

Interview: Comedian Barry Crimmins of ‘Call Me Lucky’ at 2015 Chicago Critics Film Festival

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 6, 2015 - 4:40pm

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CHICAGO – One of the more emotionally stunning screenings at the Chicago Critics Film Festival (CCFF) was a film about a comedian. Barry Crimmins is a beloved comic, with a stable of famous friends. But he also had a secret in his past, and it’s all explored in “Call Me Lucky,” directed by fellow comic traveler Bobcat Goldthwait.

Crimmins is a stand up comic who helped manage a couple of Boston comedy clubs back in the 1980s, which launched such comic stalwarts as Goldthwait, Steven Wright, Paula Poundstone and Kevin Meany. His style is fiery political anarchy, as he rails on American government, religions and other institutions. His childhood has some horrible abuse consequences, and subsequently he became an advocate for policing child pornography on the internet, for which he was cited for several honors. The documentary by Bobcat Goldthwait doesn’t turn away from anything, and the past truths of Crimmins becomes the whole truth of his anarchistic comic style.



At the CCFF: Barry Crimmins (left) and Bobcat Goldthwait of ‘Call Me Lucky,’ Music Box Theatre in Chicago

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com spoke to Barry Crimmins before the screening of his documentary at the 2015 CCFF on May 2nd.

HollywoodChicago.com: When did you realize you actually wanted to start a comedy club, and what steps did you first take to begin the process of doing it?

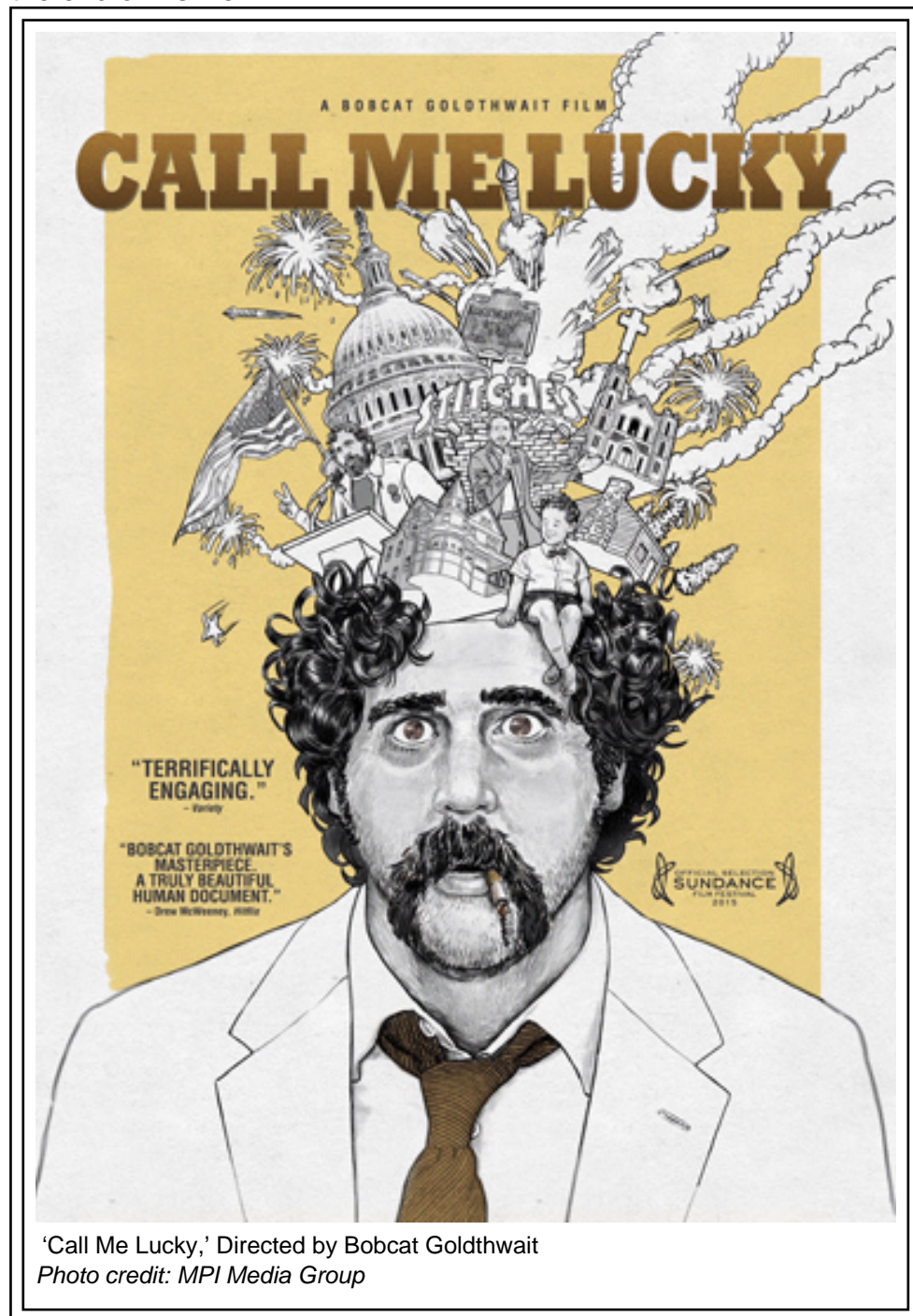
Barry Crimmins: I hustled to do it. Somebody else owned the club, and kept losing it in mah-jong games. I was the artistic director. I never drew a salary, I insisted on 0% at the top, that was non-negotiable.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you and Bobcat began the process of creating the documentary, how far did you think you wanted to go into your abusive past, and are you satisfied that you achieved that goal?

Crimmins: Yes, but it was all up to Bob. One of the things about recovering from something like that, is understanding that that I wasn't complicit in it. I didn't have any responsibility in it. People are always saying things like, 'it took a great deal of courage to admit that you were abused.' I didn't admit anything, only guilty people admit things. I disclosed, I testified. It's completely normal to me to talk about it, but I'm also a whole bunch of other things – I'm a political satirist, I'm an activist, I'm a good friend, I'm someone who will help you push your car out of a snowbank.

It was one element of my story, but it's not my whole identity. But I don't run from it, because people should disclose, and talk about this stuff. I've been public about it for 20 years, but it took until now to get the film done. Actually Robin Williams was one of the catalysts for getting it done. I even took a swipe at the script, but apparently 315 pages was too long.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was your reaction to Robin William's passing, given the circumstances of his death, and his depression at the end of his life?



Crimmins: It wasn't the circumstances of his depression, he got Parkinson's Disease, it attacked his brain, and that's what happened. Other people put their agendas out there, and once that story was out, nobody was listening. The coroner said what happened, and it was specific to Parkinson's.

Even though that record is correct by medical authorities, people were still out there talking about the depression. Sure we should talk about that, but in Robin's case it was like a beam hit his brain, and it was the horrible illness. Once someone is dead, you can make them into whatever you want.

HollywoodChicago.com: How does comedy and satire best defeat American fascism?

Crimmins: Mark Twain said nothing can withstand the assault of ridicule. The light of sunshine can kill maggots – it's just a way to shine a light on it. Also you can smuggle in content. If you have an audience laughing, you can call out bullshit. When you get someone laughing about the truth, it's like you broke them on the witness stand. The whole audience is on the witness stand.

HollywoodChicago.com: Who do you like as a sort of comic mentor, or somebody that came before you?

Crimmins: Mark Twain has always been my guy, always. And then after that I point to the Smother Brothers, Lenny Bruce and George Carlin. They are all great, but Twain is where it started.

HollywoodChicago.com: Of all the young comics that you gave a start to, which did you never think would make it, and how did they prove you wrong?

Crimmins: You never know who is going to ‘make it.’ The ones I like, I’m not surprised that they made it. But, for example, if you look at the style of Steven Wright, you’d probably say it was far-fetched and no one is going to get it. But his act turns out to be one of the most brilliant ever.

I’m still working with talent even now. It’s fun to work with people who are excited to do good work. I don’t even know what ‘making it’ means. For me, I’ve woke up every day since I was 18 years old, doing exactly what I f**king wanted to do. That’s success to me, I never had to go to some cubicle and deal with some clown, some serial bully with a bad polyester suit, sexually harassing the women around me. I never had to do that.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you think your epitaph would be, if you had to write it?

Crimmins: ‘You can’t believe he lasted this long.’

HollywoodChicago.com: [Laughs]

The 2015 Chicago Critics Film Festival runs through May 7th, at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 North Southport, Chicago. [Click here](#) [23] for film schedules and information. [Click here](#) [24] to purchase tickets.



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [26]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [25]

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