



# ORION

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

A film by JEANIE FINLAY

CREATIVE ENGLAND presents in association with FFILM CYMRU WALES, BBC STORYVILLE & BROADWAY, A GLIMMER FILMS production in association with TRUTH DEPARTMENT & MET FILM PRODUCTION | A film by JEANIE FINLAY | ORION: THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING  
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DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY Stewart Copeland, Steven Sheil & Mark Bushnell | PRODUCER OF MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION Sally Hodgson  
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS Stewart Copeland & Charles Kennedy | EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS Al Morrow, Suzanne Alizart, Richard Holmes, Christopher Moll, Hannah Thomas, Kate Townsend, Jo Lapping, John Tobin, Andy Coppin & Alexander Preston | PRODUCERS Jeanie Finlay & Dewi Gregory | DIRECTOR Jeanie Finlay

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# ***I Am Orion* as a ‘wraparound’ approach to documentary film-making**

Dr. Judith Aston, Co-founder of i-Docs and Senior Lecturer in Filmmaking and Creative Media at the University of the West of England

## **1.0 Introduction**



*‘I Am Orion’* is the direct result of a collaborative venture between myself and the artist and filmmaker Jeanie Finlay between September 2013 and March 2014. It is a ‘wraparound’ project, a term which we have come up with to offer an innovative model for 21<sup>st</sup> century filmmaking. This report documents the research that led to this approach. It also shows how it is innovative, placing audience research and new modes of engagement at the heart of the filmmaking process. It has been written in plain English to offer practice-led insights to filmmakers, transmedia storytellers and those with a general interest in Jeanie’s work and mine. A more contextualised academic version of what we mean by “wraparound filmmaking” will be published further down the line.

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## 1.1 Overview

'*I Am Orion*' is a documentary based project which is harnessing web technologies to reach out to fans, gather their memories and elicit participation in the telling and sharing of a rich and fascinating story. This story is that of Jimmy Ellis, a real man who agreed to become the fictional character of Orion in order to achieve recognition and fame. What happened to him is the subject of Jeanie's sixth feature film '*Orion: The Man Who Would Be King*', receiving its World Premiere at Tribeca Film Festival in April 2015. The film explores the themes of mystery, tribute, identity and fandom - big topics related to the spirit of the time.



'*I Am Orion*' is also creating a context for performative interventions, both in the build-up to the film's release and as part of its theatrical distribution. We are building a network of artists who will perform as Orion, creating tributes to upload online and to perform live at the film's screenings. The aim is for this to help bring the story to life and to provide audience members with another way in to the story. We are also enabling our audience to 'become Orion' by asking them to don a mask, to think about how it makes them feel and to see if it inspires them to create their own tribute to a tribute.





## 1.2 The story

Jimmy Ellis was an unknown singer plucked from obscurity in the 1970s by Sun Records and thrust into the spotlight as part of a crazy scheme that had him masquerade as Elvis back from the grave. His stage identity was Orion, inspired by the novel of the same name written by the American author Gail Brewer-Giorgio about a famous rock legend who faked his own death.

Sun Records producer Shelby Singleton *acquired* Gail's character Orion and added the trademark mask that Orion always performed in.

*"We had a guy that sounded like Elvis, if photographed in the right way he kind of looked like Elvis. Let the fans think it might be Elvis under that mask"* John Singleton Sun Records



Orion was “*blessed and cursed*” with a voice that was the twin of Elvis. He was believed by many to in fact be Elvis, still alive after having faked his death, and this helped to originate the “Elvis is alive” conspiracy theory/myth that still continues to be pondered over today.

It was the act of wearing the mask that ignited a fantasy, bringing Jimmy Ellis great pleasures but also much pain. The moment when he realized that his audience weren’t clapping for him but for a ghost, was the moment when his career went into decline. Believing that his audience would be loyal to him, he removed the mask whilst performing one fateful New Year’s Eve.

This led to Sun records dropping his contract. He ended up back in his hometown of Orrville Alabama, running a pawn and package store, where he was brutally murdered in a robbery. The film is the story behind Jimmy’s story. Who was that masked man?

Jeanie first became intrigued by this question whilst wandering through a car boot sale with her husband. Here she unearthed an obscure album – “Reborn” by Orion. It was on the Sun Records label, in limited edition gold vinyl and had a mysterious looking guy in a blue rhinestone-studded mask on the cover. They weren’t songs that she’d ever heard of, but the cover intrigued her and she wondered who that mysterious masked man was.



**Two different Orion Reborn album covers. The controversial “casket cover” (left) was banned and replaced by the blue cover (right)**

*“I took the record home, put it on and within seconds the mystery deepened. Whoever this guy was, he sounded exactly—and I mean exactly—like Elvis. Except these weren’t songs that Elvis ever recorded, and there was no*

*mention of the King on the record. But it was on Sun Records and there was this odd story on the back sleeve about a guy called Orion Eckley Darnell and something about a coffin, and a book... Most of all, though, there was this mysterious man, standing hand on hips, with his perfect raven hair and sta-press trousers, in a blue rhinestone-studded mask with the voice of Elvis. Just who was this Orion guy? What was his story? I had to know more."*

Jeanie Finlay

### **1.3 'Wraparound' filmmaking**

'Wraparound filmmaking' is a new term, chosen by Jeanie and myself to reflect our innovative approach and is a key outcome of the REACT Sandbox process. Central to this approach is the concept of filmmaking with extended content, and the application of audience research to create new possibilities for participation in the making and viewing of the film. We want to make cinema going a memorable live event and to find ways to build audience engagement from pre-production right through to distribution. In so doing, we want audiences to become invested in the story by allowing them to make their own creative interventions, whether by advising on subject matter and story, by sourcing and creating content, or by participating in events around the film's screening.

For us, wraparound filmmaking is a way to enhance engagement and participation by encouraging the audience to become actively involved in the storytelling process. Collaboration with the filmmakers can occur at any stage of the process, the key principle being that the wraparound elements that emerge from this collaboration must address core themes within the film. They must flow in and out of the film itself, helping to place audiences inside the story and deepening their ability to empathise with the key characters. This does not, however, necessarily put filmmakers in a position of shared authorship, as the outcomes of collaboration can be embedded in the wraparound as opposed to the film itself.

At the core of our approach has been a shared belief that not everything needs to be digital, that hand-crafted objects can have real value as triggers for documentary engagement, and that there is a thirst among audiences for the sense of time, place and occasion that can be created by orchestrating unique live events around a film's screening. Each intervention is designed to enhance engagement with the story, in order to encourage a deeper connection with the core themes that it addresses. We have also been thinking about how fans and wider audience members might organize their own event-based screenings, to personalise the experience within their own communities.

In coming up with this term, we fully acknowledge that it sits within or alongside related concepts, in particular Henry Jenkins' thinking around transmedia storytelling, and that it plays into wider debates around

evolving documentary forms and practices. The core driver for both of us has been to explore new possibilities for documentary storytelling – Jeanie from a practice-based perspective and me from a practice-led research perspective. As such, it is our intention that by sharing our research processes and insights gained, we will add to these debates by offering a specific term for an approach that sits within a wider set of possibilities and practices. Neither of us want to become hung up on terminology, we just think that it is a useful term to help move things forwards, offering an approach to thinking and doing which might be useful to others.

Here's a definition of transmedia storytelling from Henry Jenkins: *telling a story or experience across multiple platforms and formats ... the purpose being not only to reach a wider audience but to expand the narrative itself.*

And here's our definition of wraparound filmmaking: *moving beyond the creation of story extensions which sit alongside a film towards creating interventions which are integral to the mechanics of the film's actual making and viewing.*

#### **1.4 The collaboration**

'*I Am Orion*' has been made possible by a REACT funded Future Documentary grant. REACT funds collaborations between arts and humanities researchers and creative companies. It encourages cultural experimentation and the development of innovative digital technologies in the creative economy. The aim is to strengthen and diversify collaborative research activities and increase the number of arts and humanities researchers actively engaged in research-based knowledge exchange.

REACT is one of four Knowledge Exchange Hubs for the Creative Economy funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It is collaboration between the University of the West of England, Watershed, and the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter. As a Senior Lecturer at the University of the West of England, my collaboration with Jeanie made absolute sense, given our shared interest in live cinema and a common passion for looking for those small moments that make a bigger story.

#### **1.5 Approach to audience**

At the heart of this particular wraparound project is Jeanie's relationship with her audience and with her documentary subjects.



**Jeanie photographs the audience at the Irish premiere of *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* at *Stranger than Fiction*, Dublin 2013**

Having worked in community based participatory media in the past, she is now very clear that she is the director of her films with the ultimate say on what makes the cut and what doesn't. This is not to say, however, that those who were closer to Orion than she ever can be don't have a say in the way in which the film is being shaped and told. At every stage, she has been taking their views very seriously, with a view to understanding what is about Orion that made him so special to so many, whilst at the same time balancing this against making the story accessible to a wider audience. She has also included archival footage sourced from Orion fans in the film and credited their input – including super 8 films, home movies, photographs and hand drawn fan newsletters. Fans were able to advise on the timeline and identifying interview contributors during production and the edit.



**Extract from *Home-Maker*, an interactive documentary by Jeanie Finlay 2001**

As Co-Founder of i-Docs, Jeanie's approach to filmmaking resonates with my own practice and views. The interactive documentary world can have a tendency to assume that the technological possibilities for participation and collaboration afforded by the social networking capabilities of the internet means that all work created for this medium should be through new forms of shared authorship. I prefer to take a broader view of the possibilities, which recognises that the interplay between directorial vision, cultural context and technological possibility makes each project



unique and gives it an integrity which should be driven by its own intent and purpose.

As such I see no tension between Jeanie's insistence on retaining authorial control over the main body of her film work and the deep respect that she consistently shows both for her documentary subjects and for her audience. I am very keen for this to position to be embraced within the interactive documentary world, if it is to remain a fluid and dynamic site of exchange driven by creative vision and personal integrity. It has always been my view that, whilst the Internet does open up strong new possibilities for collaborative working, this does not mean that documentary content produced for this medium has to be driven solely by shared authorship.

## **2.0 From '*#My Orion*' to '*I Am Orion*'**

Originally our REACT funded project was conceived as '*#My Orion*', a sister project to the main film. Our plan was to use the Internet to provide audiences with another way into the Orion story, as with Ken Loach's '*I am 45*' and Carol Morley's '*Dreams of Your Life*'. These are both internet-based experiences designed to enhance and complement audience understanding of the films '*Spirit of 45*' and '*Dreams of a Life*'. However, it soon evolved into something more than this – into a more fluid approach to the film's Internet presence, which surrounds the filmmaking process from beginning to end and to which content can be added well after the film is released. This positions the website as being an integral part of the production, offering a platform for people to share their stories and memories of Orion, to contribute content that could make it into the film itself, and to make their own tributes to Orion.

### **2.1 *#MyOrion***

Through the '*#MyOrion*' part of the project, we are now using the web to engage with fans and gather stories, archive footage and other memorabilia of Orion. Whilst some of the contributors and materials are being included in the film itself, the rest is being made accessible via the film website as a means of representing wider voices and opinions of the Orion community. Exploring ways to connect with Orion fans formed a core part of the REACT project and what we learnt is now integral to the marketing and distribution strategy for the film. The fact that this has not always played out quite as expected has raised a number of interesting points from which other projects could learn. These will be discussed in the conclusion at the end of this report.

## **2.2 *I Am Orion***

The other aspect of the project is '*I Am Orion*', in which we are exploring the core theme of identity by providing opportunities for Orion fans and wider audiences to don a mask and to think about how it makes them feel. We are being playful, by suggesting that they might like to create their own tribute to Orion, but we also want them to think about how far they would be willing to compromise their own identity to achieve 'success' and on whose terms. In so doing, we are putting the audience inside the story and asking them to identify with the film's core character. The idea is that this can be done in several ways: by downloading a readymade mask, by handcrafting a unique mask or wearing a pre-prepared digital mask.



**Elaine Grewis is Orion – *I Am Orion***

Whilst the website invites people to wear a mask and take photographs or make a tribute video to upload to the website, we also want to encourage audiences to wear a mask when the film goes on theatrical release. With that in mind, we are building connections with a number of Elvis tribute artists in the hope they will be willing to wear a mask and become Orion to help inspire others to do the same. We have already filmed two Elvis tributes singing as Orion, which are included on the '*I Am Orion*' part of our website. We would also like to see more Elvis tribute artists performing at the screenings of the film, to help to create memorable live events.



**Kjell Elvis filmed in Norway for the title sequence for *Orion: The Man Who Would Be King***

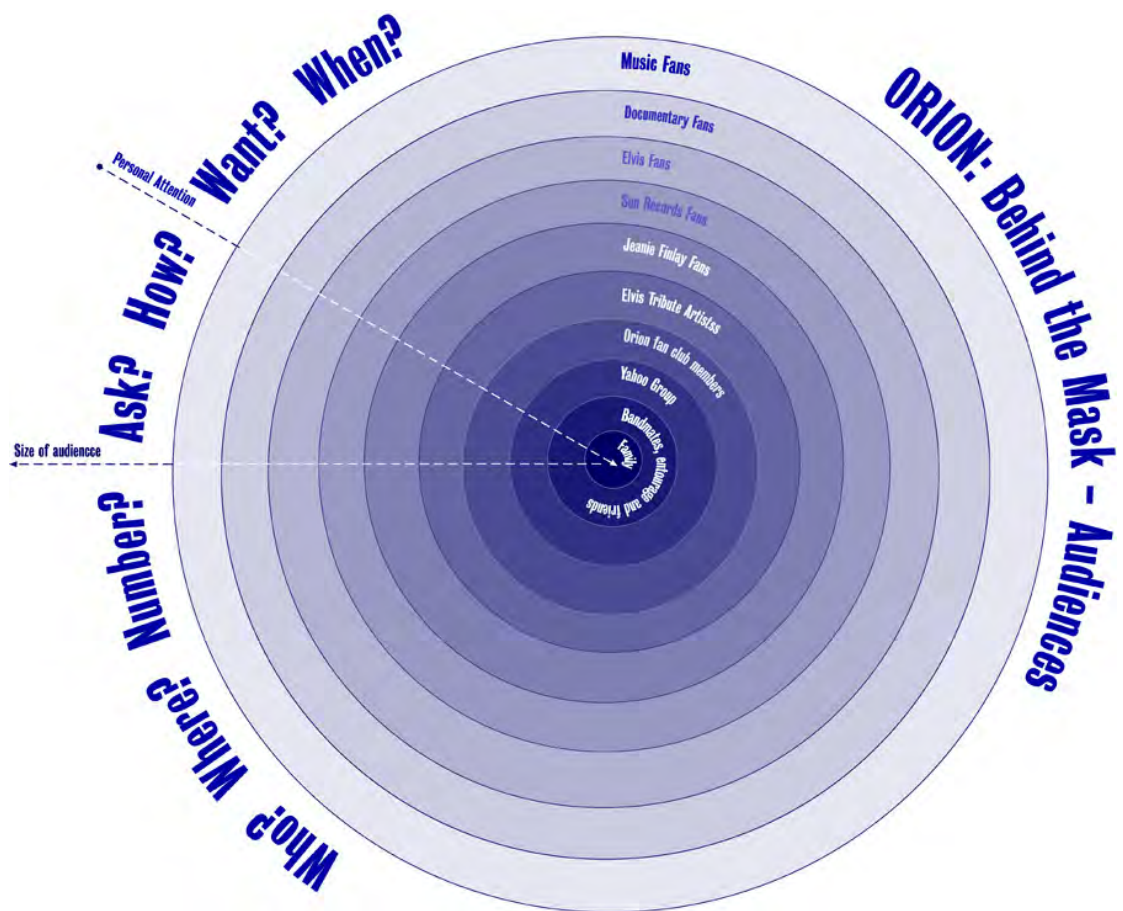
### **3.0 Audience and fan-based research**

A key outcome of the REACT funding was that it allowed time for in-depth research into audience and fandom, which fed directly into the development of our wraparound approach and the film website where this work currently resides. This research was facilitated by a series of workshops held in Bristol's Pervasive Media Studio, in which the recipients of the Future Documentary award were able to share best practice and receive some expert coaching. The pioneering work of media scholar Henry Jenkins around fans, gamers and bloggers and his subsequent texts were also key to this research.

#### **3.1 Defining the audience**

Early on in the process, we were asked to think carefully not just about the primary audience but also to define our secondary audience. The rationale here was that there is an inverse triangle in which the core audience, in this case Orion fans, often forms less than 1 percent of the total potential audience reach. It was important not to design our project solely for this primary audience, because it would make the story self-referential, limiting its reach and reducing its potential to tap into universal themes.

Jeanie designed an audience infographic, which showed the various rings of potential audiences for the film. At its centre was the primary audience of Orion's immediate family and on the outer edge were music fans. Between those two poles was a range of potential audiences, the challenge for us being to identify the core group to focus on as our secondary audience. As will be shown later, we started off by focusing on Elvis fans but soon moved to a more specific focus on Elvis tribute artists. At the same time it also became clear that the community which Jeanie had built up around her previous films was also important in terms of developing our ideas around participation and engagement in the Orion story.



**Audience infographic**

### 3.1 Primary audience research

One of our core aims was still to reach out to Orion fans and so primary audience research remained important. We wanted to build a group of key ambassadors for the film and create an on-line portal through which they could share their memories and upload their memorabilia. Our thinking was that this would create interesting story extensions to the film, of interest not just to Orion fans, and that some of the materials uploaded could be included as archive footage in the film itself. We also wanted to build an on-line community as a central focus of activity for connecting with Orion fans, to help with the film's pre-production research and to identify key players who might also become contributors within the film itself.

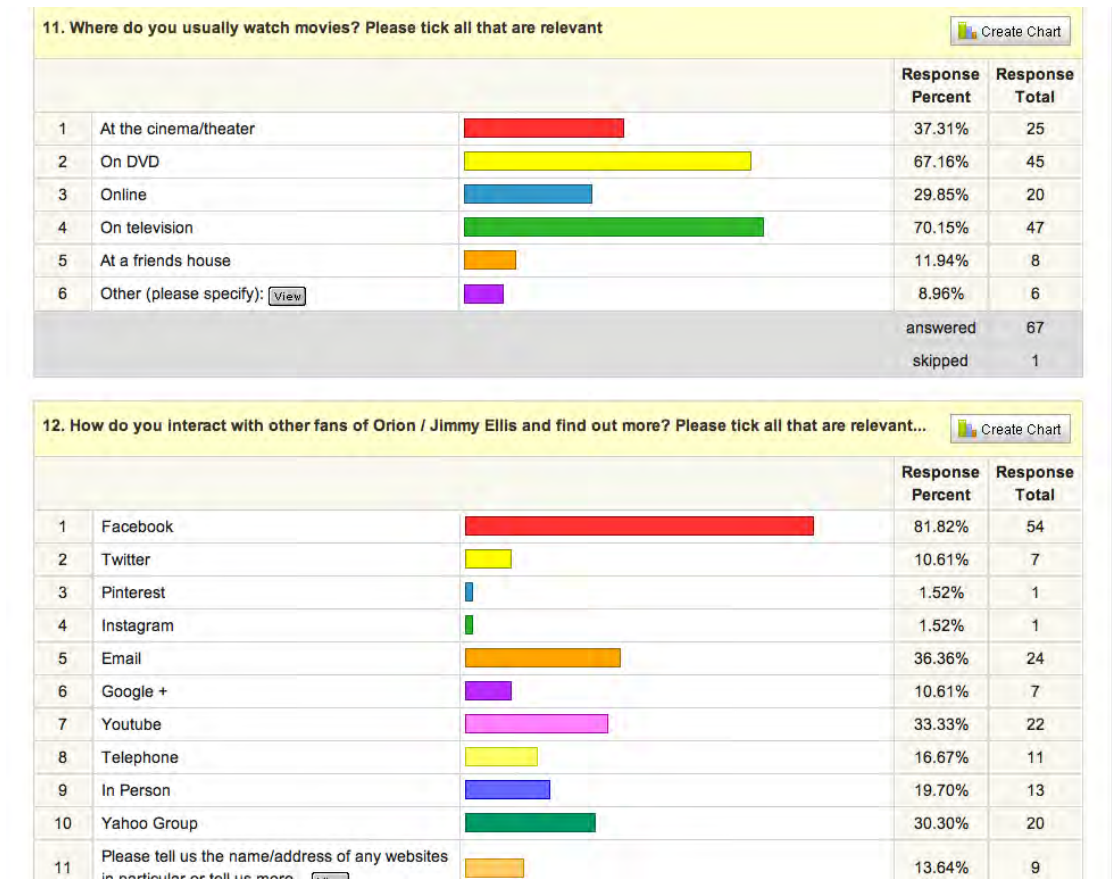
Jeanie had already built up a network of Orion fans through previous research for the film but had not been in touch with them for a while and was keen to re-establish contact. We brought her Producer of Marketing and Distribution, Sally Hodgson, on board to help with this aspect of the

project, as she would be working with Jeanie on the film over a longer period of time than myself. A key aspect of Sally's role was to work with Jeanie to communicate directly with these fans to build both their awareness of the film and their confidence and trust in Jeanie to tell the story of Orion. Whilst Jeanie and Sally were working on this part of the project, I researched more deeply into fan studies as an academic field of enquiry.

According to our fan studies advisor, Dr Lucy Bennett, it is important for fans to feel part of a group and it is their shared experiences that bring them together. These experiences are often intensely personal, to be shared with other fans but not necessarily with the wider world. As such, bragging might occur on public social media sites but the more meaningful conversations often occur within closed private groups. It soon became clear that, if Jeanie and Sally wanted to really connect with Orion fans, then they would need to join those groups and become inside participants as opposed to outside observers.

I also contributed to the design of a questionnaire, which was sent out to Orion fans via the relevant social media channels. The questionnaire asked how people became a fan, if they saw him perform and what was their most lasting memory of him. It also asked if they had any memories, memorabilia or stories that they would be willing to share and what kind of exclusive perks might be of interest in return for potential crowdfunding support. A good number of responses were received, from close family and band members through to people who had come across his voice on the radio. Respondee were mostly Americans in the 45-60 age bracket but there were also some respondees from Canada and Europe.

In particular, the questionnaire confirmed just how special Orion was to his fans and how many thought that his voice was better than that of Elvis. He clearly had a lot of charisma and his fans would regularly drive hundreds of miles to see him perform. It was clear that they saw him as his own man as opposed to an Elvis tribute artist, and that he was highly valued as a friend and colleague as well as a performer. The questionnaire also revealed that collectable memorabilia is highly prized within the fan community. This was an important insight, which directly influenced Jeanie and Sally's approach to their subsequent crowdfunding campaign.



## Collated audience responses

### 3.2 Secondary Audience Research

We initially defined our secondary audience as being Elvis fans and asked the question as to how difficult or easy it would be to gain their interest in the Orion story. Alongside Jeanie's own ongoing research, the REACT funding gave us more time to explore this question than would otherwise have been the case. It led to Jeanie attending an Elvis Convention in Porthcawl, to us consulting our fan studies advisors about the Elvis myth, reading up on the Elvis literature (both popular and academic), watching several of his films, listening to his music, and filming two tribute artists performing iconic songs.

Cultural studies academic Dr Lucy Robinson was a great help with this, being an Elvis fan herself and having an in-depth knowledge of the cultural shifts that were going on in America at height of his fame. She reminded us that many Elvis fans are seduced by his sense of authenticity and by the fact that he was the first to be picked up by the industry and made into a genuine superstar. For many, his story is the epitome of the story of rock and roll, from his early years when he was uncorrupted by money through to the Vegas years when it became all about money. The tragedy of his mother's death and effect that it had on him also makes his story very human.

As part of this research, we also designed a second questionnaire aimed specifically at Elvis fans. This asked how they became a fan, which aspect of Elvis they most identify with, if they collect Elvis memorabilia, where they go for news about Elvis, how they interact with other fans, if they attend any Elvis events and whether they ever go to see Elvis tributes. It also asked if they had heard of Jimmy “Orion” Ellis, providing a link to him performing and asking for feedback on their response to the performance. The uptake for this questionnaire was relatively small, given the large number of Elvis fans out there in the world, but we did still receive some insightful responses, mostly from the USA.

**Calling all Elvis fans, we want to hear from you for our film: ORION. Win a DVD!**

All information disclosed here will be kept anonymous and used for academic and research purposes only.



Hello, we are the team behind a documentary movie about ORION; a recording artist who was blessed and cursed with an incredible voice. He was launched on Sun Records in 1978. He wasn't an ETA (Elvis Tribute Artist) but the mysterious mask and his incredible sound-a-like voice led hundreds of thousands of people to believe that he might just be 'The King'.



We're really interested in hearing from Elvis fans to help us in our research for the film.

All information disclosed here will be kept anonymous and used for academic and research purposes only. If you have any questions about this survey, its procedures, or your participation, please email: [contact@orionthemovie.com](mailto:contact@orionthemovie.com)

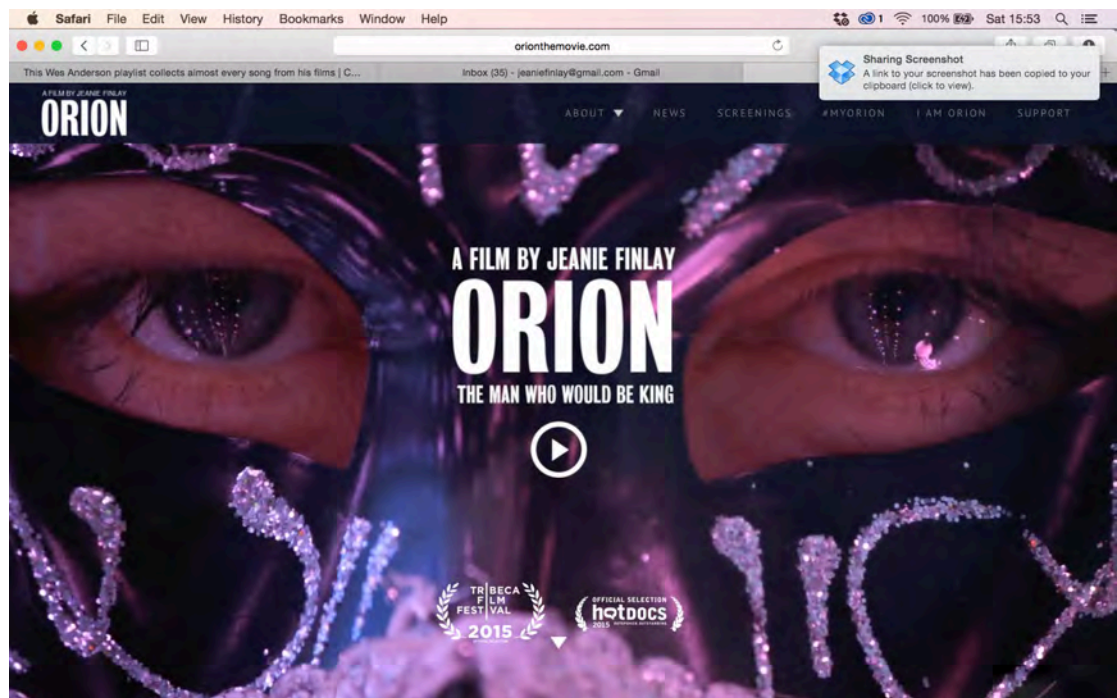
### Questionnaire for Elvis Fans

The responses revealed that Elvis is seen as being a complete one off, a man with great charisma who epitomized the American dream and had the ability to enter into peoples' dreams. It also revealed that it would not be easy to win Elvis fans over to the Orion story, as many would see him as a fake or yet another second rate tribute artist, as opposed to the real deal. It led us to switch the focus of our activities away from bringing Elvis fans in general over to the Orion story onto the more specific niche of Elvis tribute artists. Our thinking was that they would already be one

step removed from the 'real' Elvis and more relaxed with the idea of wearing a mask. They could act as ambassadors for the project, creating tributes for the website and adding some theatricality to the film screenings by giving a live performance.

#### 4.0 Website design

Our audience research fed directly into our thinking about the tangible outcomes that we wanted to create from the REACT support. Whilst we still wanted to create an on-line portal through which Orion fans could share their stories, memories and memorabilia, it was becoming increasingly evident that they wouldn't be particularly keen for this to become a public forum accessible to a wider audience. Additionally, many of them were not particularly heavy users of digital media, using social media mainly to connect in closed groups with other fans and to keep in touch with family.



**Screen grab from [www.orionthemovie.com](http://www.orionthemovie.com)**

As such, the initial contact that Jeanie and Sally established was often followed up through telephone calls. Jeanie had also got to know and had a strong connection with a Norwegian fan, who had a wealth of Orion archive materials and footage. This caused a shift in our initial focus and led to us devising an alternative strategy around the idea of creating a memory box, a place where the voices of fans could come through adding additional layers to the story above and beyond the content that would be included in the completed film. We felt this would be of interest both to Orion fans and to a wider audience, providing another way in to the film



and having the potential to become a multilayered site for fan-based storytelling in its own right.

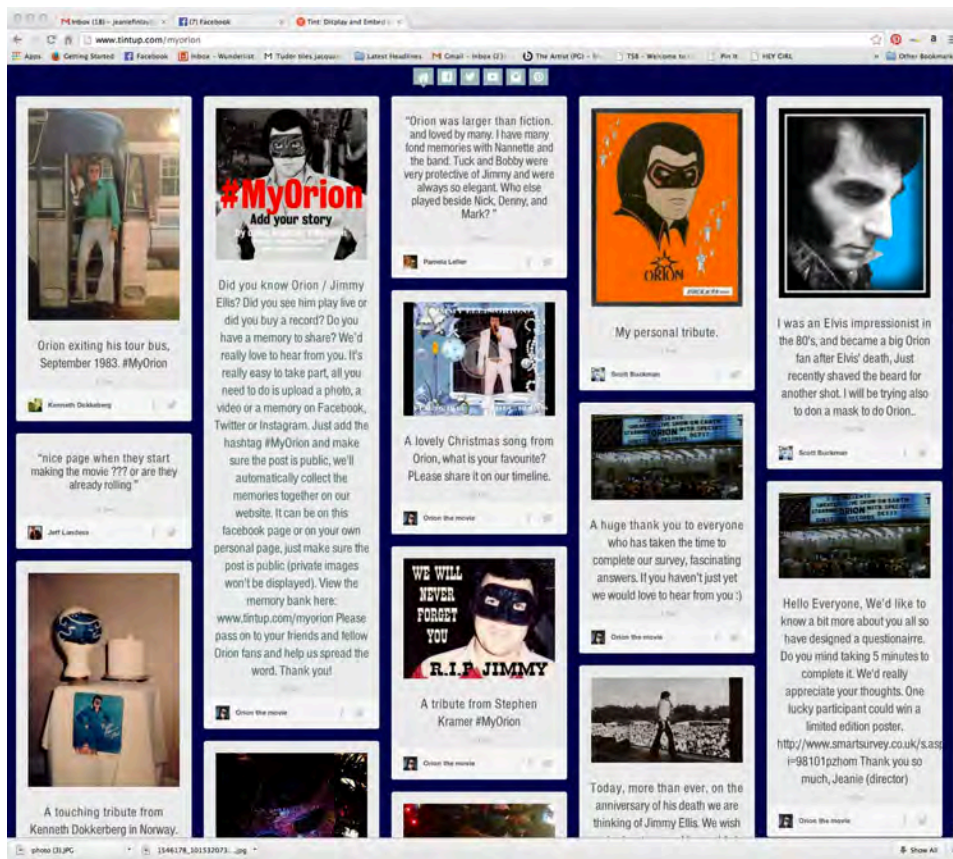
#### **4.1 Putting the primary audience inside the story**

Whilst at the Ghent Film Festival, Jeanie was prompted by our cultural studies advisor, Dr Lucy Robinson, to visit the Huis van Alijn. Here she discovered a piece of software called Tint, which can be used to harvest material relating to a particular topic or theme from across the Internet. All we needed to do was create a call to action asking fans to upload content relating to their stories and memories of Orion to their own social media sites using the hashtag *#MyOrion*. Tint would then automatically aggregate it for us onto our website. Once Jeanie had negotiated a license to use this software, this seemed like the first step towards gathering content.



**Facebook header image from [www.facebook.com/orionthemovie](http://www.facebook.com/orionthemovie)  
A call for participation in *#MyOrion***

Given the natural reticence of Orion fans to share their personal memories of Orion on a public forum, we felt we should let this aspect of the project develop organically alongside the completion and distribution of the finished film. Our feeling was that once the film was released, it would lead to more interest from Orion fans in participating. At this point we could revisit the *#MyOrion* aspect of the website to see if there was sufficient content to consider taking a more curated approach as the website evolved. This was a key moment for me, when it became clear that the timescale of the REACT project was appropriate for setting things in motion but that the outcomes would evolve over a longer time period.



Screen grab from online memory box - #MyOrion

#### 4.2 Putting the secondary audience inside the story

Throughout the REACT Sandbox, we were constantly being asked what our secondary audience would gain from becoming involved in the on-line portal. It needed to offer them more than being a place for them to browse through other peoples' stories, as contemporary audiences want to have some possibility to interact with content and to feel invested in the filmmaking process. This led us to thinking about developing the concept of *'I Am Orion'* as the core focus of our project as opposed to the *'#MyOrion'* aspect. The idea behind this was to shift our focus away from the wraparound elements of fan participation towards thinking more about creating a 'call to action' for our secondary audience members. The obvious thing to focus on was mask wearing, due to the subject matter within the film, which revolves around the core theme of identity.



### **Orion greets his audience**

In line with his public image and how he performed on stage, the Orion album covers often featured a picture of Jimmy Ellis wearing one of his masks. These iconic images were central to Sun record's strategy to transform Jimmy Ellis from Orrville, Alabama into Orion the superstar of song. Given this central aspect of mask wearing to Orion's story, it made absolute sense to use these images to create masks for our audience to wear. There are other on-line projects, which use masks to raise awareness of a film franchise, such as Play Nicely's work for *The Dark Knight Rises*. However, these tend to be firmly linked to film marketing strategies. In line with our wraparound approach, we wanted to push things a little further to encourage a different way in to the film's core theme. We felt that a good way to do this would be to create a 'call to action' on our website based on asking our audience if they would sacrifice their identity in return for being offered everything they'd ever dreamed of.

As a visual artist as well as a filmmaker, Jeanie created replicas of the masks shown on five of Orion's key albums. These were designed to be 2D and to have a paper cut out handcrafted feel. Working with digital agency 383 Project, we used these to create an on-line experience, which invites audiences to do a number of different things around the concept of making a tribute to Jimmy 'Orion' Ellis. At the simplest level, they can choose to wear one of the masks on-line and create a portrait by allowing access to their webcam. Alternatively, they can print one of the masks to cut out and wear or they can fashion their own mask. In all cases they are invited to take a photograph and upload it to the '*I Am Orion*' section of the website, it having been made easy for them to do this. Additionally, they are invited to create their own video tribute to Orion and to also upload this via the website.

# ORION

## THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING



WOULD YOU WEAR  
THE MASK?  
UPLOAD YOUR PHOTO  
[www.orionthemovie.com](http://www.orionthemovie.com)  
#IAMORION



**Cut out and keep mask available on [www.orionthemovie.com](http://www.orionthemovie.com)**

We anticipate that engagement with this aspect of our wraparound will pick up once the film has been released. Our desire is for people to be as creative as they like with 'I Am Orion' and to really consider how wearing a mask makes them feel. We played with this idea at the Future Documentary showcase and it was interesting to see how different people responded to the opportunity to wear one of the masks in public. Our hope is that it will help cinema audiences and indeed home viewers to better appreciate how Jimmy Ellis might have felt when he wore the mask and to relate this back to their own responses.



**Gordon Elvis is Orion – *I Am Orion***

## **5.0 Crowdfunding**



Jeanie and Sally continued to build on the REACT work as the film moved through its further stages of development. As part of this, they launched a three-month crowd-funding campaign on Indiegogo, which ended in April 2014, achieving 135% of its final target.

Many of the perks on offer were Orion collectibles, which our primary audience research helped to source.



**Crowdfunding perks - Original Orion albums**

In working to track down this material, Jeanie generated interest from our primary audience because she was seen to be sharing their enthusiasms and to therefore be more of an insider. Another significant moment was when she shared Orion fans indignance when Orion was mentioned on the Jimmy Fallon show in America and some of his music was played. He was described as having one of the worst albums ever and his music as being not worth the time of day, which obviously outraged Orion fans.



### **Crowdfunding perks - Custom Orion necklaces made by Tatty Devine**

However, whilst we had anticipated that the campaign would draw initial interest from Orion fans, it was in fact not until another of Jeanie's key secondary audience – fans of her previous work – came on board that they began to back the project. It took a huge leap of faith in Jeanie to recognise this and to adjust her campaign strategy accordingly.



### **Jimmy Fallon wears the Orion mask on The Tonight Show**

Although obvious now, it wasn't so obvious when in the thick of things that asking mostly American fans with a huge investment of their own in the story to back a British filmmaker whose work was unknown to them for a film that still wasn't finished was a huge ask.



**Thank you graphic posted on social media**

This is an example of where no amount of background research can prevent the unexpected from happening. As with all creative work, it is important to know when to apply analytical thinking and when to draw more on intuition. Jeanie's mantra, building on a quote from Jimmy Ellis himself that 'success takes courage', was key to getting this balance right at a crucial moment in the film's development.



**Crowdfunding perks being packed up to send to backers**

## 6.0 Conclusions and lessons learnt

This final section will concentrate on drawing conclusions that are of general applicability to filmmakers and transmedia storytellers. It will also make reference to some aspects, which are of more direct relevance to those working in the field of documentary making.

The first point to be made is that Jeanie and I see 'wraparound filmmaking' as a useful term to describe a rapidly developing area of practice, which until now hasn't been given a name. There are numerous examples of live or event-based cinema plus a whole range of interactive extensions to films, which play out on the web or through installations work or live theatrical events. However, wraparound filmmaking is a term, which can embrace all of these concepts and offer a general approach to offering a range of different ways in to the core themes of a film. At the heart of this is a desire to enhance engagement and participation by encouraging the audience to become more invested in the story. As such, we find it useful and hope that it will have wider purchase beyond our work on *'I Am Orion'*.



### The question at the heart of *I Am Orion*

With regards to our research into audience and fan engagement, being asked to make a clear distinction between our primary and secondary audiences was very helpful. In particular, it helped to prevent us from falling into the potential trap of spending too much time connecting with our small core audience at the expense of thinking about ways to create wider engagement. It was also really helpful to think about how secondary audiences need to be given the opportunity to become active participants as opposed to passive observers, if they are to become invested in the wraparound elements as a way into the film itself. Whilst secondary audiences may choose to remain passive, the act of giving them opportunities to become more active participants is important, as it



shows that they are being taken seriously as valued supporters of the project.



**Fan created Orion tribute image - I Am Orion**

With regards to our primary audience research, we had much to learn from our fan studies advisors and from the work of Henry Jenkins. Whilst fan studies has in the past been seen as a rather niche activity, it is becoming ever more relevant to mainstream audience research. This is because of the Internet and the ever-increasing use of social media in film production. It is now received wisdom that developing a coherent marketing and distribution strategy should form a core part of pre-production research, as building an audience for a film can begin long before the first scenes have been shot.

A key insight gained from this research is that where fans are active users of social media, this use will play out in different ways across different platforms and contexts. At the centre of this is a desire by many fans to be

in control of their use of public and private space on the Internet. For example, whilst the *#MyOrion* area that we created on our website for primary audience engagement is public, much of the social media traffic between Orion fans is through closed private groups away from the public gaze. We learnt that belonging to a closed group of like-minded individuals is a key aspect of fandom, and is where very different conversations take place from the more up-front bragging that is often found on public sites. As such, it has taken time for Jeanie and Sally to be accepted within these groups but it has led to some very fruitful exchanges, only some of which have made it onto the *#MyOrion* pages.

Another insight gained from our research relates to the importance of finding key ambassadors within the various audience groups to promote and support both the development and the distribution of the project and its wider wraparound activities. In this instance, our key ambassadors have helped to source memorabilia and archival content, spread the word about the project, encourage others to contribute to *#MyOrion* and I Am Orion, in some cases sponsored the project. In an age of social media, ambassadors are an essential part of building trust and interest in the project, and it is important for their efforts to be appreciated by the project team. In some cases where ambassadors are involved in facilitating the production process, it can lead to a tricky dynamic over project ownership emerging. This makes it important to have clearly defined roles, which in some cases can lead to credits on the final work.



**Congratulations image created and posted online by the Jimmy “Orion” Ellis fan club when the crowdfunding campaign hit the \$25,000 target**

The project’s ambassadors will also be factored into the distribution

strategy for the film. One of the crowdfunding perks available was a license for a special screening at home or in a community centre, with Jeanie being present to introduce the film. Whereas in the past, Jeanie has tried to be present at as many of her screenings as possible, the potential reach of this film means that it will not be possible for this to be sustained. Part of the distribution plan is that fans will be encouraged to put on their own events around the screening and cinemas to encourage activities around mask wearing. As part of this, Jeanie and Sally have also drawn up a network of Elvis tribute artists, who they hope will perform live as part of the theatrical screenings. This approach will, we hope, encourage people back into the cinema to experience the film as part of a unique and memorable event.



**Invite to the world premiere of *Orion: The Man Who Would Be King* at Tribeca Film Festival in NYC. The after party features an Orion tribute artist, a mask for each audience member and the opportunity to make a tribute**

With regard to the crowdfunding campaign, we learnt that choosing the right perks is an important way of drawing people in, as are carefully timed updates. We also learnt that in-depth research does not guarantee specific outcomes. In this instance, the connections made with our core audience of Orion fans, did not result in people initially backing the campaign. It was those who were already supporters of Jeanie's previous films who were more prepared to back the campaign in the initial instance.



**Stills from feature documentaries by Jeanie Finlay. SOUND IT OUT (left) The Great Hip Hop Hoax (right)**

We realised that it was a big ask to expect people unfamiliar with Jeanie's work to invest in a project that wasn't yet completed. Those core Orion fans did however follow the campaign's progress, with many of them coming on board in the latter stages. The campaign has also raised a lot of awareness of the film, which should pay dividends once it is released and (hopefully) favourable reviews start to come in.



**One of 5 limited edition masks that will be given to the audience at the world premiere of Orion: The Man Who Would Be King**

As *Orion: The Man Who Would be King* is shortly to be released, there will be more developments with #MyOrion and I Am Orion, which we hope to be able to share in a follow up report. Meantime, we hope you find these insights useful and that you will come and see the film!

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