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REVIEW

Review: *Bodysong*

Posted by [El Bicho](#) on August 24, 2005 08:00 PM (See [all posts by El Bicho](#))
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[Bodysong](#)
 DVD from Music Video Distribu
 Release date: 12 July, 2005

Written and directed by Simon Pummell

Bodysong is not a film to be passively watched, but is instead a piece of art that tries to actively engage. The director wants the audience to be mindful of the images on screen in the hopes that each viewer will create an individual and unique experience as he reflects on the film. *Bodysong* tells the story of a human being's life by breaking it down into six basic elements: birth, growth, sex, violence, death, and dreams. These key points show the universality of life regardless of nationality, ethnicity or creed.

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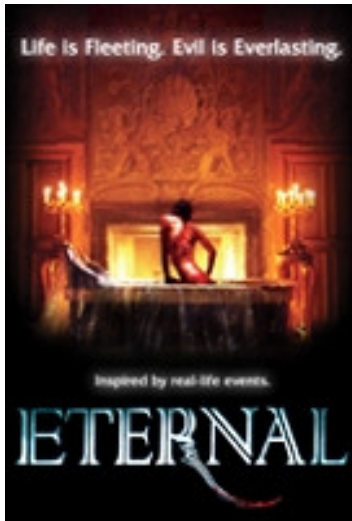
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I'm listening to it right now, and I agree, it's, ...
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The film is a celluloid collage of edited archival films that have been recorded from all over the world since the medium was first invented. The picture quality of the images isn't always great, which is understandable considering the age of some of the footage. Most of the subjects are anonymous participants, but the film also uses iconic images. We see Josephine Baker dance, Jackson Pollack paint and Helen Keller speak. There's famous news footage, such as the Vietcong officer who was shot in the head by General Loan in the middle of a Saigon street during the Vietnam War and the Chinese man holding the white flag in Tiananmen Square, attempting to block a tank. The stories about every shot can be learned through the [website](#) that was created in conjunction with the film.

Bodysong starts at the cellular level. We see the building blocks of life as they work their way from egg to child. Women from different cultures give birth in different settings, such as hospitals, homes and even pools of water. This segment goes on way too long as the events and visuals are repeated over and over. The ideas are conveyed rather quickly, so the repetition becomes relentless and I found myself losing interest.

Children grow into young adults. They get involved in courtships that are consummated. This segment included pornographic images of intercourse and oral sex. I was startled, yet not offended. At first, I found them gratuitous. They seem to call attention to themselves and I

On [The Minutemen Project and the "La Reconquista" Lie](#)
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Victor, March 23, 2005
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have to say that Bush has one Machiavellian spec...
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Great comments in #598... I'd like to give my thoug...
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On [So you think you can dance: Week 4 - The Final 16](#) by cindy
can someone please let me know the name of the son...
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Patty cakes OR Pancakes as he is selling on th 700...
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was taken out of the moment. Thinking about the film days later, I realized that it was not the presentation of the images, but my reaction to them, that caused my disconnection. Images of sexual acts certainly belong in a segment about sex. They are presented very matter-of-factly and not in a salaciousness manner. No more time is given to the sexual scenes than to any other events that comprise a person's life, so any issues I had were my own.

The violence segment starts with individuals fist-fighting and moves on to large-scale riots. Illness and death are explored with sick, old people appearing on a split-screen with microscopic views of different germs and viruses. After death, there appears to be a rebirth and we witness a conglomeration of scenes. We see body modification, religious images and fire. There is art in the forms of dance and painting that then segues into symbols and communication. We finally hear people speaking, usually with difficulty as they are learning to talk. People stage protests for civil rights and other battles against authority. The film ends back at the beginning with images from the cellular level.

I appreciate the effort and ideas behind the film, but the project comes up short for me. It was interesting, and there were some good moments, but I was puzzled by the structure. I couldn't figure out what was taking place after the death segment. At the end of the film, I saw that the segment represented dreams, but I didn't

[K](#) by Lorraine
Relient K is AWESOME! and they aren't afraid to say...
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50 is hot ja is hot, why are this niggaz tryin 2 k...
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To my mind, this isn't a leap worth taking. You wo...
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Transgression is a very good album...but it takes ...
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On [Top 5: Garth Brooks Songs](#) by georgiaboy
"artists like Faith Hill, Shania Twain and Kenny C...
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Hi! I am the reviewer again. I have no doubt that ...
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hey, yeh erm can somebody PLEASE tell me who the g...
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About a third of the way through the comments I be...
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rock on Juliette
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understand how because the sequences in the dreams segment are things that take place on this plane of existence, art and protests, things that are thought about and acted upon. Those aren't spiritual or afterlife dreams, but instead stem from a person's imagination. Dreams are subconscious ramblings of the mind with logic all its own that take place all through life, so why place it after death?

Other than the dreams section, this could have been the story of any creature's life: birth, growth, sex, violence, death are things all living things share, and the dreams could be as well. Just because we aren't aware that other life forms have dreams doesn't mean they don't exist. I find the decision to focus on humans interesting because the project's purpose seems to illustrate the universality of the human experience, yet the experience of life itself doesn't seem to be any different other than our own awareness of it.

An amazing soundtrack created by Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood accompanies the film. He does a masterful job capturing the mood of the segments. The film begins, like all life, with conception and birth, and the score for this segment brings to mind a science fiction film and explorations of new worlds. The sex sequence is paired with free jazz, the frenzied sounds matching the carnal lust on display. A pounding percussion plays as the violence segment focuses on war. The soundtrack is available for purchase and can be sampled at the [Bodysong website](#). Radiohead fans will enjoy it.

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[Al Barger](#) (31)

[RKC](#) (30)

[Nancy](#) (28)

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The extras include other short films by Pummel, a commentary track that appears sporadically and deals more with Greenwood's music and only briefly touches on Pummel's work. There's no in-depth explanation given to the choices made in the visuals. There are some video interview clips where Pummel talks about the film, the film's creation and the web interactivity.

Some will definitely find *Bodysong* pretentious and boring, but for those who enjoy thinking as a form of entertainment, it might be worth your time. I liked the experience overall even though I wasn't completely satisfied with it, and I couldn't sit through it again without taking something of a psychoactive nature to assist my meditation.

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Posted by [El Bicho](#) on August 24, 2005
08:00 PM (See [all posts by El Bicho](#))
Filed under: [Video](#)

 El Bicho's personal blog

Comment on this post and/or leave a message for the author here.

Comment 1 posted by [Aaron, Duke De Mondo](#) on August 24, 2005 08:46 PM:

great stuff, El Bicho. goodness, following this an Chris Beaumont's recent review, i'm gonna have to get the DVD out the cupboard again, it looks like. I ain't watched it in a year or more, and i find myself intrigued by the whole thing anew. Great stuff!

Comment 2 posted by [El Bicho](#) on August 24, 2005 09:08 PM:

Much appreciated, Duke.

What is good about rewatching it is that you should have a different experience. I'd be curious if your reaction to the film is different upon a repeat viewing.

Comment 3 posted by [Aaron, Duke De Mondo](#) on August 24, 2005 09:28 PM:

aha! i knew i had wittered some thoughts about this back in the day. excuse the length of this comment, but El Bicho, i thought if you were interested in what i made of it second time around, you might be interested in the first viewing. apparently this was written in feb. 2004, and i ain't gonna tell you where i found it, on account of it's shockingly awful and badly written and bland;

"On Bodysong

So The Duke put his feet up on this fine Thursday in the month of

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February and let Simon Pummell's Bodysong float around his person for 83 minutes of hypnotic bliss. We here at Mondo Towers have been itching to see this work since it was released late last year. Yet, no cinema anywhere in our general vicinity felt it worthwhile to screen the piece, what with Shanghai Medallions 3 or whatever packing them in like herring in a matchbox from here to Scarborough.

The film came out on DVD on Monday, and was dutifully plucked from the shelves by The Duke, eager to experience this unique homage to humanity.

The touchstone is obviously Koyanniquatsi, and anyone who saw that or its two sequels will know what to expect. Beautiful, surreal imagery, played out (although in this case footage is slowed to a crawl rather than speeded up) to a highly distinctive soundtrack, with Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood here getting all Phillip Glass, with his screeching guitar and virtual-orchestral carry-ons. Indeed, Greenwood's score is as worthy of praise as Pummell's gargantuan trawl through the annals of cinematic history.

Purporting to tell the tale of human experience utilising archive footage by turns astounding, disturbing, pornographic and bizarre, Bodysong would still be a magnificent achievement even if it wasn't particularly good. Which, luckily enough, it is. Very good indeed. Where do you start to pick 83 minutes worth of footage from over 100 years of cinema? Surely there must exist countless shots of children playing, grown men fighting, dancers dancing, all filed away as stock footage or lovingly labelled home

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videos. To this end, Pummell grabs frames from sources as disparate as Dziga Vertov's seminal *Man With A Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*) and 1970s porn loops, bombarding the viewer with image upon image that both validate the ambition of this undertaking, and compliment it. There are shots here which are startling, and others which make one flinch, turn away, repelled by the nature of the material and yet drawn towards the constant feed of image and sound. Viewers of a nervous disposition would be best to approach with caution, especially those with an aversion to graphic representations of childbirth, considering there are nigh on ten minutes of such at the films opening. While the aforementioned Kowanniquatsi was unforgettably beautiful, and shares many traits with Pummell's film, *Bodysong* is to some extent its polar opposite. While the former seemed to mourn human involvement in the world, the latter celebrates it, even finding beauty in the most regrettable foibles of the species.

The work was pitched as a website as well as a film, and so the *Bodysong* Site offers the stories behind every shot used in the feature, a mammoth task in itself, given the obscure nature of some of the findings. Ultimately, the film is a hymn to human experience, and while the ambition of the concept may at times overshadow the product itself, it remains something to be experienced, to be relished, and a testament to the power of the moving image."

god, "testament to the power of the moving image." what a knob i was. and am, but at least i swear more

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now.

Comment 4 posted by [Tan The Man](#) on August 25, 2005 12:48 AM:

"the experience of life itself doesn't seem to be any different other than our own awareness of it."

Nicely put...

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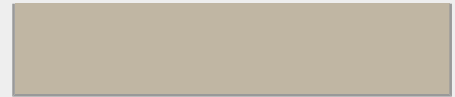
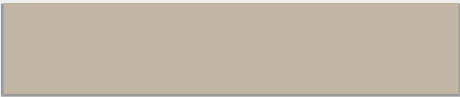
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