

CATCHING BULLETS



LOGLINE

A generation ago, Darren sold dope. Behind a gun and a bullet-proof vest, he once made a name for himself in Walnut Park, one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in St. Louis—a city itself haunted by a perennially high murder rate. Now in his 50s and marked with the scars of 13 bullets, Darren buys a condemned church building in his old neighborhood and channels his energy into establishing a youth mentoring center, dedicated to breaking the cycle of violence he once perpetuated. When Preston, the 18-year-old son of Darren’s late friend, is tempted by the allure of street-level drug dealing, Darren pledges to save Preston from winding up in a jail cell or worse.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Catching Bullets follows Darren, a reformed ex-gangster whose life has been punctuated by the trauma of imprisonment and the impact of thirteen bullets. Now, at age 50, Darren buys a condemned church building in Walnut Park, one of the most violent neighborhoods in St. Louis. After decades of looking out only for himself, he finds purpose in establishing a youth mentoring center, dedicated to breaking the very cycle of violence he once perpetuated.

As the pandemic exacerbates existing social issues, Darren’s mission gains new urgency. He mediates an escalating conflict between two young men. One is Preston, an 18-year-old street-level drug dealer and the son of Darren’s late friend. Drawn by the seductive allure of the streets, Preston falls deeper into the street life, facing the risk of ending up in a jail cell or worse.

While Darren renovates his building, he keeps contact with Preston, but his warnings are often met with casual indifference. With the youth mentoring center as the backdrop, *Catching Bullets* confronts the devastating consequences of gun violence and sheds light on the complexities of healing a community grappling with one public health crisis upon another.

PRODUCER’S STATEMENT

I grew up in St. Louis with three brothers. By the age of 16, all four of us had been shot or stabbed. My interest in filmmaking began at age nine. By 13, I fell in love with basketball, but growing up on the west side of St. Louis, violence was a constant part of my upbringing. Escaping the hood at 18, I got my GED and went on to study filmmaking. 45 years later, I feel a need to share my experiences through film.

It’s easy to become numb to the news of violence, shootings, and deaths, but sometimes outrage percolates. It can no longer be suppressed or contained. With this film, I hope to remind audiences how raw and real the losses can feel.

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

St. Louis is a notoriously divided community in terms of race, health, education, wealth, and more, but the news of 13 children killed by bullets in the summer of 2019 struck us all profoundly. In the city, neighborhoods both north and south of the “Delmar Divide” felt the pain of loss. Gun violence in St. Louis was nothing new, but it felt like it was spiraling out of control.

With each report of a new shooting, I found myself wondering who the shooters were. With the entire city on edge, what could be going on in the minds of the often very young people pulling the triggers? As the City of St. Louis adopted new public health-informed approaches to violence prevention, Derrick Phillips and I decided to partner and tell the story in a way that would be deeper and more nuanced than the typical 90-second news package.

We began by partnering with different organizations, offering to create videos for them as a way of helping and learning about their work. While we gained a deep understanding of all our partners, the story of Darren Seals and his Sankofa Unity Center is the one that best represents the vastness of the problem, the complexity of the solutions, and the humanity of the community.

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KEY CREATIVE PERSONNEL



Ben Scholle – Producer, Director

Ben Scholle completed his first feature documentary, *HairKuTT*, in 2005. *HairKuTT* followed a barber struggling to kick his addiction. It was named Best Feature Documentary at the St. Louis Filmmakers Showcase, Best Social Documentary at the New York International Independent Film Festival, and it won the Director's Award at the Hearts and Minds Film Festival. The film went on to be selected for MoMA's Documentary Fortnight and air on BET and the Documentary Channel. It also played theatrically in Boston and screened in schools and universities nationwide.

The documentary, *Silver Spurs*, which Scholle edited and co-produced in 2006, portrayed a year in the lives of the residents at a group home for the mentally ill and developmentally disabled in St. Louis, MO. It aired on Free Speech TV in 2009. Scholle's recently completed third feature film, *The Worst Crime*, covers the story of a capital murder case from 2002, provoking questions about the death penalty and mental illness. The film is distributed by Cineverse. Ben Scholle is a senior professor of cinema arts at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO.



Derrick Phillips – Producer

Derrick Phillips is a filmmaker and activist based in the St. Louis area. He earned a BA in Cinema Arts from Lindenwood University in 2011. He covered the Ferguson protests extensively, beginning in 2014, and he has created relationships with protesters, community organizers, activists, and politicians. In 2020, on the eve of the pandemic, he partnered with

Ben Scholle to document anti-gun violence efforts in the city of St. Louis.



Michael Gualdoni – Co-Producer

With a number of awards for his work, Mike Gualdoni's talents as a visual storyteller and artist have been recognized and proven. His first feature documentary, *Dignity Harbor*, chronicled a year at a homeless camp along the Mississippi riverfront in downtown St. Louis. *Dignity Harbor* was selected to screen at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, aired on

American Reframed, and won festival awards for Best Documentary Cinematography and Best Social Justice Documentary. As a proud producer working for the PBS family for nearly a decade, Mike continues to hunt for the next big story around the country and around the world — whether it be a story of injustice, a story of intrigue, or a story of hope.



Kevin Coleman-Cohen – Associate Producer

Kevin Coleman-Cohen was born and raised in St. Louis, MO. He is a director and producer. Kevin studied under directors Bill Duke (*Sister Act 2*, *Hoodlum*, *Deep Cover*) and Haile Gerima (*Sankofa*) while an undergraduate student at Howard University. Kevin worked with Mr. Duke on *Angel: One More Road To Cross* starring the late Hip Hop artist and actor, DMX and R&B artist, Mary J. Blige. Kevin also interned for Mr. Duke on the documentary, *Partners of the Heart* narrated by legendary actor, Morgan Freeman. After HU, Kevin graduated from the American Film Institute Conservatory earning an M.F.A. in Directing. Kevin strives to tell stories of the unheard and undervalued and bring their stories to a heightened consciousness.

In addition to being a filmmaker, Kevin teaches film and is a homeless youth advocate. Kevin spent many years working in street outreach serving at-risk youth who often engage in sex work to survive on the streets in his hometown of St. Louis, MO and in Los Angeles and Oakland, CA. In 2006, Kevin was the winner of the youth worker of the year by the National Network For Youth for his work with street youth. Next, Kevin is polishing a feature script *Pretty Boy* which is based on his short film of the same name.