

## **JON LEONOUKAKIS – BIO –THE SWEET SPOT**

### **Jon Leonoudakis / Founder**

Jon has been producing award-winning media and experiences in the entertainment industry in Los Angeles for thirty years. His work has been seen at Disney theme parks worldwide, Seattle's Science Fiction Museum & Hall of Fame, along with the hit music documentary, *The Wrecking Crew*.

All well and good except for one small detail: he has baseball in his blood.

A devotee since 1964, Jon grew up in San Francisco working at Candlestick Park, home of his beloved Giants, from 1970-1975. A life filled with Willie Mays, baseball cards, Little League, and softball reached a boiling point in 2002, when he experienced the Baseball Reliquary's Shrine of the Eternals induction ceremony. Minnie Minoso, Mark "The Bird" Fidrych, and "Shoeless" Joe Jackson were being inducted, and Minoso was in attendance. It was a life-changing experience, for the event embodied the heart and soul of baseball. The fan-centric Reliquary was recognizing individuals for lasting contributions to the game with an eye towards the humanity of the national pastime. It embraced the great characters and stories of the game he loved. He had not only found his tribe, but a new purpose in life.

In 2010, Jon decided to follow his heart and shifted his professional focus to telling stories about the human side of baseball. Since then he's produced and directed three feature-length documentaries: *Not Exactly Cooperstown* (about the Baseball Reliquary), *The Day the World Series Stopped* (his account of experiencing the earthquake that stopped the 1989 World Series) and *Hano! A Century in the Bleachers* (about legendary sportswriter and social activist Arnold Hano). All three are in the permanent collection of the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

As a baseball documentarian, Leonoudakis was inspired by Lawrence Ritter's iconic book, *The Glory of Their Times*, which featured oral histories from players who took the field from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1947. Jon felt oral histories were of critical importance to culture and history, and wanted to take the Ritter concept and broaden it to include people from all walks of life that weave the tapestry of baseball in America. He wanted to meet with an eclectic group of individuals to create a new look at America's oldest game that would preserve baseball history, celebrate the love of the game and share stories that transcend sport. The project would address themes and stories about race, art, literature and gender, along with gritty war stories from former players.

Thus, "The Sweet Spot – A Treasury of Baseball Stories" was born.

"I spent a year researching potential audience interest, and it was clear there was not only a sizeable audience, but a major thirst for baseball stories," says Jon. "Perhaps no other sport is as driven by narrative as baseball: fans sharing stories at the ballpark, in bars or on the street, transcending time and generations, so I decided to produce a show featuring content that would resonate with baseball fans emotionally. I wanted it to go

beyond the glory of sport to explore issues that touch us all. The first season of interviews consistently surprised me at the depth and breadth of topics and stories. The interview with Mudcat Grant alone went almost two and a half hours. Here's a guy that grew up in the Jim Crow south, met JFK, Martin Luther King, was a world champion and the first African-American to win twenty games in the American League. I can't wait to share this project with the world!"

Jon feels streaming media is an important frontier in the world of entertainment and is starting The Sweet Spot, a new baseball channel for all those poor souls who are experiencing baseball withdrawals. The Sweet Spot is currently on Roku, Amazon Prime, and Vimeo on Demand, and coming in early 2017 to Apple TV, Google Chromecast and other streaming media outlets.

"Roger Hornsby once said, 'people ask me what I do in winter when there's no baseball. I'll tell you what I do. I stare out the window and wait for spring.' I want to fill that dry gulch with a never-ending supply of baseball stories. Our first season will open with ten episodes with more airing by end of this year." The channel offers both ad supported and subscription based viewing.

Jon Leonoudakis is a documentary filmmaker living in Los Angeles, California with his wife, Lisa, and their children. He has presented papers at the NINE Spring Training Conference and the Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture. Jon has lectured at Pasadena Art Center of Design, the University of San Francisco, and Union College of New York.

The project has a website at [www.thesweetspot.tv](http://www.thesweetspot.tv).