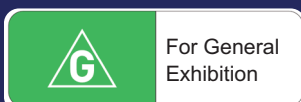




P R E S S K I T

Tea With Madame Clos

a film by Jane Oehr



SCREEN AUSTRALIA and JANE OEHR
present a film by JANE OEHR

Tea With Madame Clos

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY **JANE OEHR**

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CAMERA **JANE OEHR**

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Sound Mixing Facility **Soundfirm**
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THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE OF LAUZERTE, TARN-ET-GARONNE FRANCE
MADAME PAULETTE CLOS ARCEDUC 1908-2007

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Tea With Madame Clos

ONE SENTENCE SYNOPSIS

Madame Clos is the oldest woman in a small medieval village in south-west France. This feature-length documentary about Madame Clos is a portrait of a vanishing way of life in France.

ONE PARAGRAPH SYNOPSIS

Over 4 years an Australian filmmaker shares tea with Madame Clos, oldest woman in a small French village. Through her huge window, Madame Clos lives the dramas of her life, often hilarious, sometimes sad. Before her 100th year, she reveals her deepest secrets. Madame Clos represents a France that is disappearing – a France that is changing dramatically. It is in villages like this that the old ways are still very present. What is being lost and what we should retain of the past? An intense experience of being in the moment and immersed in a vanishing way of life in France.

Tea With Madame Clos

ONE PAGE OUTLINE

On a train heading into the South West France an Australian woman filmmaker remembers Madame Clos, the oldest woman in a small bastide village. She recalls the many encounters and cups of tea she shared with her over four years. She hopes she will still be there when she gets back.

Madame Clos engages with the world around her through her huge window. There the filmmaker first finds her. There Madame Clos is never bored and is always alert and involved with the dramas of life. There she mourns the loss of her dear housekeeper who is leaving after forty years, there she talks to her neighbours, waves to the gendarmes as they pass, there she watches a wedding and the children in the school. And each day she hands out to them from her window, the Vichy mints which have won her the name of Mamy Vichy.

In her kitchen she makes soup, talks of her life and misses her daughter. Over drinks of cassis she relates the ordeals of her husband's capture in a WW2 prisoner of war camp in Silesia for five years. Over cups of tea she evokes the presence of her parents in the house, speaks of love and the meaning of life as she fastens the many shutters every night. She shops, she visits the cafe, she goes into the countryside and visits the old property her father used to drive to each day, in his carriage with the horse PomPom. As she relates fragments of her life, spanning the whole of the last century, the years pass and the seasons change.

As she approaches her 100th year her exuberance and vitality continue to shine. The Mayor visits, they drink a champagne toast to her forthcoming birthday. Memories rise up of her early years and her mother's message to her. Madame Clos remains alert and delighted with the life she has had and the life she has now.

The train arrives. The filmmaker goes back to the village again, to Madame Clos' window. But things have changed.

Madame Clos in her dress, manners and *mode de vie* embodies the old France that is disappearing. And yet she is not a relic, she lives in the present and the sky is blue.

Madame Clos sings:

***Je vous avancer des mots
Que nul jamais les dites encore
Des mots nouveau tendresses sonorent...***

***I pass these words on to you
That have never been said before
These fresh words from which tenderness flows...***

Tea With Madame Clos

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I began to follow Madame Clos one day I was not sure why but I thought I may find out through filming her. "Instinct/reflection" - the double movement of cinema as Godard described it. The film sets this up as a premise at the start. By the end of the film that question I hope has been answered. Through the way I filmed her I wanted to convey the experience of being with her, her moments of being, her humour and sorrows. Sometimes I shared tea with her, sometimes I filmed her in her window.

THE WINDOW

From the beginning I was attracted to the idea of the window - what windows are, and what they can be to us. Madame Clos and her window - it seemed as I learned more of her life, a wonderful image - a way of looking in (as I was doing) and a way of looking out as she was doing. I was an outsider in the village. From outside I was the "voyeur" as she says once; on the inside an intimate relationship began to be shared with her. The window too, could be read as a metaphor for documentary filmmaking, both looking in and looking out.

TIME

Over the four years of filming I recorded her process of ageing more profoundly as she approached her 100th birthday - which had become her goal. I was drawn to her enduring sense of optimism, to her humour and what she conveyed of the past and its place in her present. These aspects of all human experience, I found were vividly expressed through her and I wished an audience to share the journey too. Her memory which she declares is fading sometimes means there are longuers or a struggle to find the words and I have kept these things as I believe they are important to the authenticity and emotion of the film. How to live one's life as one ages? Madame Clos offers out to us her positivism in everyday life, her determination to remain engaged with the world around her. My intention was to capture this in my encounters with her, the pace of her life in the village, the daily rituals like opening and closing the shutters, shopping, cooking, eating which all shape and give substance to her days. And the moments of stillness too.

PAST AND PRESENT

Madame Clos represents a France that is disappearing - a France that is being changed dramatically. In villages like this many of the old ways are still very present. What is being lost and what should we retain of the past is one of the questions that the film raises.

In **TEA WITH MADAME CLOS** the past is there in the present.

Tea With Madame Clos

JANE OEHR - FILMMAKER

Jane Ohr travelled from Melbourne, Australia, to study overseas as an actress before joining BBC TV as a Trainee Director in London. There she made documentaries about the cinema including a film about French director, Agnes Varda. She returned to Australia to work as an independent director, making **TAMU - THE GUEST** about the life of Australian painter Donald Friend in Bali. Later Jane travelled through Niugini and the Trobriand Islands to direct **NIUGINI CULTURE SHOCK** which won the Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Film in 1975 at the Sydney Film Festival.

Her next film, **STIRRING**, is a controversial feature documentary about corporal punishment in a Sydney boy's school. It was banned from public screening for years but went on to win an AFI Award. **SEEING RED AND FEELING BLUE** is a film about women's bodies and menstruation that broke through many myths.

Jane has gone on to write and direct drama including the low budget features **ON THE LOOSE** and **HEADS 'N TAILS**. She wrote and directed **THE JOURNEY**, a telemovie, for the Childrens' Television Foundation and ABCTV. In 2002 she made a feature length intimate portrait of her mother **MUM AT 88** which revealed hitherto unknown aspects of her mother's life. In her time as a Project Manager with the Australian Film Commission she has also supported many emerging filmmakers.

As a documentary filmmaker Jane continues to pursue the study of people and behaviour that has characterised her films as well as their political and controversial content. She works closely with her subjects, to produce highly intimate films about human beings and their thought processes and emotions and how they impact on our sense of place in the world.

Tea With Madame Clos

TEA WITH MADAME CLOS

Sometimes movies can transport their audience to another place, and the best film experiences are often unexpected. Thus it is with *Tea with Madame Clos*, an absolutely charming Australian documentary screening at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

Filmmaker Jane Oehr spends four or five years in intermittent discussion with the ageing Madame Clos, who is approaching her century but still actively involved in the life of her rural French village and its inhabitants. What emerges is a remarkable picture of the life of an entirely unremarkable woman, while touching on the effect of change over time and particularly the ravages of ageing.



It is clear the filmmaker loves her subject, with Oehr content to linger while Clos retells the same anecdote she told the year before, or hands out the mints to passers-by at her window in the manner that has led to her being referred to as 'Madame Vichy' (after the Vichy mint). It isn't her obvious affection that makes her film stand out, however, but more the way a picture develops of Clos' progressive impairment.

Oehr approaches her subject with great honesty, never seeking to avoid the obvious decline in Clos' mental and physical functioning, but rather inviting her audience to watch a woman ageing with dignity and respect. The result is a moving film, with more than one surprise in store.

The setting is rural France and the village and its inhabitants are brought vividly to life through the prism of Madame Clos' experiences and stories. The scenery is often spectacular, and more than once this film could have passed for travel advertisement. Although the use of piano accordion as soundtrack appears contextual given the hobby of one of Clos' neighbours, more than once it jars with the relatively quiet on-screen action.

Shot on digicam, this is not a film designed to look its best projected on a large screen, and yet somehow the film transcends its limitations in sound design and cinematography in the way that the best documentaries can. One forgives the slightly blurry footage when confronted by the wit and grace of the subject.

Tea with Madame Clos is a moving and rewarding experience, and one entirely unsought amidst the usual sea of dysfunction and animosity that afflicts the MIFF program. Highly recommended.

Rating: ★★★★★

Review by Mark Lavercombe, 5th August 2009

Hoopla Factor: ★★★★★

Tea With Madame Clos

TEA WITH MADAME CLOS

Australia, 2008 (MIFF 2009, Homegrown)



A documentary of humanity, old age and a vanishing way of life in provincial France.

In a small French village, the world moves past the window of Madame Clos. Over countless cups of tea she remembers the things she's seen, the people she knew and the world as it was.

The ever-vivacious Madame Clos is a part of the daily dramas, the local weddings, the lives of the children and the other villagers. In her talks with filmmaker Jane Oehr, Madame Clos recalls the moments from her life, happy and sad, remaining full of exuberance as she approaches her 100th year.

"I want to invent words that have never been said before, new words from which tenderness flows." – Madame Clos

D/P Jane Oehr WS Jane Oehr L French w/English subtitles TD digibeta/2008

- *Melbourne International Film Festival*

Tea With Madame Clos

DIRECTOR - JANE OEHR - FILMOGRAPHY

- 2010** DIRECTOR/PRODUCER **TEA WITH MADAME CLOS** - 90mins
Feature length documentary about the oldest woman in a French village, shot over four years as she shares cups of tea with the filmmaker.
- 2002/3** DIRECTOR/WRITER - **MUM AT 88** - 75mins
Portrait of the director's mother over several years as she reveals her origins to her daughter.
- 1985** DIRECTOR/WRITER - **ON THE LOOSE** – low budget feature
about a group of teenage friends breaking loose in the streets of Sydney. Sundance Film Festival USA.

WRITER – **HENRY AND OLGA** – original screenplay about the relationship between famous Australian writer Henry Handel Richardson and her companion Olga Roncoroni.
- 1984** WRITER – **THE GRASSHOPPERS** – original screenplay commissioned by PBL.
- 1983** DIRECTOR/WRITER - Series of 12 short films for Health Media for ABC TV about turmoil of adolescence.
- 1983** DIRECTOR – **HEADS N TAILS** - Telemovie about a group of friends at school. Winner Atom Awards, Penguin Award Best Drama.
- 1982** WRITER - **MIRROR, MIRROR** – Original screenplay about conflicts between a mother and daughter.
- 1982** DIRECTOR – **CONUNDRA** - Phillio St Theatre.
- 1981** WRITER DIRECTOR – **A WELL SHAPED PAIR OF LEGS** – Play for Women in Theatre about two women's friendship through 2nd World War.
- 1980** WRITER – **YOU, ME AND THE OTHERS** - Feature about two runaway girls.
WRITER/ DIRECTOR Series of documentaries for SBS TV.
- 1979** DIRECTOR – **ROMA, JUST AN ORDINARY LIFE** – Short Film.
A woman is afraid to leave her house. 16mm 30mins.
WRITER – **THE COLLINGWOOD PROJECT** - Drama about a local council.
- 1976** **THE FLASH MOB** – a rebellion among female convicts.
GIRL ON THE EMPIRE COCOA TIN – About female shop assistants struggling between work and marriage in a department store in the 1920s.
TIDES – An old woman makes an escape from a nursing home to recapture her past.
- 1976** DIRECTOR – **STIRRING** - feature length documentary about corporal punishment in a boys school. 16mm 62mins.
- 1975** DIRECTOR – **NIUGINI CULTURE SHOCK** - Innovative documentary about changes facing traditional society in Niugini. Winner Rouben Mamoulian Award Best Film SFF. 16mm 56 mins.
- 1974** DIRECTOR /PRODUCER – **TAMU - THE GUEST** – documentary about Australian painter Donald Friend in Bali. 16mm 52mins
- 1971** WRITER/DIRECTOR - **BLACKMAN IN THE CINEMA** – DOCUMENTARY
on black actors and their roles.
- 1971** WRITER/DIRECTOR - **FOUR WOMEN FILMMAKERS** - Documentary 16mm 52mins.
Agnes Varda, Mai Zetterling, Carolee Schneemann, Barbara Schwartz.