

NASHVILLE SCENE

If The Wrecking Crew hadn't made such great music, you'd have seen their documentary by now

by [Ron Wynn](#)
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The Wrecking Crew

NR, 95 min.

7 p.m. July 21 at The Belcourt

Filmmaker Denny Tedesco was initially worried about having too narrow a focus in his documentary *The Wrecking Crew*, a look at the extraordinary group of musicians who appeared on a host of immortal West Coast recordings throughout the 1960s. He began the project in 1995 to chronicle the exploits of his father, the legendary studio guitarist Tommy Tedesco, but he was concerned the film might become overly congratulatory or intimate. After showing early footage to a veteran editor/director, though, he came to think he might not have been personally invested enough.

"My friend's attitude was, 'This looks good, but anybody could have done it,' " Tedesco said in a recent phone interview. "He asked me, 'Where is your voice, input, reflections and vision?' So I saw it was important to not only tell the story of these great musicians, but provide foundation and framework while doing that."



The results are stunning in terms of information and insight. *The Wrecking Crew*, which will be shown 7 p.m. Thursday at the Belcourt (and again 1:30 p.m. Saturday as part of the NAMM show at the Nashville Convention Center), spotlights the brilliance of these genius session players, who were supposedly going to "wreck the music business" with their attitude and approach.

Instead, they powered pop, rock and soul classics by such acts as the Beach Boys, Jan & Dean, Sonny & Cher, The Righteous Brothers, The Fifth Dimension, The Mamas & the Papas, The Monkees and Nancy Sinatra. They gave producer Phil Spector his famous wall of sound; they realized any idea that came into Brian Wilson's head. (Among their ranks was longtime Nashvillian Al DeLory, who played on the Beach Boys' landmark *Pet Sounds* LP.) But the documentary also offers candid, striking testimony regarding the toll and impact their musical dedication had on their families and friends.

"Plas Johnson [the saxophonist whose career stretches from Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald to *The Odd Couple* theme] told me he's been a lot better grandfather than a father," Tedesco says. "These musicians would sometimes be in the studio for days on end. They were always on call. You didn't want to refuse a session because they might get a substitute who sounded better and that person would take your spot. You had to be on top of your game all the time, and able to adapt to things on the fly, because you were on the clock and only had a limited amount of time to get the song done, and get it done right. It was musical excellence on demand."

But if the stress and competition made for miserable home lives and busted marriages, it also forged some of the greatest session players in the history of recorded music. No one was exempt from the grueling demands. "Carol Kaye [the renowned bassist heard on everything from the *Mission: Impossible* theme to Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made for Walkin' "] talked about the fact that being a woman didn't mean anyone took it easy on her in the studio," Tedesco says. "You had to cut it just like everyone else, or they would replace you. She was there because they viewed her as the best bassist they could get for that session, nothing less and nothing more."

Among conversations with such giants as Kaye, Hal Blaine, Earl Palmer, Joe Osborne, Glen Campbell — and of course the director's father — Tedesco intersperses the accounts, comments and reflections of Brian Wilson, Herb Alpert, Jimmy Webb and Dick Clark, among others. Still, it is the brilliant music that gives *The Wrecking Crew* its special flavor. There are 130 songs in the film, almost all of them blockbuster hits. Ironically, their inclusion has posed the greatest obstacle in terms of getting the film into theatrical release. The cost of licensing all those songs has been estimated at more than \$300,000.

"We've gotten exceptional responses from audiences when we showed it at South by Southwest and in Nashville," Tedesco said. "But it's the rights fees for the songs that have held this up. We're still about \$200,000 short of the money we need to get every song cleared. We've been holding these special screenings and offering people the opportunity to contribute to it by reorganizing into a nonprofit. We've had folks contribute for individual song dedications, and we're still determined to take this film wherever we can and get the money to make sure it's issued in theaters."

Despite the fiscal challenge, Denny Tedesco remains optimistic *The Wrecking Crew* will ultimately be shown in multiplexes around the nation. He cites as particularly inspiring a comment he overheard during his previous time in Nashville.

"These two musicians were walking out of the theater, and one turned to the other and said, 'Man, that was like musician porn, it was so great,' " Tedesco says. "I knew then that the film had captured the essence of the magic my father and the rest of the crew made during those years."