

“RISE ABOVE: The Tribe 8 Documentary”  
A Film by Tracy Flannigan

Director's Comments

By Tracy Flannigan

I was first compelled to make the documentary Rise Above when I saw the dyke punk rock band Tribe 8 perform at South by Southwest in 1998. I immediately recognized in them a unique ability to confront difficult issues head-on with candor and humor and I appreciated the satirical spirit with which they approached otherwise uncomfortable themes of sexuality and power.

From the beginning, I saw an opportunity to look beneath the surface of the band's outrageous stage behavior and see the humanity of these five performers who might otherwise seem shocking to a mainstream audience.

As I got to know them better, I recognized that many of the circumstances the band members have worked so hard to transcend through their cathartic performances, mirrored those I've worked to overcome through my own filmmaking. Such similarities between my subjects and myself allowed for a candor and an openness in the filmmaking process which gave a greater depth to our work together than I ever could have hoped for at the start.

As a filmmaker, I've always been drawn to stories about outsiders and what is commonly overlooked or marginalized. In the case of Rise Above, it is through lead-singer Lynn Breedlove's irreverent parody of male rock-star posing that I've been able to reveal a broad spectrum of male and female power dynamics that I feel is too often missing from mainstream media. In addition, through exploring the childhood histories and personal lives of all the band members, we have, I believe, created a universal story whose relevance and appeal extends beyond their punk audience.

From watching this film at festivals and screenings with audiences all over the world, I see the importance in the expansion of Tribe 8's audience to include people who would never have the benefit of their irreverence, intelligence and transcendence.

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Short Synopsis:

A candid, often humorous, look into the private world of the sexy, radical dyke punk band, TRIBE 8. Through filmed performances and intense personal stories of addiction and loss, RISE ABOVE captures the beauty and resilience that lies just beneath the rough exterior of a controversial and gender-bending punk rock band.

Synopsis

This entertaining flick chronicles hilarious live performances, candid moments of their lives at work and on the road, and the controversy at The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, an all women's music festival, that landed them in a quagmire of protest and praise from a fiercely divided crowd. It also captures the truly funny and warm people behind the music and the politics!

The images presented on stage of blow jobs, sadomasochistic acts and mock castrations are not shocking the audience for shock's sake, but understood on a deeper level through the band members' intense personal disclosures. These interviews inform an understanding and respect for why they do what they do. Especially riveting are the interviews with singer Lynn Breedlove and her mother. This documentary concludes that it is the humor and physicality that lies within the controversial performance that gives these five individuals the peace to experience the rapture of being alive.

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Filmmaker Biographies

Director, Producer

TRACY FLANNIGAN is an award winning independent filmmaker residing in the Echo Park area of Los Angeles who began making movies when she was seventeen years old. She has worked professionally for the last fifteen years in the film business and has created numerous short films and music videos. Her work has been screened at many film festivals throughout the United States.

Tracy’s feature length screenplay, *THE LATE GREAT W.J.*, won a fellowship at the Squaw Valley Community of Writers.

RISE ABOVE marks Tracy Flannigan’s documentary feature debut. The film was made over a five-year period in which Tracy dedicated herself to capturing the lives and performances of the all woman punk rock band, *TRIBE 8*. *RISE ABOVE* has screened internationally and garnered the *July Award for Best Documentary* at Frameline, the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and earned Ms. Flannigan the *Kodak Emerging Talent Award* at Outfest, the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.

Currently, Ms. Flannigan is in pre-production on a second feature length documentary on the experiences of poverty stricken illegal immigrants, who on a daily basis must find work outside stores like Home Depot.

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**Biographies**

**Producer** – LILITH SIMCOX is a freelance producer residing in Los Angeles. Having attended some of Tribe 8’s earliest shows, she was delighted to join forces with Tracy Flannigan to work on a project with such potential for positive influence.

**Co-Producer** – MARUPONG CHULADUL was born in Bangkok, Thailand, but he and his family immigrated to Los Angeles in the early 1970’s. While in film school, Chuladul supported himself by landing his dream job at a small, independent video store in Santa Monica. Supported by his job as a video store manager, he spent most of the 1990’s writing scripts. He considers his years in the video store business as his "real" film school education. Chuladul has written film articles for 2-Pop.com—the leading web site for Final Cut Pro users, and film reviews of children’s videos for a local Los Angeles family magazine. He co-produced a short film, "Freight," that was an official selection at the San Diego International Film Festival, and Nashville Independent Film Festival. "Rise Above: The Tribe 8 Documentary" is his first feature documentary as a co-producer.

**Director of Photography** - RINALDO VILLANI, a native Italian, began his career as a documentary photographer in 1989. His photographic journey began with two years in Asia, working in extremely remote conditions with a makeshift studio, documenting the people of the region. From this journey came a vivid portrait of life in Kashgar, China and a series of portraits of the Pashtu and Baloch Tribes in Pakistan. His passion led him next to San Francisco and then Australia dedicating his energies to working with people with AIDS. Over the last five years, he worked with Tracy Flannigan covering the all girl punk band Tribe 8. Currently he is working as a still photographer on a PBS documentary, called "Lasting Love."

**Additional Cinematography** - SARAH HARBIN has occasionally been referred to as a 'Film Babe' by Lynnee Breedlove. This is basically a woman who likes making independent films and is generally more concerned with social/political issues and artistic expression than she is with making money (example: working on this wonderful but low-budget film). Besides producing, directing, shooting and editing, Sarah also enjoys painting, traveling, and learning to play the

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cello. Her recent work has taken her to exciting places such as Cuba, Mexico and Las Vegas.

**Additional Cinematography** – EVE BREGMAN is a Los Angeles native. She is a NEA awarded video artist who has shown her work at PS122, The Kitchen, EZTV, Film forum and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. As a cinematographer and director, she has completed several music videos and short films, which have screened at numerous film festivals. She feels honored to have introduced Tracy to Tribe 8 one fateful night in Austin. Who knew what a life changing moment that would be? Tracy’s film and Tribe 8 are an inspiration to all creative and strong women who want to make a difference. Eve plans to direct films that are evocative, beautiful and challenging - films whose stories haunt from within and linger in memory.

**Editor** – MARINA TAIT has been preparing her entire life to edit this film. Born in France and world-traveled as a child, she spent six years trapped in a tiny Oregon mill town as a punk rock teenage freak, before busting out to the “big” city of Portland armed with a National Merit Scholarship. There she earned a bachelor’s degree in Sociology & Women’s Studies and began a scattered career as an abortion counselor, a library assistant, an espresso barista, and a bean cannery worker. As a filmmaker since 1994, she has worked on many independent productions as well as producing, directing, and editing her own short films. She is delighted to work on this movie-combining her early passion for punk rock and her lifelong commitment to feminism. She hopes that this film will inspire a few kids like the one she used to be, and give them hope that it’s possible to live the life they imagine. She relocated to L.A. in 2001. This is her first feature editing credit.

**Editor** - MICHELLE HARRISON is a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Her thesis film was accepted at the Toronto International Film Festival. In the past ten years she has worked on both features and documentaries. Her documentary work includes editing a 90-minute piece entitled "The Art of Influence," directed by Deborah Dickson and shown on Bravo, and a docudrama for PBS as associate editor, "Nobodys' Girl - Women in the American West," directed by Mira Bank Brockman. Her work on fiction is equally impressive. She was the associate editor on the Academy Award winning "Boys Don't Cry," directed by Kimberly Pierce. She was also associate editor for Paul Schrader on "Forever Mine." As an additional editor she worked on Wayne Wang's "The Center of the World." Harrison is happy

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to be contributing her extensive editing talents on "Rise Above: The Tribe 8 Documentary."

**Associate Producer** - JESICA BORNEMANN is from the Bronx. Her mission in life is to make movies about heroic women that inspire women (and some men too!) to live greater lives than they ever imagined possible. She's grateful to Tracy and the musicians in Tribe 8 for making a film that fulfills that dream.

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TRIBE 8 Biographies

**Lead Singer** - LYNN BREEDLOVE, at the age of 31 in recovery from drug addiction, started the notorious punk/queercore band Tribe 8 along with Leslie Mah and Silas "Flipper" Howard. In addition to touring throughout the US, Canada and Europe, the band released various CD singles and contributed songs to compilations through the labels Outpunk and Kill Rock Stars. They also put out three full-lengths on Alternative Tentacles. In 1991, Lynn launched a package delivery service, **Lickety Split All-Girl Courier**, covering San Francisco by bike, car and truck. In the literary realm, she completed **Godspeed**, a novel relating the life of a speed freak bike messenger, recently published by St. Martin's Press. Lynn currently teaches at the Harvey Milk Institute in her hometown San Francisco.

**Guitarist** - SILAS "FLIPPER" HOWARD partied with lead singer Breedlove before bonding in rehab. Together they formed Tribe 8, began touring the US, and moved on to international stops. Known as the hunky "Davey Jones" of the band, Silas, along with her longtime collaborator, Harry Dodge, are founding members of the **Bearded Lady Café and Cabaret** – a popular San Francisco coffee house. Silas and Dodge also co-wrote, co-directed and co-starred in **By Hook or By Crook**, a feature length film which has been likened to the early style of Cassavettes. The film won the screenwriting and audience awards at **Outfest: The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival**. The film was an official selection as part of **Sundance's American Spectrum** and has shown at numerous other festivals nationally and beyond.

**Guitarist** - LESLIE MAH, is a founding member of Tribe 8, also collaborates with other bands such as the all Asian **The Dragon Ladies** and **The War Pigs**, a Sabbath cover band. Mah instantly became the femme "teen idol" of the band. Onstage, her sexual energy and bravado leaves a memorable impression. Working out of San Francisco's **Black and Blue**, Mah has established herself as one of the Mission District's premiere tattoo artists. Her current project, **Shut up White Boy**, is an all-queer and API collaborative 16mm black & white film about a "yellow fevered" white boy's exotification of a group of Asian dykes which turns into MSG nightmares. This film will screen at **Frameline Gay & Lesbian International Film Festival** and **Outfest**.

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**Drummer** - SLADE BELLUM was an already established drummer based in San Francisco, having started two all-chick bands – *Burning Witches* and *Industrial Rain Forest*. S/he jumped into Tribe 8 in 1993 and enjoyed one hell of a seven-year ride.

**Bass Player** –TANTRUM joined Tribe 8 in 1993 also, bringing with her an extensive musical background including influences of reggae, ska, pop, blues, and funk. Tantrum left the band in 2002. In addition to performing with her new band *HerAgainn*, she is currently writing and playing a number of instruments with an incredible singer named MOXIE. She makes occasional guest appearances with *Tribe 8* when possible. She now lives in Toronto, Canada.

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**Tribe 8 Now**

Lynnee Breedlove's ONE FREAK SHOW: Less Rock, More Hilarity is back with Meliza Banales and the Oakland Fejacks radical cheerleaders opening. It's queer homohop punkrock standup comedy on transgender bodies, feminism, family, and "community." His plan for world peace includes gender nesting dolls, cross-dressing stuffed animals, and a new edition of Our Bodies Ourselves for men.

Leslie Mah is a tattoo artist at Cold Steel at 1783 Haight in San Francisco, and Diving Swallow Tattoo at 264 14th Street in Oakland. You can see Leslie's work online at Rocker Babe Tattoo .

In October of 2002, Silas left Tribe 8 and moved to LA with her partner Sarah to attend school and pursue film projects. Her award-winning film **By Hook or By Crook** is now available on Wolfe Video !

Slade now lives in Los Angeles where s/he is continuing her political activism working for environmental justice with **Communities for a Better Environment**. S/he is also working on a novel about "the revolution," playing with LA rockers, and has found a real niche with paint by numbers.

Lynn "Tantrum" Payne, a Canadian citizen, realized that immigration laws were all too trying for her to remain in the U.S. as an active member of Tribe 8. She returned to Toronto and now writes and plays music with several different Canadian acts.

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**CREDITS**

**TRIBE 8 BAND MEMBERS**

Lynn Breedlove, Lead Singer  
Silas Flipper Howard, Guitar  
Leslie Mah, Guitar  
Tantrum, Bass Player  
Slade, Drums  
Mama T., Bass Player  
Jen Schwartz, Drums

**DIRECTOR/PRODUCER**

Tracy Flannigan

**PRODUCERS**

Lilith Simcox  
Marupong Chuladul

**CINEMATOGRAPHY**

Rinaldo Villani

**ADDITIONAL CINEMATOGRAPHY**

Sarah Harbin  
Eve Bregman

**EDITING**

Marina Tait  
Michelle Harrison  
Tracy Flannigan

**ASSOCIATE PRODUCER**

Jesica Bornemann

**ADDITIONAL CAMERA**

Lloyd Handwerker  
Jesica Bornemann  
Marupong Chuladul  
Tracy Flannigan  
Tyler Hubby

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**SECOND UNIT CINEMATOGRAPHY**

Sarah Harbin  
Will Zavala

**ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE BY**

Jaime Smith and Tribe 8

**ASSISTANT CAMERA**

Chris Green

**SECOND ASSISTANT CAMERA**

Victoria Garza

**EDITING CONSULTANT**

Harriet Dodge

**ASSISTANT EDITORS**

Marc Griffin  
Ayako Oguchi  
Coco Yen

**POST-PRODUCTION ASSISTANT**

Meredyth Wilson

**SOUND MIXERS**

Jen Covens (San Francisco)  
Mike Lanoue (Los Angeles)

**LIVE MUSIC RECORDING**

Mike Lanoue (Los Angeles)  
Jordan Mellk (New York)  
Killer Banshee Productions  
(Kriss de Jong & Eliot Daughtry)  
(San Francisco)

**SOUND RECORDING MIXER**

Paula Fairchild

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SOUND EDITORS / SOUND DESIGNERS

Carla Murray

Kadet Kuhne

ADDITIONAL SOUND / BOOM OPERATORS

Jesica Bornemann

Tracy Flannigan

Sarah Ryan

Teresa Dunlap

Will Zavala

Zoli Lundi

Sunshine

COLORIST

PJ Marsiglia

AFTER EFFECTS

Andy Bruntel

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Amy Saaed

STILL PHOTOGRAPHS

Alice O'Malley

Larry Hirshowitz

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS

Sarah Ryan

Arwyn Moore

Susie Kameny

PROCESSING

4MC Lab

FILM

Kodak

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**"Rise Above"**

Written by Greg Ginn

Performed by Tribe 8

Courtesy of Alternative Tentacles

**"Wrong Bathroom"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Het Punx"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Romeo & Julio"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Oversize Ego"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Speed Fortress"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Power Boy"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Shoo Fly Shoe"**

Written by Rutherford and  
Hennessy

Performed by Contraband

**"Femme Bitch Top"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

Courtesy of Alternative Tentacles

**"Venal Flow"**

Written by Rutherford

Performed by Contraband

**"Hapa Girl"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Prison Blues"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Daredevil Delivery"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Estrofemme"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Sunbears"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Manipulate"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

Courtesy of Alternative Tentacles

**"Castration Song #22"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

**"Lezbophobia"**

Written by Tribe 8

Performed by Tribe 8

Courtesy of Outpunk

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**"Mendo"**

**Written by Tribe 8  
Performed by Tribe 8**

**"Barnyard Poontang"**

**Written by Tribe 8  
Performed by Tribe 8**

**"Kick"**

**Written by Tribe 8  
Performed by Tribe 8  
Courtesy of Alternative Tentacles**

**"A Sad Poem"**

**Written by Tribe 8  
Performed by Tribe 8  
Courtesy of Alternative Tentacles**

**Special Thanks to my family,  
Lorraine Festa, William Rexnor, Christina Soletti,  
Coney Island High, Squeezebox at Don Hill's,  
Al's Bar, Michigan Womyn's Music Festival,  
Kristie, Sarah Boyd, Tyler Hubby,  
Judy Breedlove, Marla Hitchcock,  
Chad Anderson Hearn, MHz Inc.,  
Joe Milner, Dane Tracks, Wild Oats Market,  
Arthur Avary, Chantal & Mark, Trisha Wilson,  
Company 3, and Tribe 8**

**Horizons / Frameline Film & Video Completion Fund**

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### Notes

I first witnessed Tribe 8 perform at the South by Southwest Film Festival in 1998. During that first performance, the experience of seeing Lynn Breedlove, the lead singer, whip her shirt off and gleefully fling it into the audience inspired me so much that it started me on a 5 year odyssey to document the band. (I'd always loved Penelope Spheeris' "The Decline of Western Civilization" and with Tribe 8 I saw an opportunity to pay homage to one of my favorite films, only this time with chicks.) But it wasn't only Lynn Breedlove and her outrageous live performances that intrigued me, for not only did each member of the band have her own intense performance style and personality, but beyond that, I sensed a deeper story: a story which I chased until I finally had it down on film and tape.

From the earliest performances I filmed (on 16 mm) at punk clubs Coney Island High and Squeezebox in New York City, to the last show I shot at Spaceland in Los Angeles, the band has always had an energy that is raw and vital. Whether lighting guitars on fire, or inviting a dominatrix to share the stage, they live and perform completely in the moment. But capturing that moment was not always easy for my crew and me.

Very quickly I realized that if I was going to make a film about Tribe 8 I was going to have to visit the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Of course, since the festival is located outdoors in the Michigan wilderness, the only available accommodations were going to be the camping gear that my all "women" crew brought. Our first night there, protected only by our tent, we survived a thunderstorm that lasted all night long, but our Sony VX-1000 Digital Camera did not. Fortunately, we had a second camera on hand, and used it to capture interviews and performance footage that eventually became crucial to the story of the film.

One of my most treasured interviews in the film was shot almost by accident. I'd become interested in learning more about the band members' childhoods and when I asked Lynnee about hers, she was kind enough to introduce me to her mother. After conducting a first interview, a series of sound and picture mix-ups led us to believe that we had to re-record it. It was then, during the second interview session, that we got the poignant and personal moments that tie the whole film together for me.

In the end, I made this film about an impressive group of women that all chemically came together and formed a band. Through music and performance, they reclaimed lost power and continue to triumph against great odds. Through community, they found destinies of expression and freedom, as a group and as individuals. And through making this film, I also found a destiny of my own.

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Praise from the press for RISE ABOVE

"A suitably raw, wholly engaging documentary....offers a unique perspective on the lesbian community's own shift ...to a more encompassing embrace of rebellious fringe elements....tech package is solid while adhering to anti-slick punk aesthetic"

-Dennis Harvey, VARIETY

"their lyrics are confrontational and political, but also cathartic....exudes the sheer exhilaration of individuals who have learned how to live liberated, fulfilling lives."

-Kevin Thomas, LA Times

"Filmmaker Tracy Flannigan gets it all in close-up, but also captures the rich and complex life stories of these women, whose lives take on political weight based on sheer authenticity..."

-Chuck Wilson, LA Weekly

"A powerful film about transcending realities and expectations."

-Kim Sun-ah, PREMIERE

"These women live their politics....[they] should be held up as hardworking queer role models."

-Libby Jamieson, SPINACH7

"Anyone who has ever let the riotous spirit of rock and roll ever inhabit her or his heart...should consider "RISE ABOVE" a must-see."

-Chris Cooke, New England Film

"This is not your women's studies professor's chamomile tea-and-folk music feminism..."

-Frameline Lesbian & Gay Film Festival 2003

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**Praise from the press for Tribe 8**

"Tribe 8 makes its' fans feel brave and outrageous... revives the youthful impulse that should never leave adult dreams: the desire to run away and join the circus."

-INTERVIEW Magazine

"It is TRIBE 8's increasing ability to engender this kind of rapport with gays and straights alike that make them important."

-VILLAGE VOICE

"...Sifting through issues of gender and sexual mores, TRIBE 8 creates a kaleidoscopic view of sexuality that revolves around insights which ring true no matter what your sexual orientation is."

-OPTIONS Magazine

"San Francisco's superstars... if you don't know them by now, where have you been?"

-FAD Magazine

"Like most marginalized people, TRIBE 8 thinks it's nice to have a community, but they'll be damned if they're going to hide out in anybody's ghetto."

-Carol Cooper, VILLAGE VOICE

"Queer Core = punk bands with gay members... Gay rights in the mosh pit. Among the stars: TRIBE 8..."

-Front page, USA TODAY

"...So much personality you forget they're political."

-VILLAGE VOICE