

## **INTRO:**

**Shelby:**

Hello and welcome to [REDACTED].

**Piper:**

[REDACTED] is a blog dedicated to highlighting music and art that we think is exceptional in the form of reviews, recommendations, and potentially incoherent musings.

**Shelby:**

We will also be doing interviews where we'll be talking to musicians, oddballs, weirdos, eccentrics, and basically anyone else that will agree to hang out with us.

**Piper:**

This is Piper, and I am here with...

**Shelby:**

Wouldn't you like to know?

**Piper:**

That is my co-host, Shelby.

**Shelby:**

Invitations to hang out are completely legitimate, and if you're interested, you can text me at [redacted]. My home address, if you prefer snail mail, or if you just want to come visit, is [redacted]. So I hope to see you soon.

**Piper:**

Thank you to my anonymous co-host, Shelby.

**Shelby:**

Today, we are so excited to be talking with Tommy Nickoloff about his new documentary called *You Fuckers Figure It Out* about one of our very, very favorite musicians, Jason Molina.

**Piper:**

But Tommy is not just a fan of Jason's, he's a friend from childhood.

**Shelby:**

For anyone who isn't familiar with Jason Molina, he was an incredibly important singer-songwriter. He was a member of the bands Songs: Ohia, as well as Magnolia Electric Company. Their most famous album is called *Magnolia Electric Company*, and it is amazing. If you've seen any of them, you've probably seen that one. And if you haven't, you should turn this off and go listen to it immediately. About three years ago, Tommy was back in Lorraine, which is both of their hometown, and he got a call from his cousin, Kristy Walker, who is also the DP on

this film, who inspired him to make this movie honoring Jason's memory, and we agree with him that everybody should know about Jason Molina.

**Piper:**

Listen on to hear some of Tommy's best moments with Jason, including a 23-year-long joke, some signs from beyond the veil during production, and how Jason has continued to connect him to new friends all over the world.

**Shelby:**

And Tommy, we love you so much. Thank you for talking to us.

## ***INTERVIEW:***

**Tommy:**

What's up? How y'all doing today?

**Piper:**

Good.

**Shelby:**

Great!

**Tommy:**

How long y'all been fans of Jason's?

**Shelby:**

I found him about 4 or 5 years ago.

**Tommy:**

Oh, wow.

**Shelby:**

Yeah. A friend of mine was playing music, and one of his songs came on. I think it was "Farewell Transmission." And I looked up and I said, "Stop. What is this? Stop everything. What is this?" And then ever since then, it just really connected with me. He's been so important to me ever since I found him, as he is to a lot of people, I think. And Piper...

**Piper:**

I recently, probably just like 6 or 7 months ago...but I remember listening to "Farewell Transmission the first time," being like, "I think this might be the best song ever written," and I still think it is. I think it's brilliant and I actually really haven't been able to stop listening. I try to go to other music and I just keep coming back to this. It just seems so singular and so important.

**Tommy:**

It's wild because like, you know, he's been gone over 12 years and there's this whole resurgence of people that are younger than he was when he died. And I think it's fantastic. You know, he didn't really get the due he that he deserved, I think, while he was living. I don't know; maybe he didn't want it. A lot of conjecture to be made there. You know, I think he just wanted to stay true to himself, true to his music. He literally, like, didn't care if people liked it or not because he was just going to do his thing. And I think we could use a little bit more of that in our world today.

**Piper:**

Yeah, we wanted to talk to you because we're so excited by the project you're doing and want to get the word out.

**Shelby:**

People are getting more interested, which is awesome, but there's not that much content about it. There's one book [*Riding with the Ghost* by Erin Osmon], which I've read, but there's not that much other stuff, so it's just so cool to be able to make it more accessible in a different medium. It's all very exciting, but it does sound like a ton of work for you.

**Piper:**

It's really cool that you're doing it. Yeah, it's amazing.

**Tommy:**

I've got to give the backstory, because it's kind of wild. So I was living in Savannah, Georgia, like my whole...our great grandparents all came here in the early 1900s to Lorraine. I'm right outside of Lorain, Ohio right now, like a quarter mile outside. And my mom's side of the family is Croatian. And so, all my Croatian cousins were coming for a family reunion back here because it was the 100th anniversary of the American Croatian club. Everyone came here to work in the steel mill, which is definitely what "Blue Factory Flame" is about. I'm not gonna...I'm not going to try to interpret any of his other stuff. But I'm telling you, "stitched with heavy sulfur thread," that's the ash that would come out of that oven, whatever the hell you call it, would cover everything."

You wouldn't believe this, but people here don't know who he is. And if they and even if they do know who he is, like a lot of people kind of either couldn't give a shit less or they're super fans. You know, in the '80s and early '90s, when we lived here, like everyone was pushing us to get out. So now, there's a little bit of this attitude of like, "well, you guys all left." And it's like, no, no, no, no. There were no opportunities. From '83 or '84, I can remember people saying, "go to college, get a job, and get the hell out of here." So we all did. Anybody that could, did.

So anyway, I was living in Georgia. I sent "Leave the City" to my whole group of cousins. Five minutes later, my phone rings, and my cousin [Kristy Walker] in San Diego is like, "You knew Jason fucking Molina? I didn't know he was from Lorraine. I had no idea."

She goes, "We should be making a documentary."

I said, "All right, I'll talk to you later."

She goes, "What are you gonna do?"

I said, "I got phone calls to make."

And so, I called Carl Raponi first, because we'd been in touch. He was the drummer for Spineriders and Chronic Insanity, Jason's high school bands. And then Todd Jacobs, right after that. And we just started. But small crew. Like, it's me. My cousin shot it. She did help with editing for a while. I slept on her dad's couch for 73 nights in a row, a couple of winters ago. And then my niece's boyfriend helped with a few motion graphics. And that's it. So, I mean, like, editing, social media, website. It's all been me.

I try to talk to a fan every day, because I cannot possibly fuel this emotionally. Someone that can help me in any way, even if it's just their excitement about the project. If I can, I take an hour every day to talk to someone. It doesn't really matter who they are. And so like, I'm making friends all around the world. Like, you know, Jason connected me to all these people in the film and he's still doing it. That was a really magic thing about him.

**Shelby:**

We kind of wanted to know what it was like making this and getting different people's impressions of him, maybe especially after you hadn't been seeing him so much personally—if you had to reconcile your impressions of him and your personal knowledge of him with other people's impressions of him through his music and in his life.

**Tommy:**

That's a really good question, and I hope I have a really good answer. So it seems to me that the presentation of his legacy and work very much does not match my memory of him. He was the goofiest son-of-a-bitch I ever met in my entire life. Right? And aside from, like, if you look at his Wikipedia page, it says he was born in Oberlin and raised in Northeast Ohio. Doesn't even mention our city. With wanting to bring more attention to his roots and his upbringing and his young character, I didn't want to be the focus of this story. Unless you're Quentin Tarantino or Orson Welles or Alfred Hitchcock, don't show up in your own fucking movie, man. You know what I'm saying?

So, to finally answer your question, the incredible thing that happened is all these other people reflected the version of him that is mine. So it didn't need me. I think that's so much better, because there are 15 interviewees and some found footage of his dad, because his dad died two days after that phone call I told you about with my cousin. So...

I never know when this is going to happen. I just, I've spoken publicly twice, and I broke down both times. I don't understand. I don't know what's going on here. I haven't cried over Jason's



death since, like, 2012. Except for now, potentially the third time in two weeks. So we'll see what happens.

You know, it's very important to me. And not because of his music, just because of him as a human being. You know, the reconciliation wasn't within myself. The point is to reconcile the image of this sad, depressed, hopeless, sorrowful songwriter. Not the fucking guy. That's not the fucking guy.

Look, I suffered through depression for most of my life. This is a whole nother story. But Jason's death really was a major impetus for me getting my shit together. I couldn't even listen to his music because I had that in my heart and in my brain. I didn't need someone else to echo in that shit, right? I had my fucking fill. And you know, he was a complex and contradictory enough character, showing the other side of that coin. Is anybody telling that story? Have you seen anything?

**Shelby:**

Personally, no, I haven't seen very much about it. And I think people are so moved by how...how right he is, how able he is to really get at the heart of, like you said, when you're experiencing issues like any depression or addiction or anything like that, he really hits it on the head in a way that is almost uncomfortable a lot of the time. So as you said, I think that connects with people so much and that's all they focus on. But it seems like you're saying that that part of him that was inside, he expressed through his music and not really in his personality.

**Tommy:**

They're completely different. They're completely...yeah, opposite. You can't even say contrast. You can't even say they contrast each other. They contradict one another.

**Piper:**

What a gift for you to be able to show that other side of him, to really explore all of him.

**Tommy:**

I'm a little unsure how people are going to react to it.

**Shelby:**

What parts do you think people might not respond well to?

**Tommy:**

It's fucking funny. This movie is funny. It's touching. It's sad. It's a drag. It's a celebration. And it's fucking funny. He was funny.

You know, another person that played a huge role in my own personal "shedding the black dog," right, was Robin Williams. Because I could finally walk into therapy and be like, look at that fucking guy. You don't think that there are people who are energetic and engaging and full of life and want to fucking die to the degree of taking their own life, whether it's suicide or alcoholism

or reckless behavior or whatever else it might be. Doesn't that enrich? Doesn't seeing him as the strangest, funniest, most electrically goofy person? Doesn't that enhance the other side? I mean, now again, as another comparison, like, I can't imagine Elliott Smith having that side of him, but maybe he did! Wouldn't that be more interesting to know?

**Shelby:**

It seems really important. I don't think...just because it's complicated and a little harder to understand, that makes it more important and more true and real. It's not easy. Nothing's easy or simple.

**Piper:**

Yeah, it's really moving to get a full portrait of someone. I actually feel like hearing you talk about this and hearing you talk about how he was so goofy and so much fun. I think people getting access to that fuller portrait of him is going to be really powerful and enhance the depth of what he's done musically, the connection that people have with his work, I think...I think they'll have an even more profound one, knowing who he was.

Do you have any things that you really think about with his goofiness, things about him or moments with him that really stick out to you?

**Tommy:**

There's one in particular. So we played soccer together. I met Jason on a soccer field. He was becoming a freshman. I was becoming a junior. I don't know if it was that first year, or when I was a senior and he was a junior, but the sole of my cleat was coming off. And so I got this athletic tape and like, I taped the shit out of my shoe so that the sole would stay on. I think I took months to get a new pair of shoes. Jason and Carl Raponi, drummer from Spineriders, and Todd Jacobs, who played guitar for them—he's on the first several recordings, including the Black Album's "Soul," which is still my favorite song.

So Todd, Carl, Jason, were like a three-headed monster. In high school, we were all on the same soccer team, so I taped my shoe up, and I see the three of them laughing at me. Jason walks over. He doesn't say anything. He pulls out a Sharpie marker, uncaps it, kneels down, and starts writing on the tape I just put on my shoe.

Capital H, capital O, capital B.

And then he went over it again to bold it. He stood up, and he looked at me, and he put the cap back on the Sharpie, and he turned around, and those guys were laughing. They're all younger than me, by the way, right? Like I'm a junior, a senior, and they're freshmen and sophomores. But we all got along. It was an amazing place to grow up.

So a couple of days go by. I finished at practice. I've got fucking HOB written on my foot. Or H-O-B, whatever it is. So I'm like, dude, what? What the fuck? He would never explain anything. Like he wouldn't. He would never explain his lyrics. He wasn't going to explain anything to

anybody. Either you got it or you didn't. Either it was funny or it wasn't. That's just the way it always was.

Let's say it was 1990, and let's say it's 2013. So 23 years later, I still don't know what it means. And I found some old dictionary and I looked up "hob"...and it's a nail to repair a shoe. A nail to use in the repair of a fucking shoe. That has to—that has to be it! That has to be it. I'm thinking, like, House of Blues. I'm going through all these things. Like, is it like a hobbit? And a hob is a shoe nail.

**Shelby:**

That was a 23-year-long joke! You got the punchline 23 years later.

**Tommy:**

It's still going now! I just told you!

**Shelby:**

That was a great story.

**Piper:**

That's a great story.

**Shelby:**

Just to clarify, what time period is this movie mostly covering?

**Tommy:**

Birth in '73 to the spring Songs: Ohia tour in 1998. The intention was to make a film during the time frame that I knew him best, even if the story was not from my perspective. And a lot of that has to do with, that's where my access was. Those are the people that I knew. That said, '73 to spring of '98...You can't make a film about Jason Molina without saying that he died. So there's a big time jump there. You also can't make a film about Jason Molina without some form of celebration of his musical legacy, even though that's not really the point or driving force of the film. There's some aspect of that, and then it does end in his death. So I've been told that's a little confusing by some people, and I could not give a shit less.

**Shelby:**

It sounds like that's the spirit he would have encouraged.

**Piper:**

Yeah, it really does.

**Tommy:**

I would like to so, so thank you for iterating that.

**Shelby:**

And I think that's cool, especially because so much stuff does focus on Magnolia Electric Company and after, when things got more popular. But I love early stuff a lot too. As much as I love the older stuff, it sounds so different. It's so fun to hear the development of his sound. And so I think looking at the earlier stuff really helps to see where he goes.

I wonder if you have a favorite album or song that you'd like to speak about?

**Tommy:**

"Soul," his first single with Palace Records, has never been replaced as my favorite song of his. I've been listening to that song for 30 years. So the lyrics are, "I love one thing only. I love what I know about patience. I love what I know about mercy. I love what I know about soul." So he knows one thing only, but he names three things. And then he says, "I know you." So that's the longest...he takes the longest route of saying "I love you." He loves one thing only. He loves three things. And, I know you, I love you.

He took like a minute to say it, and he was 20 years old when he wrote that song. That goofy fucker wrote that! How huge and encompassing did his soul have to be to embody all of that?

It's so much more than the music. Music is half, if that. If you knew him, 25%. Can you imagine?

**Shelby:**

No, and that's kind of what's cool about this conversation, because his music is so big and looms so large, and you're sitting here saying, that's not even the half of it. That's awesome to hear.

I wanted to ask because I know you say on your website, you talk about how you would swap art with him. What was that? Was that music or sketches, and what did that look like?

**Tommy:**

A lot of it was...I don't think either of us were playing Dungeons and Dragons at that time. Could have been a lot of...it was, you know, like mythical creatures and there was this whole...I think they were called runes. There was a whole book of these archaic symbols that were in Dungeons and Dragons that were either Egyptian or Norse or, you know, these kind of ancient things that they pulled into that game. So a lot of it was stuff like that.

I remember there was this track of advanced studies. We got an amazing education at Admiral King High School. Public school. Fantastic. Sometimes we got, like, study time. We didn't have to go to class. We could just go to the library. I remember one of the things is I just wrote a story only using the titles on the spines of the books that I could see by me. Like no other words, just the titles of these books. I don't know if Jason was ever impressed with me. I don't know if he was ever impressed with anybody, but I remember a good reaction to that.

And you know, he's writing, making music. So by that time, when he was in junior high, he was in Chronic Insanity. And then I knew all the Spinneriders guys. So like, you know, songs they



were writing, or J would always draw these featureless figures that just had Xs for eyes, stuff like that. And everything had horns, there was always some kind of mythical quality to stuff.

But trading cassette tapes—I got this, you got this. I'll give you the new Cult album if you give me the Suicidal Tendencies and then, you know, take them home and dub them in the boombox, and then give them back.

**Shelby:**

Did you know, when he first started making music—on his own, outside of the Spinneriders—did you have an inclination that it would take off the way that it did?

**Tommy:**

No. No way. I mean, I knew, I definitely knew he was going to continue doing that. And option B was never...I don't think he ever considered it. And I always expected that he would be successful. I mean, he's a super talented guy, musical or not. Regardless of the avenue of success, I knew it would be a success.

I love the Spinneriders. I still do, and the whole slow core stuff was not necessarily my thing. So I can remember going to the Feve in Oberlin and seeing him play. Todd was playing with him. I think Todd had switched to drums by that point in time. And another guy, I don't remember who it was, but they were just a three-piece. And he was either playing as Sparky or he had already become Songs: Ohia, I don't recall, but I mean, I just remember expecting crossover metal and punk, right? Because I hadn't seen him in a while. And I'm like, what the fuck is this?

But there was enough of a gap in there that it wasn't this slow transition. It was in your face to way laid back from that. So you know, it took me some time to adjust to that. But I didn't go there to see him play. I went there to see him.

But no, I didn't. I did not know.

**Shelby:**

How was it to see him in college? You said you hadn't seen him for a while. Did he seem changed or more comfortable in the environment, or was there something you could see that seemed different in him?

**Tommy:**

You know, he got to settle into himself. I think in the logline, I describe it as "he escaped artless steel town indifference." You can't spread your wings in an environment like that. I'm not just talking from his perspective. I'm talking about mine and everyone around us at that time. Oberlin College is maybe ten miles from where I'm at right now. 12 tops. Totally different world. If we read a book in public anywhere outside of school, if we read a book in public, people would call you a fag. "Go with all the queers in Oberlin!" I'm reading a fucking book, man!

**Shelby:**

Yeah, that doesn't really sound conducive to anything you or him were trying to experience.

**Tommy:**

No, no, no, no. Hard-working town. People who risked their lives and the lives of their family to come across the ocean. People that ended up here, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, because they started off in lumbering or coal mines...steel mill opens up, and they all come up here.

You're not thinking about making art. You're thinking about surviving. And I say that with respect, right? I'm not looking down on that in the least. Transitioning from that would be an existential crisis. Transitioning from that mentality puts your life in jeopardy. Most of us, it was our great grandparents that came over. So our grandparents were born here. Our parents were born here. It's a three-generation gap. Who wants to live like that? If you don't have to, right? But that's your moral code. I still carry it. Jason still carried it, but in a different application.

**Piper:**

I was wondering about...I love hearing you talk about how you really wanted to be filling out this full portrait of who he was as a person. But I'm wondering what the process was like for you reaching out to other people who knew him, reaching out to people who were close with him to interview them, and what their initial reaction was. Because it seemed like on your cast list, a lot of his family did want to talk and did want to share stories of him. And I wonder what that was like for you, being able to go to them and say, "I really want to make an authentic portrait of him."

**Tommy:**

It was fucking magic. That's what it was. I mean, without all of them, there's obviously no film, right? First call, Carl Raponi, in. Second call, Todd Jacops. And bringing those guys in, that was the first time that they got together since they released the *Hello Future Tinglies* in 2014, right after Jason's death. And they got back together and started playing music again and recording. So we did a show in Lorain in November.

Third call, I think, was my cousin Beth, because now I'm looking for cousins that are Jason's siblings' age, right? Because J was two years younger than me. Aaron's three years younger than him, and Ashley's three years younger than him. So there's an eight-year gap. But I have younger cousins. This was obviously very difficult—was trying to get in touch with his dad, who is way more famous in Lorain, Ohio than Jason is. Like, way more. He was a school teacher. Everybody loved him. Obviously, with his passing, I'm not reaching out to his children anytime soon.

Well, then I talked to Mike McCartney. Mike's a couple years older than me, and he was the frontman for Spineriders. Great to talk to him. Another super smart guy, you know. Todd suggested Geof and Bruce Comings, who were born in Oberlin. I spent some time there, mainly visiting J and reading books in peace. So, you know, kind of got to...can't even say rekindle because I'm sure it was Jason saying, "Hey, Tommy, this is Jeff and Bruce. Hey, guys, this is

Tommy.” And they both played in Songs: Ohia. Max Winter, I don't know if I ever met or not, he played in Songs: Ohia.

Jeff then linked me to their friend Millicent. She knew Jason from the age of three. She's in the film. Jeff, from the rip, was like, “If you want this to be a good film, you have to talk to Millicent.” And so we did. People aren't just participating, they're helping me. My ex-wife, Jenny, she knew Jason since the age of three. She's in the film.

Will Schaff, who, in the timeline, just kind of barely comes in at '97. I'm sure you're familiar with Will's artwork. He's doing all the album covers now. Fucking phenomenal. And one of the best human beings I've ever come across in my life. Amazing. Needed a place to interview Jason's brother, Aaron. He lives in Rhode Island; Will's in Rhode Island. Set that up with Will, interviewed Aaron at Fort Foreclosure, and we're like, hey, man, we're here. Jump on in!

And he nailed it, and everybody nailed it. Everybody nailed it.

**Piper:**

I'm sure they felt your genuine intentions with this. I'm sure that probably really helped, wanting to really tell the story.

**Tommy:**

The other part of your question, though, was pitfalls. And in the process, I learned that three other productions—full crew, tons of experience, and funded—none of those three are me. Started and failed.

There are a lot of people from the Oberlin years that became the Chicago guys on the Magnolia Electric Company album, that were just like, “I'm not fucking doing this again, bro. Good luck. I hope it works out. I've sat for three interviews already. No movie.” Talking about your dead friend...it's not a good time.

**Piper:**

Yeah, to have to do it over and over, I'm sure is...

**Tommy:**

With no result! Hey, no hard feelings there. So just kind of roll with the punches. It's like, what do you got? And what can you do with it? I think it turned out pretty good.

**Shelby:**

Yeah. I wonder if there was anything surprising or any challenges you didn't anticipate running into in the making of this?

**Tommy:**

Everything. I've never done this before. It's my first film. I barely have a background in editing. I took a class at Santa Barbara City College in 1999, 22 years before I started doing this thing. Yeah, I don't know, I didn't really...I guess I really didn't think about it.

I volunteered at CIFF, at Cleveland International [Film Festival] last year. Amazing festival. Everyone's so cool. Got to talk to a lot of filmmakers. I thought I was finished in March. Not quite. And people were like, "Oh, congratulations on finishing your film. You're halfway there!"

I was like, what? That just took me over three years—what do you mean I'm halfway there?

"Do you have a logline, a synopsis, a short synopsis, a treatment, a pitch deck, a publicist, a press release. Where's your website? What are you doing? You're not doing any social media."

And the list went on and on and on. So three years of that is happening in approximately six months. Without a distributor, I'm looking at about half a million bucks, to distribute.

So what was your earlier question? What surprised you about the process?

**Piper:**

Yeah. My god.

**Tommy:**

It's been baby steps. Right? So the baby steps now is like, get these submissions out, and then I'll focus on more outreach.

I thought I'd do it for 50 grand, and I thought maybe we'd shoot a year and edit it a year. I didn't think I would have to quit my job, but, you know, just like I was saying about where you're from, sometimes, bad shit has to come about for good shit to happen. So more magic will happen. It's been happening. It's been happening all throughout.

**Shelby:**

I know you talked about how younger people are getting more into him, and you're excited about that. And I wonder if there is a particular audience or a particular set of people that you really hope to reach with this.

**Tommy:**

This film is for his family, his friends, his fans. It's for our entire generation. It's for the people coming up as fans—like I said, it's just amazing. And it's for our hometown and all the places in America just like it. These are cities where the American Dream was born and where the American dream fucking died. And even though he left this place with not a very favorable opinion of it, he never stopped writing songs about it. And this is the case for everybody. I mean, where people are from, you don't ever get that out of you. I don't know why you would want to.



You just have to find a way to turn whatever is heartbreaking or negative into something, you know, productive and hopefully beautiful.

We didn't have cell phones. We didn't have Google Maps. We didn't have the internet. We didn't have Spotify. We had record stores. I've got a niece who was a PA on the film one day, when she was 14. My cousin Kristy's daughter, Cora. We did a reenactment scene. We used my buddy Mikey's house, Cora, as a long-haired, 1989 rocker kid walks up the driveway, walks in the house, goes down to the basement, and puts a cassette tape in a player and hits play. She didn't know how to do it! There's so many things that we take for granted just the last 25 years, so that was fascinating.

When I showed my niece the film, and she was going over that, she's like, I never knew. There's so many things that you just take for granted were always there. Couldn't Google search something. You had to go to the fucking library and use the Dewey Decimal System. So I'm finding through my nieces and through my cousins, it's really interesting to them, surprisingly, and I'm very grateful that it's interesting to people. It was really a very different time. In some ways better, in some ways worse, but just different.

**Piper:**

I wonder if you've had the opportunity to share pieces and portions with people, and what initial responses have been, if there have been any yet.

**Tommy:**

I've done several for small groups. I did a screening for a group of about 55—true Lorain crowd. Spinneriders and a few of their friends showed up, so let's call that ten. Let's call it eight, maybe six. So another 47 people, 40 of whom never knew anything about Jason Molina until I started making this film.

Unbelievable response. And it's way better than that now. It's way better than that. That was April. That phone call with my cousin, Kristy, was November of '21. We started shooting. We shot a shit ton in the summer of '22, late summer. Almost everything we had, we did...we almost shot everything in two months.

My dad almost died of Covid in early in 2022. I was still living in Savannah, so I traveled a ton for work, so I was never at my house anyway, and I'd already planned on selling it. I'm like, I'm never here, I'm just going to sell my condo. Literally living three weeks on the road and then one week that wasn't even at home. If I was in Vermont, I would stay at my friend's in Vermont and work there for a week. So that place started becoming my mom and dad's house until my dad got better, which was convenient, because this is Ohio, and I was in Georgia, right?

Tore all the cartilage in my wrist in September of '22, which is still very disabling. Tough that out for a year. Now, I've been doing this.

Way underestimated cost, way underestimated time. But part of that is, I didn't expect it to be this good. I thought it was going to be rough and dirty—and it is, it's scrappy, but way better than I ever thought.

And then, as that happens, you start making filmmaker friends and like, especially editors. My new friend Brad Masi, who was friends with the Comings brothers, he comes in the picture. He's a documentary filmmaker in Cleveland. I sit down with him and he's like, "Okay, here's your seven-page Excel spreadsheet with a time code of what you need to fix. Like, fuck. I thought I was done, but it gets better. Did the screening in April. Everybody loved it, but I'm like, okay, did that get a laugh? Did that get an emotional response? Two people picked up their phone. Obviously, it's too slow. They're watching the film. I'm watching them. Gotta get better.

**Piper:**

Sounds like there was a lot of really magical little moments that brought this together, again and again and again. I wonder if anything stands out to you. Is there a really specific moment where you just really felt all of the magic of it?

**Tommy:**

I'm having a tough time picking between two and my hair is standing up...Gonna fucking make me cry again.

**Shelby:**

Oh, no.

**Piper:**

That's okay. We'll cry with you. How about that? Group cry.

**Tommy:**

I think it was after the first long...I think we shot for ten days straight on the road. Lorain. Oberlin. Cleveland. Ashland. Columbus. Athens. And then, like, family reunions, we're doing this during a family reunion, like me and my cousin and my nephew, Alex [Green]. And that gets done...

[I'm thinking], What the fuck am I doing? And who the fuck am I to be doing it?

A real confrontation. You're not gonna believe how this ends.

You know, this imposter syndrome. Wave after wave. And I walked outside, and it's a full moon. And I've done this often. But this was...I talked to J a lot. Fully overcast, like a light bulb covered in cotton.

I'm like, "Bro, you gotta help me out, homie. Are you even okay with this? Can you help me? Tell me no, and I won't do it. But like give me, give me a sign."

The clouds opened up over the moon. The entire sky was clouded. And around that moon, they just...And there it was.

I was like, "Okay, back to work."

Several instances like that. *Several*/ instances like that. And I don't even believe in that shit.

**Shelby:**

Yeah, it's so cool.

**Piper:**

Magic.

**Shelby:**

To feel that connection and clarity, especially when you're feeling like, come on, at the end of your rope, almost, with what you're doing and questioning everything. And also the moon being so important in all of his work.

**Piper:**

Yeah, he's saying hi for sure.

**Tommy:**

Yeah, I need to make a list of all those things. I mean, they involve owls. Static. Yeah, I need to make a list. He's told me to get my shit together a couple times.

And he shows up in the film, to give you a little insider tip. He's still here. Jason is still here.

**Shelby:**

What happened?

**Tommy:**

Oh, you're gonna have to wait to see that.

**Piper:**

This is so moving, hearing about him and hearing about the process you've had with him, and getting to really show who he is.

**Tommy:**

It's been wild. No doubt.

**Shelby:**

Everybody that I have met that enjoys his music or knows anything about him has a unique kind of appreciation for his music that I've really not seen other people have for other artists. And so

if for other artists, they might not love painting the contradictory picture of him, I think for him, specifically, it's an amazing way to approach it. Everybody I know that has found out about him, mostly through me, but—

**Tommy:**

So like, you're an apostle, right? Like you're a disciple. So many people. Like, Will Schaff is a disciple of Jason Molina.

**Shelby:**

I say all the time I'm evangelizing.

**Tommy:**

Yeah. It's wild.

**Piper:**

Yeah, yeah, that's how it feels. I mean, you've been spreading the word.

**Shelby:**

I've been trying to spread the word!

**Piper:**

Yeah, and listening to his music is something so singular. I've not experienced it before with any other artists, and it does really just feel like he was making it for...just going to honor what he was making. It wasn't ever about gaining critical acclaim. It was always about the music, and you can feel that and hear that in everything he makes. And I think that makes it so much more human and so much more connected. I think, like Shelby said, it's going to be really moving and profound for people to get this really full picture of him as a person. I really do.

**Tommy:**

I hope so! I hope you're right.

There's a line that Mike McCartney gives in the film, and it's to the effect of—he's quoting Jason—and he says, I'm just doing my thing. I hope you like it. And if you don't, fuck off.

**Shelby:**

Beautiful. This reminds me, I wanted to ask you about the title.

**Tommy:**

So, the first I'd heard of this was in *Riding with the Ghost*, Erin Osmon's book. Jason hated the... he just wanted to make music. He didn't want to deal with marketing. He didn't want to deal with the business end. He wanted to do his shit; somebody else take care of the rest of that shit. And I haven't even pinned down...even though I've talked to all these guys, it's still hard to figure out who was there, who this happened with.



So they're either playing in a show or they're rehearsing and they're pressing him, like, "J." Well, they didn't call him J. We called him J. L-Town homies called him J. "Jason, we need a t-shirt for this tour."

He's like, "Leave me alone. I'm writing. I'm writing a song."

"What are we gonna do later on? What are we going to do about a t-shirt?"

He took a Post-it note and he sketched out a t-shirt. And on the t-shirt he wrote, *you fuckers figure it out, band t-shirt*.

So if I'm not mistaken, years passed, Darcy finds the post-it note in a book, sends it to Dan McAdam in Chicago at Crosshair. Dan went to Oberlin College, Dan played with Songs: Ohia. He scans it and makes a t-shirt that says, *you fuckers figure it out, band t-shirt*.

**Shelby:**

That is so awesome.

**Tommy:**

Right? So originally, I was hoping that story would be after the credits roll. Tell that story. I don't think that's going to work out; totally fine with that. I don't think any quote of his better describes his attitude toward his music, art, humor, life, storytelling, any of it. I did this. I wrote HOB on your foot. You fucking figure it out.

I'm curious what your take was before hearing the explanation.

**Shelby:**

Well, you're so right when you say it encapsulates his entire response every time he's asked a question or asked to explain. So I assumed it was a quote that he had said, but that I couldn't place. I think as soon as I get into the documentary, the way that you're speaking about it, it sounds like you make that part of his personality very clear.

But yeah, it was great to talk to you! Thank you so much!

**Piper:**

Yeah, thank you very much!

**Tommy:**

A pleasure! Right on.

**OUTRO:**

**Shelby:**

Hey everybody, thanks for hanging out.

**Piper:**

For a full transcript of today's episode, head on over to [redactedblog.com](http://redactedblog.com) where you'll also find reviews, music recommendations, and general ramblings that we probably could have kept to ourselves.

**Shelby:**

You can also find us on Instagram at [redactedblog](https://www.instagram.com/redactedblog) and reach us via email at [askredactedblog@gmail.com](mailto:askredactedblog@gmail.com).

**Piper:**

And you know where Shelby lives, so.

*\*laughter\**

