

Narrated by Motown Legend Martha Reeves

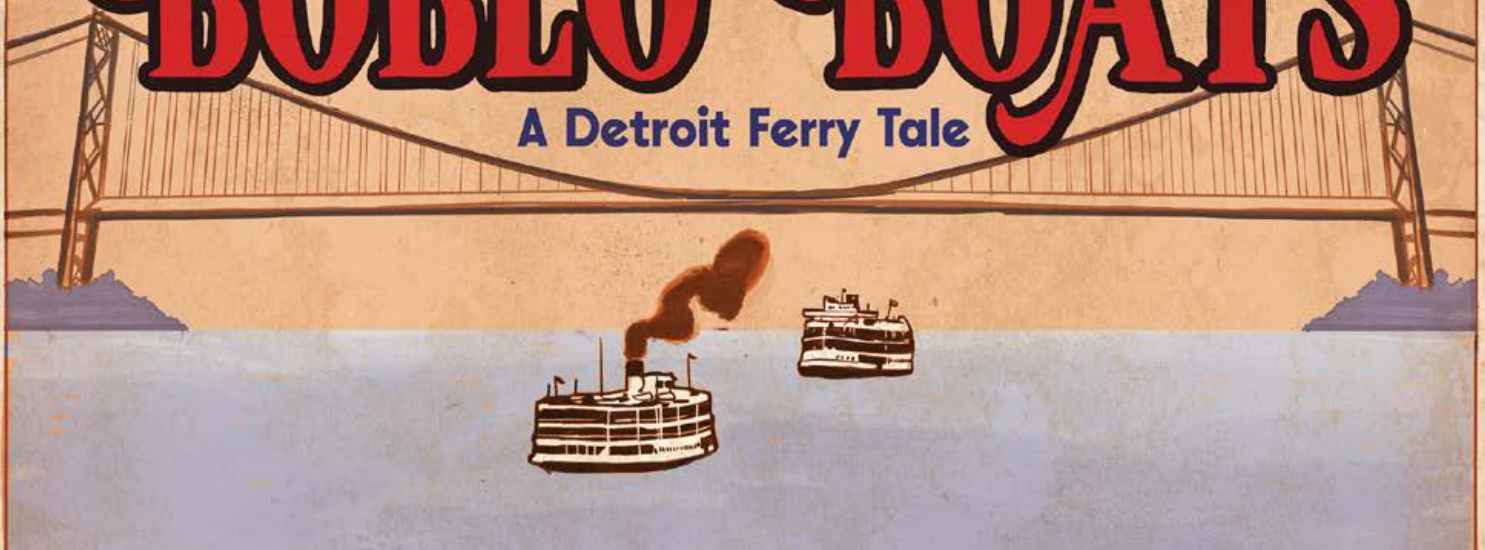


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BOBLO BOATS

A Detroit Ferry Tale



DETROIT

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"The *Tiger King* of boat stories. "

- Erin Vermeulen, WWJ Detroit

"You don't have to be a boat guy, gal, or gull to enjoy Schillinger's magical mystery boat ride of a film and, frankly, the documentary is even more fantastical if you aren't a former Boblo-goer. "

- Jerilyn Jordan, *Detroit Metro Times*

HOPE FLOATS

A documentary about Detroit's faded Boblo history weaves a stranger-than-fiction 'Ferry Tale'

By JERILYN JORDAN



LOGLINE

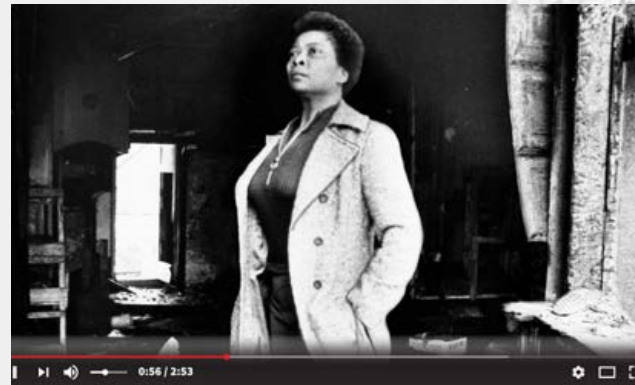
For over 85 years, steamship *Ste. Claire* transported generations of Detroiters to Boblo Island, an amusement park nestled in the waters between the US and Canada. When the vessel comes under threat of ruin, a doctor, psychic and amusement park fanatic unite to save their beloved steamship from the scrapyard. Interweaving local lore and mythology, "Boblo Boats" explores the whitewashed history of amusement parks and one crew's crusade to bring back the memories.

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VIEW THE TRAILER



WATCH AN EXCEPT ON SARAH E. RAY





SYNOPSIS

Boblo Island, one of America's earliest amusement parks, sparked the imaginations of Detroiters for more than 85 years. Passengers by the thousands reached the island by way of two sister steamships, *SS Columbia* and *Ste Claire*, designed by naval architect Frank Kirby. Their 90 years of operation witnessed America's industrial revolution and social justice movements. In 1993 Boblo Island tragically shut down, and the boats were left to ruin. Mirroring Detroit's decline and resurgence, two teams of people doggedly attempt the restoration of these iconic vessels as the city stands in the midst of a grass roots renaissance.

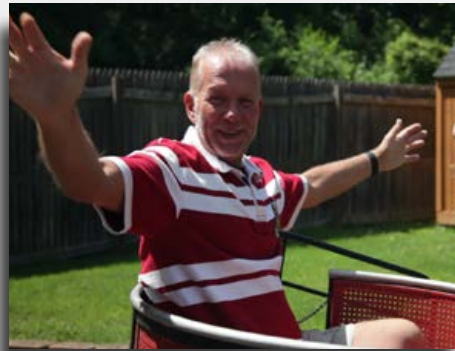
SS Columbia is presently owned by a New York-based nonprofit endowed with grants and employing experienced nautical preservationists. They are resurrecting *Columbia* into a traveling museum and event space in Buffalo, leaving *Ste. Claire* as Detroit's last vestige of Boblo Island. *Claire's* fate rests in the hands of an unlikely band of heroes: a doctor, a psychic, and an amusement park fanatic.

The documentary walks an aesthetic and narrative tightrope, accommodating rosy memories of Boblo Island without neglecting the whitewashed history of segregation in America's early amusement parks. The film pays homage to the forgotten civil rights hero Sarah E. Ray who forced the integration of Boblo Island in 1945. Although her story has previously been omitted from Detroit history, it was part of the NAACP's road to the seminal *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which ended the separate but equal doctrine in 1954. Due to the filmmakers' efforts, her former home was recently chosen by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the '11 Most Endangered' Historic sites in America. The film also unearths the buried tale of Sugar Island, a former amusement park directly neighboring Boblo Island. It was purchased in 1945 by African Americans to be a "park for their own race" in retaliation against Boblo's segregationist policies.

CHARACTERS



DR. RON KATTOO



KEVIN MAYER



GLORIA DAVIS

Dr. Ron Kattoo, majority owner of *Ste Claire*, is a family man with an 80-hour-week practice as a pulmonologist. Despite having no background in ship restoration, Kattoo has persevered through stage 4 bladder cancer, a brain tumor and severe financial setbacks to keep *Ste Claire* afloat.

Kevin Mayer, a devoted former Boblo Island employee, is Kattoo's right hand man. Mayer loves the boats for what they represent: a carefree childhood and an escape from reality. He has been haunted by the closing of Boblo Island for over twenty years. Mayer's difficulty in moving on from the past has taken a toll on his home life and emotional well being.

Gloria Davis is an elderly woman with an astute gift for tarot card reading who claims to have a psychic connection with *SS Columbia*. Her fear and reluctance of communicating with *Ste Claire* lies in the vessel's more turbulent and troubled legend. She offers the audience a more ethereal perspective on the past, present and future of the sister ships.

ARTISTIC APPROACH

Opening with a sweeping aerial shot of a dilapidated "Boblo Island" sign on the Detroit River near sunrise, the film casts a languid spell on the audience. *SS Columbia* herself, voiced by Motown legend Martha Reeves, begins her tale with the hushed, wizened authority of a sage:

"This river is my home. I can tell you the names of every current and eddy... My name is Columbia. And I have a sister, Claire."

The film makes a bold statement right in its opening minutes: this is not your usual historical documentary. Not only will our tale expand your horizons with history and sociological insight, it will also stir your emotions through a yarn of quixotic resilience, passion and daring. The character of *Columbia* is based on anecdotes from historians and residents. *Columbia* has grown wise yet weather-beaten over the years, having witnessed generations of families come and go. But she is not without a sense of humor and glowing pride. For example, *Columbia* tells the story of Boblo Island closing down and the Detroit recession as a parallel to the classic tale of Sleeping Beauty:

"When Boblo closed down, Claire and I fell into a deep slumber. It seemed like even the Motor City itself was fast asleep. Shops closed their doors. The fires of the factory furnaces grew cold. The rivers slowed, even down to the fish, their fins frozen in time. And there we were, the oldest steamboats in America slumbering away, waiting for someone to come and wake us up."

We also utilize several animation sequences to enrich the film with a magical feeling that compliments the voiceover and helps draw the viewer into the spell of Boblo Island. Sarah Elizabeth Ray's fight to integrate Boblo Island is depicted using stop motion animation with handcrafted puppets instead of the more conventional presentation of archival footage. This novel, stylistic choice lifts Ray's story from the dusty pages of history books and transforms it into a mythic yet contemporary allegory.



CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST, SARAH E RAY, ON *SS COLUMBIA*
REENACTED USING STOP MOTION ANIMATION



AARON SCHILLINGER

Director/Writer/Producer/Editor

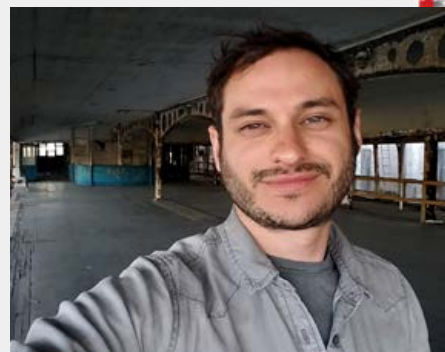
Aaron Schillinger's directorial debut is *Boblo Boats: A Detroit Ferry Tale* (2021). The documentary was selected for FilmShop's Breakthrough Competition at Film Society of Lincoln Center and won the 'Hometown Talent' award at Freep Film Fest. Aaron is a cofounder of the Sarah E. Ray Project, an organization shining a light on the forgotten Detroit civil rights pioneer. His production company, Baby Volcano Films, specializes in non-profit clients. Baby Volcano's LGBTQ+ themed short film *Pepper* (2018) received premieres at the Seattle International Film Festival, Jeonju International Film Festival and Cleveland International Film Festival.

MARTHA REEVES

Voiceover Artist

Grammy winner, Martha Reeves is the recipient of the Dinah Washington Award, a Rhythm n' Blues Foundation Pioneer Award, a Black Woman in Publishing Legends Award, and has been inducted in the Alabama, Soul, Rock and Roll, and Vocal Group halls of fame. 'Dancing in the Street' has been entered into the Library of Congress Registry of Historical Recordings and into the Grammy Hall of Fame. Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, are listed among Rolling Stone magazine's '100 Immortal Artists.' All of the roadways to victory in Martha's career have lead her to the ultimate lights of Hollywood, where she will receive her STAR on the 'Hollywood Walk of Fame 2022' on Hollywood Blvd.

CREATIVE TEAM



MARTHA REEVES & THE VANDALLAS ON BOBLO BOAT
JULY 21, 1970

STEVE BANNATYNE

Producer

Steve is producer and co-founder of Lucky Hat Entertainment. Since 2007 Steve has produced or executive produced over 20 films including *The Russian Five* (2018), Audience Award winner at the 2018 Traverse City Film Festival and one of the top grossing documentaries of 2019. Steve's other productions include *Z for Zachariah* (2015), which premiered at Sundance and stars Margot Robbie, Chiwetel Ejifor and Chris Pine, *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front* (2011), Oscar nominated for Best Documentary in 2012 and *Goodbye Solo* (2008), which was named one of the top films of 2009 by Roger



ISABEL SANDOVAL

Producer

Isabel Sandoval is a New York-based Filipina filmmaker. She has directed three full-length features, including the Filipino-language *Señorita* (2011), which premiered in competition at the Locarno Film Festival and was nominated for Best Picture by the Young Critics Circle of the Philippines. Her second feature film, *Apparition* (2012), a period drama about cloistered Filipino nuns during the Marcos regime, was widely acclaimed in its Philippine theatrical release and won a number of international awards. Her latest film *Lingua Franca* (2019) had its premiere at Venice Film Festival and is currently on Netflix.



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DES COOPER

Co-writer

Desiree Cooper is a 2015 Kresge Artist Fellow and former attorney. For more than a decade, she penned an award-winning column for the Detroit Free Press, during which she received two Pulitzer Prize nominations. Her debut collection of flash fiction, *Know the Mother*, is a 2017 Michigan Notable Book that has won numerous awards, including the 2017 Next Generation Indie Book Award. Cooper's flash fiction has appeared in *The Best Small Fictions 2018*, *Forward: 21st Century Flash Fiction*, *Electric Literature*, *COG Magazine*, and in the forthcoming *Choice Words: Writers on Abortion*.



BEC SLOANE

Builds & Animation

Bec Sloane is a production designer, puppet builder and animator based in New York City. Her work is known for promoting sustainable material, handmade craft and practical effect. Her most recent collaboration with Director/Lighting Designer Taylor Stanton, *The Likes and Dislikes of Marj Bagley* (2018), has played in over 15 festivals including the Austin Film Festival, DC SHORTS, DOCNYC, Hot Springs and the New Orleans Film Festival.

JAYIL PAK

Producer & Co-writer

Jayil Pak has worked as a director and editor of commercials, music videos, and short films in both the US and South Korea. His directorial work has screened and garnered awards in over 100 film festivals around the world. In 2019, Jayil was a recipient of the Independent Film Production Grant by the Korean Film Council and the Merit of Excellence by the Shin Young Kyun Arts & Culture Foundation. His latest project *Georgia* (2020) received the Sonje Award for Best Short Film at the Busan International Film Festival and was nominated for a Blue Dragon Award at the Korean Oscars.



PETE MONRO

Producer

Peter Monro's feature film *Days Together* (2010) was awarded Best Narrative Feature at the Virginia Film Festival, as well as Official Selections at Gotham Screen Int'l Film Festival, Dances With Films, and Int'l FF Bratislava in Slovakia. His original stage play, *The Stand-in*, co-written by Alicia Adams at the Bootleg Theater in Los Angeles was awarded a 9K match grant from the Department of Cultural Affairs in 2016.



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