

The Pleasures Of Being/  
**OUT OF STEP**



A Documentary by David L. Lewis

United States / 2013 / Documentary / English / 86 Minutes



**FIRST RUN FEATURES**

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## **Short Summary:**

*Pleasures* profiles legendary jazz writer and civil libertarian Nat Hentoff, whose career tracks the greatest cultural and political movements of the last 65 years. Powerfully narrated by actor Andre Braugher, the film is about an idea as well as a man – the idea of free expression as the defining characteristic of the individual.

## **Synopsis:**

Nat Hentoff is one of the enduring voices of the last 65 years, a writer who championed jazz as an art form and who also led the rise of 'alternative' journalism in America. This unique documentary wraps the themes of liberty, identity and free expression around a historical narrative that stretches from the Great Depression to the Patriot Act.

At the core of the film are three extraordinary, intimate conversations with Hentoff. Commentary and perspective are offered through additional interviews with such luminaries as Amiri Baraka, Stanley Crouch, Floyd Abrams, Aryeh Neier and Dan Morgenstern. Interwoven through it all is the sublime music of Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Charles Mingus and Bob Dylan, along with never-before-seen photographs and archival footage of these artists and other cultural figures at the height of their powers.

## **Director's Statement:**

We are losing a generation of our greatest journalists, men and women who built their legacy on the printed word. Their stories deserve to be told as powerfully as they have told so many to us.

I believe in the ability of these stories to have an impact on individual lives. It is my hope that Hentoff's story, in his voice, can inspire future generations to dig deeper, ask harder questions, and reject the facile or superficial discourse that so often passes for reasoning in our public life.

That is a legacy we cannot ignore.

## Credits:

**David L. Lewis** (producer/director) is a writer, director and producer with 30 years of experience as a New York City-based journalist in print and broadcast media. He was a producer and associate producer for the CBS News program *60 Minutes* and correspondent Ed Bradley for five years before going independent in 2006. He was a staff writer for the New York *Daily News* and Gannett newspapers for 15 years, and has worked for ABC News, Time Warner cable television and various national magazines. Lewis teaches reporting and writing at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism. This is his first feature-length film.

**Andre Braugher** (narrator) is an Emmy award-winning television, stage and movie actor best known for his role as Det. Frank Pembleton in *Homicide: Life on the Street* on NBC from 1993 to 1998, and Owen Thoreau Jr. in *Men of a Certain Age* on TNT from 2009 to 2011. A graduate of Stanford University and the Juilliard School, he has appeared in numerous productions of Shakespeare's plays and most recently starred in *Last Resort* on ABC.

**Sam Pollard** (consulting editor) is a documentary and feature film editor, producer and director whose accomplishments span thirty years. He is the 2010 winner of the Emmy Award winner for outstanding editing for his work on HBO's *By The People: The Election of Barack Obama*. Sam was also the supervising editor and co-producer for both of Spike Lee's award-winning documentaries on New Orleans in the wake of Katrina, which appeared on HBO. He directed his most recent film, *Slavery By Another Name*, for PBS in 2012. Pollard is professor of film studies at the New York University Tisch School of the Arts.

**Tom Hurwitz ASC** (director of photography) has credits stretching from Harlan County USA in 1975 to The Queen of Versailles in 2012. His broadcast work includes projects for the PBS series Frontline, American Masters and Nova and numerous special projects, as well as projects for HBO, NBC and dramas for ABC. His awards include two Emmys and the Sundance Festival and Jerusalem Festival Awards for Cinematography. Films shot by Hurwitz have won four Academy Awards; a dozen Emmy Awards; the Camera D'Or at Cannes; DuPont, Peabody, five DGA Awards, and two Cine Golden Eagles.

## Crew:

Sound By: Peter J. Miller

Archival Producer: Melissa Totten

Music Supervisor: Jonathan McHugh

Additional Camera: Steve Nealey

Associate Editor: James Codoyannis

Associate Music Supervisor: Jonathan Zalben

Associate Archival Producers: Sheila Maniar, Annie Shreffler

Narration Recorded at: Audio Resource Honolulu

Studio Engineer: Tony Hugar

Post Production: *Framerunner*

On-Line Editor: Don Wyllie

Sound Mix: Tony Pipitone

DSLR: Bob Sacha, Benjamin Petit, David L. Lewis

Animator: Laura Margulies

Web Site: Rosaleen Ortiz

Additional Sound: Merce Williams

Gaffer: Ned Hallick

Transcripts: Paul Garton, The Transcript Co-Op

Audio Enhancements: Robert Auld, Chad Bernhard, Nola Recording Studio

Additional Research: Joseph Carlton Walker

Script Associate: Joel Jennings

Equipment Rental: Downtown Community Television, AbelCine

Rights Attorneys: Linda Steinman, Victor Kovner, Davis Wright Tremaine

[http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2013/11/nat\\_hentoff\\_documentary\\_pleasures.php](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2013/11/nat_hentoff_documentary_pleasures.php)



## The Pleasures of the Nat Hentoff Documentary *The Pleasures of Being Out of Step*

By Alan Scherstuhl Wed., Nov. 20 2013

Here's a favorite even among this year's laudably strong DOC NYC lineup: *The Pleasures of Being Out of Step*, a feature-length tribute/study/profile of longtime Village Voice First Amendment defender Nat Hentoff, that brilliant and combative journalist, critic, screed writer, and novelist. A self-proclaimed "lowercase-l libertarian," Hentoff wrote for the Voice for more than 50 years, in his youth helping establish the paper's feisty tone and in his later years often taking on the left itself, especially in a series of columns arguing against the right of women to have an abortion.

In David L. Lewis's brisk and engaging film, former Voice editor Karen Durbin argues that Hentoff's pro-life stance "doesn't have intellectual underpinnings." Columnist Margot Hentoff, Hentoff's wife, offers some insight, laughing early on about how her husband has always found nothing more fun than a fight; later, she tells us that, in the years before *Roe v. Wade*, she once went to Cuba to end a pregnancy -- a decision her husband supported only because he's not the kind of man to tell a wife what to do.

The film has its insights, but perhaps its greatest value is in how it offers something of a record of what time with the talkative, tireless Hentoff is like. He beams as he recounts trouble he caused in his columns, just as he beams when speaking of the one subject that engages him as much as civil liberties: the jazz giants of the 20th century, many of whom he championed in his famous liner notes for their records. Stanley Crouch turns up in the film to marvel that Hentoff's notes for *Sketches of Spain* marked the first time any critic had truly understood the greatness of what Miles Davis and Gil Evans were up to.

Hentoff, indefatigable, served for years as the New York editor of *Down Beat*, then as a founder and editor (with Martin Williams) of *The Jazz Review*, the first publication to consider America's greatest music with anything like academic rigor. Then he even produced jazz records himself -- good ones.

The doc breezes through all of this, soaking a bit in the music and the big personalities of Mingus, Miles, and other stars of jazz's high-water mark -- a high-water mark Hentoff was among the first to note. We hear a too-quick snatch of Hentoff's interview with a young Bob Dylan for *Playboy*, see a too-short clip of Billie Holiday singing on a jazz TV show Hentoff briefly ran, and get much-too-quick anecdotes about Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach, and a host of other remarkable people. Also fascinating: a rapid tour through some of the First Amendment controversies Hentoff stirred in his weekly Voice column -- always principled, Hentoff argued for the free-speech rights of America Nazis. The doc runs just under 90 minutes, but it could stretch out much longer without trying viewers' patience.

For a man so given to scraps, one who just this this month unleashed a Jewish World Review column titled "Obama Betrays Future of Our Very Lives," Hentoff comes off as an amused, amusing, endlessly fascinating man, one with more stories to tell than he could have fit into his almost three dozen books or his half-century of columns. (Former Voice editor Tony Ortega appears, looking pained, to try to explain the decision to lay Hentoff off at the end of 2008. Hentoff, then 83 years old, was soon contributing to The Voice as a freelancer.) Early on, the Voice of 50 years ago gets likened to the bar talk of the Village's smartest people, and Hentoff has lost none of that rowdy conviviality -- he's a great pleasure to watch, to listen to, and to read, even when you couldn't disagree with him more.

The film isn't the final word on Hentoff, of course. He has thousands left in him. But it is a fine and lively précis, a celebration of a life well lived -- and spectacularly written.

# THE Hollywood REPORTER

## The Pleasures of Being Out of Step: Film Review

*The Bottom Line*

*Sometimes jumbled doc holds value for jazz fans and those curious about this fascinating thinker.*

### David L. Lewis looks at the bifurcated, influential career of Nat Hentoff.

The sort of writer who defined what one meant when speaking of an "alt-weekly" newspaper before that once-essential media category was hobbled by homogenizing chains and shrinking ad revenue, Nat Hentoff made his name as one of the finest writers on jazz but eventually became an important commentator on an array of political subjects. David L. Lewis provides an introduction in *The Pleasures of Being Out of Step*, a sharp-looking and enjoyable doc that celebrates the writer's legacy but, in its willfully obscure structure, seems a bit too bent on echoing his famous nonconformity. Lewis's debut should be well liked on the fest circuit, and Hentoff's reputation (along with his connection to such musical giants as Charles Mingus) should ensure a modest audience on video.

Stories of Hentoff's Boston youth reveal the origins of his musical proclivities -- hearing Artie Shaw's "Nightmare" inspired a jazz obsession that had him hosting a radio show while still a teen, then becoming the New York editor of jazz bible *Down Beat* -- and the experiences that might cause him later to identify with minority voices: He recalls with chagrin having denied being Jewish in order to avoid being bullied as a boy.

At *Down Beat* and elsewhere, Hentoff became one of the most evocative and convincing writers on jazz, establishing its place as America's great art form. More visibly for listeners who came of age decades later, he penned extensive liner notes, for innumerable classic albums, that even in the CD era would teach newcomers how to listen to and interact with the music.

Meanwhile, though, he started a column at the *Village Voice* in which he found that simply having a byline gave him (in the eyes of unskeptical readers) permission to speak with authority on any subject at all. He began covering politics and social issues, sometimes taking unpopular but principled positions: In the late 70s, for instance, he insisted that the First Amendment gave neo-Nazis the right to march in a town whose population was half Jewish.

Some of his unpopular stances gained traction over the years, but others made him unpopular at the *Voice* and elsewhere on the left. Former *Voice* editor Karen Durbin recalls that Hentoff's "first reaction to AIDS was not good," though the film isn't much interested in elaborating. It spends a little more time

on his vocal opposition to abortion rights, but not enough to really get inside his reasoning. (Hentoff comes off better on this point in Tony Kaye's abortion doc *Lake of Fire*.)

Lewis and editor Samuel D. Pollard operate by rules few viewers will fathom. A section recounting Hentoff's early stint at a jazz magazine cuts abruptly to his 1980s coverage of the anti-Apartheid movement; then, suddenly, we're back in 1957, watching the influential TV performance film *The Sound of Jazz*.

The film is subtitled "Notes on the Life of Nat Hentoff," which may be intended to deflect complaints about this scattershot structure. But it's not as if Lewis is short on material or his subject is too enormous to tackle in a film. Having collected plenty of intimate footage with Hentoff (including his home routine with wife Margot), testimony from peers and admirers, and a hefty chunk of jazz, why stop at notes when you could assemble a finished portrait?

<http://www.screendaily.com/festivals/other-festivals/doc-nyc-unveils-winners/5063860.article>

# SCREENDAILY

## ***DOC NYC unveils winners***

20 November, 2013 | By Jeremy Kay

Mahdi Fleifel's *A World Not Ours* (pictured) won the Viewfinders Competition's Grand Jury Prize on the eve of the final day of programming.

**David L Lewis' *The Pleasures Of Being Out Of Step* was named grand prize winner of the Metropolis Competition on November 20** and Kelly O'Brien's *Softening* prevailed in the Shorts Competition.

The SundanceNOW Audience Award went to *Web* by Michael Kleiman.

The 2013 festival drew close to 20,000 attendees as levels increased by 25% over last year.

The fourth annual event screened 73 feature documentaries including 11 world premieres, 10 US premieres and 34 New York premieres. The event ran from November 14-21.

<http://www.wearemoviegeeks.com/2013/11/pleasures-step-sliff-2013-review/>



## **THE PLEASURES OF BEING OUT OF STEP – The SLIFF 2013 Review**

THE PLEASURES OF BEING OUT OF STEP is welcome and overdue documentary on Nat Hentoff, jazz music critic and columnist. If you ever read The Village Voice from the 1960s to the 1990s you have probably read his columns. If you have any interest in jazz music you already know who Nat Hentoff is. During the 50s and 60s and on into the 70s Hentoff wrote the liner notes for hundreds of jazz albums. Hentoff's wife informs us that he only wants to read and write, he has no other interests.

Besides being a powerhouse write and erudite columnist Hentoff is most famous for pissing off people all across the political spectrum. Labeled a Liberal most of his professional life, a label Hentoff himself doesn't much care for, Hentoff has taken several positions that anger Liberals all across the country. Other than jazz music Hentoff is an expert on the Bill of Rights, especially the First and Fourth amendments. He is famous for supporting the rights of Nazis to march through Jewish neighborhoods, stated in print that the women's and gay rights movements in the 70s were a waste of time and most notoriously came out against abortion pointing out that if you are against the death penalty you should also be against abortion. However you feel about any of these issues this is a terrific documentary about a great American journalist.

# STL BEACON

## **SLIFF: Cairo, Beauty, Folk, Congo and Hentoff**

### **THE PLEASURES OF BEING OUT OF STEP**

5 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 17 | KDHX

Nat Hentoff has been a hero of mine for half a century or more, first because of his music writings -- who else has written liner notes for both Miles Davis and Bob Dylan? Later I came to appreciate his fervent takes on civil liberties, even after he decided that a fetus had as much right to life as a convicted killer or a drafted soldier. At least he was consistent, he tells us in David L. Lewis' fascinating and thorough profile, "The Pleasures of Being Out of Step."

He not only wrote about jazz, he was often in the middle of creating it. Charles Mingus, who did not suffer white fools gladly, used to call Nat up in the morning and play his most recent composition over the phone, wondering what Nat thought of it.

And I had forgotten that Nat was one of the driving forces behind "The Sound of Jazz," the invaluable 1957 CBS show about jazz. Thankfully, director Lewis is kind enough to show us the segment where Billie Holiday and saxophonist Lester Young, long estranged, shared a blissful moment of reunion on "Fine and Mellow." Nat wrote:

"Lester got up, and he played the purest blues I have ever heard, and [he and Holiday] were looking at each other, their eyes were sort of interlocked, and she was sort of nodding and half-smiling. It was as if they were both remembering what had been — whatever that was. And in the control room we were all crying. When the show was over, they went their separate ways."

In 2008, the Village Voice fired Nat Hentoff, who had written for the original alternative weekly for 50 years. I haven't read it since.

Nat is now in his late 80s. At the screenings, Nat's daughter, Jessica, founder of St. Louis' "Circus Harmony," will answer questions about her father. See also: "Following the out-fo-step footsteps of my father, Nat Hentoff" by Jessica Hentoff (Harper Barnes)