AFTER HOURS
FILM SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER
JUNE 15, 2026
THROUGH
AUGUST 10, 2026

SURFILMUSIC

Monday, June 15, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Antonio Ferme | Variety | Not Rated | 77 mins.

Jack Johnson on How a Surfing Injury, Warning from Chris Rock and Deadly Shark Attack Shaped 'SURFILMUSIC' Documentary

Chris Rock had it all wrong, as it turned out, when he once laid some cynical conventional wisdom about show business on Jack Johnson.

In May 2003, a 28-year-old Johnson found his way onto "The Late Show with David Letterman." A few years prior, the Oahu native had been chasing a future as a professional surfer; now he was a bona fide music star whose second album, "On and On," had just crashed into the top 10 of the Billboard 200. Waiting backstage with Johnson were his wife, Kim Johnson, and best friend, Emmett Malloy, where they shared a memorable encounter with Rock.

"We were in this little dressing room and I said, 'Oh, this is Emmett, and I'm Jack. We're best friends. He's my manager, too,'" Johnson recalled in an interview with Variety. "He looked at us and said, 'Ah, you guys blew it. You guys are going to hate each other in about five years. You'll see.'"

Rock had been around Hollywood long enough to know how the typical story goes: a rising young talent, swept up in the pursuit of fame, sheds his old skin and slowly detaches from the very people pivotal to his journey.

But in "SURFILMUSIC," a documentary that traces — as the title suggests — Johnson's evolution from pro-surf prodigy to aloof surf documentarian to world-famous superstar, the throughline is that Johnson himself never really changed. Fittingly, that's driven home by the fact that the film is directed by Malloy, who was right beside him for that defining debut on "Letterman."

"That was about 20 years ago now," Johnson says, laughing about his encounter with Rock. "It's all worked out. That's our biggest success, for sure. The friendships are all still intact."

"SURFILMUSIC," which opens in more than 100 theaters nationwide on June 5, stitches together rare footage from the formative surf films Johnson and Malloy made as kids with present-day footage of the old North Shore crew reminiscing on the good ol' days. Aside from higher-quality cameras and a bit more gray hair, the time jump is almost indiscernible.

"It's not a surfing film; it's not a music film. And that will probably be its curse," Malloy says. "But it's also the best thing about it. It's about friendships and making things."

One scene shows the crew in a garage deconstructing a surfboard and passionately debating where the fins should go. That playful spirit defines the meandering nature of the entire movie, which isn't too concerned with staying within the confines of a traditional structure or hamming up elements for mainstream appeal.

For instance, the movie's real dramatic thrust arrives almost immediately: one where the surfing prodigy smashes his head into a coral reef while riding the Banzai Pipeline on Oahu's North Shore. The brutal wipeout required more than 100 stitches — and tentatively ended Johnson's professional surfing ambitions. "We didn't play it as heavy drama in the film," Malloy explains, "because it was just sort of a life shift for Jack." During the isolated recovery period that followed, Johnson found a lot more time to play guitar. The rest was history.

What did change during the making of the film was the loss of longtime friend Tamayo Perry, who died in a shark attack in June 2024. The revelation is built toward in the film's third act, which is ultimately dedicated to Perry's memory. Malloy said the shocking loss led Johnson to feel "a little more emotionally open" about revisiting and sharing stories from their past.

"I was kind of dipping my toes into the project at first; we were just having fun going through the old footage," Johnson says. "When we lost Tamayo, I really intentionally started watching through hours of footage to find little bits that never made the movie. More and more, it felt like he was the type of person where everyone knew he was the quintessential friend. He was the moral compass of our group. Losing him just made me reflect a lot about friendship in general."

Join Us for the Pre-Show Organ Concert!

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TIVOLI THEATRE

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Hekla

Monday, July 27, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Dan Shanahan | Film Obsessive | Not Rated | 89 mins.

The introduction of the title character in Hekla is something to truly soak in. The camera moves with a boom jib shot from toe to head to reveal a young woman in a pink, belted outfit and bold makeup accentuations. The film takes a good, long look at this figure as she lifts a crown to her head and looks right down the barrel of the lens into our watching eyes. This moment turns out to be the fleeting imagery of a dream in color, as the plainer version of the figure wakes up to an apartment bedroom in a black-and-white real world. Immediately, we see this woman, played by Elizabeth Stam, and wonder what the dream in question is and how far the character is from achieving it.

Stam is Hekla Gudmunsdottir, an aspiring actress in Chicago, last seen stealing scenes in Michael Glover Smith's previous ensemble feature, Relative, who, according to omniscient narration from Twin Peaks icon Wendy Robie, has a very full day ahead of herself on March 23, 2026, after an early morning lakefront jog. She has four—count 'em, four—auditions for different gigs crisscrossing the city and an evening capped off by a Backroom Shakespeare Project performance. Along the way, Hekla is also trying to squeeze in lunch with her romantic partner, Tyler Hrabosky (Mary Tilden), at Mimi's and a portrait photographer appointment for new headshots.

Broken into titled acts and using Chicago's public transportation system of buses and trains as scenic, breath-catching transitions, Hekla treads with Stam acting out this hectic itinerary. Each act covers one of the four auditions, with an intermission break for those headshots. Promising to be a peak, the fifth and final chapter is dedicated to the performance of "The Scottish Play" at Cunnen's on the east side of the diverse Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago.

If thespian glory is indeed the ultimate goal, we are presented with a determined and vivacious candidate ready to knock the socks off the world. Yet, we are all too aware how difficult and woolly this road may be. Through this collaborative screenplay effort by Smith and Stam, Hekla takes audiences into these casting sessions filled with professional pitfalls and unexpected hoops to craft a gem of a character arc. Hekla's first audition, surprisingly—and regrettably—has her reading a bitter domestic argument scene with an actual ex-boyfriend (Conor Foley) for a persnickety director (short film specialist Jim Vendiola) with his share of notes. The second one, later, is the complete opposite; a scriptless and open-ended litmus test of vibe and personality with the vaguest experimental director (Grant Carriker) you can imagine. To think, two more unpredictable opportunities follow.

In each audition, Hekla Gudmunsdottir finds herself adjusting to the suggestions and giving it her all, no matter if it's for a full-sized production or a trivial TV commercial. We watch this artist pour her heart out over and over to get "maybes" and "we'll call you either way" answers. These dramatic swings telegraph the struggles of patience and poise required of actors. They have to constantly be prepared for a total effort and smile in the face of indifference. Then, actors must endure the eternal wait for either fortuitous approval or delayed denial. Either way, the prolonged torment of those decisions can rattle one's confidence and follow them out of the performance spaces. That becomes the case when Tyler wants to talk about feelings, but Hekla cannot or will not

Lifting what would be agonizing with visual flair is Michael Glover Smith's hue shifts during Hekla's performances. Anytime she is being recorded, cinematographer Jose Perez (What Rhymes with Magdalena?) takes the perspective of that scene's camera and puts the film in color, creating lush pauses from the monochrome French New Wave approach lent to the rest of Hekla. That extra layer of vibrance—along with the pep given by the soundtrack and score selections by Trev Gibb and King of the Sea—emphasizes the parallel between the opening dream sequence and the playful pretending of acting.

Perhaps it's no coincidence that "Hekla" is Icelandic for "cloak" and matches the name of the most active stratovolcano on the island. Powerfully conveyed through Elizabeth Stam's full range of personality permutations, it's fascinating to examine Hekla's switcheroos of color and wonder how much of a performative cloak we are watching. Can events in the monochromatic reality be better than the dreary palette they take place within? Does color tip off that Hekla Gudmunsdottir is more alive on camera than off? At the same time, can we ask the same questions of Stam herself, making all of this come to life?

Perfect to the expression, Elizabeth Stam is the straw that stirs the drink. For "one single day" movies like Hekla to succeed, they need a central character you want to be around and never miss a moment with during the running time of a fictional day, thanks to a compelling performance by the given actor. Well-steeped Renaissance man Michael Glover Smith has found and granted that kind of magic to Elizabeth Stam in the title role. Our draw to her is instant, and you want to watch her world as soon as she puts on that crown in the dream and symbolically chases it when she awakes. Moreover, you freely lend your observant heart to her with the allure and empathy she generates. We can't take our eyes off Stam across the best and worst parts of her journey, right down to the huzzah-level post-credits stinger.

Please join us for our thought-provoking post screening discussions!

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Monday, August 10, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Reel Films | Not Rated | 66 Mins.

The Rock 'N' Roll DJ Who Changed Radio:
The Wild I-Tralian, Dick Biondi

In the 1950s and '60s, rock 'n' roll swept across America, driven by the power of radio. But it was the disc jockeys who held the real sway: deciding what records to spin and, in doing so, shaping the soundtrack of a generation. With bands vying for airplay and DJs battling to be number one, an original and irreverent voice cut through the noise: the Wild I-Tralian, Dick Biondi.

Biondi didn't just play the hits—he made them. He helped break The Beatles and The Beach Boys to American audiences, and championed young artists like Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Bobby Darin, and The Rolling Stones. His rebellious, fast-talking style clashed with radio management, and he was famously fired from dozens of stations—but the kids adored him.

If rock 'n' roll was the heartbeat of hot-blooded teenage America, Dick Biondi was its voice.

ABOUT THE FILM

The Voice That Rocked America: The Dick Biondi Story is a one-hour, grassroots fan documentary about Hall of Fame radio disc jockey Dick Biondi. For over six decades, Dick's on-air energy, humor, and unwavering support of new talent built an enduring connection with audiences and musicians alike.

Told through rare archival photos and footage, re-creations, and interviews with recording artists, broadcasters, friends, fans, and Biondi himself, the film captures the spirit of a broadcasting pioneer whose passion changed lives—on both sides of the microphone.

Narrated by Award-Winning Filmmaker Pamela Enzweiler-Pulice, whose own life was transformed after meeting her teenage idol, The Voice That Rocked America is both a tribute and a love letter to the power of radio, rock 'n' roll, and fandom itself.

WHO'S IN THE FILM

Rock stars, radio stars, and Dick Biondi himself! The original Jersey Boy, Frankie Valli, Brian Wilson and Al Jardine of The Beach Boys, Paul Shaffer (The Late Show with David Letterman), Tony Orlando, Walt Parazaider (Chicago), Frankie Avalon, TV & radio personality Bob Sirott, John Records Landecker (Hall of Fame Broadcaster), Jim Peterik (The Ides of March and Survivor), Carl Giammarese, Dennis Tufano, and Nick Fortuna (The Buckinghams), Comedian Tom Dreesen, Jimy Sohns (The Shadows of Knight), and more.

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ABOUT THE FILMMAKER:

Pam Enzweiler-Pulice grew up during the 1950s and 1960s in Villa Park, Illinois, a blue-collar suburb of Chicago. From a young age Pam's interests were always creative. She listened to music, directed the neighborhood kids in a play, and wrote stories. During a low point in her late twenties, Pam destroyed her "childish" stories and poems in a fire. But the creative urges persisted.

"It wasn't until I was well into my sixties that I truly followed my heart and believed in myself," says Pam. "At the age of 77, I finally realized a creative dream by making the Dick Biondi film." Persistence paid off but the creative pursuit has been quite a journey.

Watch Now!
2025 Anim8 Virtual Student Film Festival

Anim8, the After Hours Film Society's 22nd Annual Student Film Festival, is available online for viewing! Culled from 71 entries from 11 countries around the world, this special program showcases the top-rated films from students of all ages. Watch from the comfort of your home and celebrate this new wave of cinema! Go to afterhoursfilmsociety.com/student-film-fest and enjoy.

And, while you are on the site, please take a look at our call for entries for the 2026 Anim8 Student Film Festival! Students of any level through Graduate are eligible. The application is available on FilmFeeway.com/Amim8. The deadline is June 14 with an option for late entries through July.

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SURFILMUSIC

"Intimate, reflective, and emotionally resonant."
–The Pop Break

Monday, June 15 at 7:30 pm

Hekla

"An intimately deglamorized, down-in-the-trenches look at the acting profession."
–The Hollywood Reporter

Monday, July 27 at 7:30 pm

THE VOICE THAT ROCKED AMERICA
THE DICK BIONDI STORY

"If rock 'n' roll was the heartbeat of hot-blooded teenage America, Dick Biondi was its voice."
–Reel Stories

Monday, August 10 at 7:30 pm

The After Hours Film Society is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council.