

verve
PICTURES



patti smith dream of life

a film by steven sebring



RUNNING TIME: 109 mins, CERT 15

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SYNOPSIS

Patti Smith Dream of Life is a plunge into the philosophy and artistry of cult rocker Patti Smith. The portrait of the legendary singer, artist and poet explores themes of spirituality, history and self expression. Known as the godmother of punk, she emerged in the 1970's, galvanizing the music scene with her unique style of poetic rage, music and trademark swagger.

We follow this multitalented and private artist over 11 years of international travel, through her spoken words, performances, lyrics, interviews, paintings, and photographs. *Patti Smith Dream of Life* reveals a complicated, charismatic personality. Patti Smith who narrates the film, wrestles with life's many paradoxes. She defines the human experience as an overwhelming contradiction. She pulls the strings of her guitar and simply makes music.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

No person is just one thing. I know I am not just a fashion photographer. And Patti Smith is certainly not just a rock icon. She is much more. For me, this movie is about discovering who Patti Smith is.

This process of discovery has been over the course of eleven incredible years of filming. I can't believe it, but a quarter of my life has been spent framing her in my lens. And through this film, I want to channel that experience to the audience.

It all happened so organically. I was just interested in her and in getting to know her as a person. As our friendship blossomed over a decade, and as I got to know her, my lens was getting to know her as well.

Patti is a constant reminder to me that there's an urgency in the world. Everyone sits back in his or her comfort zone. No one goes to record stores and researches new artists anymore. So few people are out there knocking down the walls. Nowadays, everything is presented to us in an easily digestible format, accessible with the click of a button.

The world we live in almost doesn't seem real. I grew up with the top hits MTV fed me. But the music world has so much more to offer. That's why Patti is so important. There's something so raw about her, she cuts through all the artifice. Whether it's through her poetry or her rocking out on stage, she's the real thing.

She's a rock star, a poet, an artist, a mother, and an activist. She's a folk hero. She's been through a lot of tragedy and yet she has come through it. I can't think of anyone who's like her.

They call her the punk poet prophet. Well, I'm one of her soldiers, or one of her messengers. I want to turn people on to Patti Smith. I want to get her message out.

First Contact

I met Patti on a *Spin* photo shoot in 1995. At the time, she was recording a song with Michael Stipe, whom I had just photographed. The story I've heard is that Michael encouraged her to ask for me when *Spin* wanted to photograph her. That's how I got the job.

So I went to her home outside Detroit, just before the album *Gone Again* came out. She hadn't returned to touring yet. And her husband, Fred, had passed away the year before. When I got there, we went to a local coffee shop and we just hung out all day. I don't think we took pictures until the very end of that first day. We connected as human beings.

A few weeks later, she invited me to see her at Irving Plaza in New York City. When I saw her perform I was completely blown away, because she wasn't the person I had met. She had been this really sweet, almost innocent, interesting woman. And then at Irving Plaza, she was raging, spitting music and spewing poetry. It was fantastic.

After the show, I asked her right there, "Has anybody ever filmed you?" And she laughed a little bit. I didn't know at the time that there was really so little documentation of her aside from concert footage. I guess she's always been very private. She didn't answer me. She just laughed and giggled, and I said, "No, really, you're incredible." She said, "Well, we go on tour in a few weeks . . ." I called her a couple times after that, but I didn't get an answer. I didn't have a specific concept



in mind. I never pitched her. I just said I wanted to do it. In a really weird way, I just wanted to film her. There was no objective in mind and maybe that's what helped get me through the door.

At the time, she was coming out of a 16-year hiatus living in Detroit with her family. And I think maybe in the back of her head, she wanted someone to document her, but she hadn't found the person whom she could trust. When you're at her level of fame, people want so much from you. Normally, people who interview her, or producers who approach her, have pre-conceived notions. They want her to say something outrageous or spit in their face or do something crazy like crack her guitar over some guy's head. I wasn't looking for anything like that. I just wanted to document her. I think she could sense that.

Through a Looking Glass

Finally, she called me. She was playing a couple shows in London and she said I could come out if I wanted. That first night, I was filming backstage and, man, it was stressful. Patti is so intense. You just don't know how to approach her. People get intimidated by her quite easily because they don't know what she might say or do. And the band was wary of me. There's a scene in the film of that night, when Patti waves her hand at me and says, "OK, you can stop filming now." The guitarist, Lenny Kaye, is walking through the frame and he's looking at the camera from the corner of his eye and you can see he's got this attitude like . . . *be careful*. The next morning Lenny walked up to me, looked at me, and said, "Who are you?" Do you know how lucky you are?" It was humbling.

Blood, Sweat and Credit Cards

The process of filming has been extraordinary. And, at times, extraordinarily painful. But I would never have done it another way. For eleven years, it was pretty much me, a camera, and a mike, following Patti around the globe, showing up to film her in Japan, Paris, Israel, New Zealand, and anywhere and everywhere she would go. I never knew what I was getting into. At first, it was me calling her, asking her when I could film. But then she would be calling me, and asking me to come film something.

I used an Arri SR-1 16 millimeter camera and a 16 millimeter Bolex. The whole movie is shot on film. As a fashion photographer, I am always looking for that one still moment that is extraordinary, of composing just the right shot. I'm always carefully trying to find that moment. That's what I did with Patti.

If I am proud of anything, it's that I had the stamina to stick it out and get those moments. This whole project was an exercise in stamina and patience.

I kept at it because I wanted to make a film that means something. If I die tomorrow I will know I made something of more historical significance than a fashion campaign. I was getting a little tired of just shooting fashion, and then I met Patti. She changed my life.

But there were bumps along the path. After four years of filming, I ran out of money. I had run up over \$100,000 in credit card debt. I just couldn't afford to finance it. I had to shelve the film. Before I did though, I created a cut of the film. It was abstract. It was long. It wasn't quite right.

It needed more from Patti. It needed more time.



Down the Rabbit Hole

Patti and I became really close over the years. We've become like brother and sister. During that slow-down period, I kept shooting material as Patti's life kept changing. She moved back to New York, both her parents passed away, and her children, Jackson and Jesse, grew up in this film.

It already had so many flavors to it—the music, the painting, the photographs, the travel. So, after I was able to recommit to the project, I had to figure out how to make sense of all this incredible material. So I said, "Let's go into your bedroom and film you in the corner." And that's what we did. She sits there and intimately talks to us, and provides a thread through her life and through the film.

I wanted the film to be almost an extension of Patti's mind. And her mind is intense. It's abstract. Provocative. She doesn't stop thinking for a moment. She speaks so poetically in the narration, that I think the film can almost function like you're reading *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In a scene, she can be sitting in her bedroom in New York holding up her old childhood dress and then, poof; we get transported to her childhood home. In another segment, when she's putting on the record *Radio Baghdad*, a song about the war in Iraq, it is a very present moment. And then, again, bing; you're suddenly in Washington DC, watching her at a massive protest against the war. The only way I was able to make all that feel organic was to have had the time to be there.

Patti improvised the narration. I think it's both complex and accessible. That's her. I mean, she's able to talk about the subtleties of her appreciation for de Kooning by making a chicken pox analogy.

The structure of the film is very much in keeping with a quote of Patti's; "Life is not some vertical or horizontal line. You have your own internal world and it's not neat." That's the way she thinks. It's the way I think as well. So this is not some talking heads biopic or a standard rockumentary. It's something different.

This film jumps around in time and space, but I hope never so much that it confuses the message. If I am to be a herald for the punk poet prophet, I want to speak clearly.

Gung Ho

After eleven years of shooting, Patti and I decided to stop. We are ready. This is the time. She's got great momentum. There's the new album, *12*. And, after nine previous nominations, she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame this year. It was awesome to be there and to hear all these well-known rock legends pay homage to Patti.

Patti and I have many plans for the future. In fact, the film is part of a multimedia extravaganza that we're developing. We are designing a whole book derived from the images, words and songs in the movie. We're going to show a movable installation which we'd like to set up in art galleries and museums in cities where *Dream of Life* is showing. The installation will include Patti's painting, my movie camera that I used for the film, giant oversized photographs, a catalog of Patti's things that are part of the film, and other personal mementos. I want people to watch the movie, check out the installation, and, hopefully, head to a venue where Patti is playing live.

I want to move people. I remember this one guy who was at an early screening of the film. He just sat there and seemed sort of stunned after it was over. "I've been wasting my life," he said. "I've got to do something."

I hope that this film stirs the desire in people to pay more attention to our world or to be motivated to feed one's mind with books, music, culture, art, history. . . . I want *Dream of Life* to inspire people to do *something*.



PATTI SMITH BIOGRAPHY

Patti Smith is considered a poet whose energy and vision found its voice in the most powerful medium of our culture, music. As a one of the early pioneers of New York City's dynamic punk scene she has been creating her unique blend of poetic rock and roll for over 35 years. She was born in Chicago in 1946, the oldest of four siblings, was raised in South Jersey. From an early age she gravitated toward the arts and human rights issues. She studied at Glassboro State Teachers College and migrated to New York City in 1967. She teamed up with art student Robert Mapplethorpe and the two encouraged each other's work process, pursuing painting and drawing while she focused on poetry.

In February 1971 Smith performed her first public reading at St. Mark's Church on the lower eastside, accompanied by Lenny Kaye on guitar. That same year she co-wrote and performed the play *Cowboy Mouth* with playwright Sam Shepard. Continuing to write and perform her poetry, around New York, including the legendary Max's Kansas City, combining their collective and varied musical roots and her improvised poetry. The independent single release, *Hey Joe/Piss Factory*, featured Tom Verlaine. The trio helped to open up a restricted music scene that centered on CBGBs in New York City. After recruiting guitarist Ivan Kral, they played CBGBs for eight weeks in the spring of 1975 and then added drummer Jay Dee Daugherty. Smith described their work as "three chords merged with the power of the word." Smith was signed by Clive Davis to his fledgling Arista label and recorded four albums: *Horses* (produced by John Cale), *Radio Ethiopia* (produced by Jack Douglas), *Easter* (produced by Jimmy Iovine), which included her top twenty hit "*Because the Night*", co-written with Bruce Springsteen, and *Wave* (produced by Todd Rundgren).

In October 1979, Smith retired from the public eye and moved to Detroit with Fred "Sonic" Smith. Where in 1980, they married, had two children and wrote songs together with no regret for the self imposed exile from show business. In 1988 they recorded *Dream of Life* (produced by Fred "Sonic" Smith and Jimmy Iovine) that included the classic anthem, *People Have the Power*, which the two wrote while she did the dinner dishes. It combined his white panther polemics with her revolutionary spirit. It also marked her final collaboration with three of her closest companions, all who met with untimely deaths; Robert Mapplethorpe, who photographed her for the cover; Richard Sohl, who provided all of the keyboards; and her husband, Fred "Sonic" Smith who had composed the music.

In the summer of 1995, with the help of old and new friends, Smith released *Gone Again*, (produced by Malcolm Burn and Lenny Kaye) a highly acclaimed meditation on passage and mortality. In touring the album, opening for Bob Dylan, it also marked her re-emergence as a performer. In 1996 Smith met photographer Steven Sebring for a photo shoot and agreed to give him unprecedented access to the tour, which subsequently led to their collaboration on the film *Dream of Life*. By 1997 her new band was formed with Lenny Kaye, Jay Dee Daugherty, Oliver Ray and Tony Shanahan. The group recorded *Peace and Noise*, which incorporated a blend of the spoken, sung in her trademark incantatory style and reflected the feel and inner play of a working group. Smith and the band toured and participated in benefit work, including the Neil Young Bridge School, Jewel Heart, and the Tibet House Foundation. The song *1959* from *Peace and Noise*, written by Smith and Shanahan, was nominated for a Grammy in 1998.

With *Gung Ho* in 2000, her eighth album on Arista Records (produced by Gil Norton), Smith continued the process of merging tradition with the moment. As in former albums, she drew on the inspiration of spiritual and political leaders and events, as well as heralding the efforts of the common man. From Mother Theresa, who exemplified charity, to the resilient Vietnamese patriot Ho Chi Minh, *Gung Ho* explored those who - as the slogan implies - entered into service with enthusiastic heart. *Glitter in their Eyes* from *Gung Ho*, written by Smith and Oliver Ray, was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2001.



In 1999 Smith read at The Whitney and Guggenheim Museums. In November 2000, she participated in the launching of the William Blake exhibit at London's Tate Gallery with a performance with Oliver Ray at St. James Cathedral, and at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art in conjunction with its William Blake program in June 2001 and also the Diane Arbus exhibit in 2005. In the past few years, Patti Smith has had the privilege to visit and participate in events at several literary foundations, including Hermann Hesse Museum in Montagnola, Virginia Woolf's Monk's House in East Sussex England, and the Casa-Museo Federico Garcia Lorca in Granada Spain.

Patti Smith is the author of *Witt, Babel, Wool Gathering, The Coral Sea, and Complete*, a catalog of lyrics, photographs, illustrations, original artwork and reflections. Smith's drawings have been exhibited at the Robert Miller Gallery in New York, the Museum Eki in Kyoto, the Pompidou Center in Paris, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In September 2002, *Strange Messenger*, an exhibition of drawings, newly created silk screens of images depicting the remains of the World Trade Center 9.11.01, and black-and-white Polaroid photographs printed in silver gelatin process, opened at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. In 2003 the exhibition toured The Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston Texas, The Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia Pennsylvania, The Parco Museum in Tokyo Japan, The Haus der Kunst in Munich Germany, Palazzo Diamanti Ferrara Italy and Museum Boijmans in Rotterdam. Her photographs were exhibited at the Palazzo Fontano di Trevi, in Rome Italy June 2005. During 2006, her art show traveled to Glasgow Scotland and Sligo Ireland and continues to build as it travels around the world.

In 2003, Patti Smith was the recipient of the Torino Poetry Award, as well as the Premio Tenco Award in Italy and in 1975 was awarded the Academie Charles Cros, Grand Pris du Disque Award in France for the recording of *Horses*. Patti also received the prestigious Women of Valor Award at the ROCKRGRL Music Conference on November 10, 2005 - exactly 30 years to the day since Horse's release.

On June 10, 2005, Smith was awarded by the Minister of Culture for the French Republic, the grade of "Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres, the highest grade awarded to artists who have contributed significantly to furthering the arts throughout the world.

On October 20, 2002, Smith was signed to Columbia Records. In Spring 2004, her first Columbia recording, *trampin*, was released. The 30th anniversary re-issue of *Horses*, entitled *Horses/Horses* was released in Fall 2005, and was heralded as one of the most poignant reissues in the recording industry. It included the digital re-master on one disk and a live disk that was recorded at The Royal Festival Hall as part of the Meltdown festival in London Summer 2005. The musicians on the live recording feature Lenny Kaye, Jay Dee Daugherty, Tony Shanahan, Tom Verlaine, and Flea of the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

On March 12, 2007 Smith was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. A new CD of cover songs, entitled *Twelve*, was released Spring 2007 on Columbia Records, and followed by an international tour.

Aside from recording, performing, art, and writing, Smith is still strongly involved in social issues and continues to participate in various human rights organizations. Her last volume of poetry, *Auguries of Innocence*, was released in Fall 2005 for Ecco Press/Harper-Collins and she is currently finishing a book on her growth as an artist and her friendship with Robert Mapplethorpe.



ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

STEVEN SEBRING - DIRECTOR

Dream of life is a full-length feature directorial debut for artist, photographer Steven Sebring. Born in South Dakota and raised in Arizona the early years were athletics, farming, carpentry and customizing cars. Self taught in photography as a teenager he tinkered with movie cameras and co-opened a photo studio only to close it after several years to escape the confines of the southwest, moving to Europe on a quest to broaden his horizons.

He established himself as a photographer renown for a definitive style of merging raw realism with the fantasy of high fashion. Working for editorial magazines and shooting advertising campaigns for companies such as Ralph Lauren, Lanvin, Maybelline and Coach who, for over the last several years he has shoot many fashion campaigns as well as directed several short films. It was however his shooting celebrity and artist portraiture that led to his meeting the artist and musician Patti Smith, He was so inspired after a seeing a performance that he encouraged her to allow him to film, resulting in the eleven year film project *Dream of life*. It was to some extent, experimental having no official filmmaking background yet fashion gave him other opportunities to explore the medium further.

He directed two short films for the DKNY line by Donna Karan. The first [*New York stories*] 2003 A little film about the big city, follows a day in the life of three New Yorkers. It Stars Angela linvalle, Sophie Dahl and Michelle Hicks and features cameos by Sylvia miles, Lauren Erzersky, and Bill Sims Jr. The second [*Road stories*] 2004, A little film about a big country, leaves the skylines of New York behind and takes up where the last film left off, following New Yorkers who are on a road trip across the U.S.A. Angela linvall reprises her role. It also stars Scarlet Chorvat, Johnny Messner, Sylvia miles and Waylon Payne whose music is featured throughout the film. These films were both produced by Laird and Partners and released to critical acclaim.

During the last 11 years while navigating between movie and still cameras, Sebring designed the photographic book titled book *Bygone Days*. Released in 2005, it depicts the history of an American family and rural homestead life in Bison South Dakota 1910-1950. The photos were taken by Sebring's great, great uncle, John Penor, who at 97 lives in the same sod house he was born in. The book was co-published with DAP publishing and has won numerous international awards.

In the fall 2005 and spring 2006 Sebring photographed the art and renowned French Sculptors Claude and Francoise Lalanne for the much-anticipated book, *Lalanne* published in 2006 by Reed Krakoff, Paul Kasmin, and Ben Brown.

Sebring's photographs have been included in Patti smith's book "*Patti Smith Complete; Lyrics, Reflections and Notes for the Future*" and on her albums such as "*Gung Ho*", "*Land*", and the latest album "*12*" released 2007. Sebring continues his collaboration with Patti Smith producing the art installation *Objects of life*, as well creating the book, *Patti Smith dream of life* that chronicles the myriad of moments, musical transcripts, and unseen photographs of the unusual experience of filming the documentary.



MARGARET SMILOW - PRODUCER

Margaret Smilow has been producing award-winning films on international culture and arts since 1979. Her projects with Alternate Current, the company she founded in 1979 include the highly acclaimed series *Music for the Movies*, a collection of films on the art and craft of scoring music for feature films. The first film in the series, *Bernard Hermann* was nominated for an Academy Award in 1992. Other works include: *Musicals Great Musicals: The Arthur Freed Unit at MGM*, *Dashiell Hammett. Detective. Writer.*, *Busby Berkeley: Going Through The Roof* and *Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Spaces*.

Ms. Smilow joined Thirteen/WNET as Director of Culture and Arts Documentaries in 1997. She just completed *Barenboim on Beethoven*, which features the great pianist performing all 32 Piano Sonatas as well as Simon Schama's *The Power of Art*, an 8 part television history of the creative moment that features 8 artists.

She received the 1999 Creative Arts Emmy Award for Outstanding Classical Music -Dance Program for her film *Itzhak Perlman: Fiddling For The Future* and a Non-Fiction Series Emmy for *Leonard Bernstein: Reaching For The Note*. Her projects for GREAT PERFORMANCES include *Kurosawa*, *Making the Misfits* and *Degas and the Dance*, which won a Peabody Award.

Among her upcoming projects is *Maestro*, is a feature length film portrait of Russian conductor Valery Gergiev.