



WONDERS ARE MANY

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“Art and science form a combustible fusion in [the] elegant and wide-ranging Wonders Are Many: The Making of Dr. Atomic. A dazzling case of the right filmmaker attached to the right subject...” —VARIETY

“...a masterful distillation of explosive elements: science, art, psychology and humanity.” —THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

Wonders Are Many tells the story of making a grand opera about the atomic bomb. This behind-the-scenes documentary follows composer John Adams and director Peter Sellars over the course of a year as they work to forge the tale of J. Robert Oppenheimer into a music drama like no other: the strange and beautiful *Doctor Atomic*.

As creation of the opera unfolds, and as Sellars and Adams struggle to make high art from the most savage weapon in history, the film explores the unnerving 60-year history of nuclear weapons. It tells the story of the real events behind the drama on stage and the unintended consequences of actions (and inactions) of men working on the first nuclear device. Weaving together the intense and sometimes hilarious process of making an opera with striking newly declassified historical film footage, *Wonders Are Many* focuses on the 48 hours leading up to the Trinity atomic test in July of 1945.

Looming at the center of both the opera and the film is the enigmatic and irresistible figure of J. Robert Oppenheimer—the frail aesthete who could curse, womanize and ride the high country in New Mexico with the best of the Alpha-males—the romantic recluse who created the most potent military weapon in history, the great lion of American science—and a culture hound who hated opera. His life spanned most of the scientific and ethical history of the 20th century, and he, more than any other scientist, grew weary under the burden and frustration of forbidden knowledge he helped unleash but could no longer control.

The film begins with an astonishing display of nuclear savagery—blast after blast in the desert, under the ocean and in space—and then suddenly cuts to the first rehearsal of *Doctor Atomic*: breathtakingly beautiful lines from baritone Gerald Finley, singing the part of Oppenheimer. Implicit throughout the film, against a present day background of terrorism, nuclear proliferation and counter-proliferation is the question: “How can art make history relevant to current affairs?”

This extraordinary documentary weaves together the frenetic back stage action at the opera house with the real World War II events that lie behind the drama on stage. Spectacular recently declassified footage of nuclear testing, the breathtaking beauty of John Adams’ music and the antics of a 250 person opera company racing toward opening night under Peter Sellars’ masterful direction all come together to make a documentary like none other.

CREDITS

Executive Producer for ITVS: Sally Jo Fifier

Director, Producer, Writer: Jon Else

Producer: Bonni Cohen

A co-production between Jon Else, Actual Films, and ITVS

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Actual Films



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