

Coastal Healing

"In feature films the director is God; in documentary films God is the director," Alfred Hitchcock once mused. Not to get religious, but soul fans around the globe will surely agree that Richard Olivier must have been sent from heaven when he shot his now-classic 'Transit Ostend' film, by far the most telling account on Marvin Gaye, once the biggest soul superstar, and his early eighties' exile at the Belgian coast.

"My wife had read in *TéléMoustique* that Marvin Gaye was now living in Ostend. A small news item, two lines. Through a journalist friend I got in touch with Freddy Coussaert." Coussaert, the Ostend promoter, had taken the lost singer under his wing after they'd met in London. "We drove to Ostend and met Marvin and Freddy in a restaurant. At the time I didn't even know who Marvin Gaye was," Olivier recalls.

The year is 1981. A young, and driven independent film maker, Olivier didn't have the slightest clue this little journey to the seaside would result in the making of a film that would make people mail him every week, from Japan to Austria, to this day, 25 years after the death of the legendary Motown singer: "Marvin was troubled at the time. He didn't have any money, and things didn't look bright. So Freddy thought it would be good for his morale that we filmed a documentary about him. Marvin said: OK, I'll come and watch your previous films."

"Marvin was nothing at the time. He knew he had a great talent, but he had sunken deep. Completely broken. In Ostend, he was getting himself back on track again. In the film you see him boxing, playing basketball, jogging on the beach, watching the North Sea. That's what he did really."

"When the film was finished, I organised a little screening at the RTBF. Friends and crew only. Marvin was too late, he arrived in the middle of the film, and at the end he asked if we could play it over again. At the end of the film he took me in his arms and told me it was fantastic. When he signed a picture for me, he thanked me for making him immortal."

Shot on 16mm film, with little to no budget, *Transit Ostend* was filmed in just a couple of days, with Marvin Gaye re-enacting his everyday activities in Ostend. Originally, the film was only a mere 29 minutes long, but was later re-edited into a 56 minute Remember Marvin Gaye version.

But more plans had been made though, plans for a film on the life and times of Freddy Coussaert: "I went to England to negoti-



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ate with the BBC, together with Freddy. We agreed to make a film about Freddy, but for some reason they decided to make the film without me. The problem was, Freddy had told them he owned the rights to *Transit Ostend*, which wasn't the case, my wife and I own all of the rights. But the BBC made a film anyway, called *Troubleman*, for which they unrightfully used my images. So I sued them. For seven years, it was my lawyer against their four lawyers. But I won. And I'm proud to say I fucked the BBC, me - little Belgian."

Back in the US 'Sexual Healing' had hit the charts big time. Gaye's mother was sick in bed at the time, and called him back home. After several arguments, Gaye's father shot two fatal bullets at his son. April 1st 1984. At the age of 44. (AD)

Contact Richard Olivier to order the Remember Marvin Gaye DVD at: www.olivier-films.be