

WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES?



EEN FILM VAN LAURIE ANDERSON  
**HEART OF A DOG**

**HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS** and ABRAMORAMA present a CANAL STREET COMMUNICATIONS PRODUCTION in association with ARTE - La LUCARNE - FIELD OFFICE FILMS

A FILM BY LAURIE ANDERSON FEATURING LOLABELLE WITH LAURIE ANDERSON, CO-MONTOURERS LAURIE ANDERSON, TOSHIKI OZAWA, JOSHUA ZUCKER-PLUDA, EDITOR KATHERINE WOLFF, BOB CURRIE, COMPOSER LUCIANO RIGOLINI, COSTUME DESIGNER MELODY LONDON, KATHERINE WOLFF  
PRODUCED BY COOPER HOLOWESKY, NOAH STAHL, JIM CASS, SHAWN MACDONALD, JASON STERN, JAKE PERLIN, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DAN JANVEY, LAURIE ANDERSON, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS LAURIE ANDERSON

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# HEART OF A DOG

EEN FILM VAN LAURIE ANDERSON

VANAF 28 APRIL TE ZIEN IN DE FILMTHEATERS

2015 | 75 MINUTEN | VERENIGDE STATEN | ENGELS GESPROKEN | NEDERLANDSE ONDERTITELING

## DISTRIBUTIE

De film wordt in de Benelux uitgebracht door

CINEMIEN  
Amstelijk 10  
1074 HP Amsterdam  
Nederland  
[www.cinemien.nl](http://www.cinemien.nl)  
[info@cinemien.nl](mailto:info@cinemien.nl)  
+31 (0)20-5776010

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## PUBLICITEIT

Voor meer informatie over de film kunt u contact opnemen met:

FILM INCOMPANY  
Anne Kervers  
e: [anne.kervers@filminc.nl](mailto:anne.kervers@filminc.nl)  
t: 06-16274537  
Petra van Horssen  
e: [petra.vanhorsen@filminc.nl](mailto:petra.vanhorsen@filminc.nl)  
t: 06-55574720



## SYNOPSIS

HEART OF A DOG is een persoonlijk essay, een autobiografische film en een muzikale meditatie van Amerikaanse experimentele performance-kunstenares en musicus Laurie Anderson (bekend van o.a. haar single "O Superman") over de liefde en de dood.

De kalme voice-over van Laurie Anderson is te horen bij een stroom aan associatieve beelden, animaties en 8mm-films uit haar kindertijd. De filmmaker vertelt het verhaal van haar geliefde hond Lolabelle die overleden is en snijdt daarbij de dood van haar moeder en ook haar echtgenoot Lou Reed aan. In de film, die ondersteund wordt met een door haar geschreven soundtrack, deelt ze haar jeugdfantasieën en behandelt ze politieke en filosofische theorieën.

HEART OF A DOG ging in wereldpremière op het Internationale Filmfestival van Venetië in 2015 en won daar de Lina Mangiacapre Award.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As an artist I have made music, paintings, installations, sculpture, and theater. But most of all I am a storyteller. Making Heart of a Dog was a way to translate my work into a form I've never used in this way. Although I have often used imagery on multiple screens in multi media performances this is the first time I have tried to link stories in a loosely structured narrative film using imagery and animation to complete the sentences. The question at the center of Heart of a Dog is what are stories? How are they made and how are they told? Throughout I was guided by the spirit of David Foster Wallace whose "Every love story is a ghost story" served as my mantra. My guides were also Wittgenstein (the power of language to create the world) and Kierkegaard on living backwards.

*Laurie ANDERSON*



## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

HEART OF A DOG began three years ago as a short personal-essay film commissioned by the Franco-German public television station Arte, as part of a series featuring artists talking about the meaning of life and work. Laurie Anderson was in Paris at the time, presenting a solo performance that featured her rat terrier, Lolabelle. The commissioner Luciano Rigolini suggested, "How about some of those stories about your dog? That's philosophy."

Over an eclectic career spanning decades, including music, theater, drawing, electronics, performance and more, Anderson in recent years has mounted shows that make innovative use of space, pushing the boundaries of what is typically contained within a frame or screen. One show, "Delusion," was a film performance involving multiple screens and projections onto unconventional surfaces, including crumpled paper and a white sofa. "It was fun to explode filmmaking like that and watch all the scenes happen simultaneously on different surfaces," says Anderson. "I'd developed a real aversion to rectangles from looking at screens all the time. I began my career as a sculptor, so fitting everything inside a rectangle has always been frustrating to me."

HEART OF A DOG remains in its completed state the original personal essay for Arte, although in a longer form than commissioned. Bursting open the conventions of the documentary format and the essay film, Anderson's first feature since the 1986 concert movie HOME OF THE BRAVE is a collage-like distillation of Anderson's her key signatures and themes, among them the use of multimedia elements, a fascination with language, and an engagement with technology. Much of the film was shot on a variety of small digital cameras, including iPhone, drone cameras and GoPro. The simple animation employed in the film's surreal opening chapter, in which Anderson dreams of giving birth to Lolabelle, is the artist's own.



HEART OF A DOG is a meditation on the experience of death. Mingyur Rinpoche, one of Anderson's Buddhist teachers, sums up the approach when he says "You should try to practice how to feel sad without actually being sad." "My goal with the center section of the film, the scene that depicts the bardo or the Tibetan afterlife, was to juxtapose jarring, rapid-fire images — a cartoon dog, a train, a data collection center and several heavily processed scenes from the first half of the movie as a way of representing some of the ways we think," Anderson says. "These are some of the ways our minds associate, remember and predict."

Beginning with the dream sequence that opens the film, HEART OF A DOG creates a visual language out of the many linked stories comprising its 75-minute running time that is akin to dream logic. "The first story is told from the perspective of my dream self and the first words are 'This is my dream body,'" says Anderson. "So the narrator says right away that these stories come from a different time and place." But the film is as much about fractured stories as it is about the construction of stories. The narrator describes the final moments of her mother's life and the deathbed speech she gave to her eight children. "We knew we were watching a mind breaking down," Anderson says. "We were watching language and words shredding as she died. The effort she made to speak under those circumstances was breathtaking."

HEART OF A DOG is also a memory piece, fusing the raw materials of Anderson's life and art into a greater narrative about love and loss, life and death, and the passage of time. While Anderson was working on the film, her brother sent several cartons filled with 8mm home movies and asked her to transfer them. While examining the many reels she became captivated at the sight of family footage from her midwestern childhood, preserved on aging celluloid that exuded a ghost-like feel. While viewing the footage she remembered the details of an incident from her childhood when she saved her twin brothers from drowning in a frozen lake. "There were my brothers, my mother, the stroller, the island and the lake. It was all so eerie," she recalls. "I had forgotten so much about that day."

"And the footage was so beautiful. When you slow down 8mm film it's almost hallucinatory," says Anderson. "It's warped from moldering for half a century, and you get these rich textures from the splicing and glue. And those colors! It's like the footage processed itself. All I had to do was cut the images together."

In HEART OF A DOG, Anderson also makes startling connections between the post-9/11 surveillance culture of Lower Manhattan, where the artist lives and works, and the government's obsession with data collection, resulting in vast repositories of digitized information stored in what has ominously become known as the Cloud. "What are they doing with our information?" wonders Anderson. "The conversation that you had with your boss two days ago is parked up there in the Cloud, but to what end? The idea fascinated me enough to wonder why we are recording so many things use things. I wanted to connect the idea of sky with fear, but also with freedom."

Another story in the movie describes how Anderson arranged for music and painting lessons for Lolabelle when she started to go blind. She segues into Lolabelle's journey into the afterlife — or the bardo, as it is known in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* — depicted in a series of charcoal drawings that were originally shown in the artist's 2011 show "Forty-Nine Days in the Bardo" at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia. The multimedia exhibition included some of the same themes in HEART OF A DOG, including love and death, the many levels of dreaming, and illusion.

The penultimate story in HEART OF A DOG is also the movie's mesmerizing centerpiece. In a virtuoso weaving together of sound and image, Anderson recounts a harrowing childhood ordeal in an Illi-



nois hospital following a swimming pool accident in which she broke her back and was confined to a children's ward for several weeks. Doctors told her she would never walk again. She was 12 and until that point never knew anyone who had died — yet kids, some of them burn victims, were dying every night and taken away, never to be seen or discussed again. Meanwhile, volunteers read her children's stories about animals and nurses avoided acknowledging the deaths. "Reliving my time in the hospital touched a nerve and released a world of sound," Anderson says. "I was overwhelmed by the whole atmosphere — the smell, the darkness, children crying. Everything about the hospital came flooding back. This section is called 'A Story About a Story.' It's about telling a story and becoming aware how repetition wears away the meaning. And how easy it is to forget."

Throughout HEART OF A DOG there are quotes, images and stories from other writers and artists, including Anderson's late friend the sculptor Gordon Matta-Clark, the philosophers Ludwig Wittgenstein and Soren Kierkegaard, and David Foster Wallace, whose evocative line "Every love story is a ghost story" was an initial title for the film. Anderson's late husband Lou Reed — to whom she dedicates HEART OF A DOG — provides a coda to the film with his song "Turning Time Around," which plays over the closing credits.

HEART OF A DOG was initially conceived as a narrative piece featuring voiceover. When Anderson decided to add music the producer Dan Janvey persuaded her to focus on strings rather than beats. She eventually used a combination of music from her own records and the rest she composed with her violin and digital effects while watching the film on her laptop when she was in residency at the Rauschenberg Foundation in early 2015. "I would love to do a movie that is entirely words, just to see what happens, but maybe that's too hardcore," says Anderson. "I was happy that I added music to this one after all."

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY BY JASON ANKENY

After briefly entering the mainstream pop radar in 1981 with her lone hit "O Superman," Laurie Anderson enjoyed a public visibility greater than virtually any other avant-garde figure of her era. Her infrequent forays into rock aside, Anderson nevertheless remained firmly grounded within the realm of performance art, her ambitious multimedia projects encompassing not only music but also film, visual projections, dance, and -- most importantly -- spoken and written language, the cornerstone of all of her work. Born in the Chicago suburb of Glen Ellyn, Illinois on June 5, 1947, she studied violin as a teen; relocating to New York City at age 20, she later attended Barnard College, graduating with a B.A. in art history in 1969. After earning an M.F.A. in sculpture from Columbia University in 1972, Anderson taught art history and Egyptian architecture at City College; she mounted her first public performances a year later.

**Big Science** By 1976 Anderson was regularly mounting performances in museums, concert halls, and art festivals throughout North America and Europe; claiming to base all of her projects on the power of words and language, her work also emphasized visual imagery and cutting-edge technology, with pieces like 1980's "Born, Never Asked" written for both orchestra and electronics. A year later, Anderson recorded "O Superman" for the tiny New York label 110 Records; an 11-minute single built around electronic drones and featuring opaque lyrics half-spoken and half-sung (in a voice sometimes electronically treated), this most unlikely hit became a smash in Britain, where it reached the number two spot on the national pop charts. Warner Bros. soon signed Anderson to record a full-length LP, and in 1982 she issued *Big Science*, a work drawn from a much larger project, the seven-hour multimedia performance *United States*.

**Mister Heartbreak** With 1984's *Mister Heartbreak*, Anderson produced her most overtly pop-oriented work, teaming with artists including Peter Gabriel and Adrian Belew; the end result even reached the American Top 100. That same year, she also issued *United States Live*, a recorded document of the complete performance spread across a five-LP set. Anderson's next project, *Home of the Brave*, was a concert film; a year later she also scored the Jonathan Demme/Spalding Gray film *Swimming to Cambodia*. A proper studio album, *Strange Angels*, did not follow until 1989; the next several years were devoted to performance tours, including 1990's *Empty Places*, 1991's *Voices from the Beyond*, and 1993's *Stories from the Nerve Bible*. In 1994 Anderson teamed with producer Brian Eno for *Bright Red*, also featuring her then-boyfriend Lou Reed (they would marry in 2008); the following year she released the LP *The Ugly One with Jewels*, as well as *Puppet Motel*, a CD-ROM confirming her ongoing interest in the latest technology.

**Life on a String** In 2001 Anderson issued *Life on a String*, which contained songs from her large musical theater pieces *Moby Dick* and *Strange Angels*. Also in 2001, just over a week after the attacks on the World Trade Center, Anderson recorded a live album at Town Hall in New York City (on its cover were the poignant words "New York City, September 19-20, 2001"). It was released as *Live at Town Hall NYC* in 2002. Anderson continued her appearance schedule but didn't record for another seven years when she began working on *Homeland*, which was released by Nonesuch in 2010. Anderson continued to work on multiple projects, though she took time off from her work to care for her husband Reed when he fell ill in 2012. After Reed's death in October 2013, Anderson returned to work on her second feature film, *Heart of a Dog*, a meditation on love, loyalty, and loss, seen through the filter of the death of Anderson's dog Lolabelle. The film and its soundtrack album were both released in October 2015.

