

CAJUN HELL— LEGACY OF A ROCKER

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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

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to keep his legacy alive. Eric Dunn, principal for the company Miscellaneous Productions, became interested in producing a feature-length documentary about Bennett and his bands. According to Dunn, who is producing and directing *Cajun Hell*, pre-production started in the summer of 2009, and shooting began last November.

With shooting continuing today, this film exposes the relatively unknown Cajun culture of Southwest Louisiana to audiences around the country, as well as the world. It also portrays punk and other underground music culture to the people of Louisiana. Dunn explains, "Many may not know that between 1993 and 2007, Mystic Fix was the most loved and most hated band in Louisiana."

Dunn was enamored with the Bennett legacy and wants to share the experience.

"While bands from New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, and the District of Columbia have been extensively documented in films," he explains, "we feel there is a real lack of information on underground/non-traditional music from Louisiana."

Previously, much of the history only existed as word-of-mouth stories, so as far as this filmmaker knows, he is shooting the first feature-length documentary about punk music in Louisiana. And the work is labor-intensive. "We have already archived many hours of footage and photos, flyers, and other artwork so that it is preserved," Dunn adds.

The idea for the film originally was conceived in 2007 after Bennett passed away. Dunn explains, "While traveling in Louisiana in 2009, we learned that there was a real interest in a documentary about Mystic Fix. We began developing the idea, making contacts and finding out what material was available." Pre-production for the film began in Louisiana in June 2009, and continued from July to October in San Francisco.

Dunn currently is working diligently to complete the film.

"Production began in November 2009, and we shot for two months in Louisiana and Texas, gathering more than one hundred hours of footage and archiving thousands of photos, flyers, and artwork." He adds, "We collected more than 40 interviews, including some with 12 former members of Mystic Fix, as well as many close friends and family and members of other bands like Acid Bath, the Hates, Frigg a Go Go, Santeria, LA Phantoms, Stabb Sassy, and the Pickups. We traveled between New Orleans, Louisiana, and Dallas, Texas, tracking down all kinds of people along the way."

Post-production began in Mexico City in February 2010, and four months were spent full-time logging footage and scanned material, editing, and assembling trailers.

"We are missing a little bit of footage which we need to finish the film," Dunn adds, "and are currently raising funds to finish shooting in Louisiana in June and July 2010. We are expecting to complete the film at the end of this year, and submit to film festivals for 2011."

MISCELLANEOUS PRODUCTIONS IS RAISING COMPLETION FUNDS ONLINE AT WWW.KICKSTARTER.COM. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON *CAJUN HELL*, VISIT WWW.CAJUNHELL.COM, OR CONTACT MISCELLANEOUS PRODUCTIONS AT MAIL@CAJUNHELL.COM OR 510-472-3368.

