

## **Bill Hicks bio. . . <http://www.americanthemovie.com/>**

Bill Hicks is considered by many to be the best comedian of the modern era – ironic given his anonymity in his native America. He was described by many names – philosopher, social satirist, even preacher, but he was ultimately a comic who believed that he could save his audience by confronting them with the truth.

His short career was a rollercoaster – from sneaking out aged 15 to start performing against the wishes of his parents, through early experiments with drink and drugs to expand his consciousness, falling in with the Texas Outlaw Comics who helped him nurture and grow his comedy, but also helped him grow a massive alcohol and drug problem, which on several occasions looked like it might end his life.

Finally succeeding in his long battle to get clean opened up new audiences for him in Canada, and then to the UK, where things exploded with sell-out tours, mesmerising audiences as he skewered organised religion, the US media and his government's hypocrisies.

Though considered 'criminally unpatriotic' at home, it looked like he was finally about to achieve wider recognition when he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. His last chance at getting his message out to the American people was taken from him when his 12th and final performance on the Letterman show was famously censored in its entirety, his material considered too 'dangerous' for mainstream audiences. He died 4 months later. Bill was 32 years old.

15 years after his death, Bill Hicks' popularity continues to grow. Regularly appearing on best of lists, and with tributes held yearly around the world, his CD sales increase each year as more and more people discover the words of the outlaw comic who tried to save the world. He still might...

### **Famous fans**

*"Hicks was a cunning comedian, probably the best informed and most articulate one I've encountered in a quarter century of writing about entertainers. He made unacceptable ideas irresistible, and reminded viewers that the best entertainers are the unelected legislators of their time."* **John Lahr, New Yorker**

*"Bill Hicks – blowtorch, excavator, truthsayer, and brain specialist. He will correct your vision. Others will drive on the road he built."* **Tom Waits**

*"Bill was right up there with Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor. He was easily the best comic of my generation."* **Brett Butler**

*"An inspired and inspiring truth teller, dangerous and brave and scary, all at once."*  
**Richard Pryor**

*“He was hilarious, brilliant, brave and right about everything.”* **Henry Rollins**

*“The past, present and future of stand-up comedy.”* **Sean Hughes**

*“To me and countless others, he remains an inspiration.”* **Bill Bailey**

**Jay Leno**

*“Hicks summation of life gains greater spirituality as time goes on.”* **Independent on Sunday**

## The filmmakers

**Matt Harlock** is a director whose drama short films have been screened widely at festivals and on television (C4, FilmFour, HBO, Sky), picking up awards from Film London, TCM and the Manhattan SFF. His first feature screenplay was developed with the Film Consortium. In 2004, Matt created the official Bill Hicks tribute nights in London, featuring a rare video footage programme, which led to a relationship with the Hicks family and suggested the definitive documentary of Bill’s life had not yet been made.

**Paul Thomas** trained as an architect before moving into a career in television. As a producer-director he has worked in-house at BBC Entertainment and several leading UK production companies. His work includes creating innovative entertainment & comedy series for the BBC, Channel 4 and SKY, and two years as series director for Channel 4’s flagship animation season.

As director-producers, Matt and Paul secured a feature-length documentary commission, and conducted over 100 hours of new in-depth interviews with Bill’s close family and friends. They have spent the last 3 years making AMERICAN – The Bill Hicks Story.

## The Journey

*“I really hope you guys know what you’re doing. Take your time, get it right. Bill’s message deserves something really special. Please don’t screw this up.”* (Fan email, one of hundreds...)

No pressure then. Telling the iconic life story of the most critically revered comedian of his generation was always going to be a long journey into the unknown.

The principal characters in Bill’s life had never all spoken at one time before, and never at such length. A diverse group of individuals, but with one thing in common – Bill’s personality, humanity and humour shone from every one of them...

From Portland, Oregon, where Bill’s first comedy partner Dwight Slade acted out their earliest teenage routines, to Kevin Booth, Bill’s lifelong friend and producer, standing at the edge of the Texas ranch pond recalling his and Bill’s mushroom-inspired UFO experience.

To Austin where David Johndrow, Bill's spiritual ally, showed us hundreds of unseen personal photos of Bill taken over 15 years, then tracking down the Houston comics, who told their hilarious stories of Bill's formative comedic years, and then of the descent into drink and drugs which almost killed him...to the family home in Little Rock, Arkansas where Bill's mother Mary served her toasted pound cake as siblings Steve and Lynn discussed the impact of Bill's more extreme routines on his Southern Baptist family. And finally to LA, to unearth the original 8 track master tapes of Bill's last performances – which became his legendary posthumous final albums, that continue to sell more each year.

Bill's story is truly unique, and so crafting the complex, interwoven layers of his life's journey through animation seemed the best way to truly immerse an audience in the magic and passion of the man that draws people to him still.

## About the film

Three years in the making, **AMERICAN: The Bill Hicks Story** brings the tale of one of modern culture's most iconic heroes to the big screen.

Much more than a comedian, Bill Hicks was and still is an inspiration to millions. His timeless comedy tackled the contradictions of America and modern life head on. But his unique gift was to tease apart the essence of religion, the dangers of unbridled government power and the double standards inherent in much of modern society, using nothing but his hilarious ideas and the uncompromising observational style that continues to resonate with successive generations.

Like many who have a strong sense of their place in history, Hicks left a large unseen legacy; his collection of video recordings and hundreds of photographs and these became the starting point for this feature-length animated documentary.

**But why animation?** Bill Hicks' complex story had never been adequately told and this demanded pushing documentary storytelling in a new direction to boldly recreate the key *unseen* scenes of Bill's life and, for the first time fully reveal the worlds that shaped his character and his comedy. Real locations, such as the bedroom window he snuck out of to perform with comedy partner Dwight Slade, the dark alleys of Houston where he nearly met his end, and the spellbinding theatre auditoriums where he played his most famous concerts; are all meticulously recreated in stunning three dimensional photorealism to provide a fresh new sense of the challenges the lone comedian faces and a real sense of what his journey was like.

Bill's story is told by the 10 people who knew him best; his family and closest friends who recount the twists & turns of his life with a freshness that hasn't faded in 15 years. From Kevin Booth, Bill's talented lifelong friend to the Outlaw Comics who introduced Bill into their heady world of drugs & alcohol, to photographer David Johndrow who perceptively captures some of the most revelatory moments of Bill's life, each speaker is a compelling narrator who still carries a piece of Bill with them and, woven together, they bring a palpable sense of Bill's presence to the screen.

Their story provides the platform for Bill's own voice and for the first time, his 17 years of material are combined in a powerful chronology with his offstage journey. With each of his routines now bedded in the context of his life, a fascinating insight into the growth and development of an artist is revealed, as Bill's early character work found first a comedic aim and then a truly powerful voice when he beat addiction to enthrall and challenge audiences, often touring 300 nights a year.

Recreating Bill's story has been a journey all of its own; traveling all across America to record extensive new interviews, watching hundreds of performances and developing the animation technique over thousands of hours to fully realize the cinematic vision required. With a little help and a few orbits of the sun, these raw materials – video clips, photographs & personal recollections – have now been put together to recreate a full sense of Bill's life, ambitions and achievements and a lasting testament as to why he will remain one of the enduring cultural cornerstones of our age.

## Reviews

Given the fact Bill Hicks was much more celebrated in the UK than he was at home, it is perhaps fitting that it's British filmmakers Matt Harlock and Paul Thomas who step up to pay him his dues. Cleverly shunning a conventional talking-heads approach, *American: The Bill Hicks Story* uses an innovative animation technique, some rare and previously unseen performance footage, and testimonies only from the people who knew him best, his family and close friends, to create a deeply perceptive, fittingly honest celebration of the man occasionally known as Goatboy...this is as complete and definitive a biography as there is available. The frequent stand-up clips serve to illustrate why Hicks remains so revered and relevant: he was so funny, so fearless and always right." *Michael Hayden, London Film Festival*

The directors do what a good bio-doc should: it makes you a fan of the subject if you weren't before. And if you knew of Bill Hicks before, you are gonna fall apart for this. The contradiction that *is* Bill Hicks starts to make sense in this inventive and daring doc. Like Bill Hicks' comedy, this is one of the few great docs for 2010 that has balls. Hicks is one of the greats - so I was incredibly relieved to see that this fitting homage to a legend does not, in any way, suck." *Hussain Currimbhoy, Sheffield International Documentary Festival*