

ST CHRIS FILM presents

# THE HAPPY POET



**Written & Directed by Paul Gordon**

USA, 2010, 85 MINUTES

<http://www.happypoetmovie.com>

**WORLD PREMIERE – EMERGING VISIONS - SXSW 2010**

**INTERNATIONAL PREMIERE – VENICE DAYS  
VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL – SEPTEMBER 2010**

**TRAVERSE CITY FILM FESTIVAL 2010 – FICTION JURY PRIZE  
FOR EMERGING TALENT**

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## SYNOPSIS

THE HAPPY POET is an all-organic, mostly vegetarian comedy about Bill, a struggling poet who pours his heart, soul, and last few dollars into starting a healthy food stand, surprising friends and customers with his dry wit and offbeat passion. Motivated by help from a rag-tag group of supporters and a budding romance with a poetry-loving customer, Bill strives to make a difference in the world, until surprising complications jeopardize his new friendships and threaten Bill's dreams for a hot dog-free future.

THE HAPPY POET cleverly re-works the classic American film story of the underdog struggling against the system, adding a dose of deadpan humor and a fresh take on a young generation's interest in the intersection of a social conscience and the food we eat.

Says Paul Gordon, writer/director/editor/producer and star of the film, "THE HAPPY POET is, on the surface, the story of a guy who wants to start a vegetarian food stand - -but it could be about anyone who wants to do anything, and throws him or herself into making it happen. It's also about survival versus kindness/generosity/idealism—and how life is often a balancing act between these things."

Gordon has crafted that rare indie film; a finely-rendered comedy of pitch-perfect sly, dry humor; bursting with young, vibrant characters, and a protagonist who—for better or worse—wears his politics on his shirtsleeve.

Made by an acclaimed group of collaborative, Austin-based filmmakers and actors, and shot locally, the film co-stars award-winning Austin actor Chris Doubek (also starring in 2010 SXSW films EARTHLING and LOVERS OF HATE), local filmmaker/actor/musician Jonny Mars, and the talents of Executive Producer Chris Ohlson (LOVERS OF HATE, THE OVERBROOK BROTHERS), Producer David Hartstein (ALONG CAME KINKY... TEXAS JEWBOY FOR GOVERNOR) and Associate Producer Jason Wehling (AUGUST EVENING).

## PRINCIPAL CAST

Bill	<b>Paul Gordon</b>
Donnie	<b>Jonny Mars</b>
Curtis	<b>Chris Doubek</b>
Agnes	<b>Liz Fisher</b>

Additional Cast:

**Amy Myers Martin**  
**Ricardo Lerma**  
**Sam Wainwright Douglas**  
**Carlos Trevino**

## PRINCIPAL CREW

Directed, Written, Edited, and Produced by **PAUL GORDON**  
Producer **DAVID HARTSTEIN**  
Executive Producer **CHRIS OHLSON**  
Co-Producer **JONNY MARS**  
Associate Producers **CAROLINE KARLEN, JASON WEHLING**  
Cinematographer **LUCAS MILLARD**  
Production Designer **CAROLINE KARLEN**  
Composers **PAUL GORDON, JONNY MARS, ERIC FRIEND**

## FILMMAKER STATEMENT

**Paul Gordon**

**Director, Writer, Editor, Producer, Actor**

THE HAPPY POET is a comedy about a guy who starts a vegetarian food stand—but it could be about anyone who wants to do anything, and throws him or herself into making it happen. It's also about survival versus kindness/generosity/idealism—and how life is often a balancing act between these things. Bill, the main character, is a somewhat impractical, idealistic dreamer, and Donnie, his new friend, is a survivor.

I had fun playing within the narrative structure of more conventional comedies or romantic comedies. The film has a lot of subtle tongue-in-cheek humor and is even satirical in parts, but is also a very sincere film. It's a fine line to walk. The actors' performances are all very sincere; I wanted to have fun with these archetypal characters but never make fun of them. I didn't want the film to be over-the-top ironic, but still wanted it to comment on or refer to the more conventional films that typically utilize this narrative structure. The ending comments on happy endings.

The idea for THE HAPPY POET came after deciding to postpone shooting another script I'd been working on for a few years. My producing partner, David Hartstein, and I had received a production grant from the Austin Film Society, but other funds we'd hoped for didn't materialize. I started thinking of ways to modify the script to make it more shootable for a fraction of the cost, but eventually decided the script would have to be changed too much and postponed shooting it. In a burst of entrepreneurial inspiration mirrored in Bill, the film's protagonist, I turned my attention to writing The Happy Poet.

After finishing the script in about a month, I realized that the story of Bill and the food stand was very similar to what we'd just been through in trying to make that other film. Bill wants to serve quality food at a reasonable price; I want to serve quality films at a reasonable price. Friends jumped in and helped make the film happen, much like Bill's new friends in the film jump in and help with the stand. I'm still touched by how much my friends and new friends helped out and made the film a reality.

I consider myself a writer before a director, and a director before an actor. I moved from writing short fiction to writing scripts, and then to directing and acting. I love collaborating creatively with people, and enjoy working on other people's films in various capacities.

## FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

### **PAUL GORDON (Bill) - Writer/Producer/Editor/Director/Actor**

Filmmaker Paul Gordon, a current Austin resident, has been crafting stories with humor since a young age. While growing up in Illinois, Paul began making short films, and after attending DePaul University in Chicago, worked various jobs—including two years for Habitat for Humanity—and lived in various places before moving to Austin in 2001 to attend the graduate film program at the University of Texas at Austin; he graduated in August 2005.

Paul's feature-length *MOTORCYCLE*, crafted from his three short film school projects, world premiered at the 2006 Slamdance Film Festival, and went on to play at film festivals around the world, including Thessaloniki, SXSW and Rooftop Films. Paul's short film *GOOD* played at the 2001 SXSW and Chicago International film festivals, and aired on PBS's Image Union.

*THE HAPPY POET* is Paul's first effort at shooting a feature film in its entirety. In addition to writing, directing, producing, editing and starring in *THE HAPPY POET*, Paul acted in *GRETCHEN* in 2006, and has a leading role in the new animated feature film *MARS*, also a 2010 SXSW World Premiere. *THE HAPPY POET* is making its International Premiere at the Venice International Film Festival in the Venice Days section.

### **DAVID HARTSTEIN - Producer**

David left New York City for Austin, TX almost a decade ago to pursue an MFA in film from The University of Texas. Since receiving his degree, David has been an Austin-based producer and director of feature films and commercials. Perhaps you recognize him from *The Real World: Austin* as a film-making teacher to the cast, but he hopes that you don't. David produced and directed *ALONG CAME KINKY: TEXAS JEWBOY FOR GOVERNOR*, a documentary chronicling Kinky Friedman's 2006 gubernatorial campaign which premiered at SXSW 2009. Currently, David is producing *AMERICA'S PARKING LOT*, a feature documentary in post-production about the culture of Dallas Cowboys tailgaters.

### **JONNY MARS (Donnie) - Co-Producer**

Jonny co-stars in and co-produced Paul Gordon's *The Happy Poet* (2010), which world premiered to sold-out audiences at SXSW, he recently starred in the short film *The Grownups*, selected to screen at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival. He is also featured in Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* (2010), starring Brad Pitt and Sean Penn. Spencer Parsons featured Jonny in his IFC distributed *I'll Come Running* (2008) and as the title character Chainsaw in *Chainsaw Finds Jesus*, debuting at NYC's Rooftop Films in August 2010. As a member of the band New Style American Boyfriends, Jonny recorded the title track to Amy Talkington's film *Night of the White Pants* (2006) starring Tom Wilkinson and also helped Paul Gordon score *The Happy Poet*. Jonny is currently producing and starring in Sean Gallagher's next film *HOME*, directing his own feature-length documentary *America's Parking Lot*, and voicing a character in Jason Wehling's animated zombie feature *The Third Day*.

**CHRIS OHLSON - Executive Producer**

Chris has been a working producer and production manager on independent films and commercials for nearly a decade. Most recently, he served as a Co-Producer on Bryan Poyser's *LOVERS OF HATE*, which premiered in the US Dramatic Competition at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival. In 2009, he produced John Bryant's *THE OVERBROOK BROTHERS* for Tom Borders' Sixth Street Films, now available via IFC Films. In 2006, Chris worked alongside Academy Award Nominated director Nanette Burstein as a production coordinator on *AMERICAN TEEN* for A&E Television and Paramount Vantage. Chris line produced Mari Marchbanks' feature film *FALL TO GRACE*, and served as the production manager on Burnt Orange's *THE CASSIDY KIDS*, starring Kadeem Hardison, Judah Friedlander and Anne Ramsay. Currently, Chris is in post-production on his directorial feature film debut, *MELVIN*.

**JASON WEHLING - Associate Producer**

Jason is the award winning producer of the film *AUGUST EVENING*, winner of the John Cassavetes Award at the 2008 Independent Spirit Awards. The film premiered at the 2007 Los Angeles Film Festival and went on to win both Best Picture and Best Ensemble Cast. Jason also worked as a producer on the PBS documentary *A PLACE TO DANCE* and on the award winning Earth Day 2007 Special for The Weather Channel. Jason's short film, *THE GROWNUPS*, is screening at the 2010 SXSW Film Festival and was recently selected to play as part of The Best of the 48 Hour Film Festival at Cannes 2010.

**LUCAS MILLARD - Cinematographer**

Currently based in New York City, Lucas was raised in Cincinnati and spent formative years in the northwestern United States as well as various overseas locales from northern Japan to Kathmandu, Perth to Tangiers. He shot his first one reel film one fateful winter afternoon in Vermont in 1998 on an automatic super8 camera. Lucas received an MFA from the University of Texas in 2007. Lucas's other feature films credits include, *ALL SUN AND LITTLE WHITE FLOWERS* and *DIG*.

**CAROLINE KARLEN - Production Designer**

A University of Texas MFA alum, Caroline has worked as Costume Designer and Production Designer on many Austin feature films, most recently *GRETCHEN* (2005), *I'LL COME RUNNING* (2006), *THE OVERBROOK BROTHERS* (2008) and *LOVERS OF HATE* (2010). She has worked on print and commercial ad campaigns for clients such as General Electric, Comcast, PGI, University Federal Credit Union, Premiere Global and the San Antonio Rodeo. She is also an award winning printmaker (1999 Samuel Fleisher Award) who has had her work shown in galleries all over the country

**ERIC FRIEND – Sound Designer and Composer**

Eric is a sound designer and composer whose credits include voice recording for the animated TV shows *King of the Hill*, *Beavis and Butt-Head*, and *Futurama*. He has edited foley sound fx for feature films including *Tom and Huck*, *Bound*, *Boogie Nights*, and *SubUrbia*. He composes music for commercials, television, and documentaries; and has performed keyboards live and in the studio for *Spoon*.

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES

### **CHRIS DOUBEK (Curtis)**

Chris was a member of the original Off-Broadway Ensemble of Julie Taymor's JUAN DARIEN, acted opposite Sean Penn in Terrence Malick's TREE OF LIFE, and has been featured in NBC's FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS and Bob Byington's HARMONY AND ME. MR. P., a short film in which he plays the title role, was an official selection at Cinevegas, SXSW, Rooftop NY, IFF of Boston, and Marfa Film Festival in 2007. Chris has been acting onstage in Austin, LA, New York and Boston since 1984. While in Austin, Chris won a B. Iden Payne Outstanding Cast Performance Award for the Southwest regional premiere of Yasmin Reza's ART and was also nominated for an Austin Critics Table Award (Best Actor in a Comedy). The Austin Chronicle has called him "...one of Austin's best actors". In addition to THE HAPPY POET, Chris also appears in Clay Liford's EARTHLING (also premiering at SXSW 2010) and Bryan Poyser's film, LOVERS OF HATE, which premiered in January at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival.

### **LIZ FISHER (Agnes)**

Liz has been acting in Austin since 2001. She has performed at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, as well as the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the Orange Tree Theatre in London. She has been in over 40 theatrical productions – more than half of them world or regional premieres. Most recently, she was seen in Capital T Theatre's critically acclaimed DYING CITY. Liz won the Austin Theater Examiner's 2009 Best Featured Actress in a Comedy Award (Varya in THE CHERRY ORCHARD) and has been nominated 8 times for Austin Critics' Table Awards, B. Iden Payne Awards, and Austin Theater Examiner Awards. She recently starred in HOLY HELL, which premiered at the 2009 Austin Film Festival.

## PRESS QUOTES

### Entertainment WEEKLY

"My favorite movie so far at this year's SXSW is a little comedy, at once wistful and wonderfully dry-witted, called *The Happy Poet*. Shot here in Austin the film tells the story of one debt-ridden man who attempts to change his lousy fortunes by opening up a vegetarian food stand. It sounds modest. It is modest! But damned if my heart didn't swell during the film's great climax to say nothing of the last shot that left me touched to the point of tears. Austin filmmaker Paul Gordon, who wrote, directed, edited and starred in the movie ought to be mighty pleased with himself."

-Karen Valby, Entertainment Weekly

### indieWIRE®

"*The Happy Poet*, a deadpan charmer directed by Austin filmmaker Paul Gordon, moves along at the brisk pace of a light romantic comedy. Gordon stars as a loner hoping to turn his organic food cart into a success, but the finances never come together. (There's probably a helpful metaphor here for the state of the independent film itself – trimmed down and in business against all odds...)

Everything about *The Happy Poet* is cheerily conventional, save for Gordon's hilariously monotonous delivery, an ironic performance that incessantly contradicts the movie's title."

-Eric Kohn, IndieWIRE



"Admittedly, the film's muted rhythms take a little getting used to, but once you're acclimated to Gordon's long takes and just-short-of-painful pauses between reactions, it's easy to understand and sympathize with Bill's ambition...Even better, the film's dry sense of humor belies sincerity, rather than the kind of ironic detachment that seems to pop up frequently in independent films...*The Happy Poet* is a modest, funny little charmer – a textbook 'independent film' in many ways – but it's got the romantic heart of a mainstream movie, which is why you want to see its dreams become reality, and after watching it, you feel like yours can, too."

-Todd Gilchrist, Cinematical





"Director/star Paul Gordon's film is right up my alley, which is to say that I tend to revel in the awkward...*The Happy Poet* is nothing but awkward, a slice-of-life tale about a weird guy who feels that he should sell organic, mostly vegetarian food out of a hot dog cart...I really, truly dug it."

-Mark Bell, Film Threat



"If *Slacker* defined the shaggy eccentricities of Austin life circa the early '90s, then Gordon's similarly low-key comedy is a delightful, deadpan reappraisal of the town's prototypical charm some two decades later. ...What makes the film so winsome, beyond a lively supporting cast of believable kooks, is Gordon's sincerity, both as a performer and filmmaker."

-Aaron Hillis, Greencine Daily

# PRODUCTION CREDITS

## **KEY CAST**

Paul Gordon - Bill  
Jonny Mars - Donny  
Chris Doubek - Curtis  
Liz Fisher - Agnes

## **KEY CREW**

Written, Directed & Edited  
By Paul Gordon

Produced by  
David Hartstein  
Paul Gordon

Executive Producer  
Chris Ohlson

Co-Producer  
Jonny Mars

Associate Producers  
Caroline Karlen, Jason Wehling

## **FULL CAST LIST (In Order of Appearance)**

Paul Gordon - Bill  
Ricardo Lerma - Banker  
Sam Wainwright Douglas - Buddy  
Troy Miller - Econtainer Salesman  
Paul Famighetti – Ungrateful Customer  
Nancy Gresham – Hot Dog Girl  
Chris Doubek - Curtis  
Frank Veierstahler - Customer #2  
Donald Robinson Jr. - Customer #3  
Kelle Austin – Customer #4  
Jonny Mars - Donny  
Sean Gallagher - Vegan Cookie Guy  
Matt Muir - Party Guy #1  
Angela de Leon - Party Girl #1  
David Fabelo - Party Guy #2

Matthew Young - Party Guy #3  
Emily Ramshaw - Emily  
Laura Stromberg - Laura  
Liz Fisher - Agnes  
Anika Kunik – Smoking Woman  
Mary Adolph – Car Girl, Customer  
Lizzy Kennedy – Car Girl #2  
Jordan Strassner – Car Girl #3  
Jimmy Jensen - Video Gamer #2  
Matt Joyner – Video Gamer #1  
Lindsey Ellison – Ex Girlfriend  
John Sheffield – Door Man  
Emmett Kerr-Perkinson – Free Coke Guy  
Leslie Viator - Customer  
Angela Skloss - Customer  
Gail Armstrong – Delivery Customer  
Ellen Johnson – Delivery Customer  
Jess Haas - Customer  
Johnny Livesay –Produce Manager  
Michael Braunstein – Grocery Customer  
Hilary Thomas - Apple Dealer  
Tre Spaw – Lars  
Colin Lowery - Customer  
Sarah Pope - Customer  
Carly Cutler - Customer  
Jeff Burras – Customer  
Preston Carroll Jr. – Parking Lot Attendant  
Ariella Dos Santos – Customer  
Jillian Talley – Counter Girl  
Rachel Fields – Customer  
Amy Myers Martin – Lily  
Band:  
Adam Elliott - Bass  
John Seibold - Vocals  
Joe Shell – Guitar  
Kat Greene – Guitar  
David Hobizal – Drummer 1  
Rev. Jared Jackson – Drummer 2  
Ryan Polomski – Audience  
Sara Masetti – Customer/Audience  
Brad Mathis – Customer/Audience  
Kristin Koch – Customer/Pregnant Lady  
Gregg Shaw - Customer  
Loretta Shaw – Customer  
Jamie Kennedy – Customer  
Carolyn Gordon – Bill's Mom  
Eleanor Cheetham – Eleanor

Fred Jones III – Nitrates Addict  
Gretchen Harms – Hot Dog Customer  
Manny Harms – Hot Dog Customer  
George Parsley – Hot Dog Customer  
Robie Gay – Randy  
Carlos Treviño - Derrick  
Lisa King - Customer  
Wesley King – Customer  
Sara Kelly – Customer  
Ryan Kelly - Customer  
Wes Turner – Delivery Boy  
Anne Morales – Pregnant Customer  
Shanti Diva – Pregnant Waitress  
Amanda Dean – Pregnant Customer  
Jessica Castro – Pregnant Customer  
Erin Joe – Pregnant Customer

### **FULL CREW LIST**

Director - Paul Gordon  
Assistant Director - David Hartstein  
Director of Photography - Lucas Millard  
Wardrobe & Production Design - Caroline Karlen  
Production Manager - Emmett Kerr-Perkinson  
2nd Assistant Director - Mary Adolph  
Production Audio Mixer - Tim Dallesandro  
Sound Re-recording Mixer - Eric Friend  
1st Assistant Camera - Geoffrey Frost  
2nd Assistant Camera - Sara Masetti  
Camera Intern - Shilpi Agrawal  
Gaffers - Ellie Ann Fenton, Ben Oliver  
Key Grip - Brad Mathis  
Grips - Michael Braunstein, Wes Turner, Jess Haas, Matheson Muir,  
Production Design Assistants - Kristin Koch, Amanda Rogers, Jeffrey Buras,  
Wardrobe Assistants - Rachel Fields, Eleanor Cheetham  
Production Assistants - Riley Hinrichs, Sunny Cho  
Editor - Paul Gordon  
Additional Editing - Jacob Vaughan  
Assistant Editor - Irvine Downing  
Titles and Visual Effects - Jason Wehling  
Colorist - Joe Malina  
On-Line Editor - Parke Gregg  
Post Production Services - Stuck On On  
Original Music - Paul Gordon, Jonny Mars, John Jordan, Eric Friend

### **MUSIC**

Militant Babies  
"Do You Feel"  
Courtesy of Militant Babies

Danny Balis  
"If You're Trying to Kill Me"  
Courtesy of Danny Balis

The Golden Falcons  
"Prussian Academy of Arts and Sciences"  
Courtesy of The Golden Falcons

The Golden Falcons  
"Horse Thieves"  
Courtesy of The Golden Falcons

The Golden Falcons  
"Tracy Rabbit"  
Courtesy of The Golden Falcons

### **THANK YOU**

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John Sheffield  
Heather Courtney  
Wheatsville Coop  
Jenn's Copies  
Off the Wall  
John Pierson  
Trey Spaw  
The Side Bar  
Idology  
The Off Center  
Rude Mechanicals  
Wes Hurt and Hey Cupcake!  
Westgate Lanes  
Crestview Minimax  
Chris Wright

The Wright Agency  
Frank Veierstahler  
John Bush - Mescalito Studios  
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