

Herzog breaks new ground again with his latest film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*

The latest documentary from prolific director, Werner Herzog's latest *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* is about to be released in the United States. It is Herzog's description of his journey into the Chauvet Cave in southern France. The cave contains the earliest known cave paintings and access is strictly limited, Herzog was only allowed to bring three people into the cave with him. Although off beat subject matter is not new territory for Herzog, the film represents a bit of a departure for Herzog. After stating that 3D is not suited for use in the general cinema, Herzog shot *Cave* in 3D.

It should be no surprise to the general public that Herzog is trying something different, it has been Herzog's willingness to try new things that has helped to shape and define his career and won him countless awards. The 68 year old director has always lead a less than conventional life. He was born Werner Herzog Stipetic on September 5, 1942 in Munich, Germany. When he was young his family moved the small Bavarian village of Sachrang after the house next to theirs was destroyed in the bombings at the close of World War II, but moved back to Munich when he was 12. Although Herzog would go onto director operas the same year his family returned to Munich he was almost expelled from school for refusing to sing in front of his class. In fact until the age of 18 Herzog did not listen to music, sing songs, or study an instrument.

Herzog was inspired to start making films at the age of 14 when he read an encyclopedia entry that he states "provided him with everything he need." he got his first 35mm camera when he stole it from Munich Film School. He states in *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* he did not consider this theft, but a necessity, that he and some sort of natural right to a camera. Herzog then went onto to study film making at The University of Munich. In the early 1960's Herzog funded his films by working the night shift as a welder in a steel factory.

Herzog has always selected a variety of offbeat subject matter in his feature films and documentaries starting with his first film in 1968, *Signs of Life*, which is about three World War II soldiers withdrawn from combat who go crazy, to the 2005 documentary, *Grizzly Man*. This documentary chronicles the life and interactions with grizzly bears, of bear enthusiast Timothy Treadwell, and his girlfriend before they were eaten by a bear in 2003. Herzog inserts his own voice into Treadwell's footage by narrating and offering his own interpretation of events. No matter what subject matter Herzog chooses his films always have a powerful impact on the viewer.

Herzog has always worked in an unconventional matter as well. Although he has used professional actors in his films he also gets his cast from the locals in the area he is shooting. He says this gives his films an "ecstatic truth" capturing an authentic element that actors cannot provide. Herzog has always used unique motivation to inspire other film makers to complete their work. In one famous incident he offered to cook and eat his own shoe if Errol Morris would complete the documentary on pet cemeteries he had been working on. He believed Morris was incapable of finishing something he started. When

Morris completed the film Herzog kept his word and in 1978 at the premier of *Gates of Heaven*, publicly cooked and ate his own shoe.

Herzog became interested in Chauvet Cave, the subject matter for *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, when he read Judith Thurman's article "First Impressions," in the June 23, 2008 issue of the *New Yorker*. This film was not easy to make because of the restrictions the cave itself presented. Access to the cave is strictly controlled to preserve it. Herzog had to receive special permission to enter it from the the French Minister of Culture to film inside the cave. Even after receiving the permission Herzog and his crew of three had to wear special shoes and suits that had not had contact with the outside world to enter the cave. Due to radon and carbon dioxide levels in the cave Herzog and his crew were only granted six shooting sessions of four hours each to get their footage.

Once Herzog and his crew got inside the cave there task did not get any easier. Their 3D cameras had to be specially built so they did not give off excess heat. In addition the cameras had to be battery powered and the Herzog and crew had to carry them in out of the cave themselves. Since the crew was so small the cinematographer Peter Zeitlinger worked the camera, another member worked the sound, the third member served as an assistant and Herzog himself worked the lights and narrated the film. While in the cave the crew were not permitted to touch any part of the wall or floor and were restricted to a two foot walkway. In spite of Herzog reservations about 3-D he used it in this film because he felt it captured the intentions of the painters who incorporated the subtle bulges and contours of the wall into their paintings. After the film was completed Herzog said he has no plans to work in 3-D again.

The film officially debuted at the Toronto film festival in September of 2010. Herzog rushed to complete the film in time for its debut, and when it premiered only 30 minutes of footage had been completed. This was the first 3-D film to premier at the festival's Bell Lightbox theater. Much like the making of the film the premier presented problems when the projector showing the film jammed five minutes before it's completion.

The film has debuted in Europe and is scheduled to debut in the United States on April 29, 2011. All the US has really seen of the film is the two and half minute trailer which is enough to motivate any Herzog or film fan unfamiliar with Herzog work to get to their local theater to see it. The trailer which is not in 3-D shows the beauty and mystery of the cave paintings. The viewer is also able to catch a glimpse of the suits Herzog and his crew were required to wear and gets a sense of how difficult it was to make the film. I found myself watching it amazed at the detail and mystery of a painting of horse. I was disappointed when the trailer ended wanting to see more. Like the rest of the American public I will just have to wait to see the full film in all it's 3-D glory. I know when I do see it I will thoroughly enjoy the film and for the duration if the film feel as if I to am in the Chauvet Cave. I will be disappointed when the film ends as I am at the end of most Herzog films, because I wish there was more, but then I console myself with the knowledge that Herzog will soon produce another captivating film.