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## William Gazecki

By Jake Lovell & Maureen Herzog

If, as a teen, William Gazecki hadn't been so naive about his chances for getting a job in sound mixing, the Academy Award nominated documentary likely wouldn't be where he is today: producing and directing multiple projects, the most recent being *A Thousand Faces: The History of the Screen Actors Guild* for the SAG Foundation.

"This is the first time that I've worked on more than one thing at a time," Gazecki says. "Usually, it is work, work, work ... until the movie is done. Then, oh my god I am out of work ... where is that phone number of those people who called a month ago?"

Over the years as his career evolved from sound mixer to producer-director, Gazecki has learned to apportion his time among various projects and delegate more. In the past year, he has been working on three docs: *Future by Design* on the life and vision of Jacques Fresco, *Energy from the Vacuum* on the work of Lt. Col Tom Bearden, and the SAG history project. Recently, he started preproduction on a documentary about Helen Thomas.

After a successful career as a sound engineer in narrative film and television (five Emmy nominations and a 1987 win for *St. Elsewhere* while with Glen Glen Sound), William turned his talents to documentary film. His first effort, *Waco: The Rules of Engagement* (1997) received an Oscar nomination and an International Documentary Association Feature Award. Three other feature length docs followed: *Reckless Indifference* (2000), *Crop Circles: Quest for Truth* (2002), *Invisible Ballots* (2004).

In June 2005, *Reckless Indifference* won the Ted Turner award for Individual Journalism at the LA Grassroots Cinema Film Festival, and last October it screened at the Eureka Film Festival in New York.

*Reckless* profiles the case of four teens who were convicted of murder and sentenced for life without the possibility of parole.

"What happens when you have a 15-year old, and he has been imprisoned for 35 years?" asks Gazecki. "Is that humane? Does that give rehabilitation? Is that justice?"

The project has taken its own unique path. "When we did the festivals in 2000, we didn't get much feedback," Gazecki explains. "It won the Phoenix award at the Boston Film festival (2000), and it routinely shows on STARZ true stories. [It's] a good piece of filmmaking, and the style in which it was made is now popular."

Gazecki recently began editing the SAG project. Unraveling the history of the Screen Actors Guild is a difficult task, and there have



Gazecki shooting with dual cameras

been several failed attempts to portray its 75-year history that attest to the fact.

According to Gazecki, the generally accepted approach for a history subject is to assemble all the material, go through it, and identify themes for further development. He posits that the people who previously attempted to document SAG's history were using this method, and he believes the problem was that "it was like holding spaghetti in your hands. The source material is complex, and so vast, and multidimensional. It's the history of acting, the movie biz, labor and organized labor."

He concluded that another approach was in order.

"I didn't read any of the material. Rather than diving in, I stayed away from it. There are too many stars, too many movies, too many stories. You had too much of a good thing. I hired somebody to read the material and give me an independent analysis of what they had read." Based on the report, Gazecki created a 60-70 page treatment he describes as a "beat by beat version of the story from 1919 to present, and into the future." Thus far, he reports that the approach has worked well.

At the core of Gazecki's work are his self-proclaimed interests — social change, science and technology, and energy — and they are reflected in his projects.

"Science is really a form of logic that we collectively trust," he explains. "If something is supported by science, you can have a very convincing argument. *Waco* had a lot of science in it. The reason that we were able to assert with tremendous conviction that automatic weapons were fired at the back of the building was because of science. The scientist who designed the equipment was able to unequivocally and categorically say that these images were of auto-





matic weapons being fired... period.

"*Crop Circles* is about the scientific paranormal — the examination of the phenomenon as studied by scientists, not the media. *Future by Design* is about the life works of Jacque Fresco and his vision of a future world, where man and science, and the earth live in harmony."

Lt. Col. Tom Bearden, the subject of *Energy from the Vacuum* (currently on hold), theorizes that electricity can be extracted from the vacuum in space. "Bearden is an eccentric genius, a student of Tesla," says Gazecki. "Luckily, he's a natural communicator, [but] the market for this is a little more sophisticated than the Discovery Channel."

As a teen, William's primary interest was music, and his curiosity about how records were made led him to try sound mixing as a high school student in the late sixties in San Francisco. "Music was a big part of the youth culture," he recalls. "A friend had a primitive recording studio in his garage, a two-track. Everything went from one tape recorder to another."

Gazecki knew that he wanted to work in sound. However, he had no idea that the chances of getting a job in the field were stacked against him. "I went to apply for a sound job just like I would a bag boy job at a grocery store. At the first studio [where] I applied, this lady at the front desk opened a drawer, showed me a stack of resumes about two inches high, and said 'Well you're behind all these other people.' I realized then how competitive it was."

Though disappointed in his first attempts, he persisted, landing a sound technician job in Los Angeles, and eventually ended up working with music producer Paul Rothchild. "Paul took me under his wing and encouraged me to go beyond being just a tech — to think about applying my skills and talent in production to be a record producer. Paul had a long-standing relationship with Electra records. He had produced The Doors, and at the time was producing sound for a musical called *The Rose*, with Bette Midler. He introduced me to the whole notion of capturing 'the moment,' and what you had to do to facilitate the creation of a moment."

The approach Rothchild taught him involved a deliberate effort to capture the moment. "It's not like, 'I'll just cross my fingers and hope to get the moment on tape,'" Gazecki says. "It's giving musicians direction, and more direction, until they have attempted all possible ways, [including] the best way. These things are not by accident, or spontaneous good strokes of luck, but hard work. Then, you go back and methodically and thoroughly dissect the performance, [taking] the best pieces and stir them all together in the editing process. It's very similar to making a film, and I didn't realize this until I started making films."

"Paul also taught me a lot about how to work with multiple performances at the same time, and string them together into an

edited whole. That's how records were made. Paul was seamless in all of this."

Rothchild also introduced Gazecki to the idea of 'the recognition of greatness.' "Paul played the track that he had selected as the title track for *The Rose*, and said, 'Twenty years from now they'll be playing this on the radio.' He was right."

With the arrival of punk and new wave in the 1980's, Gazecki "couldn't find the inner motivation to record this kind of music," and his career segued into sound editing for TV and film. He went to work at Glen Glen Sound, one of the largest TV sound post production companies. New to "the biz," he began studying all facets of the industry, taking courses at UCLA, USC, and AFI.

"I became really fascinated with story structure and took every class I could find. I decided that if I got the components of the story properly organized, [there was] a much better chance of creating a finished product."

In the early 90s, his involvement with a PBS documentary about an FDA proposal to regulate vitamins provided what he describes as "a very clear moment for me." The airing of the piece was influential in defeating the proposal, says Gazecki. "It was apparent that one can make a difference if you are smart about it, and if you know how to access the eyes and ears of the public."

How does he now become involved with projects? "Most of the time they find me, and the deals that happen are deals that happen quickly."

In the case of *Waco*, producer Michael McNulty asked him to view the infrared videotape of the FBI's assault. "He came over to my studio," Gazecki remembers. "I was expecting the usual pitch... by this time I was used to getting pitched by people who have ideas, dreams and solutions. I remembered *Waco* like everyone does. I remembered the tanks going into the building and the fire. At the time, to me it was a media event, not a historical event. So, I knew of it but didn't know everything about it."

"But, to see this black and white image of a tank going back and forth into this huge building demolishing it, and knowing that it was out of view of the media, that the public never knew about it... it was very eerie, very morbid and scary, and it was fascinating as well. Within a week we were in business. We had the money and a camera, and were ready to go. It was a project that came together just like that — in six days the whole thing fell together."

Gazecki reminisces about his illusions of shooting *Waco*.

"The first day on the job we were in Washington (1995) at the congressional hearing on [the events at] *Waco*. We thought we were going to go to Washington to shoot most of the movie, and we'd meet up with Mr. FBI agent and Mr. ATF and Mr. Senator and Congressman. They'd happily sit down and tell us everything they knew. We didn't get anybody. We had no clout, no affiliation. We





were just nobodies — a couple of guys from the sticks. But that really toughened us because we realized that we were up against a much bigger machine than we had any idea about. There was deception and cover up, and there were all kinds of agendas going on besides what was just and right. We had to take two steps back and punt at that point. We had to figure a way out how we were going to tell the story and who would talk to us. It was a fascinating and wonderful period of work and dedication."

Waco took a year and a half to complete. It premiered at Sundance in 1997, won the IDA award the same year, and in 1998, garnered an Oscar nomination.

Gazecki attended the Academy Awards ceremony but didn't

win, and the next day went to work as usual. There wasn't a flood of notoriety following the awards, but about a year later, Gazecki's business partner, Christina Schule, pointed out to him how *Waco* had begun to open doors for them.

"I learned to be respectful of the accomplishment," says William Gazecki. "I started to look at myself as a documentarian, and not as a filmmaker. I liked it very much."

Keep up with Gazecki at [www.williamgazecki.com](http://www.williamgazecki.com)

Originally from England and trained in theater arts, Jake Lovell is now a freelance writer based in Houston. Contact her via [www.jacquinelovell.biz](http://www.jacquinelovell.biz)

## SUCCESS TEACHES: Picturehouse's Bob Berney —A Life in Film

By Dave Karger

Although Bob Berney isn't a household name, his independent film-making career has been an interesting and head-banging ride. After the release of his first feature, *Life After Death*, he found himself in a financial bind, and he had to come up with a way to pay the bills.

Berney's first film, *Life After Death*, was a comedy about a man who is killed and then comes back to life. It was a success, but it was also a financial disaster. Berney had to come up with a way to pay the bills, and he decided to make a second film, *Life After Death 2*.

Berney's second film, *Life After Death 2*, was a comedy about a man who is killed and then comes back to life. It was a success, but it was also a financial disaster. Berney had to come up with a way to pay the bills, and he decided to make a third film, *Life After Death 3*.

Berney's third film, *Life After Death 3*, was a comedy about a man who is killed and then comes back to life. It was a success, but it was also a financial disaster. Berney had to come up with a way to pay the bills, and he decided to make a fourth film, *Life After Death 4*.

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Berney's fourth film, *Life After Death 4*, was a comedy about a man who is killed and then comes back to life. It was a success, but it was also a financial disaster. Berney had to come up with a way to pay the bills, and he decided to make a fifth film, *Life After Death 5*.

Berney's fifth film, *Life After Death 5*, was a comedy about a man who is killed and then comes back to life. It was a success, but it was also a financial disaster. Berney had to come up with a way to pay the bills, and he decided to make a sixth film, *Life After Death 6*.



Berney's first film

"I learned to be respectful of the accomplishment," says William Gazecki. "I started to look at myself as a documentarian, and not as a filmmaker. I liked it very much."

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