

Rory Kennedyâ??s Above and Beyond: NASAâ??s Journey to Tomorrow

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Quite a day getting an opportunity to sit down with documentary filmmaker, Rory Kennedy, before the screening of her AFI DOCS 2018 Centerpiece film, *Above and Beyond: NASAâ??s Journey to Tomorrow.*

Following my interview, I gathered my gear and waited for the eveningâ??s festivities. A brief reception was held before the screening in the Space Museum with some light appetizers and refreshments.



Dr. Ellen Stofan, the former Chief Scientist of NASA (2013-2016) and current Director of the Smithso

The screening was held in the Lockheed-Martin IMAX Theater. Introductory remarks were made by Dr. Ellen Stofan, the former Chief Scientist of NASA (2013-2016) and Director of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, who served as principal advisor to the NASA Administrator on the agencyâ??s science-related strategic planning and programs. Stofan glowingly praised Kennedyâ??s work before bringing George Stevens, the American Film Instituteâ??s (AFI) Founding Director, to the podium to make Kennedyâ??s formal introduction. And, after informing the audience of Kennedyâ??s nearly 50 films and that Kennedyâ??s middle name, Elizabeth, was in honor of Stevensâ?? wife, Stevens introduced Rory Kennedy.



Rory Kennedy, second from left, speaks on making her newest film, *Above and Beyond: NASAâ??S*

Kennedy thanked the Discovery team, as well as several other notable figures, including John Hoffman, for their support and stated what a great honor it has been to make the film. And, without further adieu *Above and Beyond* was screened. A lively panel discussion followed the screening on the NASA mission and the future safeguarding of Planet Earth.

Stay tuned for more on the panel discussion. In the meantime, keep an eye out for *Above and Beyond.* For your reading pleasure, Iâ??m including a review of the film!

REVIEW: ABOVE AND BEYOND: NASAâ??S JOURNEY TO TOMORROW

Documentary Filmmaker Rory Kennedy delivers a powerful payload of stunning and breathtaking imagery in her latest film, *Above and Beyond: NASAâ??s Journey to Tomorrow*. Kennedy has made a slew of award-winning and critically acclaimed films including *American Hollow* (1999), *The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007), *Ethel* (2012), and *Last Days in Vietnam* (2014). In, addition, Kennedy has been nominated for both the Oscar and Primetime Emmy â?? winning an Emmy with *Last Days in Vietnam (2014). Above and Beyond,* a Moxie Firecracker film, might be the film that puts her over the top when it comes to Oscar.

The film opens with an aerial shot of the Challenger Rover landing on the planet of Mars. Non-diagetic music aids in adding to the suspense of the momentous occasion. The archival footage shows the final moments of the landing with a voice-over narrator informing the audience the module had entered the atmosphere at 1100 miles and slowed to a final descending speed of one and a half miles an hour. A nice transition is made to a loud, cheering operations room at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Jet Propulsion Laboratory leading into the title and rolling credits. Various space images of NASA machinery accompany the opening and set the mood for the filmâ??s narrative.

Kennedy provides a good portion of the filmâ??s voice-over narration and reads some poignant words her uncle, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK), spoke in the early, transformative years of NASA. President Kennedy believed the Space Program and NASA offered America its greatest opportunities for its best and brightest minds as well as its able and fit bodies and tripled NASAâ??s budget from 1961 to 1962. Filmmaker Kennedy expertly crafted the words with complementary imagery. Archival footage of President Kennedy purveying an early rocket launch site as well as his wise and inspirational speech at Rice University as to why America would go to the moon, â??not because itâ??s easy, but because itâ??s hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skillsâ?¦â?• signifies the advent of the Space Race between the United States and Russia. Kennedy wanted to see space used for knowledge and understanding rather than a place for the deployment of weapons of mass destruction.

Over the course of the next six decades NASA would lead the way in space exploration. There were budgetary setbacks and unfortunate mishaps resulting in untimely deaths that temporarily halted some exploration efforts. But, more importantly, there were massive strides made and Rory Kennedy manages to weave them into the complex history of NASA with some inspirational words of her own at filmâ??s end. Surprisingly, while NASA has been known predominantly for its space exploration it has also engaged itself in the exploration of the earth. And, Kennedy manages to keep pace with this duality through a precise curation of NASA archival clips.

Having been approached by The Discovery Channel about making a documentary on NASA, Kennedy answered the call and incorporated numerous interviews with astronauts and leading NASA officials, coupled with stunning visuals and copious amounts of research materials as she delved into the known and unknown dealing with a simple philosophical premise:

> â??Human beings, more than any other species, are driven by an insatiable curiosity, a remarkable ability to wonder. It is a need to know that lies deep within our DNA as we seek to answer some of timeâ??s most fundamental questions: Where do we come from? Are we alone? What will become of us?â?•

And, much like her famous uncle, JFK, Rory Kennedy rallies NASA with its plans for space exploration and throws down the gauntlet with a call to action to moviegoers to safeguard our Planet Earth.

Above and Beyond is an ambitious film containing a wild and dangerous universe while inherently addressing the earthâ??s fragility and our place in it. One of the yearâ??s most important films. Highly recommended.

*Featured photo: Rory Kennedy (Photo credit: Gediyon Kifle)



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hollywoodglee