



Susan & Thomas

32 min • Drama, History, Biography *Completed Mar 2017*

The film is a free form stream of consciousness inspired by Susan Sontag's first encounter with her then literary idol Thomas Mann as a precocious high school student living in 1947 LA, and it is based on Sontag's 1987 New Yorker magazine essay 'Pilgrimage.' Though the story is sequential in nature, the non linear visuals mix chronological time to evoke the layered, disjointed, and elusive nature of memory filtered through experience and identification. Shot over a 12 year time period, Susan & Thomas is a personal take on a true story. Though based on real life events and circumstances, the characters depicted in the film are fictitious. Melissa Chalsma as 'the writer' retraces Sontag's steps. Though not intended as a record of the real life events that have inspired it, SUSAN & THOMAS might be possibly dubbed a fiction/documentary hybrid.

Director Statement

In 1993, while doing preproduction on a film project in LA I came across the December 1987 issue of the New Yorker magazine featuring an inspiring essay by Susan Sontag. "Pilgrimage" was the story of Sontag's own first encounter with her then literary idol Thomas Mann as a precocious 14 year old high schooler living in Los Angeles, "roped into" her "audience with the great exiled master by an enterprising friend. My fascination with her story, Mann, LA and its exile and emigre community prompted me to contact Ms. Sontag who kindly agreed to an on camera reading from her essay. Sadly that never came to pass though we kept in touch and she confirmed her support and interest in my project over the years. Unfortunately, as all too often the case with non commercial independent work, lack of funding and various other hurdles slowed things down, and I was only able to start production on what became SUSAN & THOMAS shortly after Ms. Sontag's untimely passing in 2004. Many years later, this film is intended as a personal take on a true story and a humble tribute to a great woman, her intellect, and her generosity.

Resumes



Antonello "Tony" Villani

SUBMISSION CONTACT, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER,
WRITER, ADAPTATION, CINEMATOGRAPHER/DP, EDITOR

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Tony Villani is an award winning independent filmmaker both in the U.S. and Europe. His credits include: Film Roman Kosher writer/director/producer/cinematographer/editor A TICKET TO HOLLYWOOD: Europeans in Los Angeles, 1925-56. Part One, Prologue writer/director/producer/editor DREAMCATCHERS: Costume Design for Film writer/director SOUTH AFRIKA/SUID AFRICA writer/director AIDS: The People writer/director/producer Clark Gable: God Save the King writer/assistant director A&E Biography Marilyn Monroe: The Child Goddess writer/assistant director A&E Biography Mr. Capra Goes to America writer/assistant director A&E Biography A Ticket to Hollywood: Europeans in Screenland, 1925-56. writer/producer/director/editor

Melissa Chasma

THE WRITER (LEAD ACTOR)

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Melissa Chasma is a Los Angeles based stage and film actress, director, and producer. She is founder and Artistic Director of the Independent Shakespeare Company, a professional theatre company in Los Angeles

Production Notes

Notes on CONCEPT and STRUCTURE

This film tries to evoke the layered, disjointed, and elusive but seamless nature of memory filtered through experience and identification, and though the story is sequential in nature, the non linear visuals mix chronological time showing "the writer" at different times of her life in a non sequential manner. Subtle changes in aspect ratio seek to reinforce this idea. Like Richard Linklater's Boyhood, Susan & Thomas was shot over a twelve year time period.

The Thomas Mann House

Susan & Thomas was shot entirely on location and mostly in Thomas

Mann's own San Remo Drive residence in Pacific Palisades where the great master wrote Doctor Faustus. The lush and historic estate has recently been put on the market, and the John Davidson house marked as a teardown. Susan & Thomas might thus provide a last chance to see the great author's home as it was prior to a recent remodeling job.

Locations and Props

SUSAN & THOMAS features a number of historic LA locations including the Thomas Mann San Remo Drive estate in Pacific Palisades and Aldous and Laure Huxley's second Hollywood home. All objects appearing in the film are authentic. The typewriter seen in the film was owned by Thomas Mann. His secretary Hilda Kahn Reach did the typing as the master was known to always write by hand. All the signed Thomas Mann books belonged to the master and were given to Mrs. Reach by him.

Production Stills (7)





