



ITALIAN AMERICAN COLLECTION

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Get a Grip: the Career of Jean-Pierre Nutini

A focus of the museum's permanent collection is documentation of the industrial history of the region. We have objects and archives related to historic trades such as coal mining, glass making, and steel and aluminum production, all of which generated industrialists, laborers, unions, and, of course, the commodities they produced. As our collection grows and the economy changes, we review the shifts in industry and production in Western Pennsylvania and adjust our collecting accordingly. In the last few years, the curators (myself included) have pursued material culture related to films made in the Pittsburgh area. We've become familiar with the century-long relationship between Western Pennsylvania and the film industry in Los Angeles, and are learning about the myriad of individuals in our community that work behind the scenes to make movie magic, as well as the unions that represent their interests.

One collection recently donated to the History Center by Lisa DiGioia-Nutini is reflective of the career of her late husband, Jean-Pierre Nutini, who worked on nearly every major motion picture filmed in Pittsburgh from the early 1990s until his death in 2013.

He was the son of Italian-born, Chilean-raised Dr. Hugo G. Nutini and Dr. Monique Lemaître Leon, professors of Mesoamerican Studies and Latin American Literature, respectively. Nutini worked as a gaffer, rigging gaffer, best boy, electrician, and actor, had degrees in Theatre from Northern Illinois University and the University of Pittsburgh, and studied Technical Theatrical Lighting Design at Carnegie Mellon University. A hard hat, gloves, and walkie talkie are the objects most indicative of the daily tasks performed on film sets by Nutini. They centered around executing the production's lighting plan by designing and arranging lights and cables to illuminate scenes and connect equipment to power sources.

Nutini worked on a variety of productions, from feature-length films to television series to stage productions with theatrical and dance companies. He also worked on concerts and political rallies. Shooting on location poses different challenges than filming on a sound stage. A lighting plan from the film *The Mothman Prophecies* (2002) shows the set up Nutini and his crewmates used to rig the Kittanning Citizens Bridge for a scene in the film depicting the collapse of the Silver Bridge in

Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Unlike filming on a sound stage, there are a number of additional elements to factor in when working on site, including working with municipalities to secure locations, inclement weather, and outsourcing power.

Also donated to the museum were the baseball caps and t-shirts worn by Nutini and made expressly for film crew, either by the crew themselves or by the production companies. The t-shirt for *The Mothman Prophecies* was designed by Nutini's wife, Lisa DiGioia-Nutini, who met him at a crew wrap party for the film *Wonder Boys* (2000). The t-shirt for *Diabolique* (1996), produced by the film's Pennsylvania-based crew, has an inside joke printed on it "She wants what!?" in reference to the film's star Sharon Stone, a Crawford County native. The t-shirt for the film *Striking Distance* (1993), written and directed by Pittsburgher Rowdy Harrington, was manufactured by Columbia Pictures; it has an illustration of the



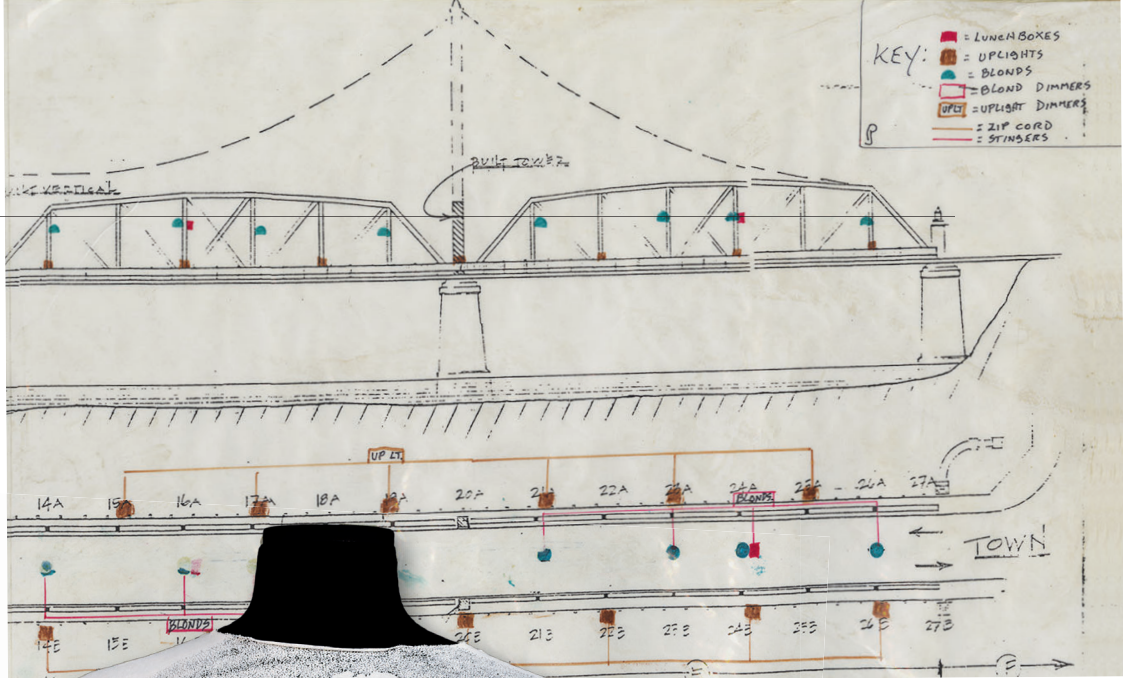
Jean-Pierre Nutini's customized initials "JP" can be found on his hard hat, gloves, and walkie talkie.

HHC Collections, gift of Lisa DiGioia-Nutini, 2019.9.
Photo by Liz Simpson.



LEFT: Nutini was not only an active member of the Iron City Grips, he served tenures as Secretary and Business Representative for the organization's Executive Board.

HHC Collections, gift of Lisa DiGioia-Nutini, 2019.9.
Photo by Liz Simpson.



ABOVE: This lighting plan shows the set up to rig the Kittanning Citizens Bridge from the film *Mothman Prophecies* (2002).

HHC Detre L&A, Jean-Pierre Nutini Papers, 2019.0009.

confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio rivers. Above the drawing is the production's working title: *Three Rivers*.

There also are examples of props from films Nutini worked on: an airline pilot cap is from the romantic comedy *She's Out of My League* (2010), which centers around a TSA agent from the Pittsburgh International Airport, and a "Monroeville Zombies" banner is from *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* (2008), another Pittsburgh-based story. Director Kevin Smith said about the film, "We got to shoot at the Monroeville Mall, and for a movie ff, that's a very cool thing ... it's as close to zombie movie as I'll ever get."¹ Another Romero reference in the film is a cameo b special effects makeup artist Tom Savini, ndustry bigwig and Pittsburgh local, at Mo roeville Mall, location of Romero's 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead*.

Nutini was a charter member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Studio Mechanics Local 489, known as "Iron City Grips." This union represents the "behind-the-scenes" crew, including special effects, set construction and decoration, grips, lighting, props, scenic paint, sound design and wardrobe. He also was involved with the Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) Local 3, a union for Ohio, Western Pennsylvania, and the panhandle of West Virginia that represents media screen, stage, and broadcasting



LEFT: Crew t-shirt from *Striking Distance* before the film's name was finalized.

HHC Collections, gift of Lisa DiGioia-Nutini, 2019.9.
Photo by Liz Simpson.

RIGHT: The amateur hockey team name "Monroeville Zombies" in the film *Zack and Miri make a Porno* (2008) was a tribute to filmmaker George A. Romero by writer/director Kevin Smith.

HHC Collections, gift of Lisa DiGioia-Nutini, 2019.9.
Photo by Liz Simpson.

professionals. A number of objects from Nutini's collection show how loyal he was to his unions; he showed his pride through a keychain, bumper stickers, t-shirts, and baseball caps that he wore while working on films.

¹ Barbara Vancheri, "Monroeville-filmed 'Zack and Miri' gets a warm reception in Toronto," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 9, 2008.

