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## **Legendary Filmmaker Agnès Varda Muses Over Love, Memory and Art In POV's "The Beaches of Agnès" on Tuesday, June 29, 2010 on PBS**

Famed French Director/Photographer Crafts Playful, Touching Memoir of a Life  
Shaped by Art, the French "New Wave," Feminism and Cinematic Magic

"She is a great director and a beautiful, lovable and wise woman, through and through. . . . Her greatest triumph is her life itself. . . . If you have not seen a single film by Agnès Varda, perhaps it is best if you start with 'The Beaches of Agnès.'" – Roger Ebert, *The Chicago Sun-Times*

Agnès Varda may not be a household name in America, though many filmgoers know her for such international hits as "Vagabond," "Cléo From 5 to 7" and "One Sings, the Other Doesn't." After the broadcast of **The Beaches of Agnès** on PBS' **POV (Point of View)** series, the 81-year-old Varda's mischievous and touching autobiography as refracted through her movies, she may find herself a late-blooming American celebrity. That would be a strange turn of events for a woman usually associated with the legendary French *Nouvelle Vague* ("New Wave") of filmmaking, comprising the work of such art-house luminaries as Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Alain Resnais and her late husband, Jacques Demy. But then, as Varda tells it, nothing could be stranger than finding herself, in **The Beaches of Agnès**, playing "a little old lady, pleasantly plump."

Agnès Varda's **The Beaches of Agnès** has its American broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, June 29, 2010** at 10 p.m. on PBS as part of the 23rd season of **POV**. The series' regular season continues on Tuesdays through Sept. 21 and concludes with a fall special. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, **POV** is the recipient of a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking as well as the International Documentary Association's 2009 IDA Award for Continuing Series.

Winner of numerous awards, including the French César for Best Documentary, **The Beaches of Agnès** is a many-mirrored take on a life lived making movies. For Varda, whose movies and art installations freely mix documentary realism and social commentary with an experimental style, memory survives through film. And so, in **The Beaches of Agnès**, she revisits her Belgian youth, adolescence in occupied Paris, early photographic work, marriage to director Jacques Demy ("The Umbrellas of Cherbourg") and social activism by telling the story of the making of each of her films. Along the way, she employs all the magic of cinema to juxtapose the real and the imagined, memory and the present and pain and joy, achieving an intriguing blend of playfulness and seriousness, of high and low laughs.

For one thing, her friend, the acclaimed and elusive master of poetic cinema Chris Marker ("The Pier," "Without Sun"), keeps showing up as an animated orange cat providing pithy comments in a digitally altered voice. For another, Varda uses her photos and film clips, often shown in the frame of present day re-enactments — or vice versa — to give a dizzying sense of the filmmaker's power to mold vision. This characteristic double-mirroring of art and life turns **The Beaches of Agnès** into a simultaneously funny and elegiac exploration of the relationship between memory and art. Varda connects the film's title to the real beaches that have figured prominently in her life, but the other

shoe drops when a tight shot of Varda working on a beach with her production staff in bathing suits widens to show that they are actually on a Paris street in front of her home, standing on a pile of sand Varda had trucked in.

Appearing both as they were and as they are today are members of her family, son Mathieu Demy, an actor, and daughter Rosalie Varda-Demy, an actress and costume designer, and the ordinary people who crossed her path and entered her films, such as the local fishermen from her first film, "La Pointe Courte" (1955). Varda also brings into the frame her many friends and collaborators, including directors Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard; French actors Gérard Depardieu, Catherine Deneuve, Michel Piccoli and Philippe Noiret (who starred in "La Pointe Courte"); British actress Jane Birkin; and American icons Harrison Ford, Robert De Niro and the late Jim Morrison.

Varda's visits to the locales of her past, and to the people who inhabited them, whether they have survived or not, create a patina of wistfulness that never gives way to sentimentality. Much of her joy and pain is wrapped up in memories of her marriage to Demy and of his death from AIDS (which Varda confirms for the first time in this film) in 1990. Most touchingly, Varda recalls her making of the documentary "Jacquot de Nantes," an account of Demy's childhood and lifelong love of theater and cinema — a film he wanted to make but could not. This sequence offers the most concrete and layered expression of Varda's (and Demy's) conflation of love, memory and cinema in the face of death.

Many have identified Varda with the French New Wave of Godard *et al.* She certainly worked and associated with the members of that group, came of filmmaking age with them and, as the only female director among them, attracted a good deal of attention from them and from the press. Her film "La Pointe Courte," a commercial flop, was even retrospectively named a precursor of the New Wave — further testament to the restless, experimental approach to filmmaking Varda shared with the *Nouvelle Vague*. But **The Beaches of Agnès** reveals an artist whose originality has taken her well beyond any label and into an idiosyncratic realm where love and loss, realism and fantasy, the impulse to document life and the impulse to re-imagine it freely contend with each other and embrace.

In short, you don't need to know anything about Varda or the French New Wave to enjoy this delightfully unconventional, visually beautiful, whimsical and touching memoir of a creative life well-lived and well-filmed.

"I wanted to be like a bird," Varda recently told A.O. Scott in an interview in *The New York Times*. "I wanted to be free in my memory, to go from one part to another and see what I would find."

**The Beaches of Agnès** is a production of Cine-Tamaris.

#### **About the Filmmaker:**

##### **Agnès Varda (Director/Writer)**

Born May 30, 1928, in Brussels, Belgium to a Greek father and French mother, Paris-based Agnès Varda has been a leading figure in French and international filmmaking for over 50 years. Trained in art and photography, she made her first film, "La Pointe Courte," in 1955 with the encouragement of filmmaker Alain Resnais (who served as its editor). Based on a William Faulkner short story, it is considered by many to have anticipated the French New Wave.

Her major films include "Cléo From 5 to 7," "Happiness," "One Sings, the Other Doesn't," "Kung-fu Master!," "Jacquot de Nantes," "One Hundred and One Nights" and "The Gleaners and I." In addition to her own films, Varda has written dialogue for the works of others, most notably for Bernardo Bertolucci's "Last Tango in Paris." She also served as producer for Jacques Demy's "Lady Oscar." Among the many awards bestowed upon Varda have been the Prix Méliès for "Cléo From 5 to 7," the Prix Louis-Delluc and Berlin Film Festival Special Award for "Le Bonheur" and the Venice Film Festival Golden Lion for "Vagabond." **The Beaches of Agnès** has received the César (France's

equivalent of the Oscar) for Best Documentary and a Directors Guild of America nomination for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentary. On April 12, 2009, she was given the rank of Commandeur of the French Legion of Honor.

#### **Credits:**

Director/Writer: Agnès Varda  
Co-producers: Agnès Varda, Thomas E. Taplin, Lisa Blok-Linson  
Cinematographers: Julia Fabry, Hélène Louvart, Arlene Nelson, Alain Sakot, Agnès Varda  
Editors: Baptiste Filloux, Jean-Baptiste Morin  
Original Music: Joanna Bruzdowicz, Stéphane Vilar  
  
Running Time: 116:46

#### **POV Series Credits:**

Executive Producer: Simon Kilmurry  
Vice President: Cynthia López

#### **Awards & Festivals:**

- Best Nonfiction Film, National Society of Film Critics (USA) Award, 2010
- Best Documentary Nominee, Online Film Critics Society Awards, 2010
- Best Documentary, César Awards (France), 2009
- Best Documentary Nominee, European Film Awards, 2009
- Best Documentary/Non-fiction Film, Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards, 2009
- Best Motion Picture/Documentary, Satellite Awards, 2009
- Best Documentary, Étoiles d'Or, 2009
- Official Selection, Toronto International Film Festival, 2009



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 23rd season on PBS in 2010, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers.

Airing June through September, with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 275 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV's Borders*. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information is available at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

#### ***POV Interactive*** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

POV's award-winning Web department produces special features for every POV presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. POV Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *POV's Borders*. In addition, the *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The POV website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

#### ***POV Community Engagement and Education***

POV works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, POV offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, POV's *Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

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**American Documentary, Inc.** ([www.amdoc.org](http://www.amdoc.org))

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | POV; Cynthia Lopez is vice president.



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