



The Ask

## Gorman Bechard: Rock Docs and Great Dogs

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Indie rock icon Grant Hart gets ready for his closeup in *Every Everything*, directed by Gorman Bechard (sitting at left).

[Gorman Bechard](#) has to be one of the hardest-working men in music documentary. After more than two decades writing fiction in prose and film form, he shifted gears in 2011 with [Color Me](#)

[Obsessed: A Film About the Replacements](#), a history of the beloved Minneapolis punk/indie band and its outsized legacy that featured neither the 'Mats nor their music, relying entirely on the testimony of contemporaries, critics, and fans. In essence a documentary variation on the question the director asked all 145 people he interviewed – “Why the Replacements?” – the film played widely on the festival circuit and came out late last year on DVD, as did Bechard’s follow-up, the Archers of Loaf concert film [What Did You Expect?](#)

Now he’s in post-production on his third music doc in three years, *Every Everything*, a portrait of ex-Husker Du singer-songwriter Grant Hart in which Bechard, who met Hart while working on *Color Me Obsessed*, reverses that film’s paradigm by featuring the artist, and only the artist, telling his own story. At the same time he has three other projects on the go: [Pizza: A Love Story](#), about the famed brick oven pizzerias of his hometown, New Haven, Connecticut; *Broken Side of Time*, a semi-improvised narrative feature about the internet modeling phenomenon; and [A Dog Named Gucci](#), the wrenching story of

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a chow who was brutally tortured as a puppy but survived to become the poster dog for reforming Alabama's animal-cruelty laws.

In an interview last week with MFW, the veteran author and filmmaker was effusive about a working method that now relies on crowdfunding, skeleton crews, and quick shoots to turn out movies on subjects that stir his obsessions. Amid fresh Indiegogo campaigns for the [Grant Hart](#) and [Gucci](#) films, Bechard talked to us about docs, dogs, and new ways to tell rock 'n' roll stories.

**MFW: I'm going to start with a variation of the question you asked everyone for *Color Me Obsessed*: why Grant Hart?**

Gorman Bechard: We gotta go back to *Color Me Obsessed* for that. One of the things that drives me nuts, in fact the only thing that drives me nuts, about *Color Me Obsessed* are the people who seem to think I made the movie that way because I couldn't get the [music] rights. I never wanted the rights. Not for a second. It's the people that think you have to make a movie a certain way, and they can't seem to accept someone who tries something different. So in trying to come up with a different take on the rock doc genre, I started thinking about Errol Morris's [The Fog of War](#), in which he interviewed Robert McNamara, Kennedy's secretary of [defense], who many people feel was the architect of the Vietnam War. He is the only person Errol Morris interviews in that film, which won the Oscar. He got slammed for that a lot – how could you not offer differing opinions and stuff? I thought the film was brilliant, and I started thinking, who in rock 'n' roll could I do that with? One person talking for an entire film, where by the end of the film you haven't walked out or killed yourself. Who is interesting like that?

We were in Brussels for a thing called Minneapolis Mon Amour that was being put on by a local venue – *Color Me Obsessed* was screening, and after it Grant Hart was playing a live show. I already knew Grant Hart was a great storyteller from the [*Color Me Obsessed*] interview. The morning of the show, my time schedule was all messed up. I had just been in Vancouver, now I'm going to Europe. So I got up really early for breakfast, and apparently so did Grant Hart. We ended up sitting there for a couple of hours, talking about everything from rest homes –

he had just put his mother in one, and I had just dealt with that with my grandfather – [to] cars, just completely random subjects. He's really amazing to listen to. He's a very, very intelligent man with a great, sharp, sarcastic sense of humor. I started thinking, he's the one we could do this with.

**Did it play into your decision to go ahead with this, or his decision to go ahead with this, that he kind of gets short shrift in the whole Husker Du and indie rock story compared to Bob Mould?**

I'm sure there's probably a little bit of him telling his side of the story. Plus he also has a very ambitious double record coming out later this year, *The Argument*, which is based on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. A lot of good things are happening for him, and hopefully we're going to time them so they're all coming out together. But yeah, when you read [Bob's book](#), he certainly got the short end of the stick. When you come down to it, there were two songwriters in Husker Du, and he's responsible for as many good songs as Bob is. In the case of popular songs, he probably outnumbers Bob. And also certainly his solo stuff – Bob has some good stuff, but Grant has some great stuff. Bob has never written a song like "The Main" or "2541."

**Did you have a dog in that fight before getting to know Grant? Did you feel this is someone whose story hasn't been properly told because he was overshadowed?**

Yes, but it was more about, this was a person who had an amazing life in rock 'n' roll, who could tell his story in the way I wanted it told for this film. I basically had an idea first, and then I looked for the band that fits, that I like. I don't ever want to make a VH1 "where are they now." It's nothing I have any desire to do. In fact, when I start thinking about [my] next rock

doc, I actually want to script some of it, and have whoever the person is play themselves in a rock doc.

### **A rock docudrama.**

Basically. I want them playing themselves as they would be appearing in a rock doc.

### **If you could do that with anybody, who would you make that rock docudrama about?**

I really don't want to say, because it probably will happen [laughs]. Let me just put it this way: it'll be a female. I've had initial conversations with some people.

### **You wrote novels and did fiction features for 20 or 25 years, and then suddenly three music docs in three years. Is this a mid-life crisis?**

Oh, no. I had always wanted to do a doc. I had wanted to do an animal-rights doc, but it just never – trying to raise money for a doc was harder than trying to raise money for a narrative feature. What it is, is Kickstarter opened the door. Kickstarter and Indiegogo are the artist's dream. When we started this production company [[What Were We Thinking Films](#)] in 2004, the goal was to have a lot of films coming out. It took eight years, but now we're at the point where we're gonna have two to three a year.

**Yes, you seem to work incredibly fast – much faster, judging by your bibliography and your filmography, than you have in the past. Is that entirely down to the fact that you can go to the crowd and raise money now and get a project off the ground?**



Gorman Bechard

Yeah, but I also used to do a lot of writing, including screenplays. In the '90s I made most of my money from screenplays that were optioned that no one's ever heard of,

and options on my books. I was hired six times to friggin' write an adaptation of The Second Greatest Story Ever Told, my first novel, but it doesn't show up on the bios.

### **What appeals to you about rock 'n' roll as a documentary subject?**

To me, when you make a film, spend so much time, it really has to be about something you're completely passionate about. I don't take work for hire anymore. I stopped doing that probably seven, eight years ago. Anything I do, it's got to be something that I truly, truly love. The Replacements doc just fell into my lap, when the person who was originally doing it wrote to me and said, "I can't finish this but I know you can." She trusted me to take it over, and I started it over from scratch.

### **You said you started out wanting to do an animal rights doc. Was A Dog Named Gucci that animal rights doc, and you just got delayed by these other things?**

No. I knew it had to be something about dogs, I just didn't have the subject matter. The Gucci subject matter literally fell into my lap again, where my wife said – she's always sending me these stories about dogs that were horribly abused. They always have such horrible endings. I would always tell her not to. We were going to Key West on our 20th anniversary [last] September, and the day before we leave she sends me this thing. I said to her, "Why are you sending me this right before we leave? I don't need to read something horrible and get all upset about it." She said, "No, this one has a good ending." I read the story and not only did it have a good ending, it had a hero – it had a man fighting against the system, it had everything, it had a three-act structure. I wrote to Doug immediately – Doug James, Gucci's owner – and told him what I was thinking. By the time I landed in Key West, he had written back.

**Has it proven to be a difficult or painful project in any way? I start crying when I watch SPCA ads about dogs that haven't been adopted. To imagine immersing yourself in a story as horrible – as uplifting in the end, but as horrible at times – as Gucci's seems to me an incredibly disciplined thing to do.**

It's not easy, but in your mind you know he lived for 16 years. He was the most happy dog, and he never showed any fear of anyone. Which is amazing, because most dogs who are abused as a puppy are very timid and run away if they don't know who you are. This dog was like a spokesperson, a politician. Looking at the pictures of him as a puppy, where the top of his head looks like raw flesh, is not easy. I think the harder thing is going to be – we're gonna use Gucci as the foundation for the entire film but cut in probably five other cases of abuse from around the country, and a lot of those are not going to have happy endings like Gucci.

**Tell me about your dogs.**

When we bought our house, the main thing we wanted was a fenced-in backyard, and we got a dog immediately. We had two Labs, Casey and Kilgore Trout. Kilgore Trout is the dog that, if you go to my blog, [Guy With Typewriter](#), every year on the anniversary of his death I [reprint] his eulogy. I just adored these two dogs. Then we got a third dog named Phoebe. Both Casey and Kilgore eventually passed. Kilgore inspired – at the age of 51 I got my first tattoo, and it was Kilgore. He's put where literally his face peeks up from under my sleeve, so if I'm having a bad day he's always there right at the end of my shirt sleeve, making me laugh, 'cause this dog made me laugh every day. Phoebe now is an 11-year old Lab/hound mix, and when Kilgore died we wanted to get a second dog. Basically I

just looked for the most mischievous puppy I could find, and we got a Lab rescue from Tennessee. I think he's Lab/golden, his hair is a lot longer, and his name is Springsteen. He's a complete lunatic, which is great.

### Why Springsteen?

We knew the name before the dog. Our next dog is named Wilco. I already know this.



Film [Every Everything, the music, life & times of Grant Hart - sound mix edition](#)

Film [A Dog Named Gucci - documentary feature on animal abuse in the U.S.](#)

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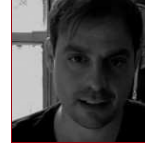
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