

WORDS FOR THE DYING

WORDS FOR THE DYING is a feature length documentary which follows John Cale from New York to London, to Moscow and back home to Wales as he tackles the most ambitious project of his career, the recording of his orchestral suite "Words for the Dying" with producer/composer Brian Eno. Wrapped around four Dylan Thomas poems sung by John and a Welch boy's choir, the music is symphonic, a clear departure from the rock music John is known for.

The film follows three main threads of conflict in cinema verite style. The first and primary struggle is to develop and record the music in its final form. When the recording begins in Moscow John is dissatisfied, hoping that key musical problems will be solved during his collaborations with Soviet, Welsh and English musicians and singers.

A second and related conflict is posed by a critique of John's music in an Amsterdam hotel room following a solo concert. Fans of his music ten years ago now question if he is still willing to take the risks required to reach new plateaus in his music. As a member of the old Velvet Underground, and later with his own bands John was considered part of the rock and roll vanguard. How does a rock and roller grow older and remain vital as a musical force?

The third conflict has to do with the making of the film and Brian's opposition to it. The filmmakers are not initially aware of the fact that Brian is extremely distracted by the presence of cameras and is also opposed to what he considers to be the false pretenses of cinema verite filming. The restrictions he places on the filming and the cat and mouse games director Rob Nilsson plays to get around them, create an unprecedented atmosphere, tense and explosive but also funny.

The film follows these three conflicts through recording studios in Moscow, Cardiff, London and Woodbridge. The music is deceptively simple. Problems of performance and interpretation come up at every stage. Brian is the cool and accomplished master of details, John the impatient creator. While Brian relies on finesse, John worries, bullies, muscles the music into shape.

Interspersed with these struggles will be encounters with some of the fascinating characters we met- the wonderful Russian bassist Rodion, John's mother Margaret who lives in a nursing home in Wales, Avdotya Smirnoff, a young outspoken Russian art critic, and John's irrepressible daughter Eden. Black market encounters in mens rooms and in front of Lenin's tomb

in Red Square, will be mixed with visits to Russian bands and composers including Brigada S, Svuki Mu and composer Camille- creating a collage of Soviet music from symphonic to avant garde.

The success of John's struggle to find new directions in his musical career is revealed in a climactic scene on top of a 12th Century castle towering over the fields and hills of John's childhood. There we show him a videotape of his Amsterdam fans' critique. The triumph of John's new music, rising up as John walks away from the cliff top and the camera pans the green Welch countryside answers the question most eloquently. John is an artist and his music is still moving and powerful.

In the same way the resolution of the conflict between Brian and Rob Nilsson, the film director, is the film itself. Brian is dubious. He doesn't believe that the film can succeed. Cinema verite is an artifice which pretends to a kind of objective truthfulness. Films about people "being creative" are tedious.

We, the filmmakers argue we are not pretending to be objective. We are making a complimentary kind of art, interpretive of and accompanying that of the composers. We believe our film explores this conflict and the others in an innovative way. We have made our own labor of love and have been fascinated by our explorations into the creative process. Audiences will be too.