

LIVIN' ON THE EDGE Bob Biniak struts his stuff in *Dogtown and Z-Boys*.



Where Z-Boys are

Stacy Peralta's old-school skateboarding documentary, *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, may have shredded up the festival circuit, but now that the film is reaching theaters, not all of its subjects are stoked **By Jay A. Fernandez** Photograph by **Glen E. Friedman**

The day before the Academy Awards, under a grand white pavilion set up in an asphalt car lot by the glistening Santa Monica sand, actor Kevin Pollak announced this year's Independent Spirit Award winner in the Best Documentary category: "...*Dogtown and Z-Boys!*" Suddenly, a half dozen grinning, tipsy, roughneck guys in their forties overran the stage, rowdily jostling each other for mike time like a bunch of stoners at a high-school assembly. They were the stars of *Dogtown*, a bong-rattling excursion into the rise of skateboarding in the 1970s and a look at its ripple effect on alternative culture in the decades since.

The documentary had already won several Audience Awards and

snagged Stacy Peralta, one of the original Z-Boys, the Best Director title at Sundance the year before. But this moment was radical, taking place within rock-throwing distance of the patch of pavement where, nearly 30 years ago, he and his fellow skate rats had begun a revolutionary movement in motion and punk attitude. For Peralta, it culminated a sometimes joyous, more often agonizing journey that had truly come full circle. As he beamed amid his old hooligan buddies, reveling unabashedly in this revival of their childhood feats, the filmmaker leaned into the podium and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I want to welcome you all to our parking lot."

Not an obvious artistic canvas, that. But for a gang of ignored teenagers from mostly broken homes in Dogtown, a dilapidated neighborhood that



stretched through parts of both Santa Monica and Venice, California, that legendary lot (and later, a roster of illegally appropriated backyard swimming pools) had provided space for the dawn of an art form. Bringing the crew back together two decades after its members had gone their separate ways, however, exposed resentments like cracks in those pools where they used to skate; the underdog bond that once connected them had dissolved. The film project began to parallel what had happened in the late '70s. As skateboarding gained notice and there was money to be made, the original Zephyr Skateboard team—the Z-Boys: Jay Adams, Tony Alva, Bob Biniak, Chris Cahill, Paul Constantineau, Shogo Kubo, Jim Muir, Peggy Oki, Peralta, Nathan Pratt, Wentzle Ruml and Allen Sarlo—busted apart. “The hardest part [of making the film] was dealing with all these guys,” Peralta admits wearily a few days after the Spirit Awards. “I got Best Director at Sundance, but they gave me the wrong award. I really should have been given Best Diplomat.”

Narrated by former Malibu surfer Sean Penn, *Dogtown and Z-Boys* is an exuberant celebration of youth rebel culture set to a pounding fuck-you '70s soundtrack of Hendrix, Zeppelin, Neil Young and the Nuge. It's a collage of old Super-8 footage, hundreds of vintage photos—many shot by the *Skateboarder* magazine contributors and ever-present chroniclers of the era Craig Stecyk and Glen E. Friedman—and present-day interviews, all juiced to breathtaking speed by editor Paul Crowder. It tells the story of how the Z-Boys took the low-to-the-board movements they'd learned as surfers and, on days when the waves were blown out, tried them on homemade skateboards, transforming a formerly genteel pastime of slow slalom and handstands into an aggressively fluid three-dimensional sport. “We were the first ones to get into radical terrain,” says Biniak, whose speed in those days earned him the nickname Bullet. Of course, these were not your Wheaties-box sort of athletic heroes—you were more likely to find them stoned, peeling up over the coping of a drained swimming pool, eyes wide behind greasy long hair, flipping you the bird. But their legitimacy as a lasting influence can be traced through the punk-rock ethos of the past 25 years, all the way to the inclusion of formerly yahoo sports like snowboarding and aerial ski jumping in this year's Salt Lake City Olympic Games (the documentary's subtitle is *A Film About the Birth of the Now*). As they say, it's been a gnarly ride.

Of all the Z-Boys, Peralta was in the best position to tell the story of that ride—cinematically, anyway. After winning the 1979 Skateboarder of the Year designation from the readers of *Skateboarder* magazine, he began

promoting his own version of the Z-Boys, the infamous Bones Brigade, with a groundbreaking series of action videos he shot and edited himself. He went on to direct several TV movies (*The '70s: The Decade That Changed Television* aired on ABC in September 2000), all the while dreaming of doing a feature film on the Dogtown days. After *Spin* magazine published a story called “The Lords of Dogtown,” by G. Beato, in March '99, Hollywood picked up the scent, bought the rights to the life stories of several key players and came knocking on Peralta's door.

“I went a year and a half saying, ‘I'm not gonna sell you guys my rights unless I'm involved,’” Peralta says. “They're gonna take the most valuable period of our lives and reduce it to some goofball summer movie—a Bruckheimer film!” Peralta decided instead to helm his own indie documentary, and let the guys speak for themselves.

But like too many surfers dropping in on the same wave, each new ego entering into the film's sphere had to have it his way. Right off the bat—unlike Penn, who offered to work for free—Biniak wanted to be paid for participating, as did Friedman, whose insistence on receiving more money has

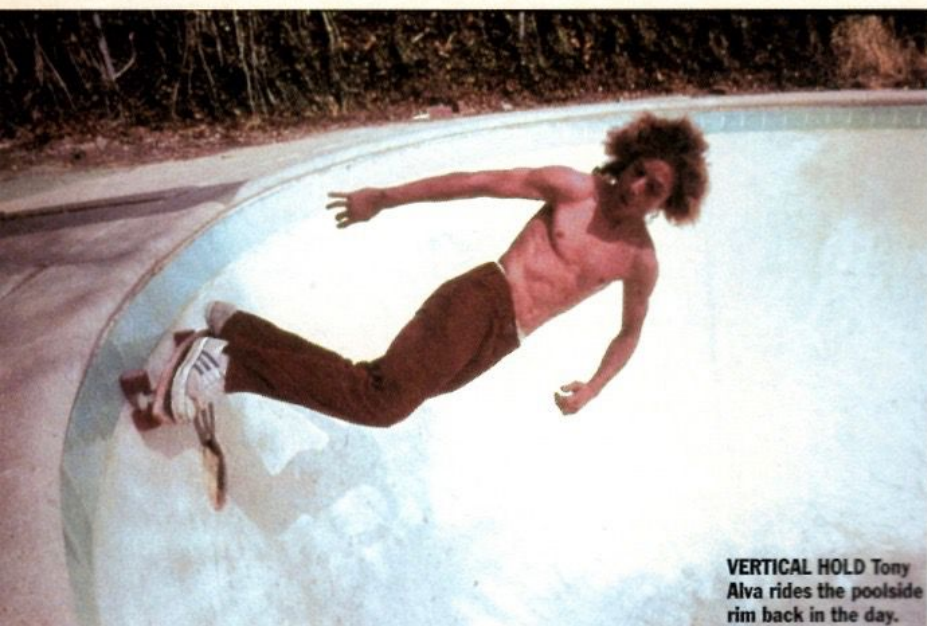
increased in direct proportion to the film's success. “I was a little bit let down that, even when I asked, [Sony Pictures Classics, the film's distributor] wouldn't offer me a piece,” says Friedman, who appears in the film's present-day segments. “I said, ‘I see what my moves have done for this film. I see how the phones haven't stopped ringing.’ They were like, ‘No.’” Friedman's website (www.burningflags.com) humbly sets the record straight. “As far as the film *Dogtown and Z-Boys* is concerned,” it sneers, “Glen's official

credit as Co-Producer and Creative Consultant barely explains the major influence he had on this feature-length documentary.”

By all accounts, Friedman's independently produced photography books from the '90s, *Fuck You Heroes* and *Fuck You Too*, with their portraits of skateboard gunslingers Jay Adams and Tony Alva, are what helped keep the Dogtown legend alive. “[Glen's] been the Dogtown curator for over 20 years,” Peralta says. “He was instrumental in getting Sean Penn, Henry Rollins and Minor Threat founder Ian MacKaye [the latter two of whom provide commentary on Dogtown's influence on their music]. He was a really big part of this.”

THRASH AND BURN In stills from the film, from top: Future director Stacy Peralta (left) takes a break with skate-scene chronicler Craig Stecyk; the Zephyr skaters make a splash in an empty Santa Monica pool; Peggy Oki, the only female Z-Boy.





VERTICAL HOLD Tony Alva rides the poolside rim back in the day.

But as the film's popularity builds, Friedman isn't the only one making demands. Peggy Oki, contacted in Australia via e-mail, declined to be quoted in this story without a guarantee that her website (which mostly hawks her marine-life landscape paintings) would be mentioned. In similar fashion, Friedman agreed to sell *TONY* the rights to print one of his photos only under the condition that the magazine plug his new book, *Dogtown—The Legend of the Z-Boys*. "If some of us seem abrasive, or not very cooperative, it's only because Sony has not paid us anything and is exploitative and rude," Friedman explains. SPC co-president Tom Bernard responds, "It's unfortunate that Glen Friedman has alienated himself from the producers and directors of the movie, who are the people who would pay him. Sony Pictures Classics has nothing to do with the payment, and has no interaction with Glen Friedman." (Friedman admits that he received "a very minimal fee" when *Dogtown* was "still an independent film," though not from SPC.) Although it has no official connection to

the documentary, Friedman's book functions as a bibliographic companion: It reprints nearly all of the articles that Stecyk (who co-wrote the *Dogtown and Z-Boys* script with Peralta, and declined to be interviewed for this story) wrote about the Zephyr team for *Skateboarder* during the '70s; it also contains nearly 400 of Friedman's previously unpublished photos, many of which also appear in the film.

Like its subjects, the movie is fast, scrappy and more than a little self-aggrandizing. Overall, the Dogtown crew has good things to say about it—though they do criticize its overdramatized treatment of legendary rider Jay Adams, who is currently serving time in a Hawaii prison on drug offenses. Several of the Z-Boys have also groaned about the film's PG-13 taint, citing the degree to which drugs, violence and profanity were glossed over. "There's so much stuff," Biniak snorts, "that they would have had to rate the thing X."

And surely there's more griping to come, now that Peralta is involved in a Hollywood adaptation of the Dogtown myth after all. He's written a script for producers Art Linson and David Fincher (who directed *Panic Room*), and they're currently seeking studio backing. Reactions to the prospect of another incarnation have been, to put it delicately, mixed.

"Can Stacy live with himself after he's done with it?" says Jim Muir, who still lives in Venice and has made a career out of designing and selling Dogtown brand skateboards. "He's in a tough position. I'm not gonna knock anyone for going out and trying to make a living."

"I don't think it'll be made," Friedman says of the feature. "It'll be impossible to replicate the era. They could try, but I'm sure it will be an absolutely worthless, good-for-nothing piece of shit."

Time will tell. But the documentary is a testament to what the Z-Boys accomplished. While on the dais at the Spirit Awards, Peralta realized that his film capsulized the high point in many of their lives. "Onstage with Skip and Paul Constantineau, and Tony Alva and Bob Biniak... Tony's ready to cry, he's hugging me, and I feel good about this, that I stuck to this and pulled this off," he says. "I'm really glad what it's doing for them. For me, too, but to see the smiles on their faces... it just thrills me, man."

Dogtown and Z-Boys is out April 26.

Park and ride

At the city's three terrain lots, it's skate or die **By Rob Erickson**

For those with the chutzpah to dodge cabbies, people, bikes, dogs and a zillion other obstacles, NYC is one endless skateboard park (just be sure to stay off the forbidden sidewalks). But if you prefer a little less clutter in your air, you'll want to hit a legit skate-rat zone. NYC's five boroughs currently have three, with terrain from beginner to expert and skaters from old school to no school. Now go shred.

Extreme Park at Chelsea Piers

"It's a safe place that caters to every age and type of skater," says Luiz Louis, an instructor here, who has taught five-year-old kids screaming "Tony Hawk!" and brittle-boned stockbrokers alike to ride the ramps. Sessions at the 20,000-square-foot park are open to both inline skaters and asphalt surfers, but the latter dominate the banks and ledges. The course, open four years, has recently been redesigned, and you can now break your head on a miniramp, launch box or wall ride in addition to the old quarter pipes. Skaters must buy a \$10 Extreme Card and complete a waiver for entry (those under 18 must have a parent's signature); sessions are \$12.50 for 3 to 5 hours, depending on the day, or \$19 for all-day (10am to 7pm). Helmets and elbow and knee pads are required, so those who shun neoprene should go to another park.

Chelsea Piers Sports Center, Pier 62, West Side

Hwy at 23rd St (212-336-6200). Subway: C, E to 23rd St. For information on classes and session times, go to www.chelseapiers.com.

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This Upper West Side park was born in 1995, after the city, the Salvadori Educational Center and a group called Built Environment teamed to replace a drug-infested playground. "Prior to this, parents wouldn't even take their kids near the shaded plot of land," says Andy Kessler, a skateboarder who helped assemble the project. That first season, more than 3,000 bikers, boarders and inline-skaters registered, and attendants have kept it exciting ever since with an annual reconfiguration of the layered-steel ramps. Skaters here can make tracks on a quarter pipe, a wall ride and a small pyramid box, plus a 40-foot-wide miniramp and a 24-foot-wide vertical ramp. "It's a mellow environment with open, flat space and ramps that are a good size to learn on," Kessler says. Helmets are required; 17 and under must have a parent-signed release form. Users pay \$2 to hang from noon to dusk. Riverside Park at 108th St (212-496-2006). Subway: 1 to 110th St-Cathedral Pkwy. The skate park is at the bottom of the hill, near the water.

Owl's Head Park

Nestled deep in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, Owl's Head is the newest addition to NYC's skateboarding scene. It's furnished with not only a street course but also two five-foot-deep bowls linked by spines to a nine-foot-deep, peanut-shaped bowl complete with tiles and coping. The street course mixes cement and wooden banks with transitions, hips and pyramids,



FREE RIDE You won't pay a penny to catch air (or surf the pool) at Brooklyn's Owl's Head Park.

all ranging from two to seven feet high. Brooklyn resident and skateboarding pro Bobby Puleo calls the park a "hassle-free environment," and the laid-back vibe makes it popular—on any given day, a handful of seasoned rippers gather to ride the bowls. Parents must sign releases for kids under 18, and helmets are required for all riders. Owl's Head is open from noon to dusk daily, and has three-hour alternating schedules for bikes and boards; for session times, go to www.nyc.gov/html/dpr/ and type in "Owl's Head." Not only is this one of the East Coast's better parks, but the skateboard gods also made it free. Owl's Head Park, 68th St at Colonial Rd, Bay Ridge, Brooklyn (no phone). Subway: R to Bay Ridge Ave.