



2023 – 102 mins – Color – DCP and MP4

Theatrical & Festival Booking contacts:

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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE in association with KINO LORBER

HOW TO COME ALIVE

with Norman Mailer

SYNOPSIS

LONG:

HOW TO COME ALIVE with Norman Mailer explores the rollercoaster life of America's most controversial and bestselling author of the 20th Century, Norman Mailer. Propelled by his tremendous ego and contrarian spirit, Mailer's ceaseless visibility in the public eye lasted 6 decades, during which he had 6 tumultuous marriages, 9 beloved children, 11 bestsellers, 3 arrests, and 2 Pulitzer Prizes. Prophet, hedonist, violent criminal, literary outlaw, and social provocateur, Mailer's ideas about love, anger, fear, and courage cut to the core of human nature, are more relevant than ever today, and point to a prescription for waking ourselves up, shaking free of society's expectations, and coming alive as a people.

The first project with full access to Mailer's family and their archive, the film unearths a treasure trove of intimate and never-before-seen footage, outtakes, audio recordings, and interviews from throughout his life. Mailer lays himself bare, foibles and all. As a lover, fighter, rabble-rouser, and perhaps the last true American public intellectual, he seeks most of all to become a bolder, better human being and encourages us to do the same — to think adventurously, speak fearlessly, and care less about the response... or risk a doomed future.

SHORT:

HOW TO COME ALIVE with Norman Mailer explores the rollercoaster life of America's most controversial and bestselling author of the 20th Century, Norman Mailer. Propelled by his tremendous ego and contrarian spirit, Mailer's ceaseless visibility in the public eye lasted 6 decades, during which he had 6 tumultuous marriages, 9 beloved children, 11 bestsellers, 3 arrests, and 2 Pulitzer Prizes. Prophet, hedonist, violent criminal, literary outlaw, and social provocateur, Mailer's ideas about love, anger, fear, and courage cut to the core of human nature, are more relevant than ever today, and point to a prescription for shaking free of society's expectations, and coming alive as a people.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

To me, Norman Mailer stirs nostalgia for a not-so-long-lost era when, instead of celebrities, there were great minds informing the masses, when town hall debates and idea sparring elevated national discourse, when to be an agitator was embraced as a noble cultural contribution – the heyday of the public intellectual.

Over time, talk shows became echo chambers, personalities eclipsed the ideas they represented, and books lost out to a fragmented excess of technology and entertainment. As Mailer prophesied, we became less and less engaged with opinions that don't agree with our own and began forgetting how to think for ourselves.

For over 60 years, Mailer fought against these trends with intense conviction, bravery, and imagination. And as it became dangerously controversial, Mailer doubled down on his commitment to bold, unpopular ideas. For me as a young storyteller, and for many others, Mailer represented unabashed, artistic courage. His life and work taught us that to fully explore our human and creative capacity, we must be less afraid of the response.

Today, in a time characterized by polarization and fear of cancellation, Mailer's ideas are more vital than ever. If alive, he would choose to be the scapegoat in challenging timidity and conformism. He would have wanted to passionately, extravagantly push society to ask better questions and realize better solutions.

But he is far from a role model. When I first met with Mailer's family to discuss the project, it was a prerequisite that an intimate character portrait couldn't just celebrate an intellectual titan's enduring reflections on his country. It needed to equally investigate his ego, his sins, his mistakes. Indeed, a film celebrating complex, provocative ideas must paint a complex, provocative portrait. We don't need to love Mailer to benefit from his mind or to be ignited by his ideas. We don't need to hate Mailer to learn from his flaws.

Balancing these opposing dimensions was an exciting, but daunting creative challenge for the team, as if assigned by Mailer himself. We weren't interested in doing a comprehensive survey of each of his works and scandals, sorting the good from the bad. Instead, we set out to focus on a single theme to study the mind of a man who both interpreted and transformed the human condition during his tumultuous, inspired life.

Our north star navigating through the edit was to have the central conflict driving the documentary be society's love / hate relationship with challenging ideas. And ultimately, we aimed to highlight one specific Mailer philosophy – that we must each awaken what makes us come alive because what the world needs is for more people to come alive.

– Jeff Zimbalist

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Jeff Zimbalist is a multi-E Emmy and Peabody winning filmmaker most known for IDA and Tribeca Film Festival winner FAVELA RISING (HBO), Emmy winner and Cannes Film Festival favorite THE TWO ESCOBARS (ESPN, Disney), Emmy and Tribeca Film Festival winner MOMENTUM GENERATION (HBO, Universal), PELÉ; BIRTH OF A LEGEND (Magnolia, Universal), the Emmy winning series REMASTERED (Netflix), Emmy nominated THE LINE (Apple), Emmy nominated 11 MINUTES (Paramount+), SUPER LEAGUE; WAR FOR FOOTBALL (Apple), Sundance and Tribeca festival favorite INVISIBLE BEAUTY (Magnolia), and most recently, Sundance hit SKYWALKERS: A LOVE STORY.

CREDITS

A TRIAGE ENTERTAINMENT Production
in association with ALL RISE FILMS

A film by JEFF ZIMBALIST

Editor ALANNAH BYRNES

Cinematographer GUY LIVNEH

Music by JACQUES BRAUTBAR

Executive Producer VINNIE MALHOTRA

Executive Producer STU SCHREIBERG

Executive Producer JOHN BUFFALO MAILER

Producer VICTORIA MARQUETTE

Produced & Directed by JEFF ZIMBALIST

Featuring

Rudy Langlais • John Waters • Maggie McKinley
Oliver Stone • Michael Mailer • Maggie Mailer
Peter Alson • Lana Jokel • Dotson Rader
Danielle Mailer • James Wolcott • Richard Stratton
J. Michael Lennon • Barbara Wasserman • Ron Fried
David Denby • Susan Mailer • Mark Anthony Neal
Elizabeth Mailer • Daphne Merkin • Gay Talese
Stephen Mailer • Jonathan Lethem • Doug Brinkley
Carol Stevens • John Buffalo Mailer • Dick Cavett

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