

Bret's Interview Questions for Edward Anderson Human Skab: CIMM Fest 2013

Please introduce yourself. Who are you and what is your role in the band and in the film:

My name is Bret Woods. I am a "genre-bending" ethnomusicologist and filmmaker. I'm originally from Utica, NY, and am currently working as Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at Troy University. As a Skab, my role has been drummer/electronic programmer/arranger since the 2009 reunion tour.

The Theme of "Unreliable Narrations" has to do with the psychic tension between the presenter and the presentee--the blurry lines reaching between creation and representation, reality and myth. How do you feel this film relates to the concept?

I think this film, and any film really, relates to the notion of unreliable narrative for two main reasons. First, any narrative--especially one with a healthy amount of drama--is a fiction of a sort, regardless of it being "fiction" or "non-fiction" proper. There is a necessary tension in *Human Skab's* story, and at many points Travis's narrative seems outrageous and unbelievable. We captured one interview with Travis, which ultimately made its way toward the end of the film, where he says, "I'm not crazy... my adrenaline may kick in when I hear the sound of bullets, or metal hitting metal, but I'm not delusional." For me, this is our film's recognition of the unreliable narrative. Living with PTSD is a reality faced by many veterans in our country, and we tried to capture that image within the core of our story about the reunion of the band.

Second, the valence of a person's own life affects how he or she receives the subject of the film. The "truth" or reality within the scope of the film space depends on that necessary context. To some, Travis's music may seem too violent or difficult to process. Uncle Byron mentioned in an interview, "It will hurt you to think about war... and violence. But, it provides a catalyst for healing, to pay attention to those wounds... and those wounds in society today need attention." Our film attempts to exist in the paranoid space of post-war reclamation and healing through music, and in the process the audience is allowed to exist in that space as well, and hopefully reflect on what it might mean to them.

Do you consider this film a part of the official Human Skab canon?

I'm not sure if there is an "official Human Skab canon" beyond the old 1980s recordings and whatever Travis managed to continue to record over the years, but if there were such a thing I would have to say yes, our film is definitely a part of it. More than being a story about other Human Skab work, the documentary is a work in and of itself, completely true to the Human Skab DIY philosophy.

Having been intimately involved with Human Skab for so long, was there a defining event that instigated the start of the film?

I have only been a Skab since 2009 myself (though I have been a fan for longer). Frank and Travis were the original Skabs. But I definitely know the defining moment that started the film. A record company named Family Vineyard Records contacted Travis because they wanted to release the 1986 recordings on CD through their label. When Travis called Frank, there was talk of a reunion tour. Frank called me on the phone and gave me the update, and I told him I was on board. From there, Frank and I began collecting themes from the old recordings and putting together an updated set list for the tour.

We wanted to bring the video camera with us to capture our story, envisioning the project at first as sort of another "This Is Spinal Tap" moment, but the more we filmed Travis and the tour, the more we realized there was a deeper story here about being a war veteran and achieving healing through music. I think when we reflected on all of our footage and began to edit our story was when we finally realized we had something incredible.

How long did filming last?

Initial filming lasted a short time throughout December 2009, and then continued in March 2010 when Travis recruited his cousin (our additional cameraman) Wilkerson to film the continuation tour. We also filmed Travis's visit to Florida where he and I recorded the tracks for the upcoming Skab release *Still Thirsty*, as well as the footage that Frank and I shot when we tracked Travis down on the Navajo reservation. Overall filming was a brief moment compared to the time investment of editing.

Were there any key moments you missed but wished you had captured?

This is a difficult question. There are so many of these moments, but I will do my best to pick just one. When we tracked Travis down on the Navajo reservation, we all went on a hike--a seventeen mile hike--along the mountains on the res. The trip ended at a local's house, complete with traditional outdoor kitchen. We sat around and exchanged stories, shared food, and relaxed from the hike. Later that night we camped out under the stars and told the local children ghost stories around a campfire. The next day we did film a bit of the mutton busting (which we incorporated into a "Screamin' Demon" segment in the film), but I wish we could have captured the hike and the campsite. It would have been some amazing footage.

Being both the filmmakers and film subjects can lead to some moral dilemmas. There are scenes show you having unflattering breakdowns - was there an impulse to cleanse your representations during the editing process? Or showcase your side of an argument?

Are there unflattering breakdowns? None come to mind... There are perhaps very real moments that happen in the film during the reunion tour, and we wanted very much to represent them honestly, as we recalled them. We definitely did not edit scenes in favor of a specific flattering or exaggerated representation. I do remember spending quite a long time working with Frank on the segment we called "Skit Drama," which features a rather lengthy segment of Travis dancing around with swords wearing a peace raven mask. Our concerns were that no matter what we did with the footage, it seemed out of place and almost crazy for Travis to be dancing and insisting on the group dancing during the reunion tour. It took an incredibly long time to find the best setting for that scene and it ultimately required a bit more editing than I think I wanted. Our final result was still true to the experience, though, so I am happy with it. But, no, we really didn't showcase our side of any one particular argument. If anything, we did our best to let Travis tell his story.

Did you feel there was a definite 'ending?' How did you decide to stop when you did?

I think we stopped where we did because we felt like the story had been adequately told. I also would not say that there is a definite ending, which is why we decided to feature a new Human Skab song in the ending credits as a way to close the film and suggest that Human Skab marches on.

Can you add an epilogue to the film?

My epilogue was written into the film. As I mentioned above, though, there is no ending to this story. We just hope people enjoy the film.