

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

The Tape Keeps Talking

Josh Tanner's feature debut Posthumous premieres at Fantastic Fest as analog horror with a pulse — a first film paid for, in part, with a nonrefundable Hail Mary.

Interview by Paul Salfen · AMFM Magazine



Atmospheric analog still created for AMFM Magazine. *Posthumous* world-premiered at Fantastic Fest 2026.

Fantastic Fest still treats analog horror like contraband. This year the festival even hung a little warning on a handful of titles — Don't Watch the Tape — and Queensland writer-director Josh Tanner's first feature, *Posthumous*, sat right in that lane. Salfen called it a perfect festival film: dark, funny in the wrong places, and willing to get crazy. Tanner did not argue.

"It goes in so many places," he said, sitting with AMFM at the festival that has become, in Salfen's words, the favorite week of the year. The movie that got him here is a ghost story built on a stack of birthday VHS tapes — grainy motherly wisdom recorded before a woman died giving birth to the daughter who would one day rewind her.

A ONE-WAY CONVERSATION

How do you describe *Posthumous* without handing over the ending? Tanner tried.

"I would say it's the story of Zoe, who returns home on her 30th birthday, to basically go back to her past and explore her relationship with her mother, who she never had in her life and passed away and left these posthumous videotapes when she died giving birth to Zoe. And in Zoe's attempt to find out more about her mother, she unravels some very dark and scary stuff."

Sophie Lowe plays Zoe. David Roberts is the surly widower father who will share a meal and pay off a drunk-driving fine and still keep the emotional door half-closed. The tapes — concise messages meant to be viewed on birthdays up to twenty-one — are the only mother Zoe has ever had. On the couch at thirty, with the house quiet and the VCR still willing, she watches the same physical media degrade a little more every time she presses play.

Salfen, who watched it with a friend, reached for an unexpected comparison: the demonic version of *My Life*, the Michael Keaton picture about a dying father leaving messages for a child. Happy second birthday. Happy third. And then the place where the intention goes wrong.

“Totally,” Tanner said. “This is what happens when it goes wrong.”

The plot tightens from there. A lead points Zoe toward the reclusive widow next door. Her father gets evasive about a shared past. She breaks in and finds the wreckage of an occult attempt to channel her mother’s pain through portals opened by sacred geometry — and, maybe, a way to finally talk back through the same cracks. Tanner’s debut is a chilling ghost story with real jumps. What lingers after the credits is how thoughtfully those analog recordings stand in for memory itself: subjectively captured, and wearing down each time you revisit it.

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— JOSH TANNER

COUPLE GOALS, THEN THE STRESS

Salfen asked the set question every first-time director gets: was there a moment you looked around and thought, I’m so glad I did this? Tanner did not romanticize the days.

“It was very stressful. It was just really ambitious. We didn’t have a lot of money. We didn’t have a lot of time.” What saved the picture, he said, was the room. “We had such an incredible cast and crew that all just rallied behind us to bring our story to life and make our dream come true — my wife, Jade van der Lei, who co-wrote and produced the film with me. It was our dream to make our first feature, and we’re really proud of the results.”

Van der Lei is Tanner’s partner at Imposter Syndrome, the Queensland company behind a decade of shorts — *The Landing*, *Wandering Soul*, *The Rizzle*, *Reverse*, *Decommissioned* — and now this. Salfen called the partnership couple goals. Tanner did not disagree. “You win,” Salfen told him.

The feature was shot in Brisbane and at Pinnacle Film Studios on the Gold Coast with Screen Australia and Screen Queensland backing, Jason Hargreaves behind the camera, Michelle McGilvray cutting, Ack Kinmonth on the score. Joel Anderson, the *Lake Mungo* filmmaker, is among the executive producers. None of that made the calendar any kinder.



Memory on magnetic tape: Posthumous treats the family VCR as both heirloom and haunt. Atmospheric still for AMFM.

NOT A GIFT. A DRIVE.

Salfen pushed on the origin story every audience member wants: when did you know you had it? Tanner refused the myth.

“I don’t think at any point you — at least me — go, oh, I have a gift. You just have a passion and you just have a drive and a desire to tell stories and build worlds.” The shorts did the rest. “You make shorts and they have success. It just keeps fueling you to go, okay, people are liking what I’m doing. And it just keeps you going. All those short films have led to this.”

The Landing took Sitges and qualified for the Oscars. Wandering Soul, a Vietnam War ghost story set in the Củ Chi tunnels and later released online, pulled toward two million views. Reverse was optioned by the Russo brothers’ AGBO. Decommissioned put him inside Unreal Engine on a story set aboard the International Space Station. Posthumous is the receipt that the shorts were never a stall.

Advice for the people in the dark who want the same shot was unfashionably practical. “Just make as much stuff as possible with whatever technology you have. Gladly, it’s the best time to make films ever. The technology is just so readily available. So really you’re only limited by your own ideas. Just go for it.”

Salfen looked at the festival rig in front of them — the cameras, the recorders, the kind of kit a kid in the nineties would have mailed to his younger self — and joked that they should pick a different line than a haunted tape. “A haunted rig,” someone offered. Tanner laughed. Not through the demonic videotape.

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THE TEN-GRAND HAIL MARY

Salfen's co-host on another show, Drew Pearson — Hail Mary of Fame, go Cowboys — has turned a football phrase into an AMFM signature: the moment you throw it because standing still is the real loss. Was Posthumous that throw?

Tanner did not hesitate. "I definitely think so."

About six months before cameras, Gold Coast studio space was disappearing under the usual tide of productions that land in Queensland. One facility could fit them. The catch was a cash deposit. Nonrefundable.

"We're putting it down right here," he remembered thinking. "That's the Hail Mary. We're going for it." Financing was already in motion. Cast and pieces were lining up. Films still fall apart for any reason. "I remember at one point going, nope. We're shooting March 2025. We're doing it. We're going to lose ten grand if we don't shoot it, but we're doing it."

What kept the path straight after the check cleared was not a slogan. "The passion for the film and the story. We felt like it was special. It felt unique. It felt like it had a lot more heart than horror movies tend to do. So we felt like it had a place."

The timing still startles him. When they started writing, analog horror was not yet a festival category with its own warning label. Kane Pixels' Backrooms shorts arrived around the same window — just before or just after the idea. "It's sort of crazy how much analog horror stuff is coming through. Even at this festival, to have three horror films like that — that's pretty cool."

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GRIEF, NOT A BLEAK FEST

Spooky season is incoming. Tanner is eager to catch The Cycle — he expects it on Shudder soon — and at least one other title that still has not reached Australia. Salfen asked the question that matters more than a watchlist: what should people carry out of the theater?

"When you make a film about ghosts, grief is like an inescapable theme," Tanner said. "The big thing for us is we just want to make sure that the film feels packed full of emotion, and people leave the cinema feeling like they've gone on a real journey — and it isn't just this complete bleak fest, where you're just like, by the end of it, I'm so sad and have no meaning going forward in my life. Like Hereditary made me feel. I love Hereditary, but it made me feel like I needed a shower after that one."

That is the bet Posthumous makes. The scares are in the machine. The aftertaste is supposed to be a life that can still move.

ALREADY ASKING ABOUT THE NEXT BABY

Salfen could not help himself. After this — what? Tanner and van der Lei want to make a feature of *Wandering Soul*, the 2016 short they shot as a proof of tone with the Spierig brothers as executive producers. “That short film exists, if anyone wants to go see it on YouTube.”

He knows how the question sounds. “You’re here talking about a movie that’s about to come out. It’s like being at the hospital, having a baby, being like, so have you thought about when you’re going to have another one?” The laugh did not hide the bruise. “You go through how hard it is to make a film, and then everyone’s like, what’s the next one?”

They have been writing the war picture for years. A Vietnam-set ghost story is more ambitious than a suburban analog haunt. They needed the first feature to prove they could hold a long-form story. “So on to the next one.”

DO AUSTIN ANYWAY

Fantastic Fest is work if you let it be. Tanner refused the fly-in. He wants the Texas Chainsaw Massacre house outside town and the comedy rooms at the Mothership. Salfen has heard too many talent interviews that end at the airport. “Don’t come to Austin if you’re not going to experience a good chunk of it.”

Tanner is doing it up. The tape already did its job. The festival warning still stands, and so does the invitation: watch it anyway.

FIND JOSH TANNER

POSTHUMOUS — world premiere, Fantastic Fest 2026 (Alamo Drafthouse South Lamar, Austin, September 19).

Cast: Sophie Lowe, David Roberts, Doris Younane, Remy Hii, Christopher James Baker, Mia Morrissey, George Pullar, Kira-Che Heelan.

Written & produced by Josh Tanner and Jade van der Lei. Directed by Josh Tanner. Imposter Syndrome / Special Day Productions.

Australian distribution: Kismet. International sales: Architect.

Next: a feature expansion of *Wandering Soul*, Tanner and van der Lei’s Vietnam War ghost short — streaming now on YouTube.

Follow: Imposter Syndrome on YouTube · Instagram @tannerofjosh

Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine, September 2026.

*Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of *Going For It!*, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.*