

About the Filmmakers

LORI MILLER, producer

Leading the documentary team behind ***They Came to Play*** is producer **Lori Miller**, known for making such commercial films as ***Panic***, starring William H. Macy, Donald Sutherland, Tracey Ullman, and Neve Campbell; and ***The Last Supper***, starring Cameron Diaz and Bill Paxton.

Lori grew up playing and listening to music, which has always been a source of joy and inspiration in her life. She approached the Van Cliburn Foundation for the film rights to their amateur competition after reading about the stories of the competition's participants -- amateur musicians over thirty-five, from all walks of life who strive to play professionally while balancing career and family. She believed that making a film about these diverse and unusual people could stimulate others to pursue their passions at any age.

Ms. Miller also wanted to make the film for her grandmother, who she considers to be the consummate amateur musician, and the true spirit behind the film. After taking piano lessons from age 8-18, Ms. Miller's grandmother -- Elsa Klahr -- escaped the holocaust in Germany and moved her young family, raising them in this country. Only at age 70 was she able to resume playing, and she has never stopped since. She even performed for an audience of several hundred just a few months ago on her 103nd birthday.

ALEX ROTARU, director

Ms. Miller's collaborator is director **Alex Rotaru**, also an amateur pianist, whose work on the PBS documentary ***The Hobart Shakespeareans*** was recognized with the 2006 Christopher Award, the Gold Special Jury Award at the 2005 WorldFest Houston, and Outstanding Achievement in Documentary at the 2005 Newport Beach International Film Festival, among others.

Mr. Rotaru's numerous credits also include his new hour-long documentary, ***Kids with Cameras*** about autistic childrens' creative genius, and in post-production ***Shakespeare High***, a feature documentary starring Kevin Spacey, about the oldest high-school theater competition in the US, which changes the lives of disadvantaged, at-risk teens.

In speaking about the making of the documentary on the competition, Mr. Rotaru said, "This is a film that can capture a lot of hearts. We wanted to give our audience a glimpse into the world of these gifted amateur pianists who have found a way to keep their passion for music alive while leading full and fascinating lives -- in the hope of inspiring others to do the same."

He added: "I loved playing piano as a child in Romania, but my parents worried about a musician's life under Communism. I returned to the keyboard while studying physics at MIT and film at USC, yet felt discouraged about reaching performance level. ***They Came to Play*** was a unique opportunity to affirm to myself and the world that one can pursue a dream later in life successfully. Seeing these wonderful amateur pianists balancing professional careers in Paris or Philadelphia, Boston or Berlin proves that passion and practice can unlock the life-changing power of music for everyone. Now I own a piano again..."

RONNIE PLANALP, executive producer

Ronnie Planalp's career has spanned senior roles in investment banking, publishing, the internet, recorded music, and film, with a significant focus on the international markets. She worked in investment banking at Goldman Sachs for seven years following her graduation from Boston University's College of Communication and Columbia University's Graduate School for Business.

While living overseas in Hong Kong, Ronnie began her international media career and spent the next ten years there and in the UK in various business development and strategy roles for companies including Time Warner, Excite Europe and EMI Recorded Music. Her most recent corporate role was as the Director of Film for the Producer's Alliance for Cinema and Television based in London. It was during this time when she worked with the independent film producing community in the UK that she concluded that producing documentary films with a specific message might be the most rewarding career she could pursue.

Shortly after moving back to New York City in 2004 Ronnie joined the Film Society of Lincoln Center as a trustee. The Film Society is best known for curating the NY Film Festival and the New Directors/New Films festival. She also became an Advisory Board member of the Social Enterprise Program at Columbia Business School. It was then that she began a dialogue with her long time friend from Columbia, Lori Miller, about making a film about the Van Cliburn amateur competition. Ronnie grew up playing the flute, began piano in her 30's, guitar in her 40's and strongly identified with the themes of the film – pursuing your passion at all ages and not giving up. She came on as Executive Producer and has been immensely gratified by the experience.