

JENNIFER WOLFE

"HELL BROKE LUCE"

Bringing Tom Waits' Apocalyptic War Dream to Life



Illustrator, photographer and director Matt Mahurin has created some of the most iconic images of contemporary American popular culture, using technology to amplify emotional content and sparking the ongoing debate surrounding digital manipulation. His illustrations have appeared in *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *Mother Jones* and *Rolling Stone*, among many other publications, and several of his photographs—on subjects as diverse as AIDS, the Texas prison system and Nicaragua—have been included in the permanent collection of New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Mahurin, a recipient of a Lifetime Achievement

Award from the Music Video Producers Guild, is a veteran director of music videos, having

Artist and illustrator Matt Mahurin created the music video for Tom Waits' "Hell Broke Luce" from the album *Bad As Me*.

worked with such performers as U2, R.E.M. and Metallica on more than 100 videos over the

course of his career. And while he has worked on productions of epic proportions in the past, his recent collaboration with Tom Waits on the video for "Hell Broke Luce," from the 2011 *Bad As Me* album, has a handcrafted feel and level of authenticity that can be achieved only by a solo practitioner.

"My work has always had an organic look," Mahurin states. "The handmade quality is an extension of process. I don't believe in perfectionism. It is impossible and counterproductive. I prefer a few rough edges ... keeps me relaxed and moving forward."

Written about Jeff Lucey, a Marine who suffered



"How is it that the only ones responsible for making this mess / Got their sorry asses stapled to a god---n desk"

from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and committed suicide following his service during the Iraq War, the song is a rousing protest anthem set to a military cadence. The video, described by Waits as "an apocalyptic war dream," arrived in August amid a flurry of speculation about a possible tour.

"Kathleen and I envisioned it as an enlightened drill sergeant yelling the hard truths of war to a brand new batch of recruits," Waits commented in a press release, speaking of Kathleen Brennan, his wife and artistic collaborator. "The video grew from the gnawing image of a soldier pulling his home, through a battlefield, at the end of a rope."

Mahurin used no postproduction facilities or effects house to create the video, instead shooting, editing and compositing all the shots himself. He employed Panasonic AG-HVX200 and Leica D-Lux 4 cameras to capture video and still images, and Adobe Photoshop and Apple Final Cut Pro and Motion.

"This one-man-band approach is rooted in my life as a painter," says Mahurin. "When I think of making a feature film, what drives me as much as



"I lost my buddy and I wept, wept"

the desire to tell a story is the sense of community that comes with being in a filmmaking family. You breathe, sweat and bleed on one another as you try to make the day. The only experience that rivals that bond of belonging is the complete opposite ... to pretty much go it alone."

Asked how his work as a photographer and

illustrator informs his work as a filmmaker, Mahurin says that although strong style, tone and atmosphere are important to the final piece, what's essential is the point of view. "As an illustrator and photographer, the idea behind the image was always most important," he relates. "It's the content that gives the visuals lasting



"Big f---ing ditches in the middle of the road /
You pay a hundred dollars just for fillin' in the hole"



"Boom went his head away /
And boom went Valerie /
What the hell was it that the president said? /
Give him a beautiful parade instead /
Left, right, left"



"Hell broke luce"

power. I enjoy the satisfaction that comes with the finished work, but what is most fulfilling and challenging is process ... the making of the thing."

Whether creating illustrations for a *TIME* magazine story on domestic violence or a photo essay on Texas maximum security prisons, Mahurin's background as an artist has been the creation of images with social and political subjects. "The most important challenge was to create images that lived up to the power and message of Tom's song," he says about "Hell Broke Luce." "I will always be grateful to Tom and his wife, Kathleen, for the opportunity to express my feelings concerning the tragic consequences of the countless young souls who are sent to war."

Discussing what he learned from the project, Mahurin comments, "I learned what I already know but must prove to myself with every

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—Matt Mahurin, director,
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project—especially filmmaking, because it is so physically demanding in time and energy: that I have one chance to give it all I have, and that helps me do my best."

In addition to ongoing music video and film projects, Mahurin is in the process of finishing *The Imagemakers Handbook*, a 500-page meditation on life as a creative professional.

"No matter what you do as a creative being, what is most important is to have something to say. To lay on the line your emotions, ideas and opinions in the work you do," Mahurin advises. "Finally, to believe that what you have to say is worthy, and that you are the only one with the power to say it. And no matter if it is a groundbreaking creative achievement or a solid piece of pure entertainment, if you are true to yourself, the lives of others will be better off for having made a connection to your art." **dv**