

Alive Mind CINEMA

presents

CRAZY WISDOM

A film by
Johanna Demetrakas

An Alive Mind Cinema Release

from Kino Lorber, Inc.
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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Chogyam Trungpa, the brilliant 'bad boy of Buddhism,' fled the invasion of Tibet, studied at Oxford, and shattered Westerners' notions of how an enlightened teacher should behave. Was it crazy wisdom when he renounced his monastic vows, eloped with a sixteen-year old aristocrat, openly drank alcohol, and had intimate relations with women students? Was it crazy wisdom when he founded a military order to dismantle aggression? Or was it when, to counter the materialism he saw infecting the world, he worked tirelessly to build an 'enlightened society,' based on compassion and courage? The film presents a direct experience of Trungpa, and stories from his wife and students, including best-selling author Pema Chodron and poet Allen Ginsberg, as well as colleagues and critics like American guru Ram Dass and eminent scholar Robert Thurman.

LONG SYNOPSIS

We speak casually of good parking karma, Samsara is a perfume, and Nirvana is a rock band. A recent survey by Germany's Der Spiegel revealed that Germans like the Dalai Lama more than their native-born Pope Benedict XVI. Tibetan Buddhism is doubling its numbers faster than any other religion in Australia and the U.S.A. How did this happen? *Crazy Wisdom* explores this profound cultural shift through the story of Chogyam Trungpa, the brilliant "bad boy of Buddhism."

Born in Tibet, trained in their rigorous monastic tradition, Trungpa fled the Communist invasion in 1959, the same year as the Dalai Lama. In Britain, seeing the cultural gap blocked his students from any deep understanding of Buddhism, he renounced his vows, eloped with a sixteen year-old, and lived as a westerner. In the U.S., he openly drank alcohol and had intimate relations with students. Was this the "crazy wisdom" that his Tibetan colleagues recognized as an authentic way to manifest in the world? And was it "crazy wisdom" that helped him build the first Buddhist university in the western hemisphere and articulate the Buddhist path in a way that would sweep across the country in one short decade?

Trungpa landed in the U.S. in 1970 and legend has it that he said to his students: "Take me to your poets." He drew a following of the country's prominent spiritual teachers and intellectuals - including R.D. Laing, John Cage, Ram Dass, and Pema Chodron. Poet Allen Ginsberg considered Trungpa his guru; Catholic priest Thomas Merton wanted to write a book with him; music icon Joni Mitchell wrote a song about him. Trungpa became renowned for translating ancient Buddhist concepts into language and ideas that Westerners could understand.

Humor was always a part of his teaching - "Enlightenment is better than Disneyland," he quipped, and he warned of the dangers of the "Western spiritual supermarket." Initially judged harshly by the Tibetan establishment, Trungpa's teachings are now recognized by both western and eastern philosophers and spiritual leaders, including the Dalai Lama, as authentic and profound.

Today, twenty years after his death, Trungpa's books have been translated into thirty-one languages and sell worldwide in the millions. His organization thrives in thirty countries and five continents. Yet Trungpa's name still evokes admiration and outrage. What made him tick, and just what is crazy wisdom anyway? Veteran director Johanna Demetrakas uses archival footage, animation, interviews, and original imagery to build a film that mirrors Trungpa's challenging energy and invites viewers to go beyond fixed ideas about our teachers and leaders.

Alive Mind CINEMA

CREDITS

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY
JOHANNA DEMETRAKAS

PRODUCED BY
LISA LEEMAN

EDITED BY
JOHANNA DEMETRAKAS
KATE AMEND, A.C.E.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
PABLO BRYANT

MUSIC COMPOSED BY
SEAN CALLERY

COLOR ONLINE AND DESIGN
BILL RUSSELL

SOUND DESIGN BY
MIDGE COSTIN

Alive Mind C I N E M A

Filmmaker Comments

From the first seminar, called "The Battle of Ego" in Los Angeles, to filming his cremation on a cloudless but rainbow-filled day in Vermont, Chogyam Trungpa blew my mind. He always created a feeling of stark reality, compassion and biting humor at the same time. Being in his presence was like being suddenly aware of an oncoming truck: it put every cell in your brain SMACK! into the present moment. And in that moment you could be outraged, moved to tears or intellectually inspired... or all at once.

This brilliant energy was difficult to resist but exhausting to experience. On top of that, he lived an unapologetic life that challenged every one of us who crossed his path with fixed ideas about how a "spiritual teacher" should behave. He wore suits, spoke precise English and lived like a bon vivant westerner, so it took years of practice and study to understand that in the rich history of Tibetan Buddhism, his outrageous "crazy wisdom teaching style" was just another tradition.

In fact it was impossible to separate his lifestyle from his teachings. He was living a life that was somehow utterly contemporary, western, controversial and totally Tibetan as well. He loved film so we worked together on several projects. He taught me how to recognize the energy of a situation both visually and emotionally, and, how to direct a scene to express that energy.

It was like unearthing ancient wisdom and somehow capturing it through a contemporary medium, film. It is my obvious prejudice that only film can come close to creating that kind of experience 23 years after Trungpa's untimely death.

Ultimately what inspired this film was far beyond the paradox of his controversial life style paired with the authentic teachings. It was the message of his life's work: to wake people up from their blind addiction to materialism, which he saw as degrading both human society and the earth at an alarming rate.

Alive Mind C I N E M A

Production History

Way back in Boulder, on a summer day in 1983, Chogyam Trungpa and I met to talk about film. Trungpa loved film and saw it as a powerful way to communicate for centuries to come. At this meeting, he asked me to make a Shambhala film. I had no idea what a Shambhala film would be, but I said yes anyway. Four years later, I was filming his cremation with four 16mm cameras and I wasn't sure of anything. More years went by, I still had no vision but I started the research and occasionally shot an interview, trying to find the story. Finally, it was the world spinning madly toward what Trungpa might call "a dark age of materialism" that forced me to begin. I remembered what he kept saying the last time he taught in Los Angeles..."The world does need your help so badly, very badly. If you don't help it, who will?" And it came to me; the images, the teaching, the controversies, the humor, the ineffable experience of Trungpa's stunning and infuriating mind... there's your Shambhala film. See if you can tell that story. Assembling a team was imperative to help me on this journey. I had to find a producer with the curiosity to want to make such a film, the down-to-earth skills to find the money and the patience to keep going until it's right.

So I called on an old, unsuspecting friend, an intrepid filmmaker, Lisa Leeman. Lisa: "Working on CRAZY WISDOM has taken me across 14,000 foot mountain passes in Tibet.... to Maui cliffs, the seaside home of Ram Dass and into the many chambers of my own mind, thanks to Chogyam Trungpa."

The Greek tradition of nepotism revealed Pablo Bryant, who happens to be both a sensitive cinematographer and my son. Pablo: "Shooting CRAZY WISDOM, for me, was discovering who Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche was. He has changed from an occasional figure from my childhood into someone I have in my corner."

Bringing films to life, Kate Amend (renowned ACE editor) came on board because I knew her sense of humor matched Trungpa's so well. Kate: "I met Chogyam Trungpa when he visited Los Angeles in the 80's but it wasn't until I attended a Shambhala weekend taught by him that I got it. He was magical--he filled the room. I remember the humor and delight he took in the laughter. I knew Johanna wanted to give her audience the feeling of being in the room with Rinpoche and that was the way I approached editing the film. I always try to find moments of subtle humor when I'm cutting any film and this was a bonanza! As we gathered more and more footage of his talks we were able to take the many rich, profound and delightful Trungpa moments and sprinkle them throughout the film. I don't think I've ever used the word "sprinkle" in reference to editing before, but I think it's apropos in conveying the light touch of Trungpa's heavy wisdom. "

I knew this would be a nice change for Sean Callery, an old friend who won 3 Emmy's composing the music for all seven years of "24." Sean: "Writing music for the scenes that featured CRAZY WISDOM's 'star', Chogyam Trungpa, was the biggest challenge. Speaking to a group, painting, or just sitting silently in a chair, he had genuine presence, full of dignity, humor and spontaneity. Who knew that drinking a glass of water could be so elegant? He always seemed completely comfortable with who he was. The music score required that level of personal authenticity. Whatever came up while composing--fear, anger, embarrassment, frustration, shoulder pain--all of it is in the score because it was real while it happened. If it wasn't coming from that raw place then the music simply didn't work."

And Bill Bryn Russell, our technical genius, quietly made every single shot in the film more beautiful. Bill: "Trungpa snuck up on me while I was doing my work. It is indeed absurd to spend so much time on the technicalities of film finishing, a job that should have taken me weeks instead of a year. That ridiculous year of minute and repetitive practice is what it took for me to absorb some crazy wisdom. About halfway through the job, Trungpa started to appear in my dreams. The clarity of the sensations, emotions and insight I take away, even when I can't remember the details... only thousands of hours in solitude, listening to Trungpa's word fragments over and over again and catching his coy and woozy manners out of the corner of my eye, could possibly afford such dreams." With a team like that, anything is possible. When I left my passport at a remote Tibetan monastery, a young monk, who happened to be making the ten-hour motorcycle drive on the most harrowing of roads to our last location, brought it to me in one day. This is how we got the film done, out of the blue people stepped up. I learned how to wait and trust the universe. And yet, after four and a half years of active filmmaking, 68 interviews, shooting in England, Scotland, Canada, Tibet and all over the U.S., unearthing hundreds of hours of archival footage going back decades, why do I feel like we're just beginning to scratch the surface?

The Filmmaking Team

Johanna Demetrakas, director

With her first documentary, *Womanhouse*, about a ground-breaking feminist art installation, Demetrakas won the AFI Independent Filmmakers Grant, a place in the Whitney Museum's New American Filmmaker Series, and international recognition at festivals such as the Venice Biennale, Paris, and New York. Her second art doc, *Right Out of History: The Making of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party*, was broadcast on PBS and the BBC after acclaim at the London and Berlin Film Festivals. Her art documentaries have been in many museum shows, including the major exhibit, "Los Angeles 1955 - 1985," at the Pompidou Museum in Paris, 2006. The Pompidou recently bought a print of *Womanhouse* for their permanent collection. Since winning the Discovery Program Award and making the dramatic short *Homesick* in 1989 (Sundance, Houston Fest winner, Showtime broadcast), Demetrakas has turned her energies to writing and directing dramatic fiction as well as documentaries. Her credits include *LA Law*, *Doogie Howser, MD*, and the Lifetime television feature *Out of Line*, starring Jennifer Beals. In 2004, Demetrakas produced, directed, and edited a two-hour special *Biography of Richard Gere* for A&E. It was the first A&E *Biography* without a narrator. Well known for her editing prowess, her credits include *The World According to Sesame Street* and *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony*. That epic documentary, edited by Demetrakas, won both the Audience and Freedom of Expression Awards at Sundance, 2002, as well as being nominated for five Emmys, including editing for Demetrakas. She Co-Directed and Edited *Busrider's Union* with the legendary cinematographer Haskell Wexler. She has collaborated with Renee Tajima-Pena on several films, including *My America*, or *Honk if You Love Buddha*, the PBS special *My Journey Home*, and the P.O.V. film, *Calavera Highway*. Demetrakas has served on several awards juries including the Director's Guild of America, the IDA, The Student Academy Awards, and The Greek Film Festival. She taught writing and directing at Cal Arts and is now on the faculty at USC's School of Cinematic Arts.

Lisa Leeman, producer

Lisa Leeman's film work has taken her to the Himalayas, Chernobyl, rural Australia, and her back yard of Venice Beach, California. Lisa writes, directs, produces, and edits documentary films -- her first feature doc, *Metamorphosis: Man Into Woman*, won the Filmmakers Trophy at Sundance, and garnered high ratings on its broadcast on PBS's acclaimed series *POV*. Lisa most recently directed the feature doc *One Lucky Elephant*, which premiered at the Los Angeles Film Festival, won Best Editing, Feature Documentary at the Woodstock Film Festival, and went on to sell out four screenings at IDFA, the mother of all documentary film festivals, in Amsterdam. Other credits include co-directing & editing *Who Needs Sleep* with renowned cinematographer & director Haskell Wexler (Sundance Film Festival), and directing the recent feature doc *Out of Faith* (PBS). Lisa is currently co-directing, with Paola di Florio, a feature documentary about the famed swami Paramahansa Yogananda. Leeman has served as a judge at the Sundance, AFI, & Los Angeles Film Festivals; the president of the International Documentary Association, and on the boards of the IDA and the National Coalition of Independent Public Broadcasting Producers. She writes articles about the ethics of documentary filmmaking, and on the international documentary scene. She is on the faculty of USC's School of Cinematic Arts, and has taught documentary filmmaking in Beijing, China & Amman, Jordan. Lisa spent a decade editing social-issue documentaries, including the acclaimed *Made in LA*.

The Filmmaking Team (cont'd)

Kate Amend, A.C.E., editor

In December 2005, Kate Amend received the International Documentary Association's inaugural award for Outstanding Achievement in Editing for her work which includes two Academy Award-winning documentary features: *Into the Arms of Strangers* and *The Long Way Home*. Amend also received the 2001 American Cinema Editors' Eddie award for *Into the Arms of Strangers*, and edited the 2001 Oscar-nominated documentary short *On Tiptoe: Gentle Steps to Freedom*. Her collaboration with Michele Ohayon, *Steal a Pencil for Me* (2007), screened at the United Nations, South by Southwest, Berlin and Kagali Film Festivals. *Man from Plains* also released in 2007 and directed by Jonathan Demme, was a triple- award winner at the 2007 Venice Film Festival. *The Brothers Warner* was presented on *American Masters* in the fall of 2008. *One Lucky Elephant*, directed by Lisa Leeman, received an editing award at the 2010 Woodstock Film Festival. *Beah: A Black Woman Speaks*, about the late actress Beah Richards and directed by LisaGay Hamilton, received the Grand Jury award at the 2003 AFI Film Festival, aired on HBO in February 2004, and received a 2005 Peabody Award. *Cowboy Del Amor* received both the Audience and Jury Awards at the 2005 South by Southwest Festival and was broadcast on Showtime in April 2006. Other credits include; *Thin* (2006), and *The World According to Sesame Street* (2005) which both premiered at Sundance 2006; *Peace by Peace: Women on the Frontlines* (PBS, 2004); *Pandemic: Facing AIDS* (Moxie Firecracker Productions, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and HBO, 2003); and *Bataan Rescue* and *The Great Transatlantic Cable* for PBS' *American Experience*. Amend is a frequent advisor at the Sundance Institute Editing Lab and the NALIP Academy. She has served as a juror at the Sundance, AFI, and Riverrun Film Festivals. She is on the faculty of the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and serves on the Board of Directors of the American Cinema Editors.

Pablo Bryant, director of photography

Pablo Bryant has been the Director of Photography on four feature documentaries, and has shot additional photography on many other projects, including the upcoming HBO film *Cinema Verite*. In 2007 he filmed in India and Nepal for the National Film Board of Canada's *Tulku*, which has just been released, and just finished shooting on *Crazy Wisdom*, in the US, the UK, and Tibet. In addition to his work as a cameraman he has produced and directed a short documentary film about the epidemic of homeless children in the US called *Stand Up For Kids*. Bryant was a staff cameraperson for LTN, a Los Angeles lifestyle network, and before that on *Savvy* for the WE network, and has shot extensively for ReelzChannel. He recently finished shooting the DVD special features for *Mad Men* and he is currently working on a documentary called *When the Iron Bird Flies* about the influence of Tibetan Buddhism on western culture.

Sean Callery, composer

Sean Callery is best known for his composition work on the worldwide television hit series *24* starring Kiefer Sutherland. He has received three Emmy(R) Awards for Outstanding Music Composition for the series, the most recent of which was for the season finale in September of 2010. He has also received eleven ASCAP Top Series honors, for his work on *24* and for CBS's *Medium*. He began composing the score for the Fox TV series, *Bones* in 2008. He is currently completing work on an 8 hour miniseries, *The Kennedys*, starring Greg Kinnear and Katie Holmes, which will premiere in March of 2011 on The History Channel. Mr. Callery lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Debbie.