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## Interview: Sean Donnelly, Director of "I Think Were Alone Now"

Posted by [joshc](#) on Thursday, September 16, 2010 · [1 Comment](#)



When I was a child, two girls in my day care center were obsessed with one song. They played it day after day. They danced to it and did their best to dress and act just like the singer. They even once put on a puppet show, making the puppets act out a kind of music video that accompanied the music. The song was "I Think We're Alone Now", originally made famous by Tommy James & The Shondells and made new by a beautiful teenage singer simply calling herself Tiffany.

Though the song and Tiffany quickly faded from the limelight, some of her most ardent admirers remained and have become the subject of a documentary called "[I Think We're Alone Now](#)" from director [Sean Donnelly](#), newly released on DVD. The film puts the microscope on two such fans, Jeff Turner and Kelly McCormick, whom some have labeled stalkers.

Sean Donnelly recently took the time to answer a few questions for cinedork.com about how the film came together.

***What inspired you to make a documentary on the subject of two over-zealous Tiffany fans?***

I randomly met Jeff on the Santa Cruz streets with my friend Jordy (the producer of the film). We were making a separate small stupid narrative film, and were looking for random people to have cameos. Jeff was amazing, and really funny and clever and unusual and so we wanted to get to know him better. It wasn't until a few hangout sessions that we realized his past with Tiffany, and then we decided to start filming this documentary. It wasn't until much later that we met Kelly and decided to intercut their stories.

***From what I understand it's been a long and arduous journey from the start of production to finally releasing on dvd. Can you shed some light on the timeline from the start of production to getting the film to a mass market on DVD? Any advice to share with budding filmmakers out there?***

I was a sophomore at NYU film school when I first met Jeff and started filming this movie in 2002. I then made my student films and some music videos in NY, and whenever I went back to my parents house in Santa Cruz for holidays I would check in with Jeff and film a little more. Each time he would reveal another amazing story or layer to his story or we'd meet somebody else that he knew and the movie progressed slowly. My friend Phil Buccellato (cinematographer/editor/producer) saw some of the footage I had gotten and was really into it and wanted to help out. Phil flew out to meet Kelly for the first time after I had been talking to her for a couple of months. Once Phil was involved, we started to take it more seriously and film more often, and start to edit all of the many hours of footage down. He edited a lot of the Kelly stuff, and I edited a lot of the Jeff stuff, and then we started meeting up around 2007 and started to work on it every day. At first it was nice to have no deadlines, and approach it very loosely so we could work on so many things at once, and have this project progress slowly in the background. Eventually though you need some deadlines and to get serious or else things will never get done, so I'm very glad that Phil came on and helped get us in gear and make sure it got finished. It premiered in 2008 at Slamdance, and played at over 20 festivals over the next year and a half after that. At first, we got tons of emails from fancy companies you have heard of in LA and managers and agents and all of those guys asking for copies. We were excited and had big hopes of selling the film, but I think it was too dark and weird for people and most of them never got back to us and we were back to square one. Eventually after it's festival run we got a distribution deal in the UK. Then a while after that a US company contacted us and put it out in the US, Canada, Europe, Japan and Australia which is great. We haven't made tons of money or anything, but we have made back what it cost to make which is cool and now it's available for people to see.

I think the lesson buried in that long paragraph, is that you shouldn't keep waiting to make a film. People are always like "Maybe i'll find a better subject". or "I don't have enough money to start" or "I'm busy with my other job." But I think there is time for everything if you really want to make something, you just have to start shooting and see what happens. And now even years after we made it, randomly we still get little deals and offerings and it's really cool to have something that is done that has the potential to still make money. I think that's much more rewarding than doing works for hire all the time, and something I want to do much more of.

Also i think we learned a lot on this film, and met a lot of people, and I think it will help my future projects be that much better.



***There are moments in the film that it must have been difficult to remain objective about what was happening as you were shooting. What was your working relationship like with Jeff and Kelly and how was the film shot to allow for such candid and intimate moments?***

I started filming Jeff because I liked him, and I still like him a lot and wanted to portray him in the fairest light I could. It is very difficult to make a film about people like this, because immediately people think it's exploiting them and the film is making fun of them. We filmed a ton of stuff, but the hardest part was editing and deciding what should stay in and what would portray them unfairly.

If you spent time with Jeff or Kelly, you would see that they are very close to how they are in the film. Always cracking jokes and telling stories, with a few moments of sadness and loneliness. So we wanted to get that balance right and not make it too funny, or too sad, or make them look totally crazy. I have a good relationship with both of them, and we still talk pretty often. Kelly is on facebook and has some amazing status updates.

***There are a few moments in the film where Tiffany is visibly uncomfortable in her interactions with Jeff. What has the response been like from the Tiffany camp overall?***

I think at first they were very weary of it. I think that she is a target for people making fun of silly things from the 80's and stuff like that, and so when she saw us making a movie about Jeff at first I think she thought we were making fun of him and her. Her agent asked for a copy and I sent it to him, and I was very pleased by his response. He said he thought we did a really great job.

***One difficulty in making a documentary about people at such a defined point in their lives is that everyone will inevitably ask, "What happened to them?" Are there any plans to follow up or create an addendum, updating the story of Kelly and Jeff? Perhaps detailing Jeff's obsession with Alyssa Milano? Do you still maintain a relationship with them?***

There is a bonus feature update on the DVD about Jeff and Alyssa. It's also on youtube. I think I'm moving on to other films and can't keep filming them forever, but I will always be interested in what they're up to. If I'm in Santa Cruz, I still usually grab a meal with Jeff and might make some youtube updates from time to time if he has anything to share.

***What projects do you have coming up on the horizon?***

I just got back from Mexico shooting a new doc about people and hookworms. I'm also working on an animated TV show with a friend.

And one day after that I'd like to make a narrative feature. So many things to do, so little time.


"I Think We're Alone Now" is available on DVD. Visit the films [official site](#) for more information.

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