

Stuck Outside of Phoenix Moving in the Right Direction

by Holly Foreman
Photos supplied



Executive Producer Nico Holthaus

At their core, most musicians are hopeless wanderers. Whether they wander the chord changes, the bar circuit, or set off cross country in search of their place in the scene, they are constantly looking for what's next. *Stuck Outside of Phoenix* captures the spirit of the nomad in us all, while staying true to the breakout roots of the '90s rock scene in none other than Tempe, Arizona.

Based on the 2003 book written by Art Edwards, *Stuck* doesn't spin its wheels. We first meet Josh Hote as he's noodling around on a Fender Jazzman in his room at his mom's house. Everyone



During taping of a scene in which BlueBottle rocks out for an appreciative audience

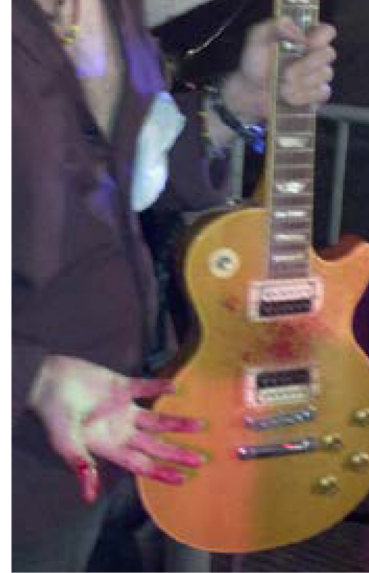
will recognize the flannel shirt and Converse kicks uniform of the early rocker as Hote gets a phone call from a friend in the burgeoning Seattle grunge scene. With hindsight, we recognize the significant crossroads this 21-year old faces – and we wonder throughout the next three days whether he will make the leap and drive that old VW Beetle north or stay in the Valley of the Sun to see his story play out.

Hote, expertly played by Brandon Hannifin, finds himself in an odd limbo. He has told his band mates he



Receptive and energetic crowd at the premier of *Stuck Outside of Phoenix* at the Tempe Pollack Cinema

is quitting in favor of the Seattle scene. His few belongings are packed, but he



Doug Hopkins' bloody "Ghost Guitar"

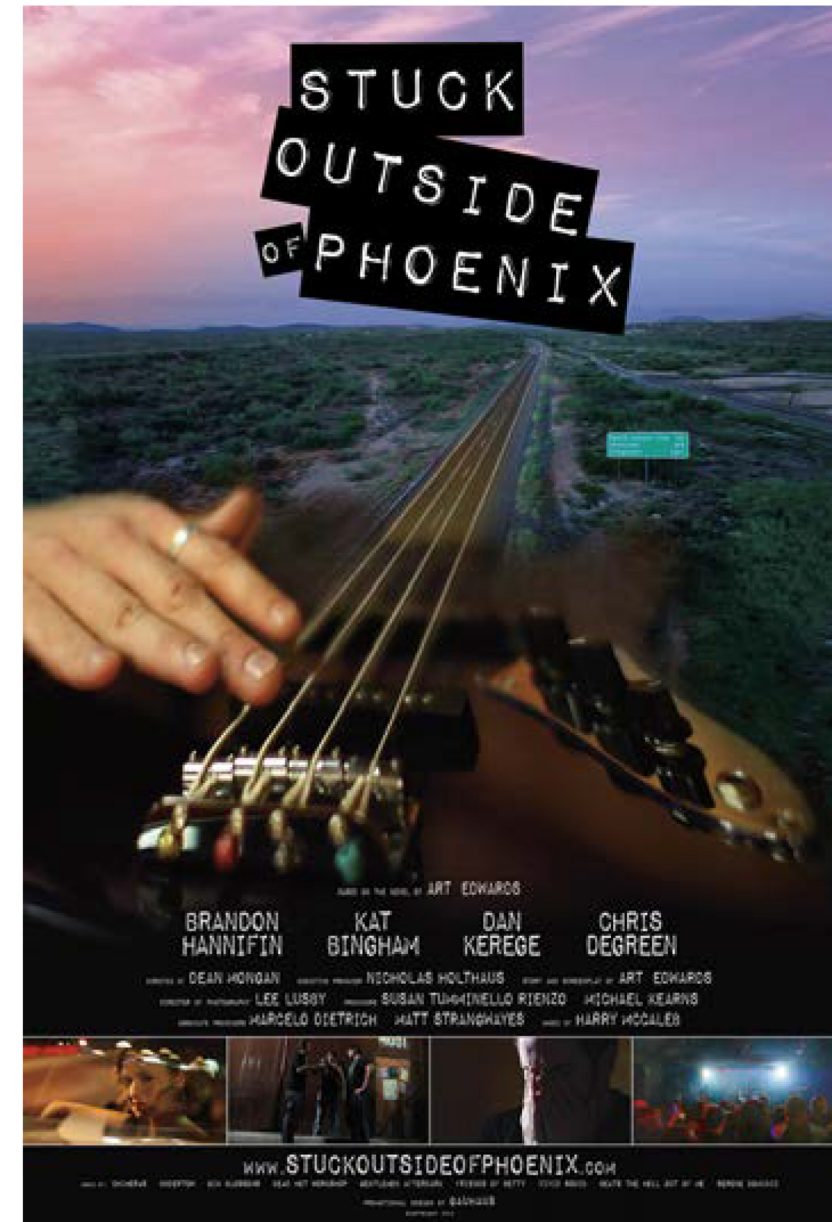
stays in town one more night to see a concert with the elusive Lola, endearingly portrayed by Kat Bingham. Hote struggles between watching his hometown dreams take steps toward reality and the choice he has made to be part of the Seattle movement. At times we feel he is desperately trying to find redemption in his home town, something to love, something to make him want to stay.

Several times during the making of *Stuck*, Executive Producer Nicholas Holthaus had reason to think it would never see the big screen. Intense personal cost and unusual production issues made getting the film into post-production seem insurmountable. But after some bizarre interference, heartbreaking losses and setbacks, *Stuck* finally premiered at Tempe Pollack Cinema on May 2, 2013 to an enthusiastic crowd of almost 400. Actor Donald J. Steward said after watching the movie, "I've never seen a film that so accurately nails what starting a band is like."

It has since played to positive reviews at other Arizona locations, including the inaugural Jerome Independent Film Festival in June of 2013, and has received several distribution offers. *Stuck* returns for one last local showing at Tempe Pollack Cinema October 26th. Especially with so many transplants living in the Phoenix area, local moviegoers strongly identify with this story of being at a crossroads and hoping to make the right choice.

The film's environment is the Tempe music scene, which burst wide open in the early '90s with such major-label bands as the Gin Blossoms, Refreshments, Pistoleros and Dead Hot Workshop. Holthaus was able to use his years of intimate knowledge of that time to ensure a virtual reenactment of the rock scene that brought international attention to Tempe. Many of those bands' songs are featured in *Stuck*, as is the storied guitar of Doug Hopkins, who was a member of the Gin Blossoms and Pistoleros. Amicably dubbed the "ghost guitar", it's the instrument on which massive pop hits "Hey Jealousy" and "Found Out About You" were composed. The guitar visited pawn shops after Hopkins' suicide in 1993, and then was found and returned to Hopkins' estate during the production of the project. It bolstered its ghostly legend when, upon its case first being opened by Holthaus, a disabled car alarm shrieked for no apparent reason. During the final night of filming, it cut open Holthaus's thumb. Similarly strange occurrences have been attributed to Hopkins' guitar when in the hands of others. It sits in its rightful place today, with family, and has harmed no one since.

Associate Producer Susan Rienzo said of the film, "As an actress, I'd never seen a movie build from the ground up before, from all the pre-production meetings to the finished product on the screen.



Stuck Outside of Phoenix movie poster

All that goes into it, it's nothing short of miraculous. If it had been anyone else producing, this film would never have been made."

The combination of efforts from local crew and actors with the intense dedication of Holthaus brought a film to the screen that not only chronicles a key time in Tempe history, but reminds us all of the wanderlust of youth, love, and the open road.