

CAJUN HELL— LEGACY OF A ROCKER

STORY BY GARY MICHAEL SMITH,
SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT EDITOR
PHOTOS BY DANIEL CASTRO

Cajun Hell is a documentary film about Criss Bennett, a young musician from Ville Platte, Louisiana, who decided to start a punk band in 1993. The film chronicles this struggling and influential musician's refusal to leave Louisiana's Cajun Country for a better shot at success in a more populated and musically open-minded area of the country, instead opting to bring his "drunk rock" music to bars, house parties, music halls and clubs across the South.

Cajun Hell illustrates the contrasts between the more traditional Cajun, French, swamp pop, and zydeco music with punk and rock 'n' roll. The film profiles the difficulties of being a musician from a small Cajun town, and also showcases Bennett's multiple talents in more than 10 different bands from 1989 until his untimely death in 2007.

Criss "Drunk" Bennett was a multi-talented musician who dedicated his life to his art. For nearly 20 years he played drums, guitar and bass, and sang and wrote songs for bands whose styles ranged from punk, metal and hard rock to reggae, country, Southern rock and acoustic. Bennett began playing drums in hard rock and metal bands such as Oblivion and Kings Legion in the small Cajun town of Ville Platte in the late 1980s. Wanting to try something different, he formed a punk band in 1993 called Mystic Fix—a group that played constantly for the next eight years, making a name for themselves in Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

Bennett then formed Southern Discomfort, a band with more of a Southern rock sound, and while this group lasted less than a year, they drew large crowds wherever they played. (He also recorded a solo acoustic album, *Taurus Attraction*, around this time.) In 2002, Bennett formed the LA Phantoms, changing his sound yet again to a more classic rock feel. The Phantoms played extensively at places like the Hard Rock Café in New Orleans and the South by Southwest music festival in Austin.

The LA Phantoms disbanded in 2005, and Bennett returned to Ville Platte and started playing in Label 13 with the original 1993 lineup of Mystic Fix, but this time restructuring the music core to hard rock and metal. Ever the hardcore musician and songwriter, he also was playing with the metal band



Manafold at the same time. In 2006, Bennett decided to officially restart Mystic Fix, and once again the band became his focus.

At the height of this resurgence into his hometown music scene, Bennett passed away in his sleep on June 11, 2007, at the age of 33. Mystic Fix had been preparing to record a new album and to tour extensively—plans that ended with the death of the band's singer and primary songwriter.

After Bennett's death, friends and fans thought something should be done

continued on page 34

