



NEW RELEASES

Becoming Cousteau

'I saw my job as getting people to know and love the sea... Because you only protect what you love.'

(Jacques Cousteau)

In 2021, we can visualise the world under the ocean thanks to the popularity of nature series and big-screen documentaries. Yet 70 years ago, when Jacques-Yves Cousteau combined an explorer's love of the sea with his talents as a filmmaker, audiences were amazed at what the intrepid French adventurer caught on camera. In his ground-breaking 1956 feature, *The Silent World* – the first non-narrative film to win Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or, which then won an Oscar® for Best Documentary Feature – and his subsequent films *World without Sun* and *Voyage to the Edge of the World* Cousteau and the genial crew aboard his storied ship Calypso captured a generation's imagination and set the stage for an ever-more-urgent environmental movement.

In addition to writing over 50 books, Cousteau brought his adventures into millions of living rooms starting in 1966 through two iconic and enormously popular series of TV specials, *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* and *The Cousteau Odyssey*. His documentaries have garnered 40 Emmy® nominations and 10 wins, while Cousteau himself received the National Geographic Society's Special Gold Medal, France's Grand Cross of National Order of Merit, and the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom, among many other honours.

Yet Cousteau, whose landmark accomplishments began when he co-invented the Aqua-Lung for longer deep-sea dives, was ahead of his time in another way. He and his crew experienced first-hand the catastrophic changes – warm sea waters, dying coral reefs and glaciers cracking before their eyes – that we now know are evidence of the planet's worsening climate crisis. He was determined to alert people to the dangers by forming The Cousteau Society in 1974 as a non-profit environmental advocacy group, successfully altering policies toward Antarctica and creating momentum for the historic first Earth Summit in 1992.

'As I began this film, just the fact that Cousteau himself is not a household name seemed extraordinary to me,' director Liz Garbus says. 'Today's generation has grown up with popular nature programmes that highlight the wonders of the ocean, and they take these programmes for granted as if we have always had them. It took a great mind, tremendous bravery and a pioneering spirit to do what he did – and today, we are surrounded by imagery and technology that exists because of him. And at the end of the day, the future of our species, and the survival of huge swaths of biodiversity on the planet, will depend on innovation in the spirit of Cousteau.'

'It may be difficult for younger people today to imagine just how revolutionary it was to actually see, every week in the 1970s, all of the undersea creatures that Cousteau filmed,' continued Garbus, whose deep dive into The Cousteau Society's aisles of film reels was an adventure in itself. 'Underwater filmmaking was very new at the time. And not only did he use it to popularise science and

important issues, but he also created a style of storytelling that has now become ubiquitous on TV and in film.'

At the same time that *Becoming Cousteau* celebrates his achievements, Garbus did not shy away from exploring Cousteau's flaws. 'In some ways, Cousteau was an accidental environmentalist. He took money from oil companies and mapped undersea drilling locations, he and his crew killed some of the creatures they met, and he pushed the limits of safety for his team in an effort to go deeper, further, longer. He had a complex family life, which left a wake of problems for many who loved him. But, I do feel storytelling that is an honest, as opposed to hagiographic, exploration of our heroes does them – and us – a greater service. If you are flawed, as we all are, and you can change, adapt, do better, then there is always hope for the rest of us and our planet.'

'Famously, Cousteau said that people only protect what they love, and that was the greatest gift he gave us,' Garbus says. 'He showed us the sea and inspired us to love all that was in it, and in so doing, he created generations of conservationists.'

In *Becoming Cousteau*, two-time Academy Award nominee Liz Garbus (*All In: The Fight for Democracy*, *What Happened*, *Miss Simone?* and *The Farm: Angola, USA*) worked with almost 550 hours of archival footage. This included over 240 hours of Cousteau's videos as well as footage from The Cousteau Society, which contains nearly 100 hours of rarely-seen footage from before he became one of the most important environmental figures of the 20th century. Additionally, over 100 hours of Cousteau's audio journals, interviews and conversations with cohorts and friends help make *Becoming Cousteau* an intimate and immersive experience into the life of the French explorer. Garbus eschews talking-head interviews in favour of an intricately knit pastiche of Cousteau's own words with archival and present-day audio interviews of those who knew him best in order to live and breathe in his visual world for the entirety of the film.

Production notes

BECOMING COUSTEAU

Directed by: Liz Garbus

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A Story Syndicate production

In association with: The Cousteau Society,

ACE Content, Diamond Docs

Presented by: National Geographic Documentary Films

Executive Producers: Julie Gaither, Carolyn Bernstein, Ryan Harrington

Produced by: Liz Garbus, Dan Cogan, Mridu Chandra, Evan Hayes

Co-producers: Francine Cousteau,

Pierre-Yves Cousteau, Diane Cousteau

Archival Producer: Briana Bierman

Line Producer: Elyse Hughes

Post-production Supervisor: Samantha Gordon Stoyanovich

Written by: Mark Monroe, Pax Wassermann

Motion Graphics & Visual Effects by: Design Syndicate

Edited by: Pax Wassermann

Associate Editor: Shelby Hougui

Music by: Danny Bensi, Saunder Jurriaans

Music Supervisor: Heather Kreamer

Sound Design: Daniel Timmons

Interview Recordists: Eber Pinheiro, Mike Fowler, Michaël Dravigny,

Emilie Haterrer, Julien Basseres, Dylan Schwartz

Chief Sound Engineer: Avi Laniado

Sound Engineer: Joel Schueneman

Re-recording Mixer: Tony Volante

Sound Editorial and Mix Services: Harbor

Co-supervising Sound Editors: Tony Volante, Daniel Timmons

Assistant Sound Editor: Giuseppe Cappello

With the voice of: Vincent Cassel

USA 2021

94 mins

A Dogwoof release

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