

The Magazine of the Mizzou Alumni Association

# MIZZOU

## Stretching the Truth

True/False creator and MU alumni trio team up for Branson documentary film.



A documentary about Branson, Mo., *We Always Lie To Strangers*, appeared at the AFI Docs Film Festival June 19–23, 2013, in Washington, D.C. The filmmakers are, from left, David Wilson, director and True/False Film Fest co-founder; AJ Schnack, BJ '90, director; Matthew Mills, HES '92, executive producer; and Nathan Truesdell, BS '02, cinematographer. Photo courtesy of AJ Schnack.

*Story by Marcus Wilkins*

*Published July 17, 2013*

**Y**ou can't make this stuff up.

When AJ Schnack, BJ '90, and True/False Film Fest co-creator David Wilson began scouting for their documentary about Branson, Mo., they had hoped to illuminate some of the quirkiest, hidden corners of the self-proclaimed “live music capital of the world.” The co-directors never expected a close-up of the Presleys and Lennons.

*We Always Lie to Strangers* takes a cinéma vérité look at four of the town's families, two of which coincidentally share names with the aforementioned icons. The Branson Lennons are part of a wave of California transplants that moved to town in the early '90s. The Presleys founded the city's music scene, and Raeanne Presley has been Branson's mayor since 2007.

The film earned Schnack and Wilson special jury recognition for directing at the 2013 South By Southwest Film Conference and Festival in Austin, Texas.

“We wanted to get to the heart of what makes Branson what it is,” Schnack says. “Not as a superficial portrait of neon and sequins, but what it is that makes people want to live there and what drives the engine.”



AJ Schnack speaks to the crowd during a Q-and-A session at AFI Docs Film Festival. While at Mizzou, Schnack was a Summer Welcome leader, a *Maneater* reporter and Homecoming king. Photo courtesy of AJ Schnack.

Schnack, Wilson and the production team's third member, Nathan Truesdell, BS '02, began filming in 2007, and the story arc took an unexpected turn when the economy did. The city that hosts more than 7.5 million tourists a year and generates nearly \$3 billion in annual tourism revenue, according to the film's [website](#), profoundly felt the reverberations.

“In a way, I think Branson is kind of like the Wild West where people come in and ‘gamble’ trying to put on a show and hoping that the rising tide will lift all boats,” Schnack says. “In a place like that, there are a lot more people living closer to the financial edge than people suspect.”

Schnack, who grew up in Edwardsville, Ill., had a well-rounded Mizzou experience. He wrote for *The Maneater*, led the [Missouri Students Association](#) as president, guided incoming freshman as a Summer Welcome leader and reigned as 1989's Homecoming king.

Schnack began his film career in Los Angeles making videos for late-1990s bands such as Blink 182 and Papa Roach. His first documentary followed the nerd-rock band They Might Be Giants. Schnack also boasts a True/False submission, the 2006 Kurt Cobain documentary *About A Son*.

“Anyone who has spent time in Missouri knows it's something special, and it's not something you see

reflected in popular culture very often,” says Schnack about the essence of *We Always Lie To Strangers*. “There aren’t a lot of movies about why pieces of Missouri mean something, and this is probably something they haven’t seen in a film before.”

**Topics:** [Alumni](#), [Arts and Humanities](#), [Web Exclusives](#)

Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone:  
573-882-5916 | Email: [mizzou@missouri.edu](mailto:mizzou@missouri.edu)

*Opinions expressed in this site do not necessarily reflect the official position of MU or the  
Mizzou Alumni Association.*

© 2019 — Curators of the [University of Missouri](#). All rights reserved. [DMCA](#) and [other  
copyright information](#).

An [equal opportunity/access/affirmative action/pro-disabled and veteran employer](#).