

FILM ORANGE'S ASSIGNMENTS GETTING JUICIER

Company shoots video for British band while working on a pitch for LeAnn Rimes

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As rain clouds fill the sky on a brisk Monday night in late October, film producer Barry Sonders' breath can be seen in the cold air while he panics over the complications that a faulty video wire can cause.

"You know where the Cheesecake Factory is? It's just past that in the plaza," explains an

anxious Sonders over his cell phone, directing his production assistant to a Radio Shack in Pittsford.

Sonders is pacing back and forth in the middle of the street in front of the Centre Park office of Film Orange, the production company he started in March 2007 that has gone from working on small-budget music videos to multimillion dollar projects.

On this night, Sonders is just hoping his assistant can buy a new wire splitter and fast. For Sonders, this couldn't have come at a

worse time. He and his creative team have just started filming outdoor scenes for a music video for "Beeline," by Leeds, England, band Sky Larkin, and this is Sonders' first real worry of the night.

During the previous few hours on set, Sonders spent more time anticipating a feeling of anxiety than actually feeling anxious. He spends his time eavesdropping on his crews' conversations and keeping a watchful eye on every aspect of the production. Yet, for all his worrying, Sonders' hands remain in his pockets while his team pulls things together.

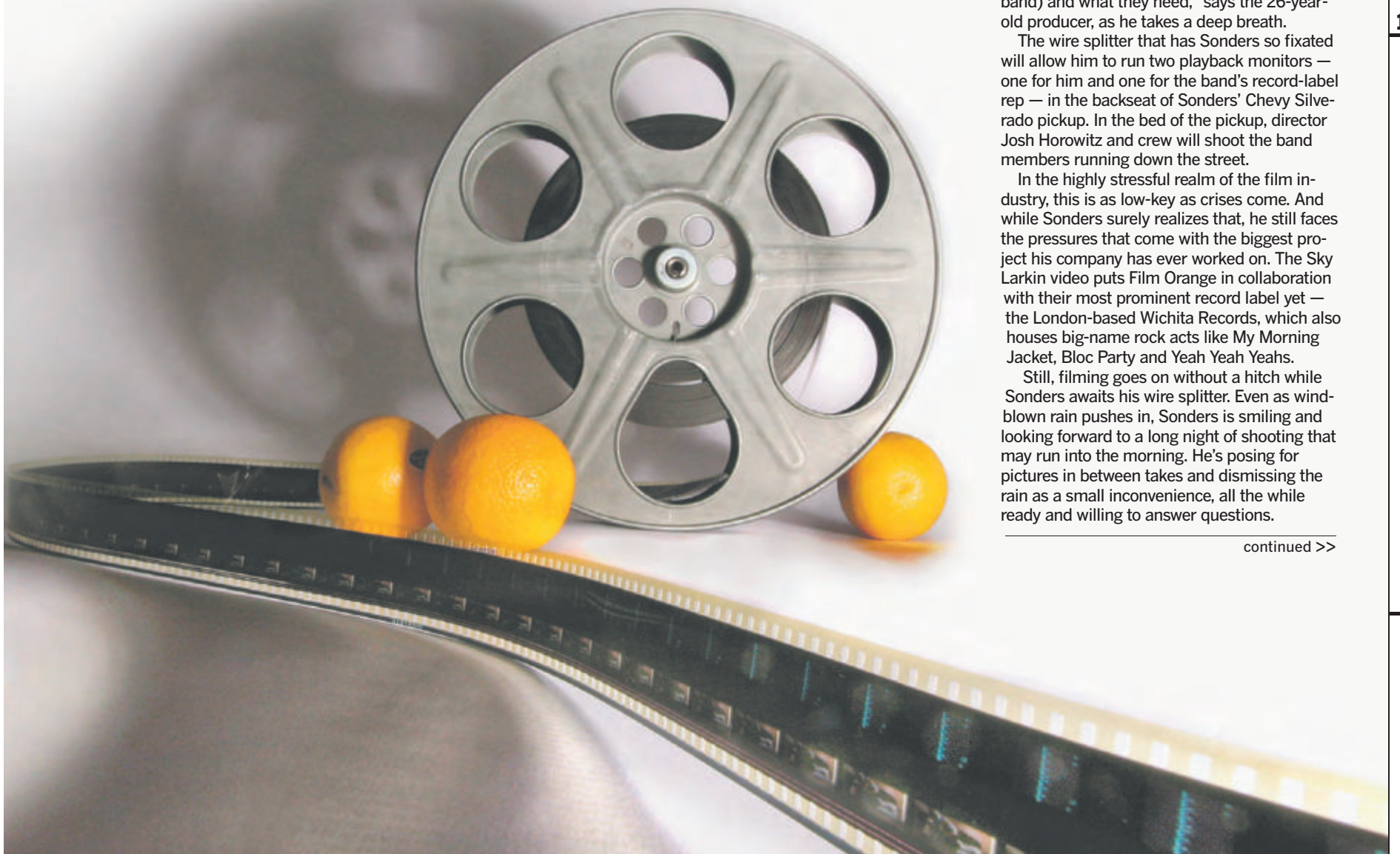
"If I've done my job, by the time filming starts my only focus will be the client (the band) and what they need," says the 26-year-old producer, as he takes a deep breath.

The wire splitter that has Sonders so fixated will allow him to run two playback monitors — one for him and one for the band's record-label rep — in the backseat of Sonders' Chevy Silverado pickup. In the bed of the pickup, director Josh Horowitz and crew will shoot the band members running down the street.

In the highly stressful realm of the film industry, this is as low-key as crises come. And while Sonders surely realizes that, he still faces the pressures that come with the biggest project his company has ever worked on. The Sky Larkin video puts Film Orange in collaboration with their most prominent record label yet — the London-based Wichita Records, which also houses big-name rock acts like My Morning Jacket, Bloc Party and Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

Still, filming goes on without a hitch while Sonders awaits his wire splitter. Even as wind-blown rain pushes in, Sonders is smiling and looking forward to a long night of shooting that may run into the morning. He's posing for pictures in between takes and dismissing the rain as a small inconvenience, all the while ready and willing to answer questions.

continued >>



Members of the U.K. band Sky Larkin are pushed down a Rochester alleyway during the video shoot for "Beeline."



FILM ORANGE



Barry Sonders,
owner of Film Orange.

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SPENDING MONEY TO MAKE MONEY

It's a far cry from the way 2008 started for Sonders and his young company.

In January, Film Orange opened the year shooting what was its biggest project to date — a music video for Victory Records punk-rock band Bayside, shot in Rochester. During that shoot, Sonders was all over the place, loaded up on caffeine and hard to track down for a brief interview.

His excitement seemed over-matched by the hard work he was facing. And even when it was all said and done, Film Orange didn't make a cent. Victory Record paid Sonders' company \$12,000 to shoot the video for Bayside's song "Carry On." Sonders put every penny into the production, eliminating any chance for

financial profit.

A calculated risk, but one that paid off. In April, Sonders tuned in as Bayside premiered the video on MTV's *TRL* in front of millions of viewers.

"I never thought I would have a music video on *TRL*," Sonders says. "It was a risk, but it's one of those things where you have to *have* work to *get* work."

The progress Sonders has made in his young film career stems from him following his instincts. After earning a bachelor's degree in digital film and television production from SUNY Fredonia in 2004, Sonders found himself in the non-suspenseful world of doing video production for high schools and weddings.

After growing frustrated, he picked up and headed to New York City in 2005, where he spent his first few months shooting film reels (DVDs).



For the "Beeline" shoot, Film Orange rigged a light to one of the shopping carts to capture close-ups.

Sonders eventually landed various production rolls on music videos and television projects. However, desiring to work on his own terms, Sonders retreated back to Rochester in mid-2006 to start his own production company in a far more cost-efficient market.

The first project the company ever produced came out of Sonders' own personal savings. Another move that paid off. Indie singer/songwriter Tim Williams' music video for the song "Novel," directed by Horowitz, won an MTVU weekly video contest last year and earned Film Orange several more video projects.

"It's just a feeling you get in your gut that this is gonna work," Sonders says.

IMPRESSING THE RECORD LABEL

Sonders' crew for the Sky Larkin video — around 30 people — is the largest he's ever had. He has a bigger budget, although the record label won't let Sonders disclose exactly what it totals. But the members of the band admit that the production in Rochester is bigger than a video they recently shot in Harlem.

The set is filled with stylists, production assistants, prop managers, grips and many other roles not employed for the Bayside shoot.

"I think it's the preparation, the foresight, the lessons learned the last time around," says Horowitz, 30, one of four directors Film Orange represents. "Everything's just running a lot smoother."

It was Horowitz's pitch for the video about a band racing through the streets of Rochester in shopping carts that convinced the label to fly the band from its native city of Leeds, England, to Rochester.

"It's not something I would've thought of right off the bat," says Wichita Records video commissioner Jill Kaplan, who accompanied the band to Rochester. "But everyone seems on top of their game. I'm impressed."

The video is just the start of a busy fourth quarter for the company. In the next few months, Horowitz will work on a pitch for Curb Records to shoot country star LeAnn Rimes' next video. Along with that, Sonders is producing a short film project for one of his other directors, Nick Carbonaro, two feature film projects and several other music video bids.

"I knew this would be a process," Sonders says. "It's not something that was gonna happen in six months, a year, or even a year and a half."

Film Orange has reached a level where Sonders can now give a clichéd answer when asked about how much money his company is bringing in.

"We're doing well," he says with a slight smirk on his face. The Film Orange office (also Sonders' home) is a 3,000-square-foot New York City-style loft he leased this past June, which used to be the Daily Record's offices. It's a significant upgrade from Sonders' previous work space — a small bedroom in a shared house on Park Avenue that Sonders compares to a "frat house."

And while just nine months ago Sonders was working with a \$12,000 budget for the Bayside video, he's now working on an upcoming feature film project with one of his directors, Jonathan Zames. The movie is called *Simpleton USA*, and Sonders is in the process of securing a budget of between \$4 to \$8 million for the project, which either will be shot in Rochester or New Mexico.

"Film Orange is attracting work from bigger, more well-known performers and creating interest in filming in this region," says Nora Brown, deputy director of The Rochester/Finger Lakes Film & Video Office. "(Sonders) has a very talented team behind him, and they are focused on playing a large part in the future of film projects in Rochester."

TRYING TO MANAGE A CRISIS

Yet, things haven't always been so stable for Sonders. During most of 2007, he found himself trying to balance his new company with the life-threatening illness of his father, who spent nine months in the hospital, but is doing better.

"It was my responsibility to help my family, but at the same time I had this young business I'd just started," recalls Sonders. "In the short run that hurt my business, but in the long run it also helped my business in that it shaped who I am. If I could handle all of that at the same time and come out still having the will to do this, it shows that I'm doing the right thing."

And Sonders' passion for Film Orange has never waned. If he's not overly anxious on set, he's checking e-mails 20 times a day. He's making sure he answers every phone call that comes through his office. (Sonders has wired his cell phone to his office phone so he never misses a call.) And even after 30-plus hours without sleep (thanks to the Sky Larkin video shoot), Sonders' heavy eyes are set off by a smile.

Despite the jittery, frantic mess he sometimes appears to be, Sonders ultimately seems comfortable with his decision to take his professional fate into his own hands.

"It's the choice I made," he says. "I made the decision to work for myself and do my own production company. If I take a break, then Film Orange takes a break. It's less scary to fail as it is exciting to succeed." ♦

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