



ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL

USA, 2008, 90 minutes

Director: Sacha Gervais, **Producer:** Rebecca Yeldham

Cast: Steve 'Lips' Kudlow, Robb Reiner, Ivan Hurd, Tiziana Arrigoni, Chris 'CT' Tsangerides

Best Documentary Feature Awards: Edmonton, Calgary, Galway

Audience Awards: Los Angeles, Sydney

Synopsis -- © Sundance Film Festival

At 14, Toronto school friends Steve “Lips” Kudlow and Robb Reiner made a pact to rock together forever. Their band, Anvil, went on to become the “demigods of Canadian metal,” releasing one of the heaviest albums in metal history, 1982’s *Metal on Metal*. The album influenced a musical generation, including Metallica, Slayer, and Anthrax, and went on to sell millions of records. But Anvil’s career took a different path—straight to obscurity. Director Sacha Gervasi has concocted a wonderful and often hilarious account of Anvil’s last-ditch quest for elusive fame and fortune. His ingenious filmmaking may first lead you to think this a mockumentary, but it isn’t. Gervasi joined the legendary heavy-metal band as a roadie for a tour of Canadian hockey arenas, so he has intimate insight into the members’ eccentricities. It’s fascinating to see the reality of their day-to-day lives as they struggle to make ends meet, take a misguided European tour, and engage in antics on the road—which is not always lined with fans. Gervasi even finds a softer center to this raucous film, introducing us to band members’ ever-supportive, but long-suffering, families. At its core, *Anvil! The Story of Anvil* is a timeless tale of survival and the unadulterated passion it takes to follow your dream, year after year. Anvil rocks—it has no other choice

Review: Anton Bitel, Eye for Film, 2008

It is 1984, and the Canadian proto-slashers Anvil are at the top of their game. Their first album, *Metal On Metal*, has proven a huge influence on the nascent heavy metal scene, the outrageous showmanship of their lead singer Steve 'Lips' Kudlow ensures their live performances are always memorable, their drummer (and Kudlow's best friend since he was 14) Robb Reiner is, according to a later assessment by Metallica's Lee Ulrich, "the best out there", and they have just played Japan's Super Rock Festival before a stadium heaving with adoring fans. Yet unlike so many of their peers and imitators who went on to sell millions of records, Anvil somehow get passed over and left behind. As Motorhead's Lemmy puts it: "you've gotta be at the right place at the right time."

Cut to the present day, and Kudlow and Reiner are still at it in their fifties. They may have day jobs, they may have families to support (or who support them), but they are still pursuing the same adolescent dream of rock stardom in a band whose latest line-up includes two of their younger fans. As director Gervasi catches up with his former friends and heroes in this endearing

documentary, they are going on a semi-disastrous European tour (their first in ages), and are reunited with their very first producer, Chris 'CT' Tsangerides, in the hope that he can bring back some of their glory years and give them the breakthrough they have been chasing for decades. *Anvil! The Story Of Anvil* is a tale of mishaps, anguish and chronic rejection, as bad management and the advance of time all begin (or rather endlessly continue) to take their toll on the band – but thanks to Kudlow's seemingly limitless optimism and his enduring friendship with Reiner, it is impossible not to be charmed by his arrested development and to find yourself rooting for his eventual success even as you laugh at his many failures.

Endearingly, the very same man whose first composition, Thumb Hang, concerned a particular method of inquisitional torture ("I thought, there's a cool subject"), and who used to perform on stage dressed in bondage gear and brandishing a dildo, later complains of an abortive attempt at telemarketing: "I've been trained my whole life to be polite, and that job is the exact opposite." Kudlow may be childlike, but with that comes a brand of innocence that is utterly winning.

In a sense there is little here that has not already been seen in other band-oriented films. There are the emotional meltdowns and studio angst of *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster* (2004), albeit on a smaller scale. There is the comic spectacle of an aging metal-head still clinging to the ambitions of his youth, as in *The Rocker* (2008). And it goes without saying that there is the epically absurd posturing of *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) – with Gervasi lovingly focusing on the moment when Tsangerides actually does turn the dial up to 11. Yet what makes it all work is the director's genuine affection for his subjects, so that the film's inherent humour never quite lapses into a supercilious kind of ridicule. Put simply, Gervasi is with Anvil all the way, and the result is that you will be, too.

The greatest irony, of course, is that if anything is going to resurrect these dinosaurs of rock, it is this film. So expect a massive comeback some time soon from the band that never quite went away.

Director and Producer

British filmmaker **Sacha Gervasi** is himself a one-time fan who as a teenager in the Eighties accompanied them as a roadie on two of their American tours, learning how to play drums on the way. Since 1995 he has worked as a reviewer and screenwriter. His recent credits include: *The Terminal*, starring Tom Hanks and directed by Steven Spielberg, *Comrade Rockstar* for Tom Hanks, and *How to Marry A Millionaire* for Nicole Kidman.

Rebecca Yeldham is an independent producer who most recently produced *The Kite Runner*, and has worked on a variety of feature and documentary projects including director Walter Salles' most recent two features, *Linha de Passe* and *On the Road*. Yeldham also served as Executive Producer on *The Motor Cycle Diaries* prior to which she ran the US production wing for FilmFour.