

FILM & TV

DIRECTOR ANDREW DOMINIK ON CAPTURING NICK CAVE AND WARREN ELLIS

by [Alex Brzezicka](#)

The director of 'This Much I Know To Be True' on finding liberation in serving someone else's genius and a cathartic relationship with the unknown.

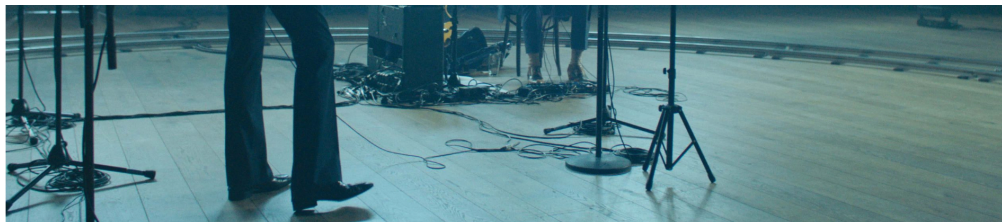
Some things are too powerful to be captured and tamed in a simple song, in an erratic scream, in a wet kiss on the lips. Sometimes to understand oneself and the strange reality outside of the human-shaped flesh-sack you need an almost universe-size canvas. Then, maybe, it's possible to express all the pain and joy that comes with being a person. In 'This Much I Know To Be True', director Andrew Dominik bears witness to a bloody trial by beauty and fire of Nick Cave and Warren Ellis' hearts in a burnt-down, the bare-walled building turned film set. All during debut live performances of 'GhoSTEEN', an album with Bad Seeds where Nick tries to make peace with himself and the world in the shadow of his son's death and 'Carnage', a soft wraith-ridden collaboration with Warren.

"It's a bit like being a mountain climber without a rope. Like you could fall to your death but it's pretty thrilling while you're climbing," says Andrew on working on the film. He's the mastermind behind Nick Cave's last documentary 'One More Time with Feeling', Brad Pitt-starring neo-noir piece 'Killing Them Softly', the revisionist western, outlaw ruled feature, 'The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford' and out this year, 'Blonde', a story about Marilyn Monroe using collective unconscious to tell a story of a person, "who's split into public and private self, and eventually destroys themselves". For this one, Andrew decided to revisit Cave's dimension when in the midst of desert-dry pandemic boredom, the artist wanted to create an oasis out of music.

"I wouldn't usually make a film for not even knowing what the fuck it is," Andrew says. He got a call from Nick while working on other projects out of the UK. "I was trying to work out how to say no, but I would have another listen to 'GhoSTEEN' and I was like 'fuck, I can't say no, I've got to do it'. So I did it."

"I'm just like this pain in the ass in the corner, filming shit, that they really didn't want around. It was the most liberating thing because I'm used to working in film where it all revolves around the camera and what you want is the most important thing, and all of a sudden, not be important, was so liberating," Andrew recalls. It was surprisingly exhilarating for him to serve someone else's genius.





As a visionary, Nick Cave is the punk's spiritual child and madman always in love with the extremes of emotions. Projecting them on symbols of death, God and imaginary characters, he's an all-compelling wielder of forces in his personal mythology. Though, what does a ruler do when facing loss? Even royalty needs to kneel down and reflect. Let themselves be led by a hand of an uncapturable God. Patiently waiting for the peace to come.

"I had some sense with this film that from Nick's point of view, it's going to be about the losses integrated into his life," says Andrew as a close witness to Nick's life's turmoil, "What has he learned from going through this experience? What does he have to pass on to the rest of us who in the course of our lives are going to lose everything that's important to us? Whether we know it now or not, we're going to. That's what life is going to be from a certain point onwards. It's happened to Nick earlier than it happens to a lot of people but we're going to lose it all and he's got a template for how to do it".

While we're trying to find lost love in the cruel absolute, it's priceless to have a helping hand, pushing us by force to the light. Stripped of the grand themes and poetics, the documentary at its core focuses on Nick and Warren's relationship. "It's a great relationship because Warren is really difficult. It's about Nick having to deal with Warren. You can't control Warren. You can't get Warren to do what you want him to do. Warren just does what Warren does, and you got to fit in around it. For Nick, that's thrilling when he forces him to do things that he wouldn't ordinarily do," Andrew explains how rare it is for Nick to be surprised by the work in the same way that a listener would be, "Nick doesn't mind people who are really difficult to deal with. I think he likes difficult people because it pulls something out of him".



"It's pretty easy for me because they both confide in me about each other," Andrew Dominik laughs. They take the piss out of each other on the surface level only, underneath hides an abundance of easy-going attitudes and unknown soon-to-be birthed material: "Warren's putting him Nick in a situation where he doesn't know what he's doing and that's the space they're looking for. They're looking for that. That space when they stop trying. When they are not trying to do anything. They're just doing stuff. It's happening instinctively. Something magical is happening that they're not even noticing at the moment," the director recalls. Watching the documentary is like sitting on spiritual needles, admiring the union of Cave and Ellis' magnificent, tormented minds. They're whispering in rage that the cruelty of life can only be cured by love. 'Ghosteen' and 'Balcony Man' touch the mysterious matter of our souls that we're often too scared to look at. Too terrified to even wave at. "Not knowing is beautiful. It's all about the relationship with the unknown. Everything's about that. If you can develop a relationship with the unknown, with the uncontrollable, you're gonna have a much better life," Dominik comments.

Nick's relationship with the uncontrollable, caught in between the shots, is beyond beautiful; he learns and deepens it day by day. A project called 'Red Hand Files' where anyone can send him a question is a safe haven to ponder on life in its absurdity: "When somebody asks him a question, he really sits and thinks about what's the best way to answer this. What's the most useful answer I can give? In doing that he's also bringing his own mind to heal. His runaway thoughts are now like a dog that's walking by side because he is forcing his mind to think responsibly," Andrew says. With a chaos-child side-kick like this, Nick proves that if it's possible for him to make friends with his demons, anyone can.

Cave has always been interested in the Biblical themes, from questioning the almighty God, calling on Jesus-like fig-

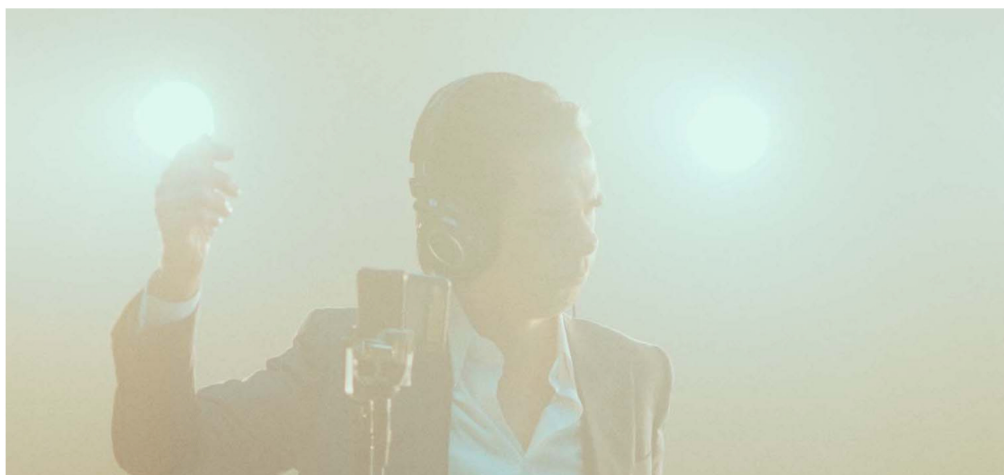
ures and raising from the dead like a modern-day Lazarus. Recently, he undertook an interest in ceramics and created a hand-crafted series under the name of 'The Life of the Devil'. "He talked about the devil sculptures, and he sent me a picture of one or two, but when he walked me through the story of them from birth to death, just realizing, 'oh my god, it's just a disguised account of his own life'. When he got to the devil kill his first child I was like 'oh my god'. It was pretty wild and really moving," Warren recalls the visit to the studio as the most surprising moment during filming to add a second later: "The whole thing's a fucking surprise. Do you know what I mean? You don't really know. You shoot a bunch of shit and then you try to make sense of it". That's a creative process in its essence.



Throughout his career, Andrew Dominik learnt how to operate the beast that's the film industry. "What I've learned from doing these movies, is when I get bored, I'd do something else," he says, "Filmmaking can be pretty boring. There's a lot of professionalism that goes on with filmmaking and people walking around with coffee and their fucking tape measures and shit like that. I tried to discourage all that and just throw them in because I find that people are really great on instinct". The best medicine against formulated expressions is pure spontaneity. Throwing people in the deep water in a first take works wonders. "People have muscle memory. If they're good at their job, they have a kind of muscle memory where if you push them into the difficulty that something comes out of them," he says.

Even though filmmaking can be an annoyingly long process, especially when you're recording ten hours for five days, the trio knows how to hack it. "For the most part, he's [Nick] pretty good human. He doesn't really complain," Andrew shares, "I think for Nick, it was it was sort of a beautiful experience, too, because it's the first time that he's trying to sing the songs in a live situation". Andrew had to find perfectly sour-sweet spots when working on the takes with Nick, "That's the thing, Nick is best when he's not comfortable. Before he's arrived at a place of comfort with what he's doing, he's much more interesting. His early takes tend to be better and if I've got it, I don't push him to do more for no fucking reason".

The documentary might be about the Cave/Ellis relationship but it's Dominik who filters it through his gaze, biting off the best bits. He puts them all together to form a fragmentary statue immortalizing what has happened in the scrapped walls of a London-based studio. He understands how special it is to be able to form that kind of professional connection with friends. "Usually what happens when you work with your friends, is you discover how pathetic they are, and you wished you'd never known that about them. You don't ever want to work with them again. You don't even want to be friends with them after that," Andrew laughs, "But this was different because it's great to work with Nick and Warren. We were friends before we started working together but we became really close because of working together. You really see what people are made of".





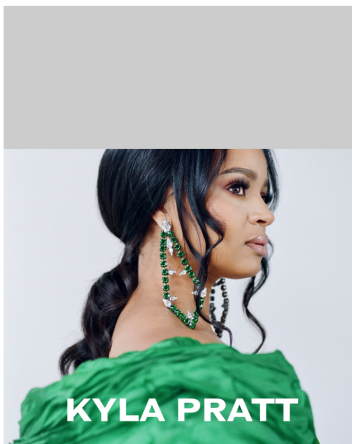
At the end of the recording day, a writing session, a walk under the white-clouded sky, it all comes down to one final struggle, the always overwhelming and haunting like a shadow question of our place in the vast galaxy and the little scrape of soil we call Earth. What it really means to be there and if we can ever truly feel whole. Nick seems to be closer to the answer than ever. Stuck in purgatory for a decade or eternity, lastly, he let himself stare at the sun. It's painful as the rays burn through the skin, revealing the backbone of the soul. And apparently what it's made of are not golden treasures, words written under the command of gods or the desires of the ego. Art is a maiden born in heaven and raised in hell. She's a loyal phantom, a supernatural fluid projection. Here only to teach us shortcuts on the way home, a moment before she'll ascend again to the above.

Nick doesn't always call her to duty when trying to catch a reflection of his humanity. In Andrew's favourite scene of the film, Nick answers a Red Hand Files question: who are you? "I love what he says about how he's reoriented himself in the world. Like he sees himself as a husband and father, and friend and citizen first. It's ironic that as he's taken his work, it's not like he doesn't take his work seriously, but as it occupies less a way of defining himself, it's gotten a lot better. The work has gotten even better". This much I know to be true. Andrew Dominik deserves a standing ovation for getting to the top of this mountain unharmed. Now we can all admire the view. It looks like the ocean of peace ridden by raging sad, waves. Spectacular.

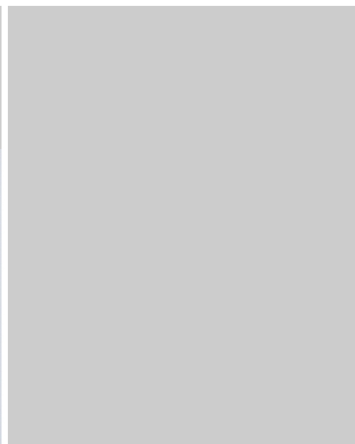
This Much I Know To Be True is in cinemas for one night only on May 11th.

This feature was written before the news of Nick Cave's son, Jethro Lazenby's death had been made public. We offer our deepest sympathies to Nick Cave and his family at this time who have released a short statement: "With much sadness, I can confirm that my son, Jethro, has passed away. We would be grateful for family privacy at this time."

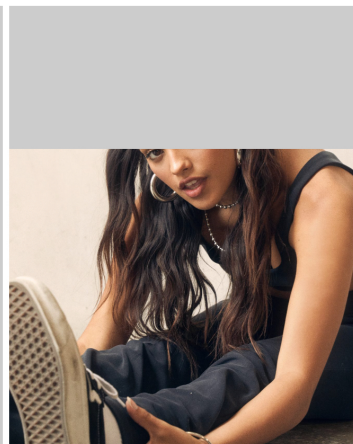
RELATED



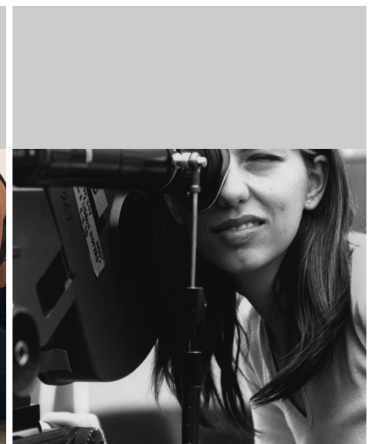
KYLA PRATT STEPS
FULLY **INTO HER
PURPOSE**



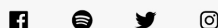
GET LOST IN BRETT
MORGEN'S '**MOONAGE
DAYDREAM**'



GET TO KNOW: **MAIA
REFICCO**



BE FOREVER YOUNG
WITH **SOFIA COPPOLA**



Today was so yesterday.

You don't want to miss a thing.

