



FILM REVIEW: Max Richter's *Sleep* connecting the world

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Max Richter's Sleep, a documentary film from Award-winning filmmaker Natalie Johns screened at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival as a Special Event. Sundance Special Events are one-of-a-kind moments highlighting new independent works that enhance the festival experience. Johns's first global feature documentary, *I Am Thelma*, won an Audience Award at the LA Film Festival. Johns also received an Emmy nomination in 2015 for Outstanding Directing and has collaborated with some of the world's leading musical talent, including John Legend, Annie Lennox, Sam Smith, Childish Gambino, Solange, and Gil Scott Heron. In 2015, to critical acclaim, Richter released an eight-hour *Sleep* lullaby with a meditative quality combining piano and strings with subtle electronic touches and vocals to mimic brain waves in a state of sleep — an unimaginable effort connecting musical consciousness to the world.

Max Richter's Sleep follows the process of mounting the most ambitious live performance of *Sleep* to date: an open-air concert in downtown Los Angeles's Grand Park, across from the Los Angeles Music Center, where over 500 people experienced the composer's work in unison. But, instead of chairs, the audience members were given beds to sleep in! Johns includes a myriad of aerial shots of the downtown Los Angeles area that are interwoven in the film while a narrative voice-over informs the audience of longing for human connection and the desire to create a space for community and connectivity. A montage of close-ups depicting musical instruments and mathematical equations delineating the intricate mathematical formulae Richter utilizes to create his dream state composition.

Intentionally designed to keep listeners in a state of sleep, Richter unlocks patterns and rhythmically represents brain waves with accompanying repetitious musical notes. Performing *Sleep* required unprecedented endurance from its musicians. Once the concert is well underway, footage of Richter walking through the sleeping audience is captured and reveals the majestic undertaking coming to fruition — rejuvenation by reengaging the arts back into society. As morning breaks, an acoustic sunrise slowly brings an emotional, refreshed awakening with a feeling of hope and a new beginning.

Johns also includes a look into Richter's home life as he and his wife balance creative pursuits and paying the bills. Richter confesses his creative pursuits are his passion but his film compositions allow him the freedom to balance his art and his household needs. The result was a striking visual portrait that immerses us within the life of Richter and his creative partner, Yulia Mahr. Interestingly, Richter has performed his *Sleep* in venues around the world including cathedrals and parks. The first performance from midnight to 8:00 AM, September 27th, 2015, in London, England, at the Wellcome Collection Reading Room as part of the BBC's "Science and Music" set a Guinness Book of World Records for the longest live broadcast. The composition was also performed at the Philharmonie de Paris from midnight to 8:00 AM on November 18th, 2017.

The Los Angeles concerts on July 27-28th and July 28-29th, 2018, from approximately 10:30 PM until dawn, were the first outdoor performances of *Sleep*. Richter played piano, keyboards, and electronics. The American Contemporary Music Ensemble accompanied Richter along with cellist Claire Jensen, soprano Grace Davidson, violinist Andrew Tholl, cellist Emily Brausa, Isabelle Hagen (viola), and Ben Russell. I viewed the ninety-nine-minute film in the evening with a group of Sundance Film Festival volunteers and several members of the press. I left the theatre feeling very connected and very grounded and I imagine you will too. Highly recommended - an ultimate chill film!

Category

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