



20,000 Days on Earth Discussion Guide

Directors: Iain Forsyth, Jane Pollard

Year: 2014

Time: 97 min

You might know these directors from:

This is the first full-length feature from this directorial team.

FILM SUMMARY

On the anniversary of his 20,000th day alive, musician Nick Cave walks audiences through a make-believe course of 24 hours in his life. All pre-planned and perfectly staged out, he sits down with a therapist to discuss his childhood, shares a meal with long-time collaborator Warren Ellis, recalls old times with the likes of Kylie Minogue and former Bad Seeds' guitarist Blixa Bargeld as they sit in the back seat of his car, and eats pizza with his twin sons. Equal parts intimate and standoffish, *20,000 DAYS ON EARTH* opens the door, invites us in, and leaves us aching for more.

If you are expecting to learn the facts about and statistics on Nick Cave the man, where he's been, where he spent his childhood and how he climbed from punk gutter to rock icon, this film has a few surprises in store. Apart from a few flash-forward minutes at the film's beginning, a kaleidoscopic slide show containing images and sound bites from his 20,000 days on earth, this film is not the classic rock biopic.

The magnetism of Nick Cave married with imaginative direction from visual artist and filmmaking duo Forsyth and Pollard makes for entrancing viewing. No heroin-tinged, groupie crazed images are allowed to clutter the clean-cut, cinematic space Cave inhabits as he expounds on memory, performance, collaboration, the weather, and the overall creative process.

Ending much like it began, presenting the only chaotic footage the film offers, Cave sings out, "I'm transforming. I'm vibrating. Look at me now!" *20,000 DAYS ON EARTH* does not pretend to present anything other than Nick Cave, whoever that man may be. And all one can hope for at the end of the 97 minutes of the day in the life that he offers up is that life grants him another 20,000 more.

FILM THEMES

By picking up a pen and pressing the piano keys, Cave enters a whole new world, one enhanced by collaborators and activated on stage.

REAL WORLD VS. FABRICATED WORLD

When Nick Cave enters his music, either in the writing process or on stage, he steps out from the concrete contours of the real world into a place of his own making, a fantastic atmosphere where self-transformation is possible. By activating his imagination, Cave garners his memories and mythologizes them, composing songs out of the building blocks they provide. However, as time goes on, the line between the concrete world and the world he has invented blurs, as Nick Cave the public figure and Nick Cave the private man begin to merge.

COLLABORATION

Nick Cave is infamous for his creative output, his stage presence, and his musical contributions. As a rock icon Cave stands amongst some of the best, yet there is a whole cast of characters and collaborators not only backing him up, but writing and creating alongside him. When discussing his creative process Cave admits whole-heartedly to the fact that he does not work in a bubble, that the ideas he has are mere sketches, nascent concepts he brings to the drawing table of the studio room, where others step in and turn the rough idea into a polished completed track. "You've got to understand your limitations," states Cave, and by turning to others for support in the creative process, some of the most gorgeous results are made possible.

MEMORIES

For Nick Cave, "Memory is what we are." A person, and thus their creative output, is indivisibly linked to their unique set of memories from childhood on. The past defines and informs current decisions, desires, views, and personality. For Cave, his entire notion of female fantasy and longing can be traced back to his childhood escapades with Julie, the pale-faced, dark-haired girl who first took his fancy. Flip through the photographs of his subsequent love affairs and traces of Julie are everywhere. The characters he has come across along the course of his days continue to inform his creative output and color his life path. For Cave, should the faculty of memory one day leave him behind, his place on the planet would be obsolete.

PERFORMANCE

"There's something that happens on stage...you are transported," says Cave when extrapolating on his experience of performing in front of an audience. A certain magic can be accessed through performance, as if a powerful magnetic field buzzes off the venue floorboards, beaming forth from the stage lights and amplifiers. The invitation granted to a musician from an audience to perform one's stories has a transformative capacity. The feeling can transport you to another dimension yet a simple yawn from a front-row audience member can shatter the illusion, exposing performance as the temporary space it is.

"My biggest fear is losing my memory... Memory is what we are. Your very soul and your very reason to be alive is tied up in memory."

Nick Cave

"To act on a bad idea is better than to not act at all."

Nick Cave

"On some level, we all want to be somebody else. We all look for that transformative thing that can happen in our lives."

Nick Cave

FILM FACTS:

- 20,000 DAYS ON EARTH was nominated for and granted a number of prestigious awards. Wins include a Golden Athena at the Athens International Film Festival, awards in Directing and Editing at Sundance, and three awards from Cinema Eye Honors. In addition, it was nominated for a BAFTA, a British Independent Film Award, an Independent Spirit Award, the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance, and the Sydney Film Prize at the Sydney Film Festival.
- Co-directors Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard met while studying Fine Art and Art Theory in London in the mid-1990s. Performance, music culture, and pioneering the use of reenactment in visual art have all played a major role in their output. In 1998 they released “A Rock ‘N’ Roll Suicide,” in which they recreated David Bowie’s final performance as Ziggy Stardust. They first worked with Cave in 2008, directing promo videos for The Bad Seeds’ upcoming singles.
- As Nick Cave began work on The Bad Seed’s “Push The Sky Away,” he asked Forsyth and Pollard if they would like to come to the studio and film the writing process. Previously private about his creative process, this came as a shock to the directors. That initial footage spawned what became 20,000 DAYS ON EARTH.
- The film’s title comes from Cave’s notebook, where he counted the days he’d been alive.
- Nick Cave’s father died in a car accident.
- Nick Cave has four sons: Jethro and Luke were both born in 1991 to different mothers, one in Brazil and one in Australia. In 1997 he married model Susie Bicks, who worked with Vivienne Westwood for a number of years. The two had twin sons—Arthur and Earl—in 2000.
- The lead singer of INXS—Michael Hutchence—and Nick Cave, both Australian, were close friends. They opened the Portobello Cafe in 1995, which they intended to be an “alternative Planet Hollywood” in London. The cafe closed down in 1997 following Hutchence’s death.
- Raised in Victoria, Australia, Nick has two older brothers and one younger sister. After finishing high school, he went on to study painting, but left that to pursue music. His first band consisted of fellow students from boarding school, and in 1973 they named themselves The Boys Next Door, later changing that to The Birthday Party. Cave moved with the band to London in 1980 and then to West Berlin. Cave and The Birthday Party member Mick Harvey formed Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds in 1983, along with German guitarist Blixa Bargeld, who left the band in 2003. As of 2015, The Bad Seeds had released 15 studio albums, 4 live albums, and 2 compilations.
- Cave’s acting credits include “Ghosts... of the Civil Dead” and “Johnny Suede,” with Brad Pitt.
- Cave and collaborator Warren Ellis compose film soundtracks, in addition to their band work.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Watch** “[Do You Love Me Like I Love You](#),” a 14-part series of short films by co-directors Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, intended to accompany the reissue of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds back catalogue.
2. **Learn** more about the work of co-directors [Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard](#), who are pioneers in the field of reenactment within contemporary visual art.
3. **Shine** a light on a small idea you have, allowing it a chance at life, rather than harboring it in the darkness of your mind. As Cave states, “To act on a bad idea is better than to not act at all.”
4. **Read** up on Mick Harvey, Warren Ellis, and Blixa Bargeld, three long-term collaborators of Nick Cave’s, who have all had great impact on Cave’s creative output.

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Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.