

Paul Williams, Legendary '70s Songwriter and 'Muppets' Guest-Star, is 'Still Alive'

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Legendary singer-songwriter/television guest-star [Paul Williams](#) received two Emmy nominations for his work on a '[Muppets](#)' special a couple years back. When he went to the awards ceremony, he received an interesting greeting from an old showbiz acquaintance.

"All of a sudden, [Tom Hanks](#) got up and he came over, and he went, 'Oh my God! You're still alive!' Williams tells Spinner with a laugh.

Hanks isn't the only one who thought that Williams, the man behind classics like the [Carpenters](#)' 'We've Only Just Begun,' [Three Dog Night](#)'s 'Old Fashioned Love Song,' the 'Love Boat' theme and Kermit the Frog's 'The Rainbow Connection,' was spending more time pushing up daisies than contemplating rainbows these days. Filmmaker [Stephen Kessler](#) had just assumed his childhood idol had long since passed away until he stumbled on some amazing news while searching the Internet one night: Paul Williams was alive and well -- and still famous in Manitoba.

After a brief correspondence, Kessler traveled to an event in Winnipeg to meet the singer and convince him to star in the documentary that would become '[Paul Williams: Still Alive](#),' which just enjoyed its world premiere at the [Toronto International Film Festival](#).

"There was something about Paul, because of the way I connected to him on TV, that made me want to do a film about him," says Kessler.

Williams was far less excited about the idea. After willingly stepping away from the spotlight to take care of his addictions (to alcohol and fame) and build a better life for himself and his family, the last thing he wanted to do was tempt any long-dormant demons.

"I said to Steve at the beginning there's something really pathetic about some little old man with his cup saying, 'Please sir, can I have some more fame?'" Williams explains.

Even the process of filming the documentary felt wrong to him, and reminded him too much of his old life as the attention-happy talk show guest who was on 'The Tonight Show' 48 times.

"There's something about pretending the camera wasn't there that felt so Old World to me. An alcoholic can abstain from alcohol. Cocaine addicts can abstain from cocaine. I think at one point, I had a deep hunger, and it was for the camera being on me. I was like the food addict who was now playing with a little bit of something that was highly addictive in my life, so it's an odd feeling, for me, to be a participant in this."

Eventually, Williams convinced Kessler to join him in front of the camera to make the whole process feel less artificial. That was when 'Paul Williams: Still Alive' started to take shape. Any notion of a straightforward, where-are-they-now profile piece gave way to a rich exploration of hero worship, the creative process, and a man who finally found what he was looking for when he turned his back on fame.

Even though Williams is out of the spotlight, he still remains extremely active in the music community. In addition to his work as an addiction advocate, he's also President of The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) and continues to work on his own material.

He doesn't listen to as much music as he used to, because he finds it impossible to do so without wanting to write some of his own, but he does enjoy current artists like [Jason Mraz](#) and [Daft Punk](#). He played a duet of 'The Rainbow Connection' with Mraz, and is now working on something with the French dance cyborgs. He's also excited about the recently released '[Green Album](#),' which features covers of songs that he wrote for 'The Muppets' by artists like [Weezer](#), [Sondre Lerche](#) and the [Fray](#). "It's a chance for a young audience to rediscover work that I'm really proud of," he says. "I love it. I'm a huge fan of [My Morning Jacket](#), and I'm discovering some new acts, some really talented people."

When he wants to calm his creative urges, he turns to reality crime shows. "'[The First 48](#)' is my favourite show on television. It's as far away from the glitz of showbiz as you can get, solving two murders," he laughs.

What he's most proud of right now, though, is his brand new song that plays over the credits to 'Still Alive,' a celebration of the peace and happiness that he has found. "I feel better about the song I've written for this movie than anything I've done in a long, long time. I think I finally wrote the song about my life."

"I put it on the end of the film and it's so great that he could have the last word in his own voice with his own music," says Kessler. "It really adds something to the film."

Williams is so proud of it that he's a little worried people won't get to hear his tale of self-discovery properly if they enjoy the film too much.

"I hope people don't applaud through the credits at the end of the movie and then miss the song. Which would actually be an amazing comment on all of this. You feel like you do your best work and it disappears in applause? I don't want the applause; I want you to listen!"

Paul Williams spent some time talking about his recovery from addiction to San Jose's diverse recovery community as part of September's Recovery Month.

