



BIG STAR: NOTHING CAN HURT ME

Directed by Drew DeNicola

Executive Producers

John Fry

Gill Holland

Producers

Danielle McCarthy

Olivia Mori

www.bigstarstory.com

Sneak Preview screening March 15 at 7pm at the Paramount Theatre in Austin,

TX: http://schedule.sxsw.com/2012/events/event_FS12365

Press Contact:

Danielle McCarthy

Ph: 917-865-0148

missdinalane@gmail.com

info@bigstarstory.com

Log line:

Big Star: Nothing Can Hurt Me is a feature-length documentary film about the dismal commercial failure, subsequent massive critical acclaim, and enduring legacy of pop music's greatest cult phenomenon, Big Star.

Synopsis:

BIG STAR: NOTHING CAN HURT ME is a feature-length documentary about legendary Memphis band Big Star. While mainstream success eluded them, Big Star's three albums have become critically lauded touchstones of the rock music canon. A seminal band in the history of alternative music, Big Star has been cited as an influence by artists including REM, The Replacements, Belle & Sebastian, Elliot Smith and Flaming Lips, to name just a few. With never-before-seen footage and photos of the band, in-depth interviews and a rousing musical tribute by the bands they inspired, **BIG STAR: NOTHING CAN HURT ME** is a story of artistic and musical salvation.

About the Film:

Among many ardent music fans and critics the band, Big Star, is widely regarded as one of the greatest bands in rock history. Never experiencing popular success in their time; even today their greatest notoriety is from their song, "In the Street" the title theme for the Fox sitcom, *That 70s Show*. But despite their unique distinction of being famous for not being famous, today Big Star's influence can be heard in the music of artists as diverse as R.E.M., The Replacements, Wilco, Beck, Jeff Buckley and Elliot Smith, just to name a few.

BIG STAR: NOTHING CAN HURT ME traces the origins and history of the legendary band from the late sixties with lead singer Alex Chilton sky-rocketing to stardom at the age of sixteen with The Box Tops and their #1 hit, "The Letter" to the serendipitous meeting of Chilton and local Memphis singer-songwriter-guitarist, Chris Bell; through the tumultuous recording of the group's three landmark albums, *#1 Record*, *Radio City* and *Third/Sister Lovers* (Ardent Records); culminating with their implosion due to failed record sales, personal breakdowns and the tragic death of Chris Bell in 1978.

This film is a unique portrait of an incredibly talented group of musicians who crafted three albums now considered pop masterpieces (all of which charted on *Rolling Stone's* Top 500 albums of all time). The group strived for stardom but fell victim to the corporate stranglehold of the major record labels and radio stations who dominated the music business at that time. **BIG STAR: NOTHING CAN HURT ME** is seen as a cautionary tale of the growing corporatization in pop music in the 70's as great American independent labels like Memphis-based STAX (Ardent's distributor), were swallowed whole or marginalized by the music conglomerates. Artists whose musical vision and style were not deemed worthy of radio play were doomed to obscurity until many were discovered by a new breed of musical upstarts who arose from places like CBGB's in New York and in college towns throughout America. Eventually aligning under the term "Punk Rock," the movement by the late 1970's sought to topple corporate control over the music industry and remind the world what rock and roll is all about. It was the leaders of this movement—bands such as REM, The dB's, The Replacements--and the passion of many frustrated music writers at such publications as *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*, and *Musician Magazine* who brought about Big Star's resurrection and eventually defined the term "alternative music," articulating a genre lying outside of the mainstream and brimming with the vitality and soul on which rock and roll was built.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS:

DREW DENICOLA - Director / Producer / Editor / DP

Drew DeNicola is producer/director of his ongoing documentary project *Natural Soul Brother: The Original Black Radio DJs*, a finalist at the IFP Market 2007. He is currently an editor/producer for VICE/VBS.tv in New York.

DANIELLE MCCARTHY - Producer

Danielle McCarthy is currently employed as Manager of Publicity and Marketing at Magnolia Pictures. She has handled publicity and promotion for independent film hits like James Marsh's *Man On Wire* (winner of the 2008 Academy Award for Best Documentary), *Let the Right One In*, *I Am Love*, *Food, Inc.* and Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*.

OLIVIA MORI - Producer

Olivia Mori has been working in the film industry for the past eight years as a costume designer and stylist. After being involved with music-related productions like Ang Lee's *Taking Woodstock* and Darnell Martin's *Cadillac Records*, Olivia is making the leap to documentary story-telling. She has a BA from the Rhode Island School of Design in Experimental Film. Olivia currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

JOHN FRY - Executive Producer / Music Supervisor

John Fry started Ardent Studios in his grandmother's sewing room when he was just a teenager and over forty years later continues to own and operate the studio in Memphis, TN. Ardent has recorded a wide-range of legendary and acclaimed artists including Big Star, Led Zeppelin, Isaac Hayes, The Staple Singers, ZZ Top, The White Stripes, Bob Dylan, Cat Power, The Replacements and R.E.M. just to name a few. John Fry came on board on the Big Star Story as Music Supervisor / Executive Producer in 2007 and has been a crucial and enthusiastic advocate for the film and the legacy of Big Star.

GILL HOLLAND - Executive Producer

Gill Holland was nominated for Spirit Award Producer of the Year 1998. He has worked on more than 50 features (including award-winners *Spring Forward*, *Bobby G. Can't Swim* and *Dear Jesse*). Gill produced Morgan Freeman's triple Sundance-winning *Hurricane Streets* and Tim Kirkman's Sundance fave *Loggerheads*, and executive produced Ali Selim's Spirit Award-winner *Sweet Land*.

AMY J. BOYD - Associate Producer

Amy J. Boyd is an independent producer and archive researcher based in Brooklyn, NY. She is a member of the Association of Movie Image Archivists and the International Documentary Association. She has contributed research to numerous feature documentary and television projects including the upcoming *Trials of Muhammad Ali* and *Mafia's Greatest Hits*.

CHRISTOPHER BRANCA – Editor

Christopher Branca is an editor living in Brooklyn, New York. He edited the documentary *Page One: Inside the New York Times* directed by Andrew Rossi and most recently the documentary *Cartoon College* directed by Tara Wray & Josh Melrod which will premiere at Palm Springs International Film Festival 2012. He is also an editing instructor at The Edit Center in New York City.

MEGHAN SIMS – ASSISTANT EDITOR

Meghan Sims has experience working on documentary films, broadcast television series, music videos and various web-based forms. She lives in New York.

SELECTED PRESS:

ROLLING STONE – May 17, 2010

The Raconteurs' Brendan Benson and R.E.M.'s Mike Mills joined the surviving members of power-pop pioneers Big Star to pay tribute to the late Alex Chilton Saturday at Memphis' Levitt Shell, a cool old outdoor amphitheatre in Overton Park. Singer-guitarist Chilton closed the first chapter in the Big Star saga at the same locale back in 1974. Re-forming in the Nineties, with Chilton and drummer Jody Stephens joined by Jon Auer and Ken Stringfellow of the Posies, Big Star last played together in November in Brooklyn. [Chilton died of a heart attack](#) on March 17th, shortly before a scheduled performance at South by Southwest that became a [powerful celebration of his music](#) after news of his untimely passing spread in Austin.

[Read David Fricke's exclusive Q&A with Big Star's Jody Stephens.](#)

Following a photo montage of Chilton and Chris Bell (the first Big Star casualty), the trio of Stephens, Auer and Stringfellow broke into the alternately dreamy and rocking "Back of a Car," from the classic *Radio City*. The first guest, John Davis of Superdrag, spearheaded fresh, spunky versions of "In the Street" (adopted as the theme song for *That '70s Show*), the unison shout-fest "Don't Lie to Me" and the driving, feel-good anthem "When My Baby's Beside Me." The affable Mills sang "Jesus Christ" and "Thank You Friends," and added pithy guitar solos to the campy, party-up finale, "A Whole New Thing." Benson contributed spirited versions of "O My Sou" and "September Gurls," and the punchy blend of his and Auer's guitars was a highlight. Poignantly, Auer strummed Bell's vintage red Gibson 335 on "I Am the Cosmos."

Even with their main man gone, Big Star sounded strong, with Auer ably synthesizing his and Chilton's guitar parts and Stephens providing musical, muscular drumming. There were more cameo appearances, ranging from local singers to Norway's Sondre Lerche. They were all capable and well-intentioned, but another recognizable name or two — say, former Replacement Paul Westerberg (who wrote "Alex Chilton," the ultimate homage) or one of the Bangles (who covered "September Gurls") — would have made the program feel more eventful. Original bassist Andy Hummel couldn't make it because of a hip injury. Still, the performances more than satisfied the supportive crowd of 2,000 sprawled on the grassy lawn at Levitt Shell, who seemed unperturbed by the onset of rain an hour into the concert.

[Rob Sheffield remembers indie cult hero Alex Chilton.](#)

"You think Alex and Chris are looking down and cracking up at this?" quipped Benson. "Rain or shine, long live Big Star."

The notoriously skeptical Chilton would likely have dismissed the whole idea of a tribute concert. Regardless, the posthumous lionization of Chilton's work is gaining momentum. His death received a

remarkable amount of national coverage, as the mainstream media finally recognized his role as a key exponent of blue-eyed soul (with the Box Tops), power pop (with Big Star) and the indie-rock sensibility (as a feisty, eclectic solo artist). A documentary about his life, titled *Nothing Can Hurt Me*, will further raise his profile. Plans are to have it out by late 2011, according to filmmakers Danielle McCarthy and Drew DeNicola.

Stephens affirmed that his relationship with Auer and Stringfellow will continue. "We'll keep doing this if people want to hear it," said the soft-spoken drummer before the show. "I can't imagine not playing with Ken and John. It's a way to keep the music going."

Parke Puterbaugh

<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/14639/86323>

INDIEWIRE – October 14, 2010

In the Works: "Darling Companion" from "Big Chill" Director, Social Anxiety Monsters & New Docs

 by Bryce J. Renninger and Daniel Loria (October 14, 2010)

This week's production column takes a look at "Darling's Companion," starring Diane Keaton and Kevin Kline as an aging couple coping with an empty home and a lost dog. We also look at "Nerve," a new film from J.R. Sawyers about a man battling with social anxiety disorder, ending our column with a couple of documentaries on cult music legends Big Star and an inspiring feat that occurred during the 2010 AIDS Walk of Los Angeles.

EDITORS NOTE: "In the Works" is a weekly column taking a look at upcoming films, in addition to projects in production. It spotlights films in development, as well completed films that are taking creative paths towards distribution and occasionally ventures away from films to look at other types of projects, such as interesting new film distribution, funding, or exhibition mechanisms.

"Big Star: Nothing Can Hurt Me"

Logline: "Big Star: Nothing Can Hurt Me" is a feature-length documentary about the massive critical acclaim, dismal commercial failure, and enduring legacy of pop music's greatest cult phenomenon, Big Star.

Production team: Director/DP/Editor: Drew DeNicola; Director/Producer: Danielle McCarthy; Executive Producer: Gill Holland; Executive Producer / Music Supervisor: John Fry; Producer: Olivia Mori; Camera: David Cavallo, Kentucker Audley; Assistant Editor: Meghan Sims; Audio: Patrick McCarthy. Featuring interviews with: Jody Stephens, John Fry, Andy Hummel, Jim Dickinson, William Eggleston, David Fricke, Mike Mills, John Doe (of X), Evan Dando, John King, Carole Manning, Mary Lindsay Dickinson.

About the film: "I'd been a Big Star fan since college but after a life-altering trip to Memphis, TN – the birthplace of rock, soul and the blues and Big Star – I wanted to know everything there was to know about where this incredible music came from. It turns out the story of Big Star is one helluva tale – a group of extremely talented musicians craft some of the best albums of their generation only to find their record label is unable to properly distribute the records and the airplay they do get seems to fall on deaf ears. Fast forward to the early 1980's during the independent, underground music scene in

America bands like R.E.M. and the Replacements are name-checking and even writing songs about band leader Alex Chilton and voila – arguably the first “cult band” is born into the pop culture consciousness. Big Star’s resurrection is a testament to the fervor of music fans the world over. The band even reunited in the mid-1990’s to rapturously received audiences. Sadly, the deaths of founding members Alex Chilton and Andy Hummel (Chris Bell died in a car accident in 1978) this past year has left only Jody Stephens to carry the Big Star mantle. But who knows what’s next for the Big Star legacy? We hope this film introduces the band to a whole new generation of fans.” - Danielle McCarthy
Current status: The documentary is currently in the editing stage and the team expects to debut at a film festival in Spring 2011 or Summer 2011.

For more information and to support the film: The team successfully raised \$14,000 dollars for the production via Kickstarter but further funding is needed to complete the film. If you’d like to make a donation or an investment in the film please contact Danielle McCarthy at info@bigstarstory.com.
http://www.indiewire.com/article/in_the_works_darling_companion_from_big_chill_director/

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL – May 8, 2010

Brooklyn producer-director Danielle McCarthy will be in Memphis this month to shoot interviews for a documentary on the band, Big Star, shown here.

With pledge dollars and mouse clicks, fans around the world are helping to ensure the completion of a feature documentary about Big Star, the influential Memphis power-pop band led by the late Alex Chilton.

"I knew that people would want to see the movie, but the response was a real eye-opener," said Brooklyn producer-director Danielle McCarthy, who hit her fundraising goal of \$6,000 just a few hours after going public with her project last week on kickstarter.com, an online "funding platform" for artists, musicians, filmmakers, inventors and other creative types.

With money raised through the website, McCarthy and co-director Drew DeNicola, also of New York, will be in Memphis this month shooting Big Star-related interviews and filming the Chilton memorial concert set for May 15 at Overton Park's Levitt Shell.

"Nothing Can Hurt Me: The Big Star Story" has been in production for about two years, with full cooperation from band members and associates. (As usual, however, the famously press-wary Chilton declined an opportunity to be interviewed or filmed in concert for the movie.) Speaking about the movie, Big Star drummer Jody Stephens, now a studio manager at Midtown's Ardent Studios, said: "We're way into it. There was just something about (McCarthy) that seemed genuine, and not aggressive, that we knew we could trust her."

Formed in Memphis in the early 1970s by Chilton, Stephens, the late Chris Bell and bassist Andy Hummel, Big Star released its first album, the unprophetically titled *#1 Record*, in 1972. Now regarded as a pop-rock masterpiece, the album failed to sell.

Two follow-up long-players released under the Big Star name also were commercial disappointments, and Chilton moved on to a solo career and other collaborations. But the band's reputation among musicians and aficionados grew to the point where Big Star became perhaps the ultimate cult rock-and-

roll band, and a huge influence on such later acts as R.E.M., the Replacements and Wilco. Beginning in 1993, a "reunited" Big Star featuring Chilton, Stephens and Jon Auer and Ken Stringfellow of The Posies performed the occasional concert. And in September, *Keep an Eye on the Sky*, a four-disc Big Star box set, was released by Rhino Records.

The Big Star season of celebration turned mournful, however, when the 59-year-old Chilton -- a rock iconoclast and punk precursor who first achieved pop fame as the teenage lead singer for The Box Tops - died March 17 in his adopted hometown of New Orleans, of an apparent heart attack. McCarthy, 31, who basically had been self-financing the documentary until this month, said she has been an intensely devoted Big Star fan since college, when she heard a friend play the Chilton composition "Kangaroo" on his acoustic guitar.

"It's hard to explain why you connect to a mysterious thing, an album or a band," she said. As manager of publicity for Magnolia Pictures, a motion picture company, it was perhaps natural that McCarthy would contemplate a Big Star movie. She recruited DeNicola, an experienced camera operator and documentarian, and began to "naively" pursue the idea, traveling to Memphis to interview people and also filming conversations about Big Star with such artists/fans as Mike Mills of R.E.M., Evan Dando of the Lemonheads and Curt Kirkwood of The Meat Puppets. "We're just buddies on a mission," she said.

The filmmakers were in Austin when news of Chilton's death shocked the South by Southwest festival, where Big Star had been scheduled to play. The festival became a sort of impromptu tribute to Chilton, causing a necessary if tragic shift in at least part of the documentary's focus. McCarthy and De Nicola knew they needed to be in Memphis for the May 15 Chilton concert and surrounding events, but couldn't really afford the trip until registering the project on kickstarter.com.

So far, patrons visiting the site have pledged more than \$11,000, in amounts ranging from \$2,000 to \$5. Most pledges have been under \$70. The project remains open for pledges through Thursday. Kickstarter is just one of several Web-based services that promote online arts patronage. Last year, for example, Paper Moon Films, a Memphis production company, raised money for local director Kentucker Audley's "Open Five" through chipin.com, a site that enables artists to solicit "crowd funding" for projects.

McCarthy said that in addition to concert footage and biographical content, "Nothing Can Hurt Me" will examine Big Star's place in "the grander scheme" of pop-music history, especially in terms of being a bridge between the era of the Beatles and the Beach Boys and the "alternative" and even punk sounds that followed Big Star's initial collapse.

She said the documentary should be finished later this year, for debut at film festivals in 2011.
-- John Beifuss: 529-2394

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2010/may/08/director-travels-to-memphis-to-film-big-star/>

THE MEMPHIS FLYER – May 13, 2010

Big Star returns to the shell to honor Alex Chilton by Chris Davis
*I've been built up and trusted, broke down and busted,
But they'll get theirs and we'll get ours if you can*

Just hold on. — "Ballad of El Goodo," Big Star

It began with a number-one record. In 1967, Dan Penn took a 16-year-old Alex Chilton and his band the Box Tops into American Sound Studio in Memphis and recorded "The Letter." It ended on March 17, 2010, in New Orleans when Chilton collapsed while mowing his lawn and died.

What happened during the 43 years in between isn't always easy to define. What is certain, though, is that in spite of his mercurial nature and a seemingly deliberate attempt to court obscurity and commercial disaster, Chilton became a hero to generations of independent-minded musicians. Big Star, Chilton's post-Box Tops project, is widely recognized as the definitive American power-pop group and possibly the most influential cult band since the Velvet Underground. Although the group failed to produce a hit in the 1970s, their music has become retroactively synonymous with the era because of the sitcom *That '70s Show*, which debuted in 1998 using Chilton's "In the Street" as a theme song. On Saturday, May 15th, Big Star, with the assistance of several special guests, will honor Chilton's singular and enduring music by breaking out all the should-have-been hits like "In the Street," "September Gurls," and "Stroke It Noel" for one last show at the Levitt Shell in Overton Park.

"I guess 'last' means different things to different people," says Jody Stephens, Big Star's drummer and the only person to play with the band in all of its various incarnations.

"It may be the last time that this group of musicians comes together," Stephens continues, singling out guest artists like Van Duren of the Baker Street Regulars, songwriter Amy Speace, and R.E.M.'s Mike Mills, who are sitting in with the band as a way of paying last respects to Chilton. Stephens says that nobody in the current permutation of the group, which includes John Auer and Ken Stringfellow of the Posies, is comfortable carrying on as Big Star. "But this is not the last time I'm going to play these songs," Stephens says, turning his attention to a show bill hanging on the wall at Ardent Studio that describes the group's October 29, 1994, appearance at the New Daisy Theatre as a "Farewell U.S. Performance." "Last is something that looks good on posters," he says.

Chilton always had a complicated relationship with his hometown. Had he lived a little longer, this weekend's concert in Overton Park would have been his second appearance in Memphis with Big Star since the erroneously dubbed "farewell" show at the Daisy. It would have been the band's first set at the Shell since a 1974 concert, which was recorded direct to two-track and eventually released by Rykodisc in 1992 as *Big Star: Live*. The concert had all the makings of a triumphant homecoming. It has since been re-imagined as a musical wake.

Chilton isn't the easiest man to honor. He didn't like to dwell on the past and wasn't always comfortable with the idea that his work with Big Star lived up to its reputation. Tribute shows don't sound like the sort of thing the famously cantankerous honoree would be inclined to participate in if he had a choice in the matter. As Stringfellow says in an interview for *Nothing Can Hurt Me*, a soon-to-be-completed Big Star documentary, "It would be weird and probably the most unnerving thing Alex could do if one day he said, 'Yeah, I'll answer your questions.'"

"He told us matter-of-factly that he didn't want to be interviewed," says *Nothing Can Hurt Me* director Danielle McCarthy, who will be visiting Memphis throughout May wrapping up her documentary.

"He said, 'It's not the sort of thing I'm inclined to do,'" says McCarthy's creative partner Drew DeNicola, who wants to get the syntax exactly right.

"But it's more about the material than it is about the personalities," Stephens says, refocusing the

conversation on the things that really matter. Instead of remembering the band's notorious feuds and failures, he connects to the group's creative moments.

"Something just clicked for me when we were playing the 'Ballad of El Goodo,' Stephens says, describing the moment when he first became aware that Big Star was doing something different. "That moment was very special to me. It was just an amazing song with great harmonies and unusual guitar sounds." Additional artists scheduled to appear at the Alex Chilton tribute include original Big Star member Andy Hummel, Brendan Benson of the Raconteurs, Norwegian recording artist Sondre Lerche, and soul and jazz singer Susan Marshall. Ardent recording artists Star & Micey open the show.

<http://www.memphisflyer.com/memphis/everybody-can-dance/Content?oid=2078947>

CHICAGO TRIBUNE - December 15, 2010

Top concerts 2010 by Greg Kot

As 2010 winds down, we've still got a bunch of potentially terrific shows to look forward to, including Ludacris at the Allstate Arena (Sunday), Elvis Costello at the Chicago Theatre (Monday) and the Hold Steady at Lincoln Hall (Dec. 30), plus a gaggle of New Year's Eve shows that we'll preview in future columns.

But it's also time to take stock and look back on a year of heavy-duty concert-going. Out of more than 100 shows I attended, here are my favorites from 2010:

2. Alex Chilton tribute, March 20 at Antone's in Austin, Texas: Alex Chilton's death as the South by Southwest Music Conference opened cast a pall over this 24th annual gathering of the music tribes. The late-night, conference-closing slot was originally set for Chilton's Big Star, the Memphis band that made three albums in the '70s, then faded into obscurity, only to endure as a guiding light for countless guitar-based pop and rock bands in subsequent decades. The performance instead turns into a wake and a tribute. The remaining members of Big Star -- founding drummer Jody Stephens and bassist Andy Hummel (who would die a few months later), and Ken Stringfellow and Jon Auer, who joined in the band's '90s comeback incarnation -- carry on in Chilton's name with a host of guest stars, including M. Ward, Evan Dando, R.E.M.'s Mike Mills, and Chris Stamey. It's a night of glorious songs performed with bittersweet conviction.

http://leisureblogs.chicagotribune.com/turn_it_up/2010/12/top-concerts-2010.html

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