**John Farrow: Hollywood’s Man in the Shadows – WORD VERSION OF PRESS KIT for Andrew Pike.**

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**John Farrow: Hollywood’s Man in the Shadows - Synopsis**

*John Farrow: Hollywood’s Man in the Shadows* is the first documentary ever made about one of Hollywood’s most prolific yet forgotten filmmakers, John Villiers Farrow (1904 -1963).

Part mystery, part biography, part film noir – the documentary follows the stranger than fiction story of this Australian born, Oscar-winning filmmaker. As one of Hollywood’s most enigmatic figures, Farrow was the director of some 50 films; a sailor, a poet, a war hero, best-selling author, a religious scholar, a family man and a philanderer – a man who lived many lives – yet who left behind no memoirs, no interviews, and no archival footage – and who today is only a shadow in the pages of film history.

**John Farrow: Hollywood’s Man in the Shadows –**

**Directors Statement by Frans Vandenburg (ASE) & Claude Gonzalez.**

As film makers and friends, we had long loved the classic Hollywood period dating from the late 1930s through to the late 1950s, especially the genre of Film Noir. And one great film of the period was John Farrow’s *The Big Clock*.

Way back in 2005, when we tried to find out a little more about the film’s director, we found that there was almost no information about him. Looking at any film guide or list of film directors, Farrow's name was rarely mentioned. Well known critics like Sarris and Kael never even considered him in their lists or pantheons, and his films were rarely featured in the articles or histories about Hollywood’s Studio System. There were no interviews with him, no biographies, and no archival footage. Unlike other directors from the Hollywood System, he had somehow fallen through the cracks of time and never had the reassessment or had his work rediscovered by the film generation of the late 60s and 70s. In so many ways, Farrow appeared as a shadow only.

What we eventually found out was that he was born in Australia, and this intrigued us even more as his name did not appear in any Australian film history or tales of expatriates making their way to Hollywood, like others such as Orry-Kelly, Dame Judith Anderson, and Errol Flynn.

So, for more than well over a decade, we began painstakingly to unearth anything related to Farrow that could tell us about this mysterious figure – at first it was finding copies of his films, then we began gathering any information found in old newspapers and magazines of the time, and finally it was a letter writing campaign – and later email – to actors or family that worked with or knew of him. And little by little, we began to join all of these pieces together to create a picture of this very talented man. In essence, the film grew organically until it became a passion for us that we had to see through to the end. We tried at first to interest Government agencies to help us make the film, but it was difficult to gain assistance, so in the end we decided to fund the film ourselves, and later we created a crowdfunding campaign to help us complete the film.

Our ambition was always to make others aware of this unfairly overlooked director and his masterful work. To bring attention to his stylistic use of the camera and his compelling storytelling skill – Farrow could make the ordinary look great – and the great look extraordinary.

Our research revealed that Farrow was an acclaimed author, scholar, athlete but infamous carouser. Adventurer, poet, decorated naval officer and sailor, devout Catholic convert, as well as prodigious philanderer and parent. He was described variously as being charming and wonderful but possessing a bad temper and being a martinet. His politics were conservative, but he was equally acknowledged for standing up for the rights of man. In the end Farrow was – an enigma.

**John Farrow: Hollywood’s Man in the Shadows –**

**Directors Statement by Frans Vandenburg (ASE) & Claude Gonzalez - BIO’s**

**Director/Producer: Frans Vandenburg (ASE)** has extensive post-production and editing credits over some decades. Ranging from crafting performances by Jack Thompson, Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe, Cate Blanchett, Hugo Weaving, Judy Davis, Heath Ledger, and Raul Julia in iconic Australian and American films including *Newsfront*, *My Brilliant Career, Blackrock, Romero* to *The Sum of Us*; for which he was nominated for the AFI award for Best Editing; to documentary and television credits including *Bangkok Hilton, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds: Murder Ballads* and *Sydney at War*. He also has extensive experience in the restoration of classic movies and archival film research.

**Director/Producer: Claude Gonzalez** is an award-winning director and producer who has worked in film and TV for many years – directing and producing documentaries, series, and commercials. Recent highlights include director of the series *Meet the Mavericks*, for which he was nominated for an AACTA Award for Best Direction, and Series Producer of Australia’s iconic film review series At the Movies. Claude is the director of the documentary *Sydney at War*, nominated for an IF award for Best Direction, and the Producer of the AACTA-winning documentary *Global Haywire*.

**John Farrow – a short biography by Vandenburg & Gonzalez (2021).**

John Villiers Farrow was born in 1904 in Australia, in the Sydney suburb of Marrickville. His father survived the First World War and his mother passed away when Farrow was three years old, in a local insane asylum under mysterious circumstances. Raised by an aunt, the boy grew restless and dreamed of worlds beyond his suburban horizon. At the age of 15 he boarded a merchant ship; never to return to Australia.

As a young sailor he travelled all over the South Pacific as a roving adventurer and began to write. In Tahiti he penned the first Tahitian-French-English dictionary as well as his first novel. He claimed to have fought in revolts in Nicaragua and Mexico.

In Hawaii, he researched and later wrote the critically acclaimed and commercially successful true story of the famous Leper Priest of Molokai, Father Damien, who was recently proclaimed as a Catholic Saint.

At the age of 18 he illegally jumped ship in San Francisco, and after a series of odd jobs including acting and portrait painting, Farrow made his way to Hollywood by 1927 and began to write title cards for the popular silent films of the day.

With the advent of sound, the enormous movie making machine that was ‘the Golden Age of the American Studio System’ became a place of great prosperity and opportunity, and it needed writers such as Farrow, who could supply it with exciting and entertaining stories to help feed the appetite of its movie going audiences.

Farrow soon found that he could sell his tales of the sea and adventures to the studios, which employed him to contribute his naval experience and expertise, first as a script consultant and then as a technical adviser on countless movies; he eventually contributed to some 25 filmed screenplays. During this time Farrow travelled to Europe where he wrote the screenplay for Basil Deans’ The Impassive Footman (1932) and worked on dialogue on G.W. Pabst’s Adventures of Don Quixote (1933).

By the early 1930s his script doctoring skills were regularly called upon, and it was on the set of one of these films, MGM’s Tarzan Escapes (1936), that he met and fell in love with its leading lady, one of Hollywood’s most beautiful and popular actresses, the MGM star Maureen O'Sullivan. Initially her high born and religious family resisted the union. Farrow was already a divorcee with an ex-wife and a daughter in San Francisco. This difficult situation was made more problematic as Farrow’s good looks, fitness and education had given him a reputation in Hollywood as a ‘ladies’ man, who was constantly featured in newspapers and gossip magazines as one of its most ‘eligible bachelors’.

Sophisticated and worldly, Farrow, like his compatriot Errol Flynn, used his roguish upbringing in ‘The Colonies’ and his storytelling charm, to concoct a tale of heraldic links to English royalty. This and a promise to convert to Roman Catholicism, finally gained Farrow the approval of the O'Sullivan family and swiftly he and Maureen became one of Hollywood most glamorous and popular couples.

Farrow and O'Sullivan also defied convention and lived together for some years before their marriage. No doubt Maureen and her many patrons came to the fore when their union was challenged; first when Farrow was caught up in an illegal alien’s charge (untangled with the help from the movie producer and co-founder of MGM, Louis B. Mayer), and then with a rare Papal dispensation for the divorcee Farrow to finally marry O'Sullivan in 1936.

Farrow's confidence was further enhanced by his rise to the role of film director, and the emergence of a large family with O'Sullivan; he fathered seven children with her, Michael, Patrick, Mia, John Charles, Prudence, Stephanie, and Tisa. He continued to lead a charmed life and become an American citizen in 1947, despite his illegal alien’s status – due to his jumping ship in San Francisco and presenting false papers declaring him to be a Romanian Consular official.

In time, John Farrow would become one of the studio system's most prolific directors, who was able to turn his hand to every genre, from drama, comedy, westerns, musicals, film noir and action pictures. He worked with such stars as John Wayne, Robert Mitchum, Alan Ladd, Ray Milland, William Holden, and actresses such as Jane Russell, Ava Gardner, Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis, and Lana Turner. From the years 1934 to 1962 Farrow made almost 50 films.

At the outbreak of World War 2 he saw active service in the Royal Canadian Navy, first as a Lieutenant in anti-submarine patrols, and then stationed to Trinidad and Curacao, where he contracted typhus and was discharged with the rank of Commander. There is also conjecture he may have participated in espionage for the allies during this period. He was awarded an Honorary Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).

On Farrow’s return from active service, he became one of Hollywood's top directors, enabling him to pick and choose projects and stars. His military experience and expertise helped him craft such films as the realistic and action packed 1942 film Wake Island; for which he won the prestigious New York Film Critics Circle Award of that year and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Direction. Some of Farrow’s most renowned and critically acclaimed films are *Five Came Back* (1939), *Wake Island* (1942), *The Hitler Gang* (1944), *Two Years Before the Mast* (1946), *The Big Clock* (1948), *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948), *Alias Nick Beal* (1949), *Where Danger Lives* (1950), *His Kind of Woman* (1951) and *Hondo* (1953).

In a rare interview, Farrow commented at the time ‘I deliberately set out to become the damnedest commercial director in the business... the only way to get anywhere in Hollywood is to make money pictures. Then you can get some measure of respect and authority from the studio bosses, and little by little you get to do more of the things you want to do” (The New York Times, 1946).

Farrow was a paradoxical figure that would remain conflicted by the power and status that his film career would give him. His climb to the top came with a reputation as one of Hollywood’s toughest and most driven directors, who bent actors to suit his needs, and who had affairs with many of the female stars and starlets that appeared in his films. Artistically he yearned to return to his writing but knew that Hollywood was where his standing and prominence was founded.

Despite his avowed conservatism, Farrow was also a man of principle, and had little fear of Senator Joe McCarthy's witch hunts of the American film industry in the 50s. Farrow notably risked his reputation and livelihood when he helped mobilise resistance against a purge of the Directors Guild of America (DGA) by a faction formed by arch-conservative Cecil B. DeMille in Oct. 1950.

In 1956 Farrow won the Oscar for co-writing the adapted screenplay for *Around the World in 80 Days*, yet even after reaching these heights Farrow was uneasy with his fame as a film director, and further looked towards his writing to give him some solace. Farrow wrote eight books, including two novels, a play, poetry and 3 biographies: The previously mentioned book about Father Damien the Leper combined with a history of the Papacy, written while he was on active service in the North Atlantic, entitled *Pageant of the Popes* and the highly acclaimed, *The Story of Thomas More*. All of these biographies contributed enormously to his standing with the Catholic Church and would lead to him receiving the Order of St John of Jerusalem, and a Knighthood of the Grand Cross of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem from Pope Pius XII.

In 1959 while filming the sea epic John Paul Jones in Spain, his eldest son Michael died in a tragic mid-air plane collision over Los Angeles. The boy was 19 years old, and his death sent the entire family into a downward spiral. Farrow suffered a series of strokes and was unable to return to steady work.

The Farrow marriage was troubled despite its longevity, and after a long sabbatical of many years, Maureen O'Sullivan returned to the stage on Broadway; and she and her daughter Mia based themselves in New York. Farrow never wanted any of his children to venture into acting, but already Mia was making inroads in the field, which would in time make her one of Hollywood’s most successful movie actors. Eventually all of the Farrow children would try their hand at acting.

Farrow continued to grapple with his health and demons, and ultimately directed three episodes of the successful television series *Empire* in the early 1960s. He continued to write stories and screenplays, and had various projects in development, including a movie that was finally made as *King of Kings* (1961) directed by Nicholas Ray, based on Farrow's story *The Son of Man* about the life of Christ.

On January 27th, 1963, John Farrow died at home in Beverly Hills California of a heart attack aged 58.

John Farrow's life was the stuff of legend - but for many today his name and films are long forgotten. In his lifetime he rarely gave interviews, or court journalists and biographers. He obscured his past from his family, who knew very little of where he had come from, and who often felt left behind in the wake of his uncompromising lifestyle.

A prolific, stylistic film director who carved out an international film career before the Australian film industry was born. Farrow was a driven man who never stopped working or searching. For all he created - his films, his books, and his family - he was in the end an enigmatic and mysterious figure to all.

**Vandenburg & Gonzalez (2021).**