



**What inspired you to make the film “Beyond the Thunder”?**

Originally, it was seeing an African-American female (singer/songwriter, Cherokee) brandishing a Gibson SG playing ‘Back in Black’ in a GAP commercial years ago on TV. For the first time ever, after being a life-long AC/DC fan, I knew that this band had finally infiltrated our culture. It never seemed like AC/DC ever got their due, and now, here was a GAP commercial utilizing AC/DC. I couldn’t believe it, but I loved it. I began writing a book about AC/DC fans all over the world and how they had all been influenced by this band. Because of my demanding career as an advertising Creative Director, the book fell by the wayside.

Then a couple of years ago, I was in Chicago with Gregg Ferguson (cinematographer for ‘Beyond the Thunder’) filming a piece for the House of Blues. Just by chance, Brian Johnson & Cliff Williams were performing with Classic Rock Cares the night before (which I missed because our flight was cancelled) however, we were all staying at the Hotel Sax adjacent to the House of Blues. I eventually ran into both Brian & Cliff in the elevator, along with Joe Lynn Turner and Mark Hitt, and basically said thank you to them for inspiring me throughout my life with their music. I was then invited for a drink at the Crimson Lounge downstairs that night to talk with heroes, Brian & Cliff. It just goes to prove how down-to-Earth and approachable these guys really are. After a quick Jack on the rocks, I handed them a box set of Chicago Blues for their road trip and headed back to work filming, but never forgot how generous they were.

The next day, Gregg and I were sitting in a bar sketching out the idea of making a documentary about AC/DC on a cocktail napkin. It was that immediate. I think I was just so energized by the notion of giving back to AC/DC what they have given to us for over the past 35 years.

Our initial idea was to do a straight up documentary that followed AC/DC in the recording studio, on tour, at home, etc. but it was just way too invasive. As a fan, even I knew that it was, but still wrote up a business proposal and gave it a shot. Management said that they liked the idea, but maybe they'd explore it at another time. Which is code for, 'probably not'. Six months later, I went back to my original book idea of how AC/DC fans with wide socioeconomic backgrounds from around the globe were influenced by this single band, and it just stuck. So we shifted the film idea 90 degrees and began shooting once 'Black Ice' was ramping up. Our goal was to film enough material to present this original idea to management.

**Getting to interview and meet so many people must have been an amazing experience, what have been the highlights for you and, if any, the low points or set-backs? What hurdles have you had to overcome to get where the film has gone from being an idea, a concept, to becoming a reality?**

We originally were inspired by films like Joe Berlinger's 'Some Kind of Monster' and Sam Dunn's 'Metal: A Headbanger's Journey' because they were really smart films in a genre that was near and dear to our hearts. We actually called Sam in Toronto to get advice before we set out. He was great. Sam taught us the 'snowball affect' of once you get one celeb in your film, two more will join, then three, and so on. But he was concerned about us taking on such a huge subject matter on our first film out. Boy was he ever right. Whereas Sam targeted a subject matter, we were targeting the ultimate band.

We then began targeting cities around AC/DC's major shows in the U.S.: Wilkes Barre, New York City, Boston, Los Angeles, Nashville, Charlotte, etc., and caught up with as many well known celebs in different entertainment fields or individuals with amazing stories. We didn't want this to be another Fan Club, but instead a look at what people did with their careers, driven by AC/DC. I think it works really well because it keeps the show grounded with a completely positive spin. Nobody wants to see how many colored vinyl Japanese imports one owns, but to see a stockbroker on Wall Street or a minister preach the ways of AC/DC...now that's something I gotta see.

The highlights of making this film completely outweigh the low points 10 to 1. We've interviewed such a diverse group of people all over the country, it's really been a dream come to fruition. From listening to the unreleased AC/DC track with Dweezil Zappa in the same studio that his father Frank Zappa built, to drinking Carolina moonshine with the boys from Hayseed Dixie to witnessing Scott Ian's (Anthrax) impeccable tattoos of the Young brothers on each bicep up close and personal...the list really goes on and on. The kicker is just how diverse the film really has become. There's something in there for everyone: from The Wiggles to Major League future Hall of Fame pitcher, Trevor Hoffman and VH1 host Eddie Trunk to military war hero / black hawk down pilot, Michael Durant. There's lots of surprises, including some blues greats, who in turn, influenced even AC/DC.

The real setback has been being granted that one meeting with management and/or the band to present this unique concept. We have tried so hard to go through all appropriate channels to make this film something true and honest and something that the band would really be proud of. The fans have shown amazing support around the globe as well. In the meantime, Gregg and I have been adding to the film's premise as time goes by. We let all participants know that AC/DC has not yet approved or endorsed this film in anyway. Most people still want to be a part of the film because they really want to express gratitude of what AC/DC means to them. Even those who refrain from signing a waiver, still go on camera hoping that AC/DC will eventually partner with this concept. And although we haven't received a response from AC/DC yet, we are in touch with management regularly. The AC/DC brand is so powerful that there's a good reason why they are so heavily guarded. We can't blame them, really. We just want one chance to pitch this idea to AC/DC without this massive wall thinking that we are capitalizing on the band.

It's been a year now since we began filming and the reviews of our promo have been really exceptional. We're grateful for that. Everyone from VH1 and A&E to Columbia and Sony Pictures Classic have been intrigued. Even inside the walls of AC/DC's management has called our promo "wonderful", so we're just trying to keep our spirits alive. Because Gregg and I essentially took a sabbatical from our jobs and depart from our young families to self-fund this film, we are completely running on fumes at this point. It certainly does take Big Balls to do this, that's for sure.

**I am sure you get asked this a lot, but if there is one song that inspires an emotion, a feeling or makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck when you hear it, what is it?**

For me, the closet thing to Stephen King on vinyl has always been 'Night Prowler'. It is such a powerful song that it gets me every time since I first heard it when I was 10 years old. Still my favorite Bon Scott track to date and chilling as it was his last recording with the band. I think they tried to record that song nine different times. They definitely got the last one right. I'm also a big fan of the entire 'For Those About To Rock' LP during Brian's years. I'd never heard a production that large before in my life. Every song from the title track to 'Spellbound' (my second AC/DC favorite) is a perfect combination of blues and the heaviest rock ever made. Best unsung AC/DC tracks: 'Cold Hearted Man' and 'Big Gun' (honorable mentions).

**The film has already won a Telly Award. Are you anticipating winning any more major awards for the documentary?**

Awards are always nice. But like AC/DC, we don't seek them out. We just entered the Telly's to see if we had something viable here and it ended up winning their highest honor in the documentary categories. And that was just for the promo. The film's not even finished yet. It's an advertising industry award that we've won previously for a TV spots utilizing the Who's "I Can See For Miles" for OSRAM SYLVANIA as well as for a few Microsoft documentaries, but to win for a brand and a band that we truly love, is award enough.

Once this film gets enough steam, we'd love to enter film festivals. It's the best way to get this concept out to the masses, really. The editor of Classic Rock Magazine (the best in the business) recently got in touch to show support for this film and offered to potentially show this at their awards show in the Fall. We're pretty excited about the recent attention, but we really only want to play ball with AC/DC's blessing. We're not sure if anyone of the band members has seen our promo yet, and although we know that they are extremely busy, that means the most to us right now.

**The rescue of a U.S. serviceman from a Somali prison evokes very strong emotions, do you think the band is aware of the impact their music has had on such a wide variety of life-changing experiences?**

Absolutely. Even though they are the most humble, self deprecating five guys you'll ever meet in rock and roll, I think they are well aware of how powerful this thing called AC/DC is. In fact, I think even they're scared of it. And they created that brand from sheer determination and relentless honesty through their music. We've heard this one word time and time again during our travels, and that word is 'religion'. Never thought of it like that before, but it most certainly is like a religion, even though they would hate that phrase. Everyone from Pat Boone to Brent Hinds of Mastodon have used that word when describing AC/DC. All hail.

I know that Brian is very good friends with Michael Durant, who graciously told his story to us at his home and showcased just how AC/DC transcends music in every aspect of life. That story is really the lynchpin to just how dramatic this concept has become. He was a terrific gentleman and a true hero. His book 'In the Company of Heroes' is inspiring.

**What is beyond "Beyond the Thunder" for you? Are you going to be working on any future projects related to AC/DC?**

Well, this film is a passion project for Gregg and I. We never wanted to jump on the AC/DC gravy train, we just wanted to do what was in our hearts. So we decided the best way to do fulfill a dream was to wake up and go straight to work. Just do it, essentially. We never wanted to break the rules (as AC/DC would say) but we knew that if we ever wanted to break into this avenue of filmmaking, that we'd have to be unconventional. Besides getting that one meeting with AC/DC, the ultimate rock and roll dream would be to team up with legendary AC/DC producer, Rocky Oldham, who's given us 'Donington', 'No Bull' and 'Stiff Upper Lip' — all fantastic live concerts, and combine new live 'Black Ice' footage with our unique story line and intertwine the two. Rocky has seen the promo and said that it is very good. Who knows what will happen, but we're certainly hoping for the best. We're really most grateful to our families for putting up with this huge risk we've taken.

If this film project does pan out, we'd love nothing more than to explore filming further within the music industry. I think that for a crew that consists of only two guys, we've really demonstrated economy of scale extremely well. Being a great fan of music and being from the advertising/film industry for the past twenty years is a great combination that we'd love to continue on the Highway to Hell with.