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PRESENT
OH MY GOD?

A film by Peter Rodger

2009, 98 Minutes



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SHORT SYNOPSIS

In every corner of the world, there's one question that can never be definitively answered, yet stirs up equal parts passion, curiosity, self-reflection and often wild imagination: "What is God?" Filmmaker Peter Rodger explores this profound, age-old query in the provocative non-fiction feature "Oh My God?"

This visual odyssey travels the globe with a revealing lens examining the idea of God through the minds and eyes of various religions and cultures, everyday people, spiritual leaders and celebrities. His goal: to give the viewer the personal, visceral experience of some kind of reasonable, meaningful definition of one of the most used--some might say overused--words in most every language.

Rodger's quest takes him from the United States to Africa, from the Middle East to the Far East, where such fundamental issues as: "Did God create man or did man create God?", "Is there one God for all religions?" and "If God exists, why does he allow so much suffering?" are explored in candid discussions with the various Christians, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and even atheists the filmmaker meets along the way. But maybe it's former Beatle Ringo Starr who sums it up best here when he simply says, "God is love."

Rodger would like viewers to come away with a feeling of having an amazing journey - seeing places they would never see normally, hearing music that inspires and words that educate, bringing understanding and tolerance of other individuals that in turn enriches their own existence.

"Oh My God?" stars Hugh Jackman, Seal, Ringo Starr, Sir Bob Geldof, Princess Michael of Kent, David Copperfield and Jack Thompson.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In every corner of the world, from the United States to Africa, from the Middle East to the Far East, there's one question that can never be definitively answered, yet stirs up equal parts passion, curiosity, self-reflection and often wild imagination: "What is God?" Is God a person? A concept? A thing? Is he explainable? Is he even a "he?" Is God over-politicized? Over-marketed? Overrated?

Filmmaker Peter Rodger explores this profound, age-old question in the provocative non-fiction feature "Oh My God?" in which he travels the globe examining the idea of God through the minds and eyes of various religions and cultures, everyday people, spiritual leaders and celebrities, in an attempt to zero in on some kind of reasonable, meaningful definition of one of the most used--some might say overused--words in most every language.

Rodger begins his journey in the United States where he talks with folks ranging from a born again Texas gun shop owner to Hurricane Katrina survivors to a human behavioral specialist who discuss such fundamental issues as "Did God create man or did man create God?" and "Is there one God for all religions?" An Arizona Native American considers God "a holy man who helps teach humankind to help each other," while singer/songwriter Seal considers God to be "infinite energy." Magician David Copperfield wonders whether, ages ago, his kind of mystifying powers might have elevated him to "godlike" status, while musician/political activist Bob Geldof firmly believes God is an "impediment to living this life."

In India, a group of Hindu, Muslim and Christian schoolchildren generally agree that "God is one," while a pair of older men wonder, "if religion teaches love of humanity, then why do religions fight?" A philosopher answers that fighting occurs "when people try to say that their God is the only one," which leads to the eternal question: "If God exists, why does he allow so much suffering?" A philanthropist spends her life helping the diseased and suffering and attributes her selfless commitment to her strict Catholic upbringing; those she helps often call her "the face of God."

In the Northern territories of Australia we witness the tribal dances and ritual celebrations of the Aborigines, the world's oldest cultural group, who contend "they don't pray to God, they sing about God." On a more glamorous note, Oscar-nominated director Baz Luhrmann, interviewed on the set of his epic film "Australia," says "Religion is man's attempt to communicate with God," while his film's star, Hugh Jackman, grapples with the amorphousness of the meaning of God.

On colorful Bali, also known as the "Island of the Gods," a Hindu priest decrees God "the supreme, the almighty, the creator of the universe," while a psycho anthropologist considers God a "direction, an indication of a course rather than a destination."

Travelling to Little Tibet in the middle of the towering Himalayas, residents consider their home "very close to God." We hear several inspiring Buddhist philosophies which include: not fighting with others to prove superiority and the need to look at things the way they are, not the way one thinks they should be. These kinds of thoughts dominate the Buddhist religion's teachings of spirituality over the concept of an absolute creator God.

Arriving in Kenya, filmmaker Rodger pinpoints four key reasons why he thinks people believe in God: We have no idea how we got here, so God is the creator; good deeds buy you a place in heaven, therefore God is the policeman; we fear death, so God is the giver of eternal life; and God is the scapegoat for when things go wrong.

On Eastern Africa's vast plains and savannas we meet the vibrant Maasai tribes people who believe in animal sacrifices (one is vividly documented here), have been introduced to Christianity over the years, and "only know one God." A stop at a seemingly arbitrary spot on the Kenya/Tanzania border offers a simple metaphor for how boundaries are drawn by man, not by God.

Next up is one of the world's most volatile locations: Israel and the Palestine territories. Jews and Muslims speak openly about how their battle is over land, not religion, and how there's a strong desire among most of the area's inhabitants to arrive at a peaceful solution to a Palestinian state. Meanwhile, a rabbi embraces the ideal that nobody represents God, but rather that God is the space between us.

The globe-trot continues: Amid the ancient ruins of Tikal, Guatemala, a guide tells how the Mayans considered it an honor to be sacrificed to their Gods. In Kashmir, why Muslims fight or "jihad" in the name of Allah is discussed. In Mexico, young Catholics debate if God gives reason to life or if he's strictly a "business;" Rodger cameras also capture the annual pilgrimage to the Virgin of Guadalupe, long considered "a woman from heaven." In Vatican City, God is described as a comfort and as a way to give people "proportion;" it's also theorized there's something "innate" in man that seeks God. In Los Angeles, an Imam (religious director) explains the danger in misinterpreting the Koran, while a Palm Springs minister declares much of the Koran was inspired by the devil himself.

In Japan, from the streets to the temples, from Zen masters to monks to Shinto priests, God is variously described as "the essence of nature," "something that is always present behind us," "something you need to feel in your heart," and what "guides us onto a proper path." A member of a hip Tokyo drum trio equates drumming with God: "What you put into it determines what you get back."

Finally, a visit to a children's cancer center puts the concept of God to perhaps the ultimate test. "When I'm weak, he makes me stronger," says one courageous young patient, with the utmost conviction. But maybe it's former Beatle Ringo Starr who sums it up best here when he simply says, "God is love."

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Renowned commercial director and photographer Peter Rodger decided it was finally time to examine a concept that has intrigued, baffled and divided people for thousands of years: "What is God?" So, over the course of two-and-a-half years, armed with a skeletal two-man crew and a pair of digital HD cameras, Rodger travelled all over the world documenting the far-flung answers to one of life's most complex and intangible questions. The result is "Oh My God?," a visually dazzling, boldly thought-provoking non-fiction film that leaves few stones unturned in its quest for answers.

"I was fed up with the childish schoolyard mentality that permeates this world, what I call the "My God is Greater than Your God" syndrome," says Peter Rodger, who served as the film's writer, director, producer and cinematographer. "My goal was to find out what this entity that goes by the name of God means to people. Why is there so much turmoil, upheaval and war in the name of God? I came to realize that the problems are what Man does with God, how Man uses God to control others, and how religion has often twisted the true essence of the preaching of its prophets to mean quite the opposite of what they intended."

Adds the first-time filmmaker, "When I realized the role Man has played in the question of God, I knew I had to film." Rodger asserts he set out to be as "objective" as possible. "I wanted to get as far away from preconceived ideas as I could," the filmmaker explains. "By throwing out the question in an interview as "What is God?" instead of "Who is God?" it makes the interviewee look at God from the outside in rather than from the inside out. It helps quench preconceptions."

So, starting in 2006, Rodger committed to an ambitious, initially self-financed journey to shoot a host of societal and religious perspectives on God. Choosing his travel sites was largely predetermined by the various places followers of the world's most dominant religions called home. Says Rodger, "You can't make a film about what people think God is without going to the Holy Land. Indigenous cultures were as important, so Australia, the United States and tribal Africa were a must. Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims had to be represented, so that dictated visiting India, Bali, Rome, Mexico, Morocco, Turkey, Palestinian Territories, the U.K. and so on."

Rodger turned over his trip scheduling to American Express Platinum Travel and, after three weeks filming across the U.S., set out on a 73-day, non-stop shoot that would eventually take Rodger and line producer Patrick Ellis (who doubled as the sound man) to various parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Unfortunately, bad timing combined with a stroke of bad luck, stopped the production's international shoot before it even began. That's because Rodger's Los Angeles departure to his first stop, Morocco, coincided with the day an alleged, U.K.-emanated terrorist plot to blow up ten transatlantic aircrafts with liquid explosives was foiled by Scotland Yard. "It was the first day in aviation history that hand luggage was completely banned," recalls Rodger. "We had to check everything and, when I arrived in Tangiers, my baggage never rolled out on the conveyor. I never saw my equipment or anything else again."

Undeterred, Rodger picked up the pieces, repurchased his production equipment with insurance money, reprogrammed his camera and, two months later, started over. Strangely, the setback might have all been for the best. "Because of the delay, I hit a frequency of events of being in the right place at the right time, something that never would've happened if I'd started shooting two months earlier," affirms Rodger. "In over 227 [eventual total] shooting days, I didn't have a single weather problem. When I wanted sun, I had it; when I wanted rain, I had it; when I wanted a rainbow--there it was!" He adds, "I have learned that out of every negative there is a positive of exactly the same magnitude, maybe not exactly at the same time, but there is one."

After the first leg of production concluded, Rodger took a winter vacation break. He then resumed shooting over the next two years in a series of individual trips that included stretches in Europe, Latin America, and, again, Asia and the United States. Though Rodger also wanted to shoot in such countries

as China, Iraq and Afghanistan, the political climate, access issues, and safety concerns made it virtually impossible for the filmmaker to go in and obtain the kind of footage he felt he really needed.

Rodger did, however, manage to find Muslim Militants to interview, though it meant travelling deep into the hidden areas of Northern India's state of Jammu and Kashmir. "I had help from powerful friends," reveals Rodger. "But getting these extremists to talk on camera, given language barriers and the very charged nature of the questions, was difficult. Underneath it all, they're just poor, ill-educated villagers who are scared and brainwashed into carrying out evil men's work."

With his minimal camera equipment and two-man crew (the film's composer, Alexander van Bubenheim, later subbed for line producer Ellis) Rodger was generally able to work under the radar, attracting little if any attention as he shot. "We could sneak in and sneak out and no one would know we were making a theatrically releasable movie," says Rodger. "Furthermore, as this was a documentary, there didn't have to be continuity from scene to scene like in a drama. That gave me enormous license to just put people where the light was right and use the resources I had in front of my eyes rather than having to create a scene to match the one before."

Rodger found himself in front of the camera for much of the shoot as well, taking on the role of the movie's guide and narrator "just in case." It wasn't until he and editor John Hoyt began assembling the film that Rodger was convinced he needed the kind of connective tissue a narrator can provide. "My character in the film, as minimal as it is, helps to break things up, keep the film on track, and give it a certain arc and structure," notes Rodger.

The filmmaker, who admits he discovered the movie's eventual structure only after reviewing all the footage with editor Hoyt, ended up with a lengthy 200 hours of digital video to whittle down into a workable feature. He was under no illusion that would be an easy task. "When you edit something like this you have to be extremely ruthless in cutting to manageable length," says the multi-award winning commercial director, whose clients have included Toyota, Coca Cola, Canon, U.S. West, and the National Resources Defense Council. It took 13 months of editing, along with a production, post-production and distribution budget augmented by South American investor Horacio Altamirano, but Rodger deftly delivered a 98-minute movie event with the breadth, depth, and look of a film far beyond what was spent to bring this one to life.

"Oh My God?" had its world premiere in July, 2009 at the Jerusalem International Film Festival. "The response there was phenomenal," says Rodger. "The audience really lapped up the global objective questioning that goes on in the film." He adds, "I'm happy to say that none of the Palestinians or Israelis I've shown the film to have been offended. The reaction was charged, but they embraced and loved the film."

As for Rodger, the experience of making this unique movie made him realize, "We all have a responsibility to live our lives with tolerance and understanding for our fellow man." He adds, "I also learned that hostility is manufactured by power-seeking humans and has nothing to do with God. The world is way more united than divided, even though most of us are conditioned to believe otherwise."

Concludes the filmmaker, "You only have to look into children's eyes to see the spark of this 'thing' that is common to all of us. It is the glue that binds us all together."

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ABOUT FILMMAKER PETER RODGER

Peter Rodger grew up looking through a camera lens. As a teenager, the award-winning British director honed his skills by assisting his father, George Rodger, the renowned photo-journalist and co-founder of Magnum Photos.

After completing his education at England's Maidstone College of Art, his skill with the lens made him one of the most sought-after talents in the European and United States Advertising Industry, shooting numerous car, clothing and cosmetics companies' print and commercial campaigns in over forty different countries.

Peter has exhibited his fine art work all over the world and has won numerous awards for his filmed work including several Telly Awards.

Peter has penned seven screenplays – including “Bystander” – to be shot 2010; “Comfort of The Storm” – entering pre-production Autumn 2009 and “Publication Day” – In development.

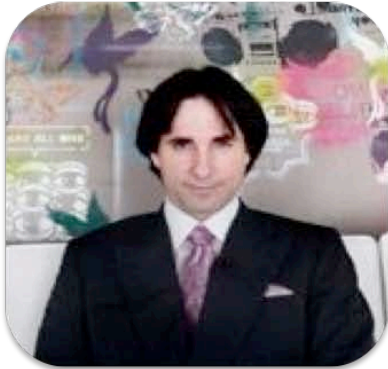
After two-and-a-half years of filming across 23 countries, Peter has just completed producing and directing the epic non-fiction, documentary film entitled “Oh My God?” – which explores people’s diverse opinions and perceptions of God.

Peter resides in Los Angeles with his wife and children.

www.peterrodger.com



David Copperfield is an Emmy Award-winning American Illusionist described by Forbes in 2006 as the most commercially successful magician in history. Best known for his combination of storytelling and illusion, Copperfield has so far sold 40 million tickets and grossed over \$1 billion.



Dr. John F. Demartini, is one of the teachers featured in the inspirational hit movie, "The Secret." His programs explore diverse topics ranging from the sacred healing of ancient cultures to cutting edge personal development technologies. Best-selling author of *Count Your Blessings*, *You Can Have an Amazing Life in Just 60 Days*, *The Healing Power of Gratitude and Love & The Breakthrough Experience*, *A Revolutionary New Approach to Personal Transformation*. Two of his most popular workshops include "The Breakthrough Experience" and "The Demartini Method."



Sir Bob Geldof is an Irish singer, songwriter, author, and political activist. He rose to prominence as the lead singer of the Irish rock band The Boomtown Rats, which had hits with his compositions "Rat Trap" and "I Don't Like Mondays". He co-wrote "Do They Know It's Christmas?", one of the best-selling singles of all time. He also starred as Pink in Pink Floyd's 1982 film *Pink Floyd The Wall*. Geldof's humanitarian efforts have included "Live Aid" that raised tens of millions of dollars for famine relief in Ethiopia.



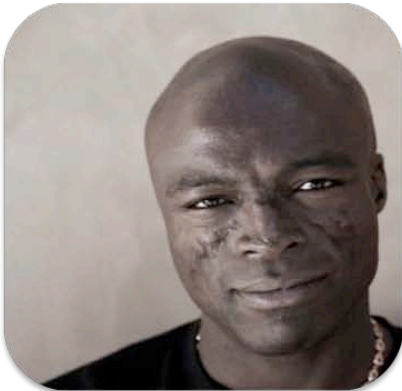
Hugh Jackman is an Australian actor and producer who is involved in film, musical theatre and television. He has won international recognition for his roles as Wolverine in the *X-Men* series, plus *Kate & Leopold*, *Van Helsing*, *The Prestige*, and *Australia*. Jackman is a singer, dancer and actor in stage musicals, and won a Tony Award for his role in *The Boy from Oz*. A three-time host of the Tony Awards, Jackman hosted the 81st Academy Awards on February 22, 2009.



Baz Luhrmann is a Golden Globe and Academy award-nominated Australian film director, screenwriter, and producer best known for the trio of films, *Strictly Ballroom*, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* and *Moulin Rouge!* All adhere to a specific style developed by Luhrmann and his collaborators that he has dubbed "the Red Curtain".



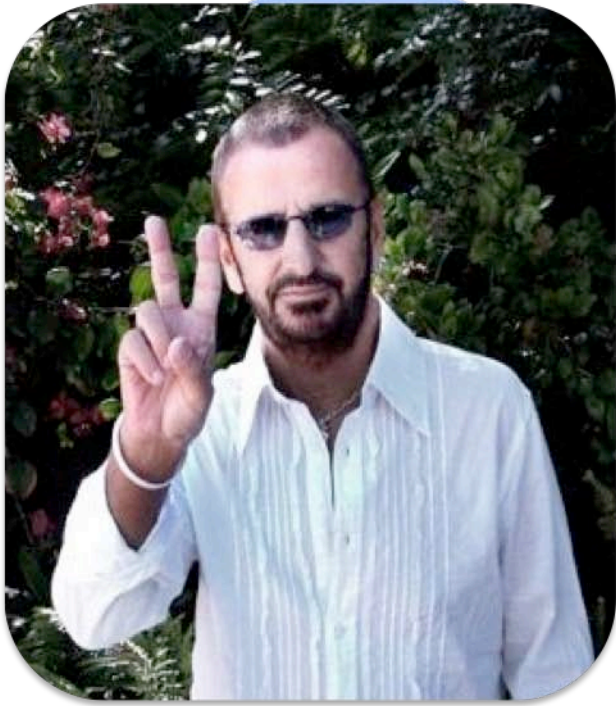
HRH Princess Michael of Kent is a member of the British Royal Family. She is married to Prince Michael of Kent, who is a grandson of King George V. Princess Michael is an author, and has published several books on the royal families of Europe. She also undertakes lecture tours, and supports her husband in his public work. The Kents do not officially carry out royal duties, although they have on occasion represented Queen Elizabeth II at functions abroad.



Seal emerged from England's house music scene in the early '90s to become the most popular British soul vocalist of the decade. By the mid-'90s he had created a distinctive fusion of soul, folk, pop, dance, and rock that brought him success on both sides of the Atlantic. The singer-songwriter Seal shot up to the top of the charts the old-fashioned way: through superior songwriting, polished production, and the discipline and dedication required to survive and succeed in the music industry. Seal's lineage can be traced to Nigerian, Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean roots; it is thus no surprise that his music transcends genres and appeals to a wide array of listeners.



Jack Thompson is one of the major figures of Australian cinema. He is best known as a lead actor in several acclaimed Australian films including popular classics *Sunday Too Far Away*, *The Man from Snowy River* and *Breaker Morant*. He won Cannes and AFI acting awards for the latter film. He was the recipient of a Living Legend Award at the 2005 Inside Film Awards.



Ringo Starr is an English musician, singer-songwriter, and actor who gained worldwide fame as the drummer for the rock group The Beatles. In addition to his contribution as drummer, Starr featured as lead singer on a number of successful Beatles songs (in particular, "With a Little Help from My Friends" and "Yellow Submarine"), and also as songwriter with the songs "Don't Pass Me By", "Octopus's Garden", and in collaboration with the other members, the songs "What Goes On", "Flying", and "Dig It". Starr is the most documented actor of The Beatles, playing the central character in several Beatles films, and has appeared in numerous other films both during and after his time with The Beatles. After The Beatles' break-up in 1970, Starr achieved commercial success with a number of solo singles and albums, and continued occasional work with each of his fellow ex-Beatles as they too developed their post-Beatles musical careers. He has also featured in a number of TV documentaries, hosted TV shows, and acted as the narrator for the children's TV series *Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends*. He now tours with Ringo Starr & His All-Starr Band.

Q & A WITH "OH MY GOD" FILMMAKER PETER RODGER

Q. What was your inspiration for making your epic documentary film, OH MY GOD?

I was frustrated with the childish schoolyard mentality that permeates this world -- I call it the "My God Is Greater Than Your God" syndrome -- where you have grown men flying airplanes into buildings shouting "God is Great" -- where you have the leader of the free world telling the BBC in 2003 that he invaded Iraq because God told him to -- where you have the constitution of a country (Iran) that dictates that its supreme leader is God's representative on earth -- where you have young men and women blowing themselves up (and innocent others) to buy a place into heaven. None of these concepts made any sense to me. Does it matter what I believe? Does it matter what you believe? And what is this entity that goes by the name of God, which seems to bring about so much friction, hurt and pain? I decided to go around the world and ask people what they think.

Q. Why did you ask, 'What is God?' versus 'Who is God?,' since most of us personalize God in some form or another?

I wanted to look at God as a concept and be as objective as possible. Referring to God as "who" is already putting the concept into the image of Man and therefore the objectivity becomes lost. I wanted to get as far away from preconceived ideas as possible to see what I would find. I felt that phrasing the question as "what is..." instead of "who is..." would make the interviewee immediately look at God from the outside-in rather than the inside-out, and thereby help quench preconceptions. I wanted the film to have a wide application and ultimately get to the question, "Did God create man, or did man create God?"

Q. Did you set out with a goal in mind? Did you find a common theme in the answers you received?

My goal was to find out what "God" means to people, and to determine whether religion and religious people were causing all the world's problems. There was such commonality in all the responses that at one point I didn't even think I had a film. It was frustrating because all the answers seemed to be the same from all over the world. "God is everything..." "God is the creator..." "God is in the birds and the bees in the trees..." "God is the energy that binds us all together..." etc., etc. And then it occurred to me that if there are all these placid descriptions, why is there so much turmoil, upheaval and war in the name of God? I realized that the problem in the world may be what Man does with "God" -- how he uses it to control other men, how he twists the preaching of its prophets to create politicized clubs that serve his narrow ends. When I realized that it was Man creating God in his own image, I knew I had a film.

Q. What criterion were set in place for which countries you visited and interviewees you sought? Did you try to interview leaders such as the Dalai Lama or the Pope?

I had to have representation from as many diverse places as possible in order to capture as wide a spectrum of faith expressions as possible. You can't, of course, make a film about who or what people think God is without going to the Holy Land. Indigenous cultures are also important, so Australia, the United States and Tribal Africa were a must. I wanted celebrities in the film to help navigate us through, so their geographical locations and schedules became a factor. Then Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Muslims had to be represented somewhere, so that dictated India, Bali, Rome, Mexico, Morocco, Turkey, the Palestinian Territories, UK. I wanted the Mayans in there too, so Guatemala... Put all of that in a

melting pot and I passed the buck over to American Express Platinum Travel and that's how we made the schedule!

Most religious leaders turned us down -- and I am very thankful that they did, because they are all "professional God people," so all I would have gotten was politicized rhetoric and theology. The film is not about religion and its leaders. The film is about who or what people think God is. If I had the Dalai Lama in the film, I would've had to have the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and then Ali Khamenei and other religious people and my film would be really, really boring.

Q. Is that why you decided to include so many everyday people and 'man on the street' insights?

Yes, that is precisely the intent of the film – to find out what God means to the common man – not just professional God people, politicians and celebrities, but "normal" people.

Q. How were you able to capture such personal insights about God and religion from so many notable celebrities?

I asked them one simple question: "What is God?" They did the rest. Then, based upon their answers, I would take it to the next level until we were yapping away. All of them were colorful and gracious and I am very grateful for the time and effort they contributed to the film.

Q Is it true you that encountered some difficulties when you first set out to make this film and almost gave it up?

My first trip in 2006 was to Morocco and I chose the same day to fly that the British terrorist plot to blow up planes with liquid explosives was foiled by Scotland Yard. I was flying out of LAX to Tangiers via Heathrow with all my camera equipment. Normally you take the important stuff as hand luggage -- phone, camera, notes, lenses, computer, stock, etc., but this was the first day in aviation history that hand luggage was completely banned. We had to check everything into the hold and needless to say, I never saw my equipment, notes, or toothbrush again. Because of the delay, however, I hit on a succession of events in which I was in the right place at the right time, something that would never have happened if I had started shooting two months earlier. In over 227 shooting days, I didn't have a single weather problem. So I've come to believe that out of every negative there is a positive of exactly the same magnitude -- maybe not exactly at the same time, but there always is one.

Q. What moved or surprised you the most on your filmmaking journey?

How very small the world is. How similar all of us are and how blind most of us are to that fact. The similarities in belief-systems transcend time and geographical boundaries and this was the case long before the birth of the telephone, the airplane and the internet. I was also moved by the enormous desire for peace on the part of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. It is very clear to me that it is the politicians who are messing that situation up. It doesn't seem to be a conflict of religion at all. It is a conflict of Land, politics and EMOTION.

Q. Did you meet anyone who made a powerful spiritual impact on you?

Kanju Tanaka, the Zen master in Kyoto, was my favorite for inspiration. As soon as I walked into his temple, I had an unbelievable feeling. That temple is one of most peaceful places in Kyoto, and when he sat us down for tea I choked up. There was such a vibe! I want to go back and spend three weeks scraping his gravel. He made so much sense in so few words. The other guy I really liked was Sonkyo Takito. He's the 105th superior priest of Shitennoji temple in Osaka. Those guys really did it for me. I was also moved by the generosity of the Indian people – the Hindus and the Sikhs especially - and also by the Maasai in Kenya, a wonderfully cultured group in their own simple way. Kind people with big skies.

Q. Any personal spiritual insights from your journey?

That the natural human instinct within each one of us from the day we are born seems to be what the prophets would call, "Godliness." It became very clear that this beautiful humanity does exist across the world and it is very unfortunate that human beings twist it to their own way of thinking in the name of God. I acquired the sense that we are much more united on this earth than divided. You only have to look into children's eyes to see the spark of this "thing" that is common to all of us. It is the glue that binds us all together.

Q. Speaking of children, the children in the cancer center you interviewed were extremely touching and profound. What made you decide to interview them?

Children seem to be vessels of what can be described as Godliness. I love the truth of children, the generosity of their spirits. I felt that the most accurate or inspired opinion on God could come from a child who is facing possible death. A young one who can't be running around with friends today because he is lying in a hospital bed with a shaved head, in pain, vomiting, and thinking whether he's going to climb out of this predicament or not. What would his views on God be? I learned so much from these children. Hanging out with them, I have to say, was one of the most harrowing and rewarding experiences of my life. The courage, the confidence, the wisdom and the grace that came out of those little people made me grow up a little more, made me learn a lot and made me thankful that my own children are healthy, that I am healthy, and that we really have no right to complain about our silly little things. When we bitch about someone else because they belong to a different "club" than we do, well, we're just missing the point. And when I asked Christian, one of the children, what his biggest wish was, well, his answer -- and I'm not going to give it away -- let's just say it blew me away.

Q. Your worldwide premiere of the film took place at the Jerusalem International Film Festival. What was it like debuting in the Holy Land and what sort of response did you receive from the audience?

The response was phenomenal. Q/A sessions that were meant to be only 20 minutes wouldn't end. It is such a charged place, the Holy Land, as far as God is concerned, that the audience really lapped up the global objective questioning that goes on in the film. Of course, there is a whole section in the film on the Israeli-Palestinian issue (it's very difficult to make a film about what people think God is without including such a subject) so of course that section was under a lot of scrutiny. I am happy to say that none of the Palestinians I have shown the film to have been offended and no Israelis I have shown the film to have been offended. PHEW! But the reaction was certainly charged. They embraced and loved the film there. It took us eight weeks to edit that section.

Q. Did you encounter any danger in certain areas? For example, how were you able to capture insights from Muslim extremists?

Finding Muslim extremists to talk on camera was extremely hard, as you might imagine. In the end the best and most radical English-speaking gentleman came to me -- quite by chance. I was shooting in a mosque -- somewhere in the world that I don't wish to divulge, and as I exited, he aggressively approached me and asked in very good English, "Are you Muslim?" I said I was not. Then he said, "Then what was I doing in the mosque?" I said I was filming and why couldn't I be in the mosque anyway? He said that non-Muslims were not allowed in the mosque, and that I should not be there. I said, "Really? Well you know what -- I'd love to ask you some questions about this. Would it be possible to film you?" I told him what the film was about and surprisingly he agreed. I cancelled my afternoon shoot (I had a whole load of stuff lined up) and spent the rest of the day with him. He was very accommodating and spoke his mind.

Finding Muslim militant terrorists was tough indeed and took over a year. I had to go up into hidden areas of Kashmir and find them. I had help from powerful friends. Getting them to talk on camera with language barriers and the very charged nature of the questions was difficult. The point is, most of these extremists are just poor, ill-educated villagers that are promised better food, living conditions and support of their families – as well as salvation in the afterlife – if they join the Taliban or other extremist Jihadist groups. Underneath it all, they are just scared human beings who are being brainwashed into carrying out evil acts. Their evil leaders are not going to talk on my camera -- especially as I was a one-man-show, without a CNN or BBC behind me. What you did not see was behind my camera: I had about 17 armed guards with machine guns – my “escort.” So this was one of those moments. We made it to the village and found the guys who were going to talk. I set up my camera and turned it on. NOTHING. It was dead. Something was wrong with the power going from the battery to the camera. I was thinking, “Oh no, not here, not at this place, not today, not after all this work finding these guys. This is really bad.” I had a back-up power supply that I could run off a car battery, but I needed a cigarette lighter to plug it into and none of our transport had cigarette lighters. I shared this problem with all the very armed people around me, and soon we were off in the trucks with the terrorists into the local town. We dug out a man who was sleeping under a sheet of plastic. He turned out to be the local electrician, and I kid you not, within 20 minutes he had soldered a car battery with a cigarette lighter. We all piled into the trucks, plugged in the camera, and it worked!

Was I under any kind of danger on this trip? Yeah, all the time. But I never felt it. I just felt humanity.

Q. What about the more day-to-day filmmaking problems such as transporting equipment, crowd control and such. How did you manage with a “skeleton” crew?

Very easily. There were two of us, but we had both shot many times around the world. We could sneak in and out of countries and no one would know we were making a theatrically releasable movie. Modern technology helped a lot. Furthermore, this was a documentary and there didn't have to be continuity from scene to scene like in a drama, so that gave me enormous license to put people where the light was right, use the resources I had in front of my eyes rather than creating a scene to match the previous one. Our equipment fit into four bags. I still have a bad back from it.

Q. What did you personally take away from the making of Oh My God?

I really warmed up to the immense humanity and humor I found in people. Get the most vehemently radical militant face-to-face and even he, who has killed and maimed and blown people up in the name of God, could crack a joke. One-on-one he was not the animal he had once been in my mind and maybe still was. I realized that we all have a responsibility to live our lives with tolerance and understanding for our fellow man. Don't be barbaric and ignorant. Learn about different cultures and soon one realizes how very much the same we all are, that most barriers are of our own creation, that hostility is manufactured by power-seeking humans and has nothing to do with God. I learned that the world is way more united than divided, but most of us are conditioned to believe otherwise.

Q. Most books are turned into films, however you have decided to write a book about your filmmaking experience. Can you tell us about that?

It's one helluva story. It's quite a journey and I kept a journal throughout. The quest was very hard and very surprising and the story has many components that are relevant in these difficult, polarized times. I wrote the first chapter and sent it off to a publisher and they loved the concept. Without sounding pompous, it really will be compelling reading and there is so much more to add. There are some extremely funny moments too that have to be shared.

Q. The soundtrack is stunningly original, was it important to have an original soundtrack?

Absolutely. I was very fortunate to have a genius composer, Alexander van Bubenheim, who did a stunning job. He actually came as the sound man and other crew member for a significant part of the shoot. He would record weird sounds across the world – a witch’s door creaking in England, flowing water in Bali, feet in the rain in Tokyo – and then he would blend these sounds into the score. He would record drumming and singing and all sorts of things and then make tracks of them on his laptop while we were traveling. Then I would shoot footage that the music inspired. It was a great organic way to blend sound and vision.

Q. This is your first feature documentary. How did your background in photography and commercials help you prepare for filmmaking?

I was blessed by having a great teacher – my father, George Rodger – who was a Life Magazine War photojournalist and went on to found Magnum Photos with Robert Capa, Henri Cartier Bresson, and Chim Seymour. He taught me how to see and about composition. Then I was blessed by working in advertising for many years directing TV commercials and doing print campaigns. “Oh My God” is just an extension of that privileged education and experience.

Q. What do you hope the viewer will take away from your film?

I would like the viewers to be ambassadors to the discussion the film creates. I would like viewers to be educated in the fact that we share this world with many diverse groups who are very much like we are and that the way forward is to understand our similarities and not obsess about those with different beliefs. If a viewer is religious, I would love them to take away from this film the desire to study their religion themselves, to understand their holy book and not rely on other human beings who might be manipulating the meanings of their scriptures. I would like viewers to come away exhilarated, with a feeling of having had an amazing journey and adventure with me seeing places they would never see normally, hearing music that inspires and words that enlighten and fill them with love, understanding and tolerance toward the other individuals who share our planet. We are just primitive little organisms on a big rock in a scary vacuum driven by fear and desperately searching for something to hold onto. Finally, I would like viewers to come away with the commitment that what they end up holding onto doesn't push others away, that we are all in this together and that one club isn't necessarily better than any other club. If we are to succeed in having a peaceful, fulfilling life we should listen to other cultures and learn from other people to enrich our existence on this wandering rock.

* * * * *

CREDITS LIST

A Peter Rodger Film

OH MY GOD?

With:

David Copperfield
Dr. John F. Demartini
Sir Bob Geldof
Hugh Jackman
Baz Luhrmann
HRH Princess Michael of Kent
Seal
Ringo Starr
Jack Thompson

Line Producer: Patrick Ellis
Director of Photography: Peter Rodger
Editor: John Hoyt
Music Composer: Alexander van Bubenheim
Executive Producers: Horacio Altamirano
Metin Anter
Adam Krentzman

Written, Produced and Directed by: Peter Rodger

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Sami Hall Bassam
Alex Bienfait
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Calvin Little Eagle Baez
Rabbi Moti Bar-Or
Delmae Marion Barton
Chhote Bharany
Dr. Lawrence Blair
Cinthya Chávez

The children and teachers of St. Paul's Church Higher Secondary School	Lobsang Chodak
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Annette Cooper	David Copperfield
Benjamin Crème	
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Anat Zahor

Father Zambara

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Post Production Facility	The Post Group
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