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WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

Directed by Nicholas Ray

Written by Nicholas Ray with Susan Ray

(1973; restored in 2011 - 94 minutes)

DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH

Directed by Susan Ray

(documentary, 2011 - 70 minutes)

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SYNPOSES

WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

The most complete, newly restored version of Nicholas Ray's until-now-unseen final work, made with his students at the State University of New York at Binghamton, WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN embodies Ray's approach to filmmaking as a communal way of life. The film records Ray's groundbreaking use of multiple images as a way of telling more than one story simultaneously, and of colorization as a way to heighten emotional expression. He called it a "journalistic" film, one that shares the anthropologists' aim of recording the "history, progress, manners, morals, and mores of everyday life," at a critical moment in American history. Ray plays himself in the film, serving as mentor, friend, and reference point around whom the students' stories constellate.

DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH

Did Nick Ray leave Hollywood, or did Hollywood leave him? What was he up to when he returned to the States after a decade in Europe? What was his intention with WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN, that experimental film he made with a bunch of college students? What was he doing with so many images on the screen all at once? *How* did he do it? Why was the film never finished? Did he lose his way, his talent, his sanity, his common sense? DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH, a full-length documentary helmed by Ray's wife Susan, investigates these questions and the relationship forged by Ray between his life and his art. Drawing on the director's archive of never-before-seen film, video, and stills, Susan finds answers to our questions about Nick Ray in Nick Ray's own words and images. And we learn from interviews with members of the original crew of WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN, directors Jim Jarmusch and Victor Erice, and others, how this man lived, saw, learned, and taught, how he fought and danced with his demons, and how he loved.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS

Nicholas Ray on WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

When asked, "What is your film about?" Ray answered, "It's about what we're looking for. We're looking for ourselves, for a sense of identity."

Susan Ray on DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH

"I came to this project with questions, many questions, and frankly, a few doubts. In the course of the work, Nick himself answered the questions; and the doubts led to revelations, not only of Nick's intentions, mode of work, and prescient vision, but of some of the driving forces underpinning our lives today that Nick observed taking seed 40 years ago. Although I knew the man pretty well, until working on this film, I'm not sure I truly knew him."

DIRECTORS' BIOS

NICHOLAS RAY

Director of WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

Nicholas Ray was born in the heartland of America, in Galesville, Wisconsin, on August 7, 1911. He lived a bold and adventurous life, always searching for a deeper understanding of himself and his world. His career touched every aspect of American cultural life and included his direction of such film classics as *Party Girl*, *In A Lonely Place*, *Lusty Men*, *Bigger Than Life*, *Bitter Victory*, and, of course, *Rebel Without A Cause*. When the Hollywood system became too restrictive, Ray exiled himself to Europe, where he lived for 10 years, returning to the States in 1969. He worked on WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN between 1971 and 1976, acted in films of Wenders and Foreman, and in 1977, having come to grips with his alcohol addiction, he turned to teaching, which he has been quoted as saying was the most fulfilling work of his life.

SUSAN RAY

Director of DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH

Susan Ray was born on November 15, 1951, in New Haven, Connecticut. She attended the University of Chicago, and it was in Chicago, at the Conspiracy Trial, that she first met Nicholas Ray. Soon she was working full-time for the director, and soon after that they were living together in New York. There Susan worked as a book editor while also giving her efforts to whatever project Ray had underway. The couple collaborated on the concept and first pages for WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN. She has edited and introduced with her memoir the book *I Was Interrupted: Nicholas Ray On Making Movies*, and over the years has published several short pieces about Ray. She has practiced Rinzai Zen for 30 years, ordained in the lineage of Kyozan Joshu, Roshi, and studied with a number of indigenous healers. She is a writer by trade, with a semi-fictional novel in final revisions. DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH is her first film, and she hopes not her last.

INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN RAY

Courtesy of INDIEWIRE

From August 31, 2011

Nicholas Ray Was an Early Adopter: An Interview With Susan Ray on Her Husband's Legacy

By Shane Daniels

Of the big names premiering work at this year's Venice Film Festival, one is particularly both notable and unexpected. More than 30 years after his death, legendary American filmmaker Nicholas Ray appears in the program—and not with a retrospective, but with a “new” work.

It's the world premiere of the fully restored version of his elusive last film, “We Can't Go Home Again,” a collaborative piece devised and executed by the filmmaker and his students in 1971 at Binghamton University's Harper College in upstate New York. Oscilloscope has already acquired the film for North America along with its companion documentary, “Don't Expect Too Much,” directed by his widow, Susan Ray. For both Venice director Marco Muller and for Susan, the premiere is the culmination of a long-cherished desire to see the work presented in something that resembles a finished, integral form. Originally assembled in haste, and stymied by Ray's growing alcoholism, the result screened as a work-in-progress at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival, where the director described it as an effort to make “what, in our minds, is a Guernica” out of “a broken-down Bolex.” He continued to tinker with it in subsequent years, but it remained unfinished when he died from cancer in 1979.

Its current restoration was undertaken by the Venice Biennale in conjunction with the Nicholas Ray Foundation, Gucci, Netherlands' Eye Film Institute and the Academy Film Archive. Following its Venice bow, the film will screen at both the Toronto and New York film festivals.

Its very making has already achieved a minor-legend status. Ever the iconoclast, Ray believed the project represented a necessary clash between two generations: His own (which he called “a generation of betrayers”) and that of his young students. He sought to facilitate a dialogue, one in which the collective's individual experiences and perspectives would inform the work being shot.

Toward this end, he maintained a fierce sense of community. The group lived and worked together until the lines between the project and everyday life began to dissolve. Students were also required to rotate jobs every two weeks—becoming actors, cinematographers, set designers, editors, sound recordists—in order to gain a practical knowledge of every aspect of the filmmaking process.

“One of the themes that Nick hoped WCGHA would articulate is the search for self-image,” says Susan Ray, speaking from her home in New York. “To him, it seemed that the younger generation – and you have to remember,” she adds, “this was the start of the 1970s, a critical turning point for this country – a lot of these kids were withdrawing from the political confrontations of the '60s into something else: a search for an image or an idea of themselves.

“And I remember Nick saying to me once how strange he found that. How he'd feel terribly burdened, he said, if he had an ‘image’ of himself, because he thought it would keep him from ever changing or growing.

“Whereas today, of course, we're obsessed with image. We strive to be these perfect beings, with our every flaw disguised and smoothed over. And that's why, I think,

we have this increasingly impersonal, mechanized, animated cinema – and I mean animated in the literal sense: digital animations, CGI... Because we're constantly trying to erase any human imperfections."

Over the course of a semester, Ray and his crew shot over 90,000 feet of film, on all available gauges, from 8mm through to 35mm. Smaller formats were integrated into the main image through rear projection on a 35mm matte. The result, incorporating anything from two to six separate images, was then subjected to further digital manipulation, courtesy of artist Nam June Paik's video synthesizer.

It was nothing less than an attempt to replicate what, in Ray's mind, the times required: not a conventional drama, or even a straightforward documentary, but the "journalistic film... recording the history, progress, manner, morals and mores of everyday life" at that particular moment in American culture.

Certainly, with its palimpsest-like layering of images, and its lurid, almost Expressionist palette, it looks and plays quite unlike any other Ray movie, something Susan Ray is quick to emphasize. It finds the filmmaker, ever restless, moving in a direction that prefigures much of the avant-garde of the following two decades.

Would Ray have been excited or intimidated by today's accelerated digital culture?

"I think both," says Susan Ray. "I actually have some footage of him at a conference on technology about 40 years ago, in which he refers – rather emotionally, in fact – to the various difficulties he foresaw with it. In part because he felt it was simply creating, among our kids, a bunch of adolescent consumers – when really what it needed to do was to help us learn how to bring people together."

"Nick was always interested in new things, but he definitely viewed technology as a tool to be used rather than as a goal in itself. I'm sure he'd find the potential of digital filmmaking fascinating – for one thing, the multiple image work in WCGHA would have been much easier to achieve, and far less expensive. But as for the way it's isolating and disembodimenting our culture . . . I think that would have appalled him, to be honest."

For Susan Ray, the desire to see the film complete was motivated largely by curiosity: "Ultimately, I was trying to come to a deeper understanding of what Nick had in mind. Because WCGHA is emphatically not a finished film. So I was curious to find out what it might have been, had he the opportunity to make it what he wanted."

The process led her to create a work of her own, a documentary entitled "Don't Expect Too Much," also screening at Venice, which serves as a companion piece to and explication of the main feature. Drawing upon archival material, showing her husband both at work and in more casual moments, it also features interviews from the original crew members, as well as directors Jim Jarmusch and Victor Erice.

Though she claims to have come to filmmaking "ass-backward," ("Someone else was going to make it, and then suddenly they couldn't, so it fell to me") Susan Ray found the process not only fascinating, but necessary.

"I had a number of questions of my own about Nick's film that I wanted to explore," she says. "I've always been very interested in the teacher-student relationship, it's one of my abiding curiosities. And also, about how the experience had for the original crew members, and what it left them with, how it affected them, what they got out of it. So I interviewed a number of them and worked quite closely with some of them on the restoration."

"But I want to be clear," she adds, "I'm not doing this because I'm just some devoted widow. I'm doing it because I think Nick has something important to say to us now, about technology and society and the way we live. Something that very few people

are putting their finger on, even today. I think he saw where we were headed, and was trying to warn us, in his own, very personal way.”

In his early years, long before he became a filmmaker, Ray was invited by Frank Lloyd Wright to serve an apprenticeship at the architect’s Taliesin community. A few years later, he worked closely with musicologist and cultural historian Allan Lomax, recording American folk tunes as part of the US government’s Resettlement Project. From each man, he gained a sense both of the wider world and the importance of artistic expression – and as Susan Ray concedes, came to appreciate the pivotal importance of a mentor-figure in the lives of younger artists.

“Well, one of the things I hope the documentary will show, is that for the last 10 years of his life, which have been written off by people who claimed he was washed up, he was actually enjoying being a teacher himself. After he got sober, he was teaching at the Strasberg Institute and at NYU. And being Nick, he was interested in teaching a way of living, of seeing the world – not just how to make movies. And one of the students who worked with him on WCGHA said that he told him that he considered this by far the most rewarding thing he’d ever done.

“But that was Nick. He was a searcher, a seeker. He was interested in who he was and what this world was. And film was a way to process that, and to communicate his experience. Of course making movies was of huge importance to him. But really, the search was the main thing. The search, and the wisdom it yielded.”

CREDITS

WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

Produced and Directed by Nicholas Ray

Written by Nicholas Ray with Susan Ray

Restoration Produced by The Nicholas Ray Foundation with EYE Film Institute of the Netherlands and the Academy Film Archive, with additional support from RAI, Gucci, The Film Foundation, The Gulbenkian Foundation, La Cinematheque Francaise, and Museo Internazionale del Cinema. Picture restored by Cineric, Inc.; Sound by Audio Mechanics.

Principal Cast

Nicholas Ray
Richie Bock
Tom Farrell
Jill Ganon
Jane Heymann
Leslie Wynne Levinson

Principal Crew

Steve Anker
Richard Bock
Peer Bode
Charlie Bornstein
Doug Cohen
Danny Fisher
Stanley Liu
Luke Oberle
Helene Kaplan Wright

DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH

Directed by Susan Ray

Produced by The Nicholas Ray Foundation and Susan Ray

Edited by Tom Haneke

Narrated by Susan Ray

Photography by Peter McCandless

Music by Tim Ray, Stormin' Norman Zamcheck, Markus de Pretto

Principal Cast

Gerry Bamman
Bernard Eisenschitz
Victor Erice
Jim Jarmusch
Myron Meisel
Original crew from *We Can't Go Home Again*
and
Nicholas Ray