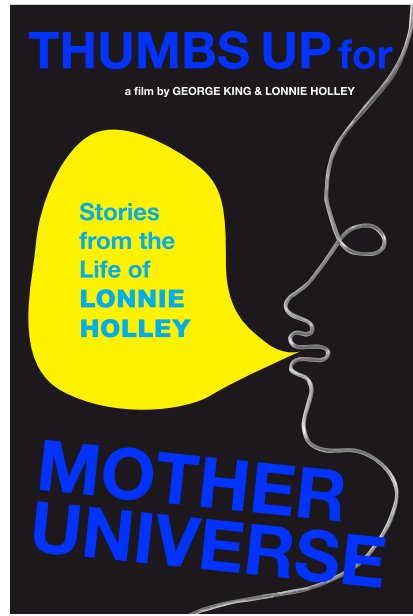


**THUMBS UP FOR MOTHER UNIVERSE:  
STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF LONNIE HOLLEY**

**PRESS KIT**



**TITLE:** Thumbs Up for Mother Universe: Stories from the Life of Lonnie Holley

**LOGLINE:** After the world gave up on Lonnie Holley, the Universe sent him the gift of art.

**TRT:** 95:00 ©2020

**TRAILER:** <https://vimeo.com/kingg/thumbsuptrailer>

**WEBSITE:** <http://www.lonnieholleystory.com>

**FACEBOOK:** <https://www.facebook.com/TheLonnieHolleyStory>

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**THUMBS UP FOR MOTHER UNIVERSE:  
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**RESPONSES TO VIEWING THE FILM**

“This film depicts an artist in the truest sense...free of self-promotion and ego. He is the art, and it is him. A fascinating and inspirational documentary.”

-- **James McDaniel, Jury Chair, Harlem International Film Festival, Harlem, NY.**

“*Thumbs Up For Mother Universe* is the most fascinating documentary about an artist life that I have ever seen. Lonnie Holley is a National Treasure.. His extraordinary vision, talent and love of humanity not only has carried him through but is also carrying US—his African American brothers and sisters along this endless journey to freedom.”

-- **Márcia Minter, Executive Director, Indigo Arts Alliance, Portland, Maine**

“I enjoyed it tremendously! It's sensitive, moving, and powerful...such an important project!”

– **Leslie Umberger, Curator, Folk & Self-Taught Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum**

“An intimate reflection on the greatest imagination of our time. An essential story never told so completely.” – **Jordan Young, South Arts**

“Excellent documentary, I am floored. I loved this film. Highly recommended.” ----

-- **Steve Kopian, Unseen Films**

“It's so moving and beautiful beyond words.”

-- **Daniel Arite, Bosch Institute**

“It reminded me of the power of art to heal and connect people in ways that are hard to explain. Thumbs Up caught me by surprise! It truly is a gem”

-- **Leslie Dungee, AVAM audience**

“It would really work well for my environmental classes where we are thinking about attitudes toward consumer, disposable, commodity culture—questions about ‘What is waste?’” — **Ellen Griffith Spears, Writer, Professor, Environmental Studies, University of Alabama**

## THUMBS UP FOR MOTHER UNIVERSE: STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF LONNIE HOLLEY

### BRIEF SYNOPSIS:

After the world gave up on Lonnie Holley, the Universe sent him the gift of art. Born, one of 27 children in Jim Crow Alabama, Holley was stolen away as an infant and sold for a pint of whiskey. Growing up in grinding poverty and abuse on society's margins left its scars. At age 28, Holley discovers making things quiets the demons that haunt him to this day. He begins to make art out of what the rest of us throw away—trash, garbage and debris. Now, in his 70's, his artwork sits in the Smithsonian, the National Gallery, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, while his music has garnered international critical acclaim for its stirring soulful depth. Thumbs Up for Mother Universe tells the story of how Lonnie Holley overcame the longest of odds to become an unlikely art superstar.

### EXTENDED SYNOPSIS:

This feature-length documentary traces the dramatic life of Lonnie Holley from the basest poverty and educational opportunities to his recognition as a revered visual artist and musician. The film will also reveal Holley's creative process—his insights into conservation, ecology and the environment, and his sources of deep inspiration rooted in southern life and African American history and culture.

After the world gave up on Lonnie Holley, the Universe sent him the gift of art. This film tells how Holley overcame all odds to become an unlikely art superstar. Lonnie B. Holley has been described as an outsider, a poet, a con man, a prophet, a hustler, a visionary artist, a junkman and a shaman. Foremost, the 72-year-old African American artist and musician from Birmingham, Alabama is an American original. Born the seventh of 27 children, Holley's childhood is the stuff of novels. At 18-months-old he is given to another woman who in turn sells him into servitude for a pint of whiskey. He is raised in a juke joint as 'Tunky' MacElroy, unaware of his true identity. By age five he is forced to work full time and savagely beaten for any shirking of his duties. At age 8 he discovers his true identity and sets out to find his family. It is a complex journey that takes him to New Orleans (when he 'hobos' a ride on the wrong train), incarceration in the Mount Meigs Industrial School for Negro Children—where he is again beaten close to death—and finally, at age 17, reconciliation with his family.

As an adult at age 28, with no training or guidance, Holley starts carving 'core sand'—an industrial by-product of Birmingham's blast furnaces. The stark power of his work attracts the attention of a local TV crew and soon his sculptures are in the Smithsonian. Today his paintings, assemblages of found objects and carvings are in museums and collections worldwide. Yet Holley still lives on the margins. Eschewing worldly goods, he lives to make art.

In 2012 Holley, who has always sung for his own entertainment, is pulled into a studio. The resulting recording leads to a European tour. In December 2013, *The Chicago Sun Times* names Holley's second album #2, behind Kanye West, and *Washington Post* music critic Chris Richards names Holley's first record the #4 album of 2013. Richards describes Holley's sound as "a free jazz fever dream from the deep South, a babbling Baptist sermon from deep space, a lullaby for the end of the world, a songbook that's frequently beautiful and occasionally frightening." His 2018 recording, *Mith*, resulted in further critical acclaim and a four-continent world tour. *The Guardian* simply declared it, "The year's best album."

## THUMBS UP FOR MOTHER UNIVERSE: STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF LONNIE HOLLEY

### PRODUCER BIOS

#### **GEORGE KING**

George King is a writer/producer/director of nonfiction film, television and radio projects. His work has consistently won national and international awards (Peabody, Cine Golden Eagles, Golden Reels, nominated for Prix Italia, etc.) and garnered reviews in the U.S. national and regional press (CNN, NYT, L.A Times, Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, Atlanta Journal/Constitution, etc.). See: FILMOGRAPHY.

King's work addresses diverse subjects including race, civil rights, art & culture, the environment, labor, education, poverty, housing, and community development. He has always involved broad community participation to ensure the work accurately reflects historical and cultural truths. In this documentary, in addition to community screenings, King also worked closely with African American colleagues such as artist/activist Charmaine Minniefield, and filmmakers Sam Pollard and Lewis Erskine as a core team.

#### **AMY LINTON, p.g.a. ACE**

Ms Linton is an Emmy-award winning member of the Producers Guild of America. She began her career as an editor and still works in that capacity. One of her earlier credits as an editor, the critically-acclaimed *Daughters of the Dust* was selected for preservation by the [Library of Congress](#) in the [National Film Registry](#). Ms Linton's producing credits include: *AKA Doc Pomus*; *Robert Shaw--Man of Many Voices*; *Jews and Baseball: An American Love Story*; and *Sacco and Vanzetti*. She first collaborated with producer George King and story editor Sam Pollard on the 2000 PBS documentary *Goin' to Chicago*

#### **CHARMAINE MINNIEFIELD**

Ms Minniefield is an artist, activist, and professor at Atlanta's Spelman College. Drawing from indigenous traditions, her work centers around African and African American ritual from a feminist perspective. Utilizing historical images, stories and places, Ms Minniefield seeks, reclaims and retells lost narratives. From charcoal to acrylic on canvas; from digital mixed media and video projection to site specific installation and public art, her work ritually celebrates women while conversing between the past and the present, and between spirit space and the physical. She has also served as a producer and arts administrator for nearly 20 years, holding positions with such arts organizations as the National Black Arts Festival, the High Museum of Art, Fulton County Department of Art and Culture, Foxfire, and Flux Projects.

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**FILMOGRAPHY: GEORGE KING**

**NOTES FROM NICARAGUA**

Writer/Co-Producer/ Director/Camera/Sound/Editor

30 min, video (1986) Pegajosa Productions

*Winner: "Best Public Affairs Documentary" National Federation of Local Cable Programmers. Regional PBS broadcast*

**WORD OF MOUTH**

Writer/Producer/Editor

3 x 30 min, audio (1987)

*Winner: Golden Reel: "Best Arts & Cultural Programming"  
(National Federation of Community Broadcasters)*

**YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK BY LOOKIN' AT THE COVER**

Writer/Producer/Director

30 min, video (1987) George King & Assoc.

Atlanta Film & Video Festival, Regional PBS broadcast

**WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?**

Writer/Producer

26 x 30 min, audio (1997) Southern Regional Council, American Public Radio

*Winner: 1997 Non-Print Media Award (Oral History Association), Golden Reel: "Best National News & Current Affairs Programming" (National Federation of Community Broadcasters), 1998 George Foster Peabody Award.*

(National reviews)

**GOIN' TO CHICAGO**

Producer/Director

70 min, 16mm color (2001) George King & Associates

*Winner: Cine Golden Eagle, Full Frame Festival, National PBS broadcast 2001.*

(National reviews) <http://www.georgeking-assoc.com/gointochicago/>

**WHO'S THAT STRANGER?**

Producer/Director/Camera/Editor

30 min, video (2007) Pegajosa Productions

*Winner: Audience Award, Rome International Film Festival (GA), Atlanta Film Festival, Tucson Festival of Music & Film.*

**TEN THOUSAND POINTS OF LIGHT**

Writer/Co-Producer/Director/Camera/Sound/Editor

30 min, video (1991/2010) Velvet Video

*Winner: Atlanta Film & Video Festival, Charlotte Film & Video Festival*

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*Distributed by: Dust to Digital, <http://dust-digital.com/light>*

**FILMOGRAPHY: GEORGE KING (Cont.)**

**KICK LIKE ME (working title)**

Producer/Director

Feature documentary about drug use, addiction, treatment, and recovery told through the story of Atlanta musician Warren Ullom. Once poised on the brink of stardom, Ullom is now serving a 20 year sentence for his role in a heroin overdose death. (In production)

**THUMBS UP FOR MOTHER UNIVERSE;  
STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF LONNIE HOLLEY**

Producer/Director

A documentary feature about the life and work of self-taught Alabama visual artist and musician Lonnie Holley. 2020

**AWARDS** (Partial listing)

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Media Arts (4), NEA Southeast Media Fellowship (3), NEA Inter-Arts/ Rockefeller Inter-disciplinary Fellowship (2), Corporation for Public Broadcasting, British Film Institute, Arts Council of Great Britain, National Endowment for the Humanities (4), Mississippi Arts Commission, Georgia Council for the Arts, California Arts Council, Georgia Humanities Council, Illinois Humanities Council, Tennessee Humanities Council, Missouri Humanities Council, City of Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Fulton County Arts Council, City of Atlanta Mayor's Fellow in the Arts, 2006 IMAGE award (with N.Y. filmmaker Spike Lee.) Lubo Fund, Idea Capital.

**Panelist:** National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Southeast Media Fellowships; NEA Inter-Arts/ Rockefeller Inter-disciplinary Fellowships; Fulton County Arts Council: Film & Video Artists; Georgia Council for the Arts: Individual Artists; City of Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs: Individual Artists; and Cable Television Producers; Kentucky Arts Council: Media Artists; Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation; Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta.

**THUMBS UP FOR MOTHER UNIVERSE:  
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**CREDITS**

**Producer/Director**

George King

**Visual Art & Music**

Lonnie B. Holley

**Co-Producers**

Amy Linton, p.g.a. ACE  
Charmaine Minniefield

**Editors**

Amy Linton, p.g.a. ACE  
Lewis Erskine, ACE

**Story Consultant**

Sam Pollard

**Camera**

Jack Frost, Rashaad Espinoza, Ed Myers, Sylvia Jackson, Fraser Reade, Travis Ward, Larry Robertson, Kimberly Binns, Laura Asherman, George King, Rick King, Josh Bagnall, Azariah Oldacre, Alan Facemire, Ralph Madison, Bill Brown, Clay Asbury, Justin Schein, David Hudson, Billy McKinney

**Location Sound**

French Spencer, Fraser Reade, Booker Edwards, Michael Catalano, Greg Linton,

**Puppetry**

Lindsay Coleman, Mauree Culberson, Brandi Hoofnagle, Carole D'agostino,  
Anthony Marotta, Melissa Brewer

**Animation & Compositing**

Elli Mayhem, Althea Brown, Ross Boone

**Online Editor**

Ron Heidt

**Colorist**

Ron Anderson

**Sound Engineer & Mixer**

Kenneth Lovell

## THUMBS UP FOR MOTHER UNIVERSE: STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF LONNIE HOLLEY

### ABOUT LONNIE HOLLEY, LINKS

#### INTERVIEWS & FEATURE ARTICLES:

[New York Times Magazine | The Insider's Outsider](#)

[New Yorker | Lonnie Holley's Glorious Improvisations](#)

[The Guardian | Twenty-six siblings and a child labour camp: how Lonnie Holley's epic life led to the year's best album](#)

[The Bitter Southerner | One Man's Trash is Another Man's Salvation](#)

[Fader | Listen to a New Fader Mix by Lonnie Holley](#)

[Afpunk | The Art of Trauma: Lonnie Holley's Modern Folklore](#)

NYT: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/06/arts/design/lonnie-holley.html>

Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/may/01/lonnie-holley-art-the-growth-of-communication-the-edge-of-what>

#### MUSIC REVIEWS

[Pitchfork: 100 Best Songs of 2018](#)

[Pitchfork: Album Review](#)

[New Yorker: 10 Best Albums of 2018](#)

[Newsweek: Best Albums of 2018](#)

[PopMatters: The 20 Best Avant-Garde and Experimental Albums of 2018](#)

[Brooklyn Vegan: Album Review](#)

[Spin: The 51 Best Albums of 2018](#)

[Aquarium Drunkard: 2018 Year In Review](#)

[Paste: The 10 Best Roots & Blues Albums of 2018](#)

[Paste: The 50 Best Albums of 2018](#)