

MILFORD GRAVES FULL MANTIS

Pooja Rangan, Thurston Moore, Byron Coley and Matt Krefting on Milford Graves Full Mantis

"I'm going right to the praying mantis. That's the boss, not some human!" – Milford Graves

Milford Graves Full Mantis, a portrait of the artist Milford Graves, is an elegant piece of reportage, an exquisite endeavor that eschews the steakhouse-sized menu of music-doc clichés by opting for a mantis-level degree of focus on its subject. There's no handholding through a career overview; no overly-verbose, laudatory talking heads plucked from the music press; no conceit to traditional narrative biography. What happens instead is that the film enters into and emerges from its subject in a spectral, twining way. By continually applying its own logic, the questions and philosophies that have propelled Graves' decades of artistic and physical and scientific and intellectual travel are drawn into sharp relief.

The film takes up the challenge of Graves' art and, like the many devices he's used (hands, wind, sticks, brushes, etc.) to activate the surfaces of his many instruments (drum heads, vocal cords, the heart-ribcage-flesh apparatus of the chest, etc.), it dances upon membranes.

To put it simply, Graves' world – a coppice between history and immediacy, between aesthetics and science, between heart and intellect – is rendered cinematically, in all its quivering, pulsing, kinetic *life*. This is filmmaking that helps remind us of the profundity of our most basic senses, and the rhythm that guides and glides with them. It's like how Robert Creeley said that the dancing is in the dancing. It's like that. Don't try to analyze it. Just take it in.

--Matt Krefting, *The Wire*, *Huffington Post*

"Milford Graves Full Mantis is one of the best jazz documentaries ever assembled. Part of this is due to the decision to skip the parade of talking heads who usually populate such films, but even more stems from the amazing depth of the subject, Milford Graves himself. A shaman and master martial artist, in addition to being one of the planet's most brilliant percussionists, Milford harbors more layers of arcane knowledge than most sentient beings, and this film gets inside many of them. The live clips are unbelievably great, but some of the interview segments are even more mind-blowing. All of which makes for a singular viewing experience."

--Byron Coley, *The Wire*

"Milford Graves engages with our universe through contemplation and meditation where we coexist in a garden of timeless nature. Since the early 1960s he has struck a mythic figure in the lineage of New Thing/Free Jazz music and art. A theorist on rhythm defined by inherent emotional impulse (as opposed to a mechanism of strict repetition) he has consistently championed the idea that music is more than an art form to be mastered. In his world, sound is a life force to be in tune with, through regard and respect. With patience and a clear devotion to the beauty of the practice and performance of music, both spirit and earth-conscious, MILFORD GRAVES FULL MANTIS as directed by Jake Meginsky, and co-directed by Neil Young, both experimental musicians from Western Massachusetts, is a portrait of one of the most fascinating lights in the lineage of late 20th century music. It is a sonic-visual ode to the ineffable magic of inspired and gracious living."

---Thurston Moore, London 2018

"Much more than a music documentary, *MILFORD GRAVES FULL MANTIS* is cinema that actually learns from its subject, whose life does not fit easily into a conventional genre like the biopic. Like Graves's music, the film is uncompromisingly original in form, but it teaches us to watch and enjoy it."

--Pooja Rangan

author of: *Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary* (2017)

dukeupress.edu/immediations

