

American MASTERS

thirteen
WNET NEW YORK

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press information



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American Masters **GLASS: a portrait of Philip in twelve parts** *Director's Notes*

In 1984, my then teenage son Scott took me along to a midnight screening of KOYAANISQATSI in Adelaide, and a new addiction was created. I became a fan of Philip Glass music.

In 1997, while I was editing *Snow Falling On Cedars* I used a track of Philip's music as "temp" (what filmmaker hasn't?) for a powerful sequence we were working on. I made contact with his publishing company Dunvagen to inquire about licensing the track, and formed a connection with his manager Jim Keller. It was Jim who encouraged the start of a relationship between Philip and myself, and over the next few years I enjoyed a number of his performances - from Los Angeles to Sydney - taking both my sons to see Philip and his Ensemble play live to movie screenings.

Early in 2005, Jim reminded me over dinner that Philip would be turning 70 in '07. He asked what I felt about making a documentary about him. I decided right away to do it, without any thought of how or when.

Together with close friend and colleague, Susanne Preissler of Independent Media in L.A., we started cash-flowing the project. I bought an HDV camera and flew to Nova Scotia where Philip was on vacation with his family. This was intended as a stopgap until there was the budget for a crew, but Philip started a dialogue with me behind the camera. It became apparent that the low impact of minimal crew allowed a real intimacy and immediacy, which I did not want to lose.

At the same time, I was directing commercials regularly for Susanne's company. Whenever this work put me into the same hemisphere as Philip I would seize the opportunity to spend more time with him. I would turn up at his house, knock on his door and see what he was up to. In a real sense, the commercial work was subsidizing artistic passion as the fees I earned ploughed back into the Glass project. Madison Ave. becomes the new Medici!

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Finance remained a pressing issue but ultimately the full budget was raised (thanks to the support of Executive Producers Kerry Heysen and Roger Sexton) from a small group of private investors in my hometown of Adelaide, South Australia.

And there were others who enabled it to happen. Oasis Post, who has hosted the editing of three of my movies, devised a post-production path that allowed the film to be pulled together efficiently with the best technology, despite being shot on multiple formats across three continents over two years. My son Scott Heysen, who had first turned me on to Glass two decades earlier, brilliantly applied his invaluable creative computer genius to the film.

Philip being Philip, there was never a dull moment. Every day there was something new - a fresh collaboration, renewal of an old friendship, rehearsals for a world premiere of a new symphony, recordings of film scores (including my own *No Reservations*), sessions with other film directors or time out with his infant sons. Gradually pieces of his rich and varied life revealed themselves as Philip gradually opened the doors into his family and friendships, as well as the extraordinary tapestry of his evolution from early days in Paris and the downtown New York art scene in the 60's and 70's.

This was a story in which I wanted the participants to be the narrators. I always saw the film as a "mosaic portrait" - dare I say like Chuck Close's work - where an arrangement of fragments form an overall picture. In fact I called it "Portrait" precisely because it's a highly personal, subjective look at a world-renowned artist - an intimate glimpse "behind the curtain". It was never going to be the "definitive" Glass film, or a reverential retrospective of a grand career, or even the comprehensive life story. For that you can go to the web or find a book. Cinema is not about facts, it's about emotion.

From the outset, I imagined the structure being in twelve parts - like an hourglass or the calendar - a "Year In A Day" with Philip as it were. Of course there's the obvious tongue-in-cheek tribute to his seminal work "Music In Twelve Parts", as well as a passing reference to *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*. Ultimately, each "part" became a portal into the past, or into Philip's creative process or some other facet of his life seen through the prism of the present.

As the material accumulated - more than 120 hours of it - the pressing question for me became, "How on earth am I going to edit this thing?" Enter Steve Jess, a fine editor I had worked with in New York on various commercials. Steve gave up his day-job at the

post-production company The WhiteHouse for seven months (and they generously agreed) and applied his extraordinary energy to this project. Using cineSync software created in Adelaide by Rising Sun, we would lock our computers together and screen sessions of cuts across the globe - usually very early in my morning, which was late in the day for Steve. We also had face to face editing sessions when I was in New York, and then he came to Adelaide for a month of fine cutting. Steve proved to be a marvelous collaborator.

Recently people have been asking, "What is it about you and obsessive pianists?" I have no explanation except to say perhaps I should have practiced my piano more as a child!

Originally the film was intended as a tribute to a man I hugely admire on the occasion of his 70th anniversary. What Philip makes of it is another matter. When he first saw it, he remarked, "You've made a wonderful film, I just wish it wasn't about me!" Oh well, as his manager Jim said to me at the outset "If he likes the whole thing, it probably won't be a very good film!"

All in all, making this film has been a return to my roots as a filmmaker - pursuing a passion, living it by the skin of your teeth, and maintaining the persistence of vision you need to realize a dream. I've enjoyed returning to the documentary form of story telling after more than a decade away from it - with all its unexpected developments, frustrations and delights.

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