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**Presents**

# **INFORMANT**

**A DOCUMENTARY BY JAMIE MELTZER**

*Winner: Grand Jury Prize, Doc NYC*

*Winner: Best Feature Documentary Award, Austin Film Festival*

81 min., U.S., 2012

To download hi-res images and video clips, please visit:

<http://www.musicboxfilms.com/informant-movies-70.php>

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## SUMMARY

Winner of Best Documentary at the 2012 Doc NYC Festival, *INFORMANT* is a fascinating, gripping portrait of Brandon Darby, a radical activist turned FBI informant who has been alternately vilified and deified. In 2005, Darby became an overnight hero when he traveled to Katrina-devastated New Orleans and braved toxic floodwaters to rescue a friend stranded in the Ninth Ward. Soon after, he co-founded Common Ground, a successful grassroots relief organization. But over the next few years, he began hiding a shocking secret. After two young protestors were arrested at the 2008 Republican National Convention, Darby revealed he had been instrumental in the indictment as an FBI informant.

The only film with access to Brandon Darby since his public confession, *INFORMANT* meticulously constructs a picture of his life — before and after the death threats — through interviews and tense reenactments starring Darby himself. His version of events is accompanied — and often contradicted — by evidence from acquaintances and expert commentators on various points along the political spectrum, posing complicated questions about trust and the nature of reality. As David Hanners of *St. Paul Pioneer Press* suggests, “When you interview people about Brandon Darby, you realize that everyone has a different idea of who he is.”

## **DIRECTOR/ WRITER'S BIOGRAPHY**

Jamie Meltzer's feature documentary films have been broadcast nationally on PBS and screened at numerous film festivals worldwide. They include OFF THE CHARTS: THE SONG-POEM STORY (Independent Lens, 2003) about the shadowy world of song-poems, WELCOME TO NOLLYWOOD, an investigation into the wildly successful Nigerian movie industry (PBS broadcast, 2008), and LA CAMINATA (2009), a recent short film about a small town in Mexico that runs a simulated border crossing as a tourist attraction, screened at Silverdocs and True/False, among others. Mr. Meltzer teaches in the Documentary Film and Video M.F.A. Program at Stanford University.

## **CAST & CREW**

Featuring: Brandon Darby, Scott Crow, Lisa Fithian, Caroline Heldman, Michael May, David Hanners

Executive Producer: Adam Spielberg

Producers: George Rush, Stephen Bannatyne

Director/Writer: Jamie Meltzer

Editors: Jamie Meltzer, John Kane, Summers Henderson

Composer: T. Griffin

Sound Design: Dan Olmsted/Berkeley Sound Artists

## **An Interview with Director Jamie Meltzer**

How would you describe **INFORMANT**?

**INFORMANT** is a character study, a psychological thriller about how Brandon Darby went from being a radical leftist activist to working with the FBI, and now an activist with the Tea Party. People exalted him as a hero on one side, a villain on the other, but there wasn't really anyone looking at all the complexities. I found myself in the gray area between those two extremes, trying to figure out what I thought about Brandon, and trying to get the audience to figure out what they think about him as well.

Why did you decide to make a film about Brandon Darby? Did you know him before you started working on the movie?

I first discovered this story when Brandon posted his 'open letter' declaring he was an informant, which the *NY Times* picked up. I immediately emailed him and began the (long) process of getting him to agree to an interview (it took six months to do the first interview and another year before he agreed to allow me to use the interview in the film). My tactic was just to be honest: I was interested in his story, his transformation from the radical left to working with the FBI, and I didn't have an ideological axe to grind. I was interested in creating a complex film that didn't present simple answers - a film that challenged the audience to make up their own minds about him and his choices. I was also clear that the film would contain perspectives very different from his own, because I was interested in portraying clashing viewpoints. That is really at the heart of it, because when you ask three people who know Brandon Darby what they think of him and his choices, you get three distinct but often contradictory opinions (as journalist David Hanners says in the film, "Everyone has a different idea of who he is.")

What are your thoughts about what he chose to do?

I didn't want to come down as a filmmaker on one side or another, but rather show the fascinating complexities of Darby and his choices. I don't believe a documentary film should tell people what to think or believe; I'd rather provoke, challenge, and invite people to be active, intelligent participants in deciphering the "story" – in this case Brandon's journey and its ramifications (political, personal, etc.)

How much time did you spend with Darby?

**We spent three years making the film- 20 hours of interviews with Darby, a few trips to New Orleans to visit the places where he established himself as a prominent activist, and a trip to St. Paul to visit the sites where the Republican Convention happened in 2008. We also shot many of the reenactments in the film with Brandon "starring" as himself - at once reenacting and commenting on the most contentious parts of his journey and the most controversial moments at the Republican National Convention.**

Has he seen the final film? If so, what was his response?

**He had mixed feelings about the film, is the short answer- at first he was angry, and then he slowly understood that the film didn't take sides, even as it presented varying perspectives on him and his choices. I think if everyone involved in the film isn't entirely happy with it, then I've done my job, which is a bit of a hard place to be as a filmmaker (not fully pleasing any of the subjects of the film), but I think it's the right place for this particular film.**

How was this filmmaking process different from past documentaries you've made?

**I used reenactments in this film which I hadn't done before, but which were essential to getting across the idea, central to the film, that anything you hear or see in the film is subjective and therefore unreliable, colored by the storyteller's perspective- whether it's Brandon, Scott Crow, or David McKay. I don't want the viewer to passively accept anything said or represented in the film; instead I used the reenactments to challenge the viewer to revisit key events and see them from varying angles/perspectives.**

How did you find the right tone for INFORMANT?

**The hard part in editing the film was trying to find a balance - where two sides of an event or issue are revealed, but the viewers are forced to make up their own minds. The challenge of the edit was providing the viewer with enough information without confusing them- this was incredibly hard in parts since Brandon's life journey is so intense and complicated- spanning revolutionary politics in post-Katrina New Orleans, guerilla movements in Venezuela, FBI involvement in a few different cases and of course, more recently, Tea Party**

**activism! Portraying all these aspects of his story, and keeping the storytelling gripping and complex all the way through was an exciting challenge.**

What are you working on next?

**I'm working on a film about a group of exonerated men in Dallas County (between them they have served 57 years in prison for crimes they didn't commit) who are starting a detective agency to look into cases of imprisoned men who, like themselves, were wrongly convicted. They call themselves the Freedom Fighters, and these guys are truly inspiring; I'm following them as they start the detective agency and take on their first cases over the next year or so. Our website is [www.freedomfightersfilm.com](http://www.freedomfightersfilm.com).**

## **ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS**

Founded in 2007, Music Box Films has quickly established itself as one of the leading theatrical and home entertainment distributors of foreign language, American independent and documentary films in the US. Past releases include the film adaptations of Stieg Larsson's trilogy of international mega selling novels; the first in the series, THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO, with over \$10 million in US box office, was one of the most popular international releases of the decade. 2012 heralded diverse new titles such as Terence Davies' THE DEEP BLUE SEA, starring Rachel Weisz, and Philippe Falardeau's Academy Award nominated MONSIEUR LAZHAR, one of the top grossing foreign language films of the year. 2013 releases include Cate Shortland's LORE and Baran bo Odar's THE SILENCE. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates The Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premiere venue for independent and foreign films.