrobeat and more than a smidge of hip-hop, the group’s horn-dominated arrangements rely on an uncommonly intense interpersonal chemistry, and it’s no secret where that chemistry comes from. Sons of Chicago
jazz polymath and Black Consciousness figure Phil Cohran, the brothers all grew up in a huge, unconventional family (though they share the same father, the group’s eight players count three different mothers, two of whom helped raise the communal brood side-by-side), practicing music for hours every day and performing in the Phil Cohran Youth Ensemble.

In forming Hypnotic, the group made a partial break from their father, and the struggle to re-evaluate and reinterpret his uncompromising musical and political ideals for a modern era, while retaining his anti-establishment spirit, becomes ever more acute as the group’s profile rises. In a sense, the band members’ complicated relationships with their imposing paterfamilias form an intriguing microcosm of the tensions between the hip-hop generation and its civil-rights-era forebears, which gives the film a much more potent through-line than the simple “perils of success” tropes in which so many music docs traffic.

First seen playing on the streets of Manhattan (where they reason they can make just as much money as playing in clubs), the group eventually graduates to venues like Lincoln Center and major European festivals. Whereas artistic integrity is something so many contempo artists grouse about before signing on to do a Pepsi commercial, Hypnotic clearly take the concept seriously. They turn down an early contract offer from Atlantic Records, and when they’re given opportunities to play with the likes of Mos Def, Damon Albarn and Prince, they first thoughtfully debate whether the gigs are worth the tradeoff of being seen as someone else’s backing band. Yet this is hardly a dour, Fugazi-like indie operation: After jamming with Prince at an Irish concert, the brothers walk offstage and can do nothing but scream with joy and disbelief.

Perhaps inevitably, given the sheer number of characters involved, the film has occasional difficulty differentiating the various musicians’ personalities — referring to them by order of birth doesn’t help — but nearly all of them exhibit the laid-back, improvisational comedic instincts of veteran street showmen. Even a near-meltdown in a recording studio is softened by the brotherly banter that continues throughout the crisis, and a scene in which two of them endlessly dissect a paragraph-long album review recalls This Is Spinal Tap in the best possible way. In addition to his own footage, Atlas draws from a wealth of archival tapes and home video, with understandably variable quality. Yet the sound fidelity is consistently fantastic, befitting a band that sounds more or less the same whether it’s playing on street corners, ritzy concert hall stages or cramped New York City apartments.

AUSTIN CHRONICLE

When a film successfully footnotes heavy-hitters like Prince, Sun Ra, Earth, Wind & Fire, Mos Def, and Damon Albarn (Blur, Gorillaz), the main subject's gotta be
tight. For Hudah, Cid, Baji, LT, Yoshi, Rocco, Clef, and Smoov, the brothers of other mothers who share a father and are Chicago's Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, "tight" – in the family and musical sense – is a way of life. Their dad, trumpeter Kelan Phil Cohran, served both Earth, Wind & Fire and the collective womb of jazz spaceman Sun Ra, and he instilled in his sons his anti-establishment mindset as well as the discipline, dedication, and heart to reach master-level musicianship. As the ensemble grew from boys to men, their greatest challenge wasn't so much navigating the temptations of stardom as the indomitable spirit of the man they call Pops. Director Atlas wisely lets the music play, capturing the ecstatic, rational exuberance of young men finding their own long tone.

CBS LOCAL

Brothers Hypnotic is one of the best music documentaries you'll see at Sound Unseen, or anywhere else for that matter. The film is centered on the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, eight brothers from Chicago who were molded as boys to be proper musicians by their father, legendary jazz trumpeter Phil Cohran. Brothers is rare in that it catches a group of artists on the up-and-up, rather than at the other end of slight fame, abject failure and heart-wrenching tragedy. (I'm a huge fan of the documentary series Unsung, so I kept waiting and waiting for the milk to turn.) Viewers get to marvel at the passion, musicianship and unified purpose of the brothers as they navigate the transition from “street” performers (a term that initially haunts them), to their discovery by the highly-respected rapper Mos Def, their honorable rejection of a major-label deal, their steam-building international tours and even a bucket list-obliterating concert with none other than Prince — in Ireland of all places! Director Reuben Atlas also bucks the tired trend of going nuts with Adobe’s Photoshop and After Effects programs. (‘Wow! The subjects in the photos are moving within the photo!’) Brothers Hypnotic will restore your faith in humanity, bring a tear to your eye, a heavy stomp to your right foot and, possibly, make you curse your parents for not forcing you to wake up at the crack of dawn for tuba practice.

DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Reuben Atlas is a New York-based filmmaker and lawyer. Currently, with funding from the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund and the IDA’s Pare Lorentz grant, Mr. Atlas and Sam Pollard are co-directing a film about the controversial community group ACORN. Mr. Atlas has taught English in Costa Rica; worked at Legal Aid in Paterson, NJ; and provided legal counseling at a maximum-security prison in New York [[which one?]]. Brothers Hypnotic is his first feature documentary.
DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

One sweaty summer night in Times Square, I met the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. On the corner of 7th Avenue, the frenetic, neon energy gave way to a singular, unified sight and sound: Eight young men breathing their souls into worn brass horns.

The music bounced off skyscrapers and stopped taxicabs. Businessmen stared. Tourists danced rapturously on the sidewalk. The serendipitous scene lifted my spirit up and away from the city bustle.

In a time when American Idol and the overnight celebrity exemplified success, here was a band representing an entirely different ethos about art and expression. Their talent would attract major record companies and collaborations with Prince, Maxwell, Maceo Parker, Damon Albarn, Tony Allen, and Mos Def… but they were playing on the corner; for the community and for free.

That night, after they had sold out of CDs, I talked with them. Their “brotherhood” was literal; they were all sons of Kelan Phil Cohran, a Chicago musician who playing trumpet with Sun-Ra and mentored Earth, Wind, and Fire. In the 1960s, Cohran turned his back on commercial undertakings to devote his life to improving his South Side community. He founded the Affro-Arts Theatre and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM).

In the 1980s, Cohran and the mothers of his children—three different women, each a musician in her own right—taught the children to play. Although training began as young as three years old, Cohran was no Joe Jackson grooming the Jackson 5 for pop stardom. Instead, he shielded his children from the commercial marketplace and insisted that their music serve the community.

When they came to New York, the Brothers weren’t banging down record label doors; they upheld their parents’ values, built the family business, and earned a place on the landscape of music history. Yet when eight people collaborate to realize a collective vision, conflict is inevitable. When those eight people are family and they imagine a path not imagined before, it’s even more challenging.

I filmed Hypnotic in four different countries over four years, through the grit and glory of independent international tours. They gave me access to their recording sessions, business meetings, and their homes. It has been an honor to witness first hand the creation of their groundbreaking music and the struggle of a family who bucked the pressures of convention to create something beautiful.
FILM CREDITS

Film title: *Brothers Hypnotic*
A film by: Reuben Atlas
Year: 2013
Total running time: 84 minutes
Country: USA, The Netherlands
Production Company: Pandora Film Center
Production Partners: ITVS, NBPC, NTR

Featuring:
- Hypnotic Brass Ensemble
- Gabriel Hubert
- Saiph Graves
- Amal Hubert
- Tycho Cohran
- Jafar Graves
- Uttama Hubert
- Seba Graves

Also Appearing:
- Christopher Anderson
- The Naked Cowboy
- Lily Koppel
- Knox Robinson
- Yasin Bey aka Mos Def
- Mark Murphy
- Emmanuel Harrold
- Gabriel Wallace
- Andrew McClean
- Prince
- Alan Schoefield
- Damon Albarn

Producer and Director: Reuben Atlas
Editor: Keiko Deguchi
Producer: Sam Pollard
Consulting Producers: David Van Taylor, Jamin Mendelsohn
Producer: Pheelco Entertainment/HBE
Cinematographers: Dan Fridman, Sean Porter, Ari Issler, Reuben Atlas
Additional Cinematographers: Paul Greenhouse; Igor Martinovich; Ryan Garrett; Adam McDaid; Arianna LaPenne; Rachel Morrison; Scott Miller; Nick Castle; Danny Vechionne; Ray Yao; Alex Kornreich; Brian Moore; Brian Wingert
Additional Editors: Paul Greenhouse, Reuben Atlas

Advisors: Bonnie Friedman, St. Clair Bourne, Doug Pray, Nick Corrao, Angelo Corrao
Sound Mixers: Daniel Brooks, John Mathie
Additional Sound Mixers: Mark Keshishian, Shaka King, Dominique De Leon, Laurens Koorevar, Daniel Gaughran, Russel White, Pat Tillman
Motion/Graphic Designer: David Byrd
Assistant Editor: Steffan Borg Niemann
Post Supervisor: Omry Maoz
Concert Recordists: Steve White, Aura Sonic, USA Mobile Studios, Doug White

Production All-Stars: Ian Kibbe, Amber Somner, Chris Miller, Jorge Soto, James Arthur Tanner, Mariko Yoshimura-Rank, German Gruber
On-line Editor: Steve Pequignot
On-line Facility: Glue Edit
Sound Mix Facility: Soundspace Studios
Sound Mixer: Matthew Polis
Website Design: Andy Owens

Family Movie Footage Courtesy of: MAIA, Phil Cohran
Family Photos Courtesy of: Aquilla Sadalla, MAIA, Kelan Phil Cohran
Music:
“War”

“Satin Sheets”

“Malcolm X”
Written by Kelan Phil Cohran. Performed by Kelan Phil Cohran and the Artistic Heritage Ensemble. Courtesy of Zulu Record Co.

“Balicky Bon”

“Touch the Sky”

“Gypsy”

“Alyo”

“A Negro Speaks of Rivers”
Written by Langston Hughes. Performed by Phil Cohran.

“Sankofa”

“Party Started”

“Mars”

“Meditations”
Written by Kelan Phil Cohran. Performed by Kelan Phil Cohran and the Artistic Heritage Ensemble. Courtesy of Zulu Record Co.

“Jupiter”
“Musicology”

“Black Boy”
Written by the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble and Phil Cohran. Performed by the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble and Phil Cohran. Courtesy of My Publishing Group and Pheelco Entertainment.

“Kryptonite”

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The Lion’s Den
The Shrine
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NTR:NPS Dutch TV
Commissioning Editors for NTR: NPS: Marloes Blokker, Annemiek van der Zanden
Executive Producer for NBPC: Jacquie Jones
Director of Programming for NBPC: Leslie Fields Cruz
Production Managers for ITVS: Jorge Trelles, Innes Hofmann Kanna
Senior Programming Manager for ITVS: Cynthia Kane
Executive Producer for ITVS: Sally Jo Fifer

*Brothers Hypnotic* is a co-production of Pandora Educational Film Center, the Independent Television Service (ITVS), National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC), and NTR: NPS Dutch TV, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). *Brothers Hypnotic* is produced by Pandora Educational Film Center who is solely responsible for its content. © 2013 Pandora Educational Film Center. All rights reserved.

Tickets: [http://maysles.org/cinema/documentaryinbloom.html](http://maysles.org/cinema/documentaryinbloom.html) - New website!
 Listen to Hypnotic Brass Ensemble perform ‘War,’ featured in *The Hunger Games.*
 Facebook event: [https://www.facebook.com/events/442898385837607/](https://www.facebook.com/events/442898385837607/)
 Official broadcast webpage: [http://www.itvs.org/films/brothers-hypnotic](http://www.itvs.org/films/brothers-hypnotic)

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