

# STRONGER THAN BULLETS

A FILM BY MATTHEW MILLAN



They struck a chord for freedom...

A DOCUMENTARY BY 180 FILMS IN ASSOCIATION WITH TURNING TABLES  
PRODUCED BY ALISTAIR AUDSLEY DIRECTED BY MATTHEW MILLAN WRITTEN BY MATTHEW MILLAN ALISTAIR AUDSLEY  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: HAROLD MILLAN PRODUCERS: HAMMUDA ABIDIA HAITHAM DARRAT  
FEATURING: HAMMUDA ABIDIA MASQUD BUISIR JASMIN IKANOVIC RAMI EL KALEH MC SWAT MALIK MOSTAFA EL DALI GUYS UNDERGROUND AZIZ AGORI  
SUPERVISING EDITOR DOUG BLUSH SUPERVISING SOUND MIXER JEREMY GRODY STORY CONSULTANTS: ERIK NIEL BENTON QUIN ALEX REA  
MUSIC BY: JASMIN IKANOVIC ERIK NIEL ALEX REA FEATURING LIBYAN ARTISTS



# EXECUTIVE PRODUCER INTRODUCTION

February 15th 2011. A dry date in the calendar for the uninvolved historian. But, for those who were there, this is the day when brave protests rapidly escalated into full, bloody rebellion in Benghazi, Libya. The day when, out of the most censored-state in the Middle East and North Africa, freedom of expression would finally burst into the voice of rebellion.

Little did I realise that, within a few months I would be on the ground in war torn Sirte, the home town of the tyrant Muammar Gaddafi. Or that the revolution would introduce me to an inspiring young filmmaker from Monterey, California. Or that I would end up trying to persuade one of the world's biggest rock bands to perform in a Freedom concert to mark the end of this revolution. Or that, thanks to the sheer will and determination of that filmmaker, I would be producing his documentary of this incredible story.

Well, perhaps the making of the film is the least surprising. It really is an incredible story and stories need to be told, for one person's story can nourish millions of lives. The true value of documentary film is its ability to turn dry dates into vicarious, but visceral reality. Film can take us across the bridge from filtered knowledge to true feeling and understanding.

Matthew Millan's story takes us into the very hearts of those least violent of folk - musicians and bards, as they sing their songs of defiance and refusal to ever surrender to tyranny. We stand alongside them as they find their voice to challenge one of the most brutal dictators of modern history. Matthew Millan was there and, thanks to him, so are we.

In **STRONGER THAN BULLETS**, we follow a counter-culture blooming at the front lines of a battle where acoustic guitars became as dangerous as automatic rifles to Gaddafi's crumbling, despotic regime.

This film is also about the lull and loss of purpose for those musical revolutionaries when the battle was won. For, the aftermath of revolution is anarchy and true anarchy is really about dull inertia. Before Libya and from the confines of middle England, I had always thought punk rock provided the clamour and excitement of anarchy. In fact there is no soundtrack suitable for waiting for something to happen when heroes are no longer needed.

So **STRONGER THAN BULLETS** is ultimately about the triumph of these inspiring Libyan musicians as they look for a new destiny by reaching out to their own heroes - those whose music first inspired them to pick up a guitar, a microphone, a drum ...and strike a chord for freedom.

Alistair Audsley  
Executive Producer  
London, 2017



# DIRECTOR STATEMENT

“STRONGER THAN BULLETS is a rock & roll odyssey in the sands of the Sahara.”

As documentary filmmakers, we often go into situations expecting to tell one story, but, inevitably, the story transforms into something entirely different. Such was the case when I went to Libya to document the revolution. What awaited me was something unexpected to say the least, a spring bloom in the middle of an inhospitable desert.

When I crossed the border into the dust of revolution, I was astounded by the spirit of cooperation, the sheer joy shared by the people, and all amid destruction, chaos, and uncertainty. This unstained human spirit manifested in many ways. People sweeping the streets...children directing traffic...and an explosion of music and art unlike anything I have ever witnessed. From blues to country, heavy metal to hip hop, the Libyan youth defiantly came out in droves, and for the very first time, to express their newfound freedom through the powerful medium of music.

STRONGER THAN BULLETS is not just a study of a dazzling music bloom in the midst of a bloody revolution. It's a rousing tale about a group of determined musicians who continued to play, armed with the unbridled joy of a liberated people, even in the direst of conditions.

As slaves to the 24-hour sensationalist media culture, our worldviews are largely shaped by agendas that often highlight the differences between peoples, instead of their similarities. This is why I believe that STRONGER THAN BULLETS is such an important story to tell, for it bridges the vast gulfs between wildly different societies, and highlights the commonality found within them all. In addition, the documentary offers valuable insight into the unique conditions needed for countercultures to form, and to thrive.

Matthew Millan  
Director  
Los Angeles, CA 2017



## SYNOPSIS

1985. In a brutal show of power, Libyan dictator Moammar Gaddafi outlaws music instruments, and orders them hurled into bonfires. Those were the years the music died...

Yet in 2011, when the people rise, the music reawakens, and the streets of Benghazi resound with a melodic fury. Libyan youth come out in droves to rock the very foundations of the regime with crunching guitars and furious beats.

But when the tyrant falls, victory soon descends into chaos, and a new tyranny emerges. The streets of Benghazi once again go silent. Yet the flame of hope cannot be dimmed, as the musicians once again prepare to challenge oppression... and strike a chord for freedom.



# FULL SYNOPSIS

“Strings are stronger than bullets.” – Masoud Buisir, Libyan musician

Libya, 2011...Amidst the bloody revolution to overthrow the tyrant Muammar Gaddafi, a music scene emerges from the dust of war, and becomes the talisman of resistance. Filmed through the months of the uprising and its chaotic aftermath, **STRONGER THAN BULLETS** (STB) captures the spirit of this counterculture that exploded out of the shackles of Gaddafi’s iron-fisted rule. After 42 years of silence, Benghazi resounds with a melodic fury that manifests in a staggering variety of musical genres. STB transcends the standard war documentary, instead shining a unique light on the Arab Spring. It is a rock & roll odyssey of people finding their voices for the first time in generations.

The story begins in the midst of Gaddafi’s cruel reign. Fearful of the threat that freedom of expression poses, the regime comes down like a hammer on the perceived threat from the arts with giant bonfires of thousands of music instruments. As the spreading Arab Spring lights the fuse in Benghazi, a vibrant music scene blossoms overnight as the shining symbol of freedom.

The film introduces the musicians who emerge, and follows them as they stand shoulder-to-shoulder, guitar to rifle, alongside rebel fighters. DADO, a soft-spoken, pony-tailed musician and Bosnian war refugee, becomes the focal point as Libyan musicians gravitate toward his natural leadership. RAMI, a kind-faced virtuoso, writes what will become the anthem of the rebellion, but is killed only hours after completing it. The defiant MC SWAT rises as the voice of the streets with his searing brand of hip-hop. MALIK L, a Libyan-American, returns home after a lifetime of exile, and inspires the youth rap culture with biting, insightful rhymes belted out in his smooth-as-silk voice. Wild-haired MASOUD rushes headlong to the front with a Kalashnikov in one hand and a beat-up guitar in the other, and binds these two symbols into rousing revolutionary songs. Fearful of this artistic bloom, the Gaddafi regime deploys its 5th Column to brutally silence the artists.



## FULL SYNOPSIS (CONT))

In response, the singers raise their voices...and the scene continues to grow.

After months of brutal war, Gaddafi's death paves the way for the musicians to celebrate their victory with a triumphant music festival. Yet when the tyrant falls, he shatters into a thousand pieces, as shadowy elements emerge to halt the festival. Libya, once filled with hope for the future, descends into chaos. Rebels who fought side-by-side only months before now turn their guns on one other, and anyone who stands in their way. And as before, our heroes are forced to play in hiding to avoid the wrath of the new oppressors.

Refusing to be beaten, the musicians persevere even as Libya races toward the abyss of civil war. An epic song that tells their story emerges, and resounds beyond the crumbling basement walls and across the Great Desert, carrying these defiant words:

*In the chaos and confusion  
Of a new age still in its youth  
Can't tell what's real from what's illusion  
Music is the only truth...*



# PRODUCTION NOTES

March of 2011, California. It is three weeks after the initial protests in Benghazi have erupted into outright revolt. Hammuda, a close friend of Matthew Millan's, and a Libyan emigre, has decided to return to Benghazi after 36 years to answer the call to all exiles to return home.

Aware of Matthew's directing abilities, Hammuda asks him to travel to Libya with him to document the uprising.

Nothing is certain, except for the obvious dangers, but after reflecting on the offer for a week, the filmmaker comes to his decision at a bachelor party in Las Vegas...and just as Gaddafi's forces are besieging Benghazi.

With a sense of dread and excitement, Matthew Millan prepares for the journey and within a few weeks, he crosses the Libyan border, and into the dust of war.

## The production

While in Benghazi, Matthew, himself a musician, gravitates toward his own kind - and is amazed to find a dazzling music scene burgeoning from the once oppressed population.

For much of 2011-2013, Matthew stays in Benghazi to document this rock & roll odyssey, and the counter-culture emerging amid the revolution. It even inspires him to try to launch a music festival in the epicenter of the uprising. The documentary plays out much like a narrative film, with the high-octane urgency of a punk-rock song.

With more than 200 hours of HD footage taken in Libya since the dawn of the revolution, the dramatic rise and fall of this music bloom is well documented. In addition, the people of Benghazi have provided him with more than 11,000 photos and video clips of the revolution. And perhaps most importantly, the soundtrack is already complete, with scores of songs produced in Benghazi during this time. The triumphant underscore, a musical journey that seamlessly bridges the songs was recorded in Culver City, California, and produced by Alex Elena and Topher Mohr.

As of 2018, STRONGER THAN BULLETS has played in many prestigious festivals on three continents. The film has garnered several awards, including Best Documentary at Woodstock Film Festival and the Press Award at Santa Fe Film Festival. Further, a 47-minute version regularly airs worldwide on Al Jazeera English.



Matt Millan on location in Benghazi 2011.



Citizens celebrate a liberated Benghazi.



# FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**MATTHEW MILLAN (DIRECTOR)** boasts a truly unconventional background for a filmmaker. He graduated from UCSC with a Physics degree, and worked as an engineer for several years.

Yet he always found this vocation wanting, so when the opportunity presented itself, he duly quit his job and co-founded 180 Films.

Since then, he has built an impressive portfolio, which covers both narratives, music videos and documentaries.



DIRECTOR ++ MATTHEW MILLAN

His work has ushered him to many exotic places, from the snowy peaks of Ladakh, India to the lawless border towns of Northern Vietnam. When the uprising in Libya first erupted, he traveled there to witness the revolution firsthand. And what he saw inspired him to live in Benghazi for a year, and document its burgeoning music scene. While there, he also directed the award winning WE WIN OR WE DIE, a fast-paced short documentary about the early days of the Libyan revolution.

Currently, Matthew is working on a travel series, entitled BEYOND BORDERS, that shines a mirror on civilization, and challenges the views that societies often take for granted.

**ALISTAIR AUDSLEY (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER)** has worked all over the globe during the last twenty years as a sought-after marketing consultant both for, and in, emerging markets, such as Russia, Bulgaria, Panama, the Middle East and Libya.

His world now straddles the music and film industries. In the music world, he has been executive producer on several international pop albums, as well as being a co-producer of the spectacular interval show at the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest.



PRODUCER ++ ALISTAIR AUDSLEY

He wrote and produced the critically acclaimed independent feature, The Paddy Lincoln Gang and is an in-demand screenwriter and script-doctor, having written two major European films set for release in 2019.

It was while providing commercial consulting for Magrheb, the commercial security arm of the NTC, that Alistair was drawn to the wider story and staggering diversity of music coming out of the epicenter of the revolution.

After initially providing some advice to Matthew Millan's efforts to launch a music festival, he duly boarded as Producer for STRONGER THAN BULLETS.



## FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**HAMMUDA ABIDIA (PRODUCER)** is a Libyan entrepreneur who came to the United States as a political dissident in the early days of Gaddafi's reign.

After 36 years of exile, he returned to Benghazi during the opening stages of the revolution and was the original impetus behind documenting the revolution on film, which has ultimately developed into STRONGER THAN BULLETS.

Since then, he founded the Libyan Friendship Association, a charitable organization that focuses on many

facets of improving Libyan society, ranging from telemedicine to agricultural projects. In addition, Hammuda has produced several films, including Matthew Millan's award-winning WE WIN OR WE DIE, a short film of the first four days of the 2011 Libyan revolution.



PRODUCER ↔ HAMMUDA ABIDIA

**HAROLD MILLAN (PRODUCER)** is the U.S Producer of STRONGER THAN BULLETS. Previously, he has been a producer of WE WIN OR WE DIE and provided seed funding for STRONGER THAN BULLETS.



PRODUCER ↔ HAROLD MILLAN

He coordinated festival submissions for WE WIN OR WE DIE, resulting in selection by 15 festivals in four continents.

He has represented the film at many of these festivals. In addition to supporting these films, his career include more than 25 years of experience in Information Technology Management and Project Management.

## ADDITIONAL CREW

**DOUG BLUSH (SUPERVISING EDITOR)** is an award winning documentary director, editor, cinematographer, and writer. He received the 2013 ACE Eddie Award for Documentaries for his work as Supervising Editor on TWENTY FEET FROM STARDOM, the winner of the 2014 Critic's Choice Award, and the 2014 Academy Award winner for Best Documentary.

Doug is the editor and an associate producer of the Academy Award-nominated THE INVISIBLE WAR, winner of the 2014 Emmy for Best Documentary. He is co-producer and editor of OF TWO MINDS (about bipolar disorder), a winner of the 2013 Voice Awards. He is the Consulting Editor on the 2014

Sundance Documentary Grand Jury Prize winning RICH HILL. He was also the editor of other notable films, including WORDPLAY, TROUBADORS, THESE AMAZING SHADOWS, I.O.U.S.A, OUTRAGE, BEER WARS, and FREAKONOMICS.



S. EDITOR ++ DOUG BLUSH

## STORY CONSULTANTS

**ERIK NIEL, ALEX REA AND BENTON QUIN** are filmmakers and musicians with an eclectic range of talents. Erik graduated with a degree in physics and worked as an engineer before embarking on a career in filmmaking. He is also an accomplished drummer and teacher. Erik played drums on the underscore of the film.



ERIK NIEL, BENTON QUIN,  
ALEX REA

Benton was an epic songwriter and painter, who has had his finger on the pulse of rock & roll since his days of hanging out with New York Dolls and Blondie. The energy of the Libyan music reminded him of those early days of punk, so he immediately identified with the burgeoning Libyan counter-culture. Tragically, Benton passed away in 2016.

Alex is a wrestler and a screenwriter, but his true passion lies in playing the bass guitar. Citing Lemmy as his main influence, Alex has developed a trademark style that is both melodic and raw. Alex wrote and performed the underscore of the film.

In 2014, they joined forces to work on a monumental 20-minute rock opera about the story, entitled "Post-Revolutionary Blues", and have since provided invaluable insight on the final structure of the film. In addition, they completed a mini-underscore in 2015 to support the Libyan music in the film.

# CAST AND CREW

Masoud Buisir.....Musician/Revolutionary  
Jasmin "Dado" Ikanovic.....Music Producer  
MC Swat.....Rapper  
Malik L.....Rapper  
Hammuda Abidia.....Navigator  
Mostafa "Bofa" el Dali.....Musician  
Aziz Agori.....Witness  
Shwaib El Kaleh.....Witness  
Mary Fitzgerald.....Witness  
Rami El Kaleh.....Musician  
Mouza the Metalhead.....Musician  
Hussain Kablan.....Musician  
Marrwan Gargoum.....Musician  
Yahya al-Mogerbe.....Musician  
Hamed Hassi.....Musician

Directed by.....Matthew Millan  
Executive Producer.....Alistair Audsley  
Producer.....Hammuda Abidia  
Producer.....Harold Millan  
Producer.....Haitham Darrat  
Associate Producer.....Martin Jacobsen  
Supervising Editor.....Doug Blush  
Editor.....Matthew Millan  
Music.....Jasmin Ikanovic, Alex Rea  
Sound.....Jeremy Grody  
Film Whisperer.....Oliver Benton Quin  
Consultants.....Amir Masud, Erik Niel, Alex Rea  
Additional Footage.....The Libyan People  
Location.....Benghazi, Libya; London, England;  
Tunis, Tunisia; Los Angeles, California

## FEATURED SONGS

"We Will Not Surrender (We Win or We Die)"  
Written by Rami El Kaleh and Jasmin Ikanovic  
Performed by Hussain Kablan  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Mandakish Mushkullah"  
Written and performed by Masoud Buisir  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"United Warriors"  
Written by Mostafa El Dali  
Performed by Dawn of Odessa  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Angel Wings"  
Written by Jasmin Ikanovic  
Performed by Saleh Majid  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Lies and Pain"  
Written and performed by MC Swat  
Featuring Guys Underground  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Post-Revolutionary Blues"  
Written by Oliver Benton Quin and Dan Ursillo  
Performed by PTSD  
Produced by That British Place

"We are the Libyans"  
Written and performed by Taher Elfaghi  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Man from Nowhere"  
Written and performed by Shehab El Madani  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Libya Hurra"  
Written and performed by Omran Shebly  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Shof-ya Alam"  
Written and performed by Hamed Hassi  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Revolution"  
Written by Marrwan Gargoum and Yahya al-Mogharbe  
Performed by Guys Underground  
Produced by Jasmin Ikanovic

"Get Back"  
Written and performed by Malik L  
Produced by Malik L

**AND MANY MORE...**

## CONTACTS

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