



SHIFTING LAYERS: THE FILM SCORES OF PHILIP GLASS

Kundun

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Director: Martin Scorsese

Production Companies: Touchstone Pictures,

Cappa Productions, De Fina Productions

Production Company: Refuge Productions *

Executive Producer: Laura Fattori

Producers: Barbara De Fina, Martin Scorsese,
Harrison Ford *

2nd Unit Producer: Jeanne Stack

Co-producer: Melissa Mathison

Associate Producer: Scott Harris

Unit Production Manager: Roberto Malerba

Key Location Manager: Antonio Gabrielli

Post-production Supervisor: Karen L. Thorson

British Columbia 2nd Unit Director: E.J. Foerster

Idaho 2nd Unit Director: Phil Pfeiffer

1st Assistant Director: Scott Harris

Script Supervisor: James Ellis Deakins

Casting: Ellen Lewis

Screenplay: Melissa Mathison

Director of Photography: Roger Deakins

British Columbia 2nd Unit Director of Photography:

Jan Kiesser

Idaho 2nd Unit Director of Photography:

Phil Pfeiffer

B Camera/Steadicam Operator: Peter Cavaciuti

Visual Effects: Dream Quest Images

Additional Visual Effects: Digital Domain

Additional Matte Paintings: Illusion Arts

3D Matte Painting: Matte World Digital

Senior Special Effects: Kevin Hannigan,

Renato Agostini

Sand Mandala Photography:

Phil Marco Productions Inc

Editor: Thelma Schoonmaker

Associate Editor: James Kwei

Production Designer: Dante Ferretti

Supervising Art Director: Alan Tomkins

Art Directors: Franco Ceraolo, Massimo Razzi

Set Decorator: Francesca Lo Schiavo

Costume Designer: Dante Ferretti

Wardrobe Supervisor: Bona Nasalli Rocca

Key Make-up Artist: Fabrizio Sforza

Key Hairstylist: Mirella Ginnoto

Titles Design/Production: Balsmeyer & Everett Inc

Opticals: The Effects House

Music: Philip Glass

Additional Music: Jason Kao Hwang

Additional Lyrics: Liu Yan

Tibetan Horns/Cymbals: Dhondup Namgyal Khorcho

Sound Mixer: Clive Winter

Re-recording Mixer: Tom Fleischman

Supervising Sound Editor: Philip Stockton

Effects Supervisor: Eugene Gearty

Research Supervisor: Namgyal L. Takhla

Technical Adviser: Lobsang Lhalungpa

Religious Technical Adviser: Lobsang Samten

Wranglers: Joël Proust, Jerzy Lamirowsky,

Jean-Philippe Varin

Cast:

Tenzin Thuthob Tsarong (*Dalai Lama, adult*)

Gyurme Tethong (*Dalai Lama, aged 12*)

Tulku Jamyang Kunga Tenzin

(*Dalai Lama, aged 5*)

Tenzin Yeshi Paichang (*Dalai Lama, aged 2*)

Tencho Gyampo (*mother*)

Tenzin Topjar (*Lobsang 5-10*)

Tsewang Migyur Khangsar (*father*)

Tenzin Lodoe (*Takster*)

Tsering Lhamo (*Tsering Dolma*)

Geshi Yeshi Gyatso (*Lama of Sera*)

Lobsang Gyatso (*the messenger*)

Sonam Phuntsok (*Reting Rinpoche*)

+ intro by writer Ian Haydn Smith (on Monday 5 August only)

A breathtaking visual and aural experience, Scorsese's magisterial epic charts the early life of the Dalai Lama, from his being identified, aged two, as the 14th Dalai Lama to his escape from Tibet following its annexation by China. Philip Glass, a Buddhist, worked on the film throughout the shoot and edit, combining Western and Tibetan instruments. From the earlier, playful scenes capturing a child's sense of wonder to the extended escape sequence, this is a marvel of music and image – of two artists collaborating at the height of their powers.

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From its very conception, *Kundun* had the potential to be a vainglorious disaster, or at least a dull exercise in liberal-chic. The consummate American film director of our era, Martin Scorsese's natural habitat is the tawdry dreams of hustlers, but here he is making a biographical epic about the Dalai Lama, the very embodiment of eastern serenity. Lacking a recognisable star and unloved by its corporate parent Disney – but filmed on four continents at tremendous expense – it's a movie that only someone of Scorsese's stature and ambition could have made. Perhaps Scorsese should face impossible odds and boardroom opposition more often, since the product of his perseverance is nothing short of astonishing. *Kundun* is more than a grand spectacle full of breathtakingly beautiful images (magnificent, but expected). It's a movie that uses its visual and aural palette to build something almost indescribable, revelatory and profoundly moving.

Kundun stems from a deeper and more personal source than a didactic urge to educate westerners about the tragedy of Tibet. This is a difficult film to categorise, and superficially seems completely at odds with Scorsese's body of work, even *The Last Temptation of Christ*. But the director has made sporadic attempts over the last decade to escape from the wise guys. (He may not have been completely at ease with *The Age of Innocence*, for example, but it's a much better and sexier movie than is generally recognised.) Scorsese's most memorable work – often scenes or sequences rather than whole movies – has always had a symphonic, collaborative aspect, transcending conventional notions of plot and character to create kinetic narrative from the onrushing flow of cinematography, production design and music. (He would have made great silent films – or for that matter great music videos.) With the stark, improbable beauty of its setting, its marvellously haunting score by Philip Glass and Roger Deakins' remarkable photography, *Kundun* is the apotheosis of this tendency. In it, Scorsese has gathered up everything he has learned about movies and pushed forward into a more mature and subtler kind of film-making than he has ever tried before. There's little point in arguing about whether *Kundun* is his 'best' movie, but for my money it comes dazzlingly close to the mysterious synthesis of landscape, ritual and spirituality that film can only approach once in a great while – in the best work, say, of Dovzhenko, Tarkovsky or Kurosawa.

Despite its storybook beauty and almost mythic grandeur, *Kundun* is certainly not destined to be Scorsese's most popular work. It begins slowly in the peasant household of the Dalai Lama-to-be before abruptly shifting focus to the often baffling pomp and pageantry of the monastic palace in Lhasa, and offers us no pop-psychological insight into its central character. While there was no realistic alternative to having the cast of Tibetan non-actors (headed by the composed performance of Tenzin Thuthob Tsarong as the adult Dalai

Gyatso Lukhang (*Lord Chamberlain*)
 Lobsang Samten (*master of the kitchen*)
 Tsewang Jigme Tsarong (*Taktra Rinpoche*)
 Tenzin Trinley (*Ling Rinpoche*)
 Ngawang Dorjee (*kashag/nobleman 1*)
 Phintso Thonden (*kashag/nobleman 2*)
 Chewang Tsering Ngokhang (*layman 1*)
 Jamyang Tenzin (*Norbu Thundrup*)
 Tashi Dhondup (*Lobsang, adult*)
 Jampa Lungtok (*Nechung oracle*)
 Karma Wangchuck (*deformed face bodyguard*)
 Ben Wang (*General Chang Chin-Wu*)
 Kim Chan (*sepond Chinese general*)
 Henry Yuk (*General Tan*)
 Ngawang Kaldan (*Prime Minister Lobsang Tashi*)
 Jurme Wangda (*Prime Minister Lukhangwa*)
 Robert Lin (*Chairman Mao*)
 Selden Kunga (*Tibetan doctor*)
 John Wong (*Chinese comrade*)
 Gawa Youngdung (*old woman*)
 Tenzin Rampa (*Tenzin Choneyi, aged 12*)
 Vyas Ananthakrishnan (*Indian soldier*)
 USA 1997
 134 mins
 35mm

* Uncredited

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Koyaanisqatsi

Tue 6 Aug 18:20; Sat 24 Aug 12:50; Mon 26 Aug 11:30 BFI IMAX

Powaqqatsi

Wed 7 Aug 20:40; Sat 24 Aug 15:20

Naqoqatsi

Thu 8 Aug 18:20; Sat 24 Aug 18:00

The Truman Show

Thu 8 Aug 20:30; Sat 10 Aug 18:30

The Illusionist

Fri 9 Aug 20:30; Thu 29 Aug 18:10

UK Premiere: A Place Called Music + Q&A with director Enrique M. Rizo

Sun 11 Aug 15:15

The Hours

Sun 11 Aug 18:00; Mon 26 Aug 17:30

The Philip Glass Effect

Wed 14 Aug 18:10

Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters

Wed 14 Aug 20:20

Dracula (Philip Glass Special Edition)

Thu 15 Aug 18:10

Visitors + UK Premiere: Once Within a Time

Thu 15 Aug 20:10; Tue 27 Aug 17:50

Notes on a Scandal

Fri 16 Aug 18:30; Thu 29 Aug 20:40

Jane

Sat 17 Aug 20:40; Sat 31 Aug 15:10

Kundun

Sun 18 Aug 18:00

The Thin Blue Line

Mon 19 Aug 18:10

The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara

Mon 19 Aug 20:30; Mon 26 Aug 20:10

Candyman

Fri 23 Aug 18:20

Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent

Fri 23 Aug 20:40

With thanks to

Richard Guerin, Director of Orange Mountain Music

Lama) speaking in variously accented grades of English, it's not a completely comfortable solution. But whether you like it or not, this film's uncompromising nature is one index of its unique achievement.

To their everlasting credit, Scorsese and screenwriter Melissa Mathison resist preachy explication of Buddhist theology or Tibetan politics. Instead, they use the childish curiosity of the Dalai Lama as the audience's point of access to his miraculously transformed world. After the boy is discovered and moves to Lhasa, the film explodes into a panoply of bright colours and mysterious darkneses. The child Dalai Lama doesn't comprehend the ancient complex of rituals that surrounds him – he explores the palace with all the inquisitive wonder of a plucky children's book hero, unable to sit still for meditation, fascinated by the rats who clamber on the altar (the Buddha of Compassion, whose mandate is 'to love all living things', can make no exceptions for vermin), examining the portraits of his legendary forebears.

Although we hear fragments of Buddhist catechism and tenuous reports of the mounting Chinese threat, *Kundun* advances its ideas through its many unforgettable images: the Dalai Lama among the teeming wildlife on his summer palace's grounds; the movies, newsreels and maps that introduce him to the world outside Tibet (also archly suggesting the importance the western media would ultimately play in his life); the faceless legions of the People's Liberation Army who appear in a scene that suggests both Fritz Lang and Chen Kaige. We probably learn more about Tibetan Buddhism through a wrenching scene in which monks matter-of-factly tear apart the body of the Dalai Lama's father and feed it to vultures than we would from dozens of earnest disquisitions.

Indeed, the primary representatives of the Word in *Kundun* are the Chinese Communists, who plaster the Dalai Lama's childhood home with propaganda slogans and shatter the calm of Lhasa with loudspeakers. When the Dalai Lama meets Mao in Beijing (on an amazing mid-period Commie-chic set), the author of *The Little Red Book*, in Robert Lin's portrayal, is a menacing, mercurial intellectual, one day explaining that his mother was a Buddhist and the next telling his visitor, 'Your people are poisoned and inferior.' While some leftward critics have complained that *Kundun* stacks the deck unfairly in its confrontation between Communist materialism and Buddhist spirituality, in fact Mathison's script takes pains to humanise its Chinese characters, and makes it clear that the Dalai Lama had hoped to reform the more autocratic elements of Tibetan tradition.

Kundun does indeed take place entirely within the Tibetan belief system; the legitimacy of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation is treated as a matter of course. But the movie's real concerns – as is usual with Scorsese – seem to be the nature and meaning of artistic experience, not religion or politics. *Kundun's* central visual and conceptual metaphor is the Buddhist sand painting, a colourful and elaborate mandala that monks labour over for hours or days before sweeping it away in an instant. When we first see one being made, the operative symbolism seems trite and obvious: art, like life, is ephemeral, and we vain humans must learn humility. But when we finally see the painting swept away, during the masterful and heartbreaking extended montage that concludes the film after the escaping Dalai Lama has witnessed the imminent destruction of his nation in a series of visions, the metaphor has become ironically and tragically inverted. It is the artifice, in fact, that endures; the movie we are watching will preserve for posterity both an artwork that has been destroyed and an ancient society that has largely been obliterated.

Andrew O'Hehir, *Sight and Sound*, April 1998