

COHEN MEDIA GROUP PRESENTS

THE STORMS OF JEREMY THOMAS

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MARK COUSINS

2023 | 93 MIN. | UK | ENGLISH | DOCUMENTARY



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
CANNES CLASSICS
OFFICIAL SELECTION

COHEN MEDIA GROUP

LOGLINE

Joining Oscar-winning producer Jeremy Thomas on his annual pilgrimage to the Cannes Film Festival, filmmaker Mark Cousins gives an intimate glimpse into the life of the legendary icon behind some of the most controversial and acclaimed films of all time.

SYNOPSIS

Jeremy Thomas, the Oscar-winning producer of films like *EO* and *THE LAST EMPEROR*, is joined by documentarian Mark Cousins on his annual pilgrimage to the Cannes Film Festival, to give an intimate glimpse into the life of the legendary icon behind some of the most acclaimed and controversial films of all time. Featuring insights into a life lived just off-frame, the film bridges the epic and the intimate, just as Thomas did so consistently, making the dreams of cinema's most daring visionaries come true.

Cousins, also the director of *THE STORY OF FILM: AN ODYSSEY*, *THE EYES OF ORSON WELLES*, follows Thomas' illustrious career with a dazzling range of film clips and interviews, rich in insights about creativity and survival. **THE STORMS OF JEREMY THOMAS** is a road movie, a portrait of France, a master class, and — in the era of streaming and corporatization — a passionate call to arms for movies that get to the heart of life.



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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Could we make a kind of *Thelma & Louise* about the love of cinema? Could we make an intimate, passionate road movie through France on which we try to understand some of the most acclaimed and controversial films of the last forty years, and the great man behind them?

I could have made a conventional film about Jeremy Thomas, but I wanted to do something more daring.

Years ago, I was with Jeremy in Cannes and a storm came. We were at a beach restaurant and people fled. As the rain pelted down, Jeremy looked around at the chaos and said, "Isn't this wonderful?"

In that moment, I think I glimpsed the essence of his work. Movie making is like a storm.

So our film is called *The Storms of Jeremy Thomas*. It tells the story of his remarkable films – *Bad Timing*, *Naked Lunch*, *Crash*, *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence*, *The Last Emperor*, *Blade of the Immortal*, *Sexy Beast*, *Young Adam* – but also of the man behind them. His punkiness, his "pickaxe in the spirit" as he calls it, his brush with death.

I decided to tell our road movie story in a series of chapters:

1 – CARS

May 2019. England. The electric doorway of a grand house opens to reveal film producer Jeremy Thomas, bags packed, ready for a road trip. A famous song, *There'll Be Blue Birds Over The White Cliffs of Dover*, plays. Cut, and we see the White Cliffs of Dover. Jeremy is going to France.

Where to? The Cannes Film Festival. 850.4 miles from here. The journey will take 3-4 days. Will there be another storm in Cannes this year? We're off.

2 – SEX

As we get deeper into our journey, we talk about the bold sexuality in Jeremy's films, not only in *Crash*, but also in *Young Adam* with Ewan McGregor and Tilda Swinton, the kiss between David Bowie and Ryuichi Sakamoto in *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence*, the disruptive sex between Art Garfunkel and Theresa Russell in *Bad Timing*, the young lust of *The Dreamers*. These are storms, these sex scenes.

3 – POLITICS

We arrive in Paris, and we discuss the political storm of 1968. *The Dreamers* tried to show its fluidity and how personal the politics were. We look at the politics Thomas has lived through, his own leftism, and the politics in his films: the yell of rage in *The Shout*, the seismic change in *The Last Emperor*, the food politics of *Fast Food Nation*. Which leads us...

4 – DEATH

...to death. Thomas' own, and all those deaths in his films. The bloodlust of Takeshi Miike's *Blade of The Immortal*, the resignation to death in Stephen Frears' *The Hit*.

5 – CANNES

We arrive at the grand festival of Cannes and get to the most personal and passionate bit of our film. Are people always searching in Jeremy Thomas films? If so, for what? What happens when you win an Oscar, when you find your gold?

Are movie stars storms? Cannes is their transit lounge, their dais. Thomas has known so many.

And so, he's on the beach at the Croisette, this petrol-head, this rebel, this image-maker, this restless punk, this chancer. He's waiting for the storm.

Jeremy Thomas is one of the greatest producers in cinema since Irving Thalberg. He's a man who, through his own choices and tastes, has created a disruptive body of work. We drive to Cannes in search of a storm. I think we'll find it.

More generally in our lives, whether we say this explicitly or not, we want to be close to the flame, we want to feel alive. Not somnambulant, not just existing. Most people, at most levels of society, want that. I come from a very working-class Belfast family, but our family lived for the weekend, for vodka and sad songs, for an overload or euphoria. That is the storm.

Why do I want to make this film? In a way, I don't. I'd rather get to know Jeremy, get drunk with him, and encounter his worlds. He and I started at the opposite ends of the social spectrum. He had a chauffeur as a child, my dad was a motor mechanic. And yet, we have this common language, this common passion – the passion of film. If I can capture some of that on film, if I can help show that Thomas has tapped into a collective unconscious, that we have similar inner lives and desires with which many people can identify, then I will be a happy filmmaker.

Mark Cousins

PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

I contacted Jeremy in early 2018 to gauge whether he would allow a documentary to be made about his life in cinema. I had been aware of the scale and range of Jeremy's films and was inspired by his international outlook on film producing, and his company, Recorded Picture Company, in my view, had shone a remarkable light on the human condition over a 45-year span and across sixty-seven feature films to become the only fully independent British-owned company with a history of making truly significant UK and International films. I felt that the documentary needed a signature filmmaker and with Mark's breath of knowledge as a film historian and documentarian it was clear that he would be the ideal director for this film. Mark's fresh take and insight presents Jeremy Thomas as possessing a 'dissenting English sensibility' in the alchemy of making his films.

Since I first started producing feature films in the mid 1990's, I have always wanted to initiate a documentary about the 'producer's producer,' as Ken Loach's long-time producer Rebecca O'Brien aptly describes Jeremy Thomas in our film. His way of choosing original projects and directors, with co-production as an essential ingredient, was a beacon to many producers and directors around the World. He built creative and collaborative relationships with filmmakers both in the UK and globally. He continues to stimulate a huge amount of creativity and is still a driving force behind independent films.

With this film, we examine the mystery of the man, and the tremendously vibrant and unique films he has brought to our world. It's exciting that we are here in Cannes, two years later, with this exceptionally moving and unique road movie.

David P. Kelly – Producer



PRODUCTION NOTES

There have been very few films about movie producers. Legendary Hollywood movie bosses Irving Thalberg and Darryl F Zanuck have been the subjects of TV programmes, and in Italy Dino de Laurentis has been profiled, but when Mark Cousins was asked by David P. Kelly with help from Executive producer Brendan Byrne to make a film about Jeremy Thomas, he jumped at the chance.

There were many reasons. The scale and daring of Thomas' career. The fact that, in the time of entertainment mega-corporations such as Disney, Thomas has stood sentinel for a kind of independence. In the era of Brexit, Thomas' passionate internationalism, in particular his engagement with Japanese cinema, stands in sharp relief. As England drifts more to the political right, Jeremy Thomas represents the radical Englishness of William Blake and Francis Bacon. And, more personally, when Cousins was a TV presenter in the 1990s, he introduced *Bad Timing*, one of his favourite films that was produced by Thomas, on the BBC's *Moviedrome*.

Cousins knew at once how he wanted to make the film. As Jeremy drove to Cannes, Cousins would travel with him, bringing two cameras and recording sound himself with no follow car or drone shots. He wanted an intimate road movie, something like Alexander Payne's *Sideways* or *Thelma and Louise*!

And the title of the film? A few years previously, Thomas and Cousins were caught in a storm in Cannes. Whilst others dashed for cover, Thomas smiled and said, "Isn't this wonderful?" This struck Cousins as distinctively Thomas. When David Cronenberg's *Crash* created a storm of controversy and media coverage, Thomas said, "It doesn't get any better."

The drive took five days. The duo stopped in Paris, Orleans, the Lumiere Institute in Lyons, and other places close to Jeremy's heart. But they also went to the Drancy concentration camp and a new newly finished Le Corbusier church in Firminy. Not the itinerary you might expect. They talked cinema – discussing many of Jeremy's own films, his friendships with Jack Nicholson, David Bowie and many others, as well as the movies of Powell and Pressburger, Abbas Kiarostami, and the bawdy *Carry On* comedies of Thomas' uncle Gerald. Just as important was the music. Thomas is passionate about music and DJed across the whole of France.

Producer David Kelly took the train and regularly copied Cousins' rushes. On most nights, Cousins would set up his sound recorder and quiz Thomas on his life and work. Specifically, they discussed Thomas' love of movie stardom, the life-changing effect of winning Oscars, the necessity of having a counter-culture, the timeless quality of cinema, the civilised and wild aspects of people and films, what the movies *Bad Timing* and *Eureka* say about identity, Jeremy's near death from cancer, and the attraction of Cannes.

After filming for four days in Cannes, the editing began. Cousins divided the movie into 7 sections: Prologue, Cars, Sex, Politics, Death, Cannes and Endings. Together with editor Timo Langer, he spliced scores of film clips into the road movie to create a kind of kaleidoscope, to give the impression of seeing inside Jeremy's head. To enhance this, they also used dream sequences.

Cousins didn't want to make one of those films in which dozens of collaborators are interviewed – he wanted this biographical film to be mostly in Jeremy's own words, a self-portrait. But he did interview Tilda Swinton (in London), Debra Winger (Rome), and fellow producer Rebecca O'Brien (Cannes). Swinton, who worked with Thomas on *Only Lovers Left Alive*, called Thomas a pirate. Winger, whose best-known collaboration with Thomas

was on Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky*, said that he's a kind of conductor. O'Brien called him "the producer's producer."

Composer David Holmes, most famous for his scores for *Ocean's Eleven* and *Out of Sight*, did the music. Creative Scotland provided co-financing, as did Northern Ireland Screen and Executive Producer Tim Macready.

Visit Films boarded in early 2021, and the film was one of the first to be selected for Cannes 2021, a kind of homecoming.

BIOS



JEREMY THOMAS – SUBJECT

Thomas was born into cinema as his father and uncle were successful film directors. He started in the film laboratories and graduated to the editing department, working on many movies and ultimately editing a film for Ken Loach. In 1974, Thomas produced his first film in Australia, Philippe Mora's *Mad Dog Morgan* starring Dennis Hopper, and then founded Recorded Picture Company. Thomas has since gone on to produce many distinctive films in a truly international career, including Jerzy Skolimowski's *The Shout*, Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing*, *Eureka* and *Insignificance*, and Nagisa Ôshima's *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* starring David Bowie. In 1986, Thomas collaborated with director Bernardo Bertolucci on *The Last Emperor*, which won nine Academy Awards® including Best Picture, along with many other international awards. Thomas went on to make many films including *The Sheltering Sky*, *Stealing Beauty* and *The Dreamers* with Bertolucci.

Thomas has strategically remained an independent producer, resulting in a diverse body of work, including titles such as David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*, *Crash* and *A Dangerous Method*, Takeshi Kitano's *Brother*, Jonathan

Glazer's *Sexy Beast*, David Mackenzie's *Young Adam*, Takashi Miike's *13 Assassins*, *Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai*, *Blade of the Immortal* and *First Love*, the Oscar-nominated *Kon-Tiki* by Joachim Roenning and Espen Sandberg, Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*, Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise*, and *Tale of Tales* and *Pinocchio* by Matteo Garrone. Throughout his career, Thomas has worked with many other leading filmmakers including Stephen Frears, Richard Linklater, Bob Rafelson, Phillip Noyce, Wim Wenders, Khyentse Norbu and Terry Gilliam.

In 1992, Thomas was appointed Chairman of the British Film Institute, and was made a Life Fellow in 2000. He has been the recipient of many awards throughout the world, including BAFTA's Michael Balcon Award for Outstanding British Contribution to Cinema in 1991. He has been President of the Jury at the Tokyo, San Sebastian, Berlin and Cannes film festivals (Un Certain Regard), and has also served on the main Jury at Cannes. His long relationship with Cannes has seen him premiere over fifteen films at the festival. Thomas was named C.B.E. in the 2009 Queen's Honours for his services to film. Thomas has produced over sixty films and continues to make movies at Recorded Picture Company, with titles upcoming from Takashi Miike and Julien Temple.

MARK COUSINS – WRITER, DIRECTOR, CINEMATOGRAPHER, SOUND

Mark is an Irish-Scottish director and writer. His films – including *The First Movie*, *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, *What is This Film Called Love?*, *Life May Be*, *A Story of Children* and *Film, Atomic, Stockholm My Love*, *I am Belfast* and *The Eyes of Orson Welles* – have premiered in Cannes, Berlin, Sundance and Venice film festivals and have won the Prix Italia, a Peabody, the Stanley Kubrick Award, the European Film Award for Innovative Storytelling, and many other prizes. He has filmed in Iraq, Sarajevo during the siege, Iran, across Asia and in America in Europe. He has honorary doctorates from the Universities of Edinburgh and Stirling.

Mark's books include *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary*, *The Story of Film* and *The Story of Looking*. They have been published around the world. He has collaborated with Tilda Swinton on innovative film events, and tried to find new, passionate, filmic ways to explore his themes: looking, cities, cinema, childhood, and recovery.

He is the Chair of the Belfast Film Festival, a Patron of the Edinburgh International Film Festival and an advisor to Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival. His 14 hour documentary *Women Make Film* tries to rethink cinema. It is narrated by Jane Fonda, Tilda Swinton, Sharmila Tagore, Kerry Fox, Debra Winger, Adjoa Andoh and Thandie Newton. His newest film is *The Storms of Jeremy Thomas*. He has walked across Los Angeles, Belfast, Moscow, Beijing, London, Paris, Berlin, Dakar and Mexico City. He once drove from Edinburgh to Mumbai, and loves night swimming.

FILMOGRAPHY

Dear Mr Gorbachev (assoc d, with Mike Grigsby, 60 m, 1989)

Gulf War: Scottish Eye (d, 38 m, 1990)

Another Journey by Train (co-d with Mark Forrest, 59 m, 1993)

Ian Hamilton Finlay (d, 40 m, 1996)

I Remember IKWIG (d, 40 m, 1996)

Scene by Scene (d, 24 x 60 m doc interviews, 1997-2001)

Cinema Iran (w/d 59 m, 2005)

On the Road with Kiarostami (w/d, 28 mins, 2005)

New Ten Commandments: Kenny Richie (co-d with Irvine Welsh, 11 m, 2008)

NTC: 8 1/2 (co w/co d with Tilda Swinton, 23 m, 2008)
The First Movie (w/d/dp, 81 m, 2009)
The Story of Film: An Odyssey (w/d/dp, 930 m, 2011)
What is this Film Called Love? (w/d/dp, 75 m, 2012) a personal film about Mexico City and Sergei Eisenstein
Dear Georges Méliès (with 102 children and Tilda Swinton, 8 1/2 mins, 2013)
Here be Dragons (w/d/dp 76 mins, 2013) About Albania
A Story of Children and Film (w/d/dp, 101 m, 2013)
Homeless and The Wind in the Trees (w/d/dp, 2 x 9.88s, 2014)
Life May Be (co-w/co-d/co-dp with Mania Akbari, 80 m, 2014) Cine-letters
The Oar and the Winnowing Fan (w/d/dp 4 x short films about in betweenness, takeover of Dazed Vision, 2014)
6 Desires: DH Lawrence and Sardinia (w/d/dp, 83 m, 2014)
Your Eyes Flash Solemnly with Hate (w/d, 10 m, 2015) About the killer of Pasolini
I am Belfast (w/d/co-dp, 86 m, 2015) A city film, co-shot by Christopher Doyle
Atomic (d, 72 mins, 2015) A montage film, with a score by Mogwai
Stockholm My Love (w/d, co-dp 2016) City musical, with Neneh Cherry
Bigger than The Shining (d, 83 mins, 2016) Secret film
Eisenstein on Lawrence (w/d/dp, 9 mins, 2016)
Storm in My Heart (p, 110 mins, 2018) about Susan Hayward and Lena Horne
The Eyes of Orson Welles (w/d/dp, 100 mins, 2018)
Women Make Film: A New Road Movie Through Cinema (w/d 15 hrs, 2020)
Dear Paul Schrader (w/d/dp, 11 mins, 2021)
The Story of Looking (w/d/dp, 87 mins, 2021)
The Storms of Jeremy Thomas (w/d/dp, 89 mins, 2021)
The Story of Film: A New Generation (w/d/dp, 160 mins, 2021)
My Name is Alfred Hitchcock (w/d/dp , 120 mins, 2022)



DAVID P. KELLY – PRODUCER

David has extensive experience of producing, executive producing and story development on UK and International films. His training took place at M.G.M. studios in Los Angeles, A.C.E. training in Paris and at Central St Martin's Art School London. He has developed scripts from newcomers to Oscar-winning writers, whilst working under a producers deal at Working Title films and with Elton John's Rocket pictures. He was creative director with Barbican's music - cinema events, initiating projects like the PET SHOP BOYS performing their unique soundtrack for the film *Battleship Potemkin*.

Selected productions - Universal's, *Mad about Mambo*, Aki Kaurismaki's *Hired a Contract Killer*, Sherry Hormann's *Desert Flower* and recently Vera Glagoleva's *Two Women*, which starred Ralph Fiennes. The latest production is *The Storms of Jeremy Thomas* by Mark Cousins. The company is co-developing projects with streaming platforms, Screen Ireland and with Tim Macready's UK Pygmalion Pictures.

David's on the jury of UK's annual Russian Film Festival and has lectured on film producing at UK Film Schools and with EU-funded training programme E.A.V.E. Initiated Film industry publications including co-authored 'Into the Lion's Den,' a report on MGM/UA studios whilst attending on a producer secondment scheme there. More recently, David became a non-executive director at two London independent cinemas.

TIM MACREADY – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, CO-FINANCIER

Tim is a British independent film, TV and documentary producer. He is also an entrepreneur and balances his time between the two careers. He set up his first company Skill Capital in 1998 with funding from George Soros' private equity vehicle Soros Private Equity Partners. His current slate of feature film projects include *Herzog*, which is an adaptation of the Saul Bellow novel first published in 1964. This production will be a major feature film in partnership with a highly respected Hollywood actor-writer-director. Tim is also partnering up with Storms producer David Kelly on *The Master*, a film about Charlotte Brontë's troubled formative period studying and working in Brussels where she fell in love with her literary professor Constantin Heger, the husband of her employer. Another project in the works is *Let Go My Hand*, an adaptation of the Ed Docx novel which will be co-produced by Kevin Loader; and he is also working on a major historical drama TV series with Charlie Pattinson from New Pictures and Luc Roeg from Independent.

FILMOGRAPHY

The Sea (EP - 2013) adapted for the screen by novelist John Banville, produced by Luc Roeg and directed by Stephen Brown. Starring Charlotte Rampling, Natascha McElhone, Rufus Sewell, Bonnie Wright and Sinead Cusack.

Two Women (EP - 2016) an adaptation of Ivan Turgenev's play *A Month in the Country*, with David P. Kelly also executive producing, starring Ralph Fiennes. Directed by Vera Glagoleva and co-starring Sylvie Testud, Anna Astrakhantseva, Alexander Baluyev and Anna Levanova.

MARK THOMAS – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Mark Thomas has worked for Creative Scotland (now Screen Scotland) for the past 11 years supporting and delivering feature film and broadcast development and production. Mark works as an Executive Producer on a slate of feature film and broadcast projects across drama, factual and animation, supporting indigenous producing, directing and writing talent. Recent examples of his work in documentary include the theatrical feature film *Aquarela* from director Victor Kossakovsky, which premiered at Venice in 2018 and Sundance in 2019, *The Eyes of Orson Welles* directed by Mark Cousins, which premiered at Cannes 2018 and *Scheme Birds*, which won best documentary at the 2019 Tribeca Film Festival.



DAVID HOLMES – COMPOSER

David Holmes is a Belfast born DJ, composer and producer. In his varied professional life, he has produced seven of his own albums and over 30 film soundtracks. He is well known for his collaborations with director Steven Soderbergh on the *Ocean's* series of films as well more recently scoring *The Laundromat* and the forthcoming *No Sudden Move*.

David scored all 3 seasons of BBC's *The Fall* and all seasons of *Killing Eve*, which also featured the music of his band Unloved. He has been nominated for and won numerous awards including two Ivans Novellos for the film '71 and BBC series *London Spy*.

Music production work includes a No. 1 Noel Gallagher album, Primal Scream and Sinead O'Connor as well as remixes for U2, Orbital and Jarvis Cocker.

His film company Canderblinks have released two features to critical acclaim: *Good Vibrations* (2013) and *Ordinary Love* (2019), which starred Liam Neeson and Lesley Manville.



THE STORMS OF JEREMY THOMAS

Directed, photographed, recorded and written by MARK COUSINS

Produced by DAVID P. KELLY Edited by TIMO LANGER
Original Music by DAVID HOLMES Sound Design by ALI MURRAY

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