

Self-taught directors, the Malloy brothers, built their reputation on filming daredevil surfers and high-scoring sports stars. Like their heroes, their career has been a steep learning curve that's threatened to bring them crashing down with each new challenge. But *Iain Blair* finds the pair's anything-goes California mindset has helped them catch every wave of their mindbogglingly wide roster of commercials, music promos, docs and features without losing their cool

Cleveland celebrates the return of basketball player LeBron James in the *Together* spot for Nike. 'Rock star' limes hit the clubs in slo-mo for a Sauza 901 tequila commercial. Metallica rock out as they thrash through *St. Anger* for their - literally - captive audience in San Quentin prison. Olympic gold medallist Shaun White catches air big time as he perfects another impossible trick snowboarding move.

All these diverse images and stories were created and crafted by the Malloy brothers, Brendan [opposite, left] and Emmett, the LA-based team whose work spans ads, features, documentaries and music videos. Of all of these, perhaps the inspirational 2014 Nike spot best sums up the brothers' creative approach and work philosophy. "We love sports. It was a huge story, and a very cool ad for us," notes Brendan. "Most ads come and go very quickly, but this really captured and documented

an important moment - LeBron's comeback. I think it's one of the first times Nike ever ran a major two-minute ad campaign, and I think it also feels special because it features so many real Cleveland fans, and we always like to make our spots as real as we can. They're so passionate about their team, and we're passionate about our work and trying to expand our horizons all the time, so it was a good fit for us."

As was their 2011 *Love The Game* spot for Jordan. "The NBA had gone on strike, so all the players were playing in these spontaneous pick-up leagues," says Emmett. "So Jordan came up with the idea to bring all the big players out to these leagues. It was a huge sports moment where we got to shoot with these iconic players all over the world. That was so much fun for us."

Their high profile commercial clients have included Verizon, Budweiser, Virgin Mobile, Coke, HP, ESPN, Heineken, ▣



MALLOYS *the*

EA Skate, and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. They shot the acclaimed *For The Love Of Baseball* spot featuring Bryce Harper for Major League Baseball, and were nominated for a DGA award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Commercials for Nike's *The Huddle*, featuring LeBron James. Their first feature film, the surfing adventure *Thicker Than Water*, a collaboration with musician/filmmaker/surfer Jack Johnson, was named *Surfer Magazine's* Movie of the Year in 2000. They've shot music videos for N.E.R.D, Vampire Weekend, The Raconteurs, Wolfmother, The Cold War Kids,

Empire Of The Sun, Jack Johnson co-starring Ben Stiller, Metallica, Matt Costa, Jimmy Eat World, The Kooks and Japanese Motors. Their video for the Foo Fighters' *Breakout* won Best Directorial Debut at the Music Video Production Awards in 2001, and their video for Blink 182's *Rock Show* won best rock video at the 2001 MTV Europe Awards. The brothers were also nominated for Director of the Year at the 2004 and 2006 MVPAs. Then there's their hilarious cross-promotion work done with Will Ferrell performing *Afternoon Delight* from the hit film *Anchorman*, and the bittersweet video made for The Shins' *New Slang*, which was featured in the award-winning film *Garden State*. In 2009 the Malloys directed *Under Great White Northern Lights*, the Grammy-nominated full-length documentary on the White Stripes, in 2012 they produced HBO's critically acclaimed cinéma-vérité series *On Freddie Roach*, by filmmaker Peter Berg, and in 2013 they took home a Grammy for the long-form music video *The Big Easy Express*, featuring Mumford & Sons, Edward Sharpe and others. They also produced *Shaun White: Russia Calling*, an NBC documentary that aired in prime time, following the champion snowboarder as he fought to gain a spot on the US team for the 2014 Winter Olympics. As if all this wasn't enough, in addition to his production and directorial accomplishments, Emmett Malloy also manages musician Jack Johnson with whom he co-founded Brushfire Records. Their roster includes Bahamas, Matt Costa, G.Love and Neil Halstead.

### Let's go directin' now, everybody's learnin' how

What's truly impressive about the Malloys isn't just their Stakhanovite work ethic, it's also the fact that they're virtually self-taught in the arts of writing, producing, shooting and editing. "We don't come from a showbiz family," states 43-year-old Emmett. "Our dad was an underground contractor, who helped lay all the storm drains and water pipes throughout the city, and it was him who suggested we might want to try to do something else for a living. As we grew up in Hancock Park, L.A., very close to Hollywood, the entertainment business seemed like a logical thing to try. It was all around us, it was a cool area to grow up in, and our offices and homes are still in the same neighbourhood."

"Neither of us went to film school, and we didn't know anyone in the business. We both started in the 90s at a company that made movie trailers," says Brendan, 41. "It almost felt like working at an ad agency. I was a copywriter and Emmett was an editor, and we did that for several years, learning some of the basic skills and working on some very big movies."

While there, the brothers moonlighted as nascent music video directors, "doing any projects that we could get our hands on". Those jobs - and a family connection - served as a springboard for the duo's first foray into feature films. "Our cousins happened to be very well-known pro surfers, so all their friends were these top surfers that everyone wanted to see

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footage of," explains Emmett. "So we lucked out in that regard, as there was already this built-in audience for our little surf films." These "little surf films" were instrumental in kick-starting their careers. "They allowed us to learn so much, as we were trying to tell little stories," Emmett adds. "And all those early surf films led to a lot of bands going, 'Hey, we really like that surf movie you put our song in,' and then we'd link up with them and do their videos."

It was an era - the late 90s - when music videos were seen as a hotbed of fresh, exciting directorial talent, and the Malloys quickly parlayed their initial successes into a more ambitious game plan. "We worked hard to build up our own body of work and try to do interesting stuff to get some attention, and the first couple of videos we shot helped us get in with some record labels," recalls Brendan. That in turn led to writing and directing bigger projects, including the videos for the Foo Fighters and Blink 182. "We were suddenly 'official directors', and we began submitting treatments - things we'd never done before," Emmett adds. "We had to learn how to handle big budgets and all the increased expectations, and it was pretty challenging and quite a steep learning curve for us."

### The first time ever we saw a crane...

The big reality check came when they shot the follow-up to their well received *Teenage Suicide* video for punk band Unwritten Law. "We had a very low budget for that first one, and it had a lot of character," says Emmett. "But *California Sky*, the second video for the band, was really a debacle. We had all this expensive equipment, like a crane, and neither of us had even seen one before, and we were just like, 'This is so hot.' Unfortunately, we forgot about the plot and story, and I was only able to save it in the edit and make it more of a performance video ultimately."

It was a hard lesson to learn, but a necessary one, he admits. "When you're self-taught like us, then you inevitably make bad mistakes, and you have to learn the hard way. And we've had a couple of those reality checks where we were elevated to that next level, and it took us a little while to understand it and find our footing, as we'd never been there before. We were simply out of our depth."

Although the brothers have come a long way from the days when they "didn't really know" what they were doing, they still make music videos and documentary projects as well as big commercial jobs and movies. "I think doing all those different things is still very important for us as directors," says Emmett. "I think it makes us better as commercial directors, as you can pull from all the different experiences - especially working on documentaries where you really are shooting real subjects and high profile people like Kevin Durant or Freddie Roach. That's so helpful when you're shooting a spot, as you can question yourself, 'Does this feel real?' and go back to how you worked in the documentary. And it's especially helpful when you're trying to capture reality in a spot. A lot of the spots we do are more stylised and more visual, and you're not pulling for that as much, but on the others it's a great resource to have."

After stints with Propaganda and RSA - "where we did most of our music videos", Emmett reports, the duo switched to HSI, which then morphed into their current home, Superprime. "We've been there about six years now," says Brendan. "We began really focusing on commercials around 2002, 2003, and our first spot was a jeans commercial that was more music- and style-driven. So we had to transition into those kinds of spots that felt more like music videos, before we got into more traditional, dialogue-driven spots."



**The Malloys**  
**Representation**  
 London & Paris iconoclast.tv  
 Rest of the world superprimefilms.com  
**Key work**

- Nike, *Together*
- Jordan, *Love The Game*
- The White Stripes, *Under Great White Northern Lights*
- Google, *Android One*
- Foo Fighters, *Breakout*

But it wasn't easy transitioning out of music videos and their comfort zone into the bigger, more demanding commercial world, they admit. "It felt like no matter how big our videos were, it didn't help us break in to commercials," says Emmett. "Ultimately, it was our documentaries and surf films that persuaded people we could make the leap - but then all those coloured perceptions, so that people felt, maybe we couldn't shoot stylistic stuff. So it's an ongoing refinement."  
 "It's a fairly humbling business," he adds. "After we did the Nike spot, we thought we were such hot shit, but then the next minute you lose a job. So you just have to persevere."

**There's a car ad waiting for these guys**

In the past year the pair has scored major spots for Goodyear with their yearly NASCAR launch, and "a very cool" Chevy/Manchester United spot. They've also been busy prepping *The Tribes Of Palos Verdes*, a low budget movie that's due to start shooting this spring. "It's a family tragedy, a dark tale based on a bestseller, and it's been on-and-off, which wreaked havoc with our normal productivity last year," admits Emmett. "But it's coming together now, and we have Jennifer Garner and Maika Monroe, the star of *It Follows*, so we're pretty excited."

Looking ahead, the brothers plan to pursue more movie projects, but stress that they will always do commercials, "as we have such a passion for them," says Brendan. "And videos and documentaries," adds Emmett. "We want to do it all." ❧



1 Nike, *Together*  
 2 Jordan, *Love The Game*  
 3 Justin Timberlake as Rick 'Sour' Vane in *No Limes Needed for Sauza 901*