

AF MAG: REVIEWS/PREVIEW

REVIEW: "MAN ON A WIRE"
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Review & Photos by [Jeremy Baumann](#) for The Artists Forum Magazine
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MOVIE: Man On A Wire

A MAN ON A WIRE

NEW YORK, NY (Thursday, August 7, 2008) Cover your eyes, everyone, I'm pulling a spoiler (and revealing the end of the movie in this review, right now. Got them covered? Okay, here we go:

A man walks across a wire.

And boy does he... on his practice wires at home, above the gargoyles of Notre Dame, and most definitely between the towers of the World Trade Center on a misty August day in 1974. The press asks a jaded, NYPD sergeant about Petit walking across the tightrope after Petit is arrested. The sergeant clarifies Petit wasn't so much *walking* on the wire between the towers as *dancing*. Petit is breathtaking in ways I never knew to stop and appreciate, perhaps because when I was a kid in New York, he was all the way up there, and there was no internet, no youtube, and I didn't have binoculars. I was busy skateboarding. Thus, I let him be fabulous from afar, and never looked back, until now.

Obviously it is paradoxical to spoil the end of the documentary, when the tale itself is of the most press-covered, most spectacular... nay... super-human wire-walking event in history. So the question is: why does it feel like a spoiler to write of it? The answer is simple: because the story is so well edited, directed so well, and told so well by the guilty parties themselves, that you are with them every inch of the way. You feel such a part of the team I heard other audience members both laughing and crying along with the crew as they told of heartbreaks, disappointments and breakthroughs. You thrill along with Petit from the lightbulb moment when he realizes his dream of the WTC walk, right through to the credits.

You feel the inspiration of momentum building as Petit recruits his friends and plans for years, even before the buildings are built. You cheer on the advances, revel as things nearly come to fruition and don't feel silly to worry he might die, even as you watch him now, 30-something years later telling the story, reliving the story, props and all. You bond—one-sided bonding, true, but bond nonetheless—with the wacky characters who help make this craziness possible.

THE CHARACTERS: Come along for the ride with the flakey pothead musician, the wild Australian, the highly-competent (and emotional) French rigging guy who's been with Petit from the get-go, the girlfriend, the American who couldn't understand half the French crew's critical orders, and all the rest. Most importantly you get to know Philippe Petit and in doing so, you learn a kid can have a dream, a crazy, impossible, inhuman dream, and can somehow make it come true. Words can't do that part justice, it is something each viewer will have to experience themselves.

The story is told well in part because of the rich material director James Marsh and editor Jinx Godfrey had to work with, from old footage of Petit training, researching and performing numerous wire-walking acts, to his sketches and models new and old; TV and newspaper press clips, and flashback scenes. Almost without fail the use of the flashback in a documentary takes me out of the film's world in the worst way, but in this case it worked. They worked, perhaps, because the information garnered for the scenes was directly from Petit's memories, stories and direction, so I felt more a part of Petit's dream, as he narrates, than some random producer's creative vision.

Yet another side of this multi-faceted experience is revisiting the World Trade Center, itself. When the twin co-stars of this documentary appear in close-up after close-up on the big screen, a lot of sighing is heard throughout the theater. In time, the sighing and comments stop, and the awe of the sheer size of the beasts sets in. Love or hate the design of them, it matters not: nobody can argue it was tremendous, the absolute enormity of those buildings. The shots from helicopters, the ground, the photos from the rooftops all help to remind us of the seemingly impossible scale of them, and in doing so, it is clearly spelled out, to walk across them on a tightrope simply is not possible. It cannot be done. The buildings sway. The ropes will contract and expand by many feet. The wind would blow him blocks away if one of the rather common 100-mph gusts kicked up.

But this boy had a dream, and nothing can stop what is meant to be. See this film. You'll be glad you did.

Just don't tell anyone how it ends.

TRAILER: www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi3520790809/

WEB: www.manonwire.com/

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