



## King & Country's Emmy-Winning Main Titles for 'The Good Lord Bird'

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Bill Traylor, born into slavery in 1853, became an acclaimed artist at the very end of his long life. Homeless at the time, Traylor was telling the story of his life by creating drawings and paintings on the sidewalks of Montgomery, Ala., when a young artist, Charles Shannon, came upon them. Shannon bestowed Traylor with paint, paper and cardboard to allow him to continue his work.

Traylor only created art for three years-between 1939 and 1942-and he only saw one exhibition of his work-in 1940 when he was 86 years old. Yet those short years of work ended up in an exhibition at the Smithsonian.

Los Angeles-based creative agency King & Country based its Emmy-winning main titles for Showtime's *The Good Lord Bird*, based on the National Book Award-winning novell by James McBride, on Traylor's style, said Efrain Montañez, King & Country executive creative director and partner/director. The sequence was awarded the Emmy for outstanding main title design during the Creative Arts Emmys on Sept. 14.

"There was something about his work, which are kind of crude drawings in

silhouettes and bright colors, that made us really feel where he came from-all the joy, pain and emotion of it," said Montañez. "[McBride's] book was so vivid, you could just see this stuff. Seeing Bill Traylor's work-it was just the perfect match for our imaginations to go wild with it."

The Good Lord Bird tells the story of fictional slave Onion (Joshua Caleb Johnson) who becomes a soldier for controversial abolitionist John Brown (Ethan Hawke, who also executive produced the series). Onion eventually participates in the now-famous 1859 raid on the U.S. Armory at Harpers Ferry, unintentionally starting the Civil War.

King & Country was brought in to pitch for the project by Blumhouse Television, which produced the series. The agency had worked with Blumhouse on several other main-title sequences, including USA Network's The Purge.

The agency offered five or six different treatments for the Good Lord Bird main titles, but ultimately landed on the one they preferred from the start, Montañez said.

The sequence started as a series of drawings by then King & Country Art Director Eduardo Guisandes (who has since departed the agency), which were animated by Guisandes, Abigail Fairfax and Josh Lewis. The team stuck with a basic palette of mustard yellow, brick red, black, white, and later, blue, when the Civil War and the armies of the Union and of the Confederacy are represented.

"The yellow and black are kind of the landscape, while black also represents the life of Onion, the main character, in darkness," said Montañez. "There's also a woodpecker that's part of it-the Good Lord Bird is a woodpecker-that's where those colors came through. Red and blue came later-those represent the North and the South."

The music is the spiritual "Come on Children, Let's Sing" by Mahalia Jackson (who recently was the subject of a documentary on Lifetime executive produced by Robin Roberts and starring Orange is the New Black's Danielle Brooks). Initially, Blumhouse and the producers had chosen a track with a marching band vibe but they changed to "Come on Children" about half-way through the process, said Montañez.

In the end, the sequence achieves a sort of perfect balance of modernity and history to introduce viewers to the show's world. And Traylor's art forms the basis of it all.

"My favorite thing about it is that any frame could be a painting," said Montañez.

## CREDITS

Client: Blumhouse Television

Agency: King and Country

Executive Producer: Jerry Torgerson

Creative Director: Efrain Montañez

Art Director: Eduardo Guisandes

Animators: Abigail Fairfax, Josh Lewis, Eduardo Guisandes

Producer: Ryan Lowrie

Title Theme: "Come on Children, Let's Sing" by Mahalia Jackson

Client: Blumhouse

EP/Creative Director: Padraig McKinley

EP: Olga Hamlet

Producers: Alex Espinoza, Adan Orozco