

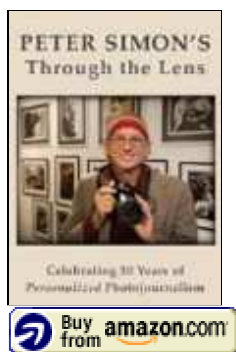
DVD & Blu-ray Reviews

Peter Simon's "Through the Lens" (2014)

A celebration of 50 years of photojournalism by the photographer himself.



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Peter Simon's "Through the Lens" (2014)

Cast: Peter Simon, photographer

Director: Carl Holt

Studio: PeterSimon.com (2 DVDs) [4/22/14] [Distr. by MVD]

Video: 16:9 & 4:3 color & black & white

Audio: English PCM stereo

Extras: "Photography 101" tutorial

Length: 240 minutes

Rating: *****

An enjoyable couple of DVDs which, according to Simon himself, "Celebrate 50 Years of Personalized Photojournalism." It will be especially interesting if you share his boomer generation alternative lifestyle, political leanings and promotion of Martha's Vineyard, where he now lives and runs a gallery with his wife.

It comes packed with over 300 of his own images and his continual commentary tying together the various photos and happenings. He has divided the two DVDS into a dozen sections, which will give an idea of the contents:

A Look Into My Father's Eyes

College Daze

Street Life

Country Comforts

Decent Exposures

Searching for the Spirit

Legendary People

Reggae Bloodlines

High and Dry

So Many Roads

OCCUPY!

On the Vineyard

Peter is the son of the senior Simon who founded Simon & Schuster Publishers. He is also the brother of Carly Simon and another sister who married Walter Cronkite the last five years of his life. Some of the legendary people you'll see in his photos include Bill and Hilary Clinton, Jerry Garcia, Mick Jagger, Bob Marley, Ram Das, Robert Plant and many others. Diane Sawyer wrote the recommendation of his hand and lens work on the DVD cover. After explaining how he took over his father's darkroom and the photography pursuit after the death of his father, he has shots of college days at Boston University, the anti-war movement and rock & roll (I was there part of that time too but missed out on all the excitement till I got to California).

"Street Life" deals with his photography of urban decay and problems, and "Country Comforts" records life at the hippie commune he had for two years in rural Vermont (until he tired of picking up after everyone). "Decent Exposures" was the cute title of his first book of photos, which explore the naturist way of life as one of the first published books of nude photos. The New Age spiritual movement is the next section, in which Simon explored his spiritual side with the noted spiritual leader Ram Das, who eventually presided as minister at Simon's wedding.

Simon is as nuts about reggae as he is about rock & roll, and in "Reggae Bloodlines" shows shots from his many trips to Jamaica and his books on the subject. "High and Dry" concerns his becoming an alcoholic, which started as his reaction to 9/11 and the fact that an important book he had worked on was scheduled to be released on that day and therefore failed miserably. He ended up in rehab and is back now to being only a casual weed user. The Occupy Movement gets attention from his camera and he explains that he feels that during the couple years it was most active it continued some of the hippie movement's positive ideas but has now sort of petered out. The final section is a pean to Martha's Vineyard, which island has been his home now for nearly four decades.

His few comments about lighting and framing are useful and well-chosen. I was interested in the fact that he didn't use any flash early in his career and I liked those portraits the best. He also loves back-lighting, and looks for situations where multiple people or animals are spaced out just so, but naturally, without his involvement. Though not Blu-ray, the photos look excellent on the screen. Some of his voice-over is a bit jarring as it was clearly recorded at two different times with entirely different acoustics. He has a straight-forward and honest approach to his photos of the past half century in this enjoyable experience.

—John Sunier

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