

A Listening Eye: The Films of Mike Dibb
Part Three: Conversation Pieces

Week Three

Available to view 12 - 18 March 2021

For the tenth week of *A Listening Eye*, as we move further into the final phase of Mike Dibb's series, we focus on his dynamic films about and with writers and artists. Dibb's literary portraits extend with revealing and sympathetic studies of crime writer Elmore Leonard, Chicago oral historian and broadcaster Studs Terkel and artist Ralph Steadman, channelling Leonardo... This programme continues to demonstrate the sheer range of engaged lives and ideas that Dibb has documented.

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Studs Terkel's Chicago, 1986 60'

Studs Terkel Profile, 2003, 30'

Elmore Leonard's Criminal Records, 1990, 60'

Arena Ralph Steadman, 1978, 50'

Steadman's 'Don't Tell Leonardo', 1987, 52'

Studs Terkel's Chicago

Over almost 40 years, through his daily radio programme (recorded in Chicago but carried by stations throughout the country), Studs Terkel became one of America's most familiar voices, talking to whoever happened to be passing through, from leading cultural figures to ordinary working people. He also became familiar to an even wider national and international audience with his best-selling oral histories of aspects of American life. In this film Studs reflects with much humour and insight on his life and times in Chicago; and we meet some of the people whose lives formed the substance of his books, listen to the music of two veteran blues pianists and tenor saxophonist Bud Freeman, and recall several old friends of Studs, including the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, blues guitarist Big Bill Broonzy, the Chicago writers Nelson Algren and Vernon Jarrett and the legendary British journalist James Cameron, to whose memory Studs dedicated this film.

Studs Terkel

A BBC4 profile, filmed and presented by Mike Dibb, of America's great oral historian and broadcaster...

Elmore Leonard's Criminal Records

Leonard, known as Dutch to his friends, began his life as a writer of Westerns, only turning to crime when the market for Westerns dried up. By the 1980s his novels were so successful that his picture appeared on the cover of *Newsweek*. Not so interested in mystery, Leonard is more drawn to the lives and amoral values of small time hustlers and desperados, and to the strange workings of the law. His array of vivid street characters inhabit a world where casual and

occasionally disturbing violence is offset by cynical wisecracking humour, mostly expressed through Leonard's great ear for dialogue. This film follows him as he re-visits some of the colourful and contrasting people and places that have been the inspirations for his best-selling books, a number of which have been made into well-known movies. In Detroit we meet members of the homicide squad and take a look inside the police crime property room, packed with a bizarre array of weapons, drugs and every kind of gun. In Florida we meet a circuit court judge, bond bailman, probation officer...as well as a group of Weekee Wachee mermaids! While, along the way, carefully selected passages from his novels are read by the people Dutch is talking to who helped shape his work; as well as by his voluble and invaluable street-wise researcher Greg Sutter, who contributed greatly to the making of the film.

Ralph Steadman

A freewheeling film about the life and times of the exceptionally talented graphic artist and caricaturist Ralph Steadman: he is filmed at work, both in his West London studio, where he creates from start to finish a colour illustration for his children's anti-war story "The Cherry Wood Canon", as well as in his local Fulham pub where he draws a number of quick but wonderfully observed caricatures of the regulars, to the accompaniment of the pub's house pianist. Along the way Ralph also talks about some of his most celebrated work, including his brilliant illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, and the drawings and photo-collages of *America*, particularly his impressions for the US journal *Rolling Stone* of the Patty Hearst Trial and Watergate Hearings.

Don't Tell Leonardo

For this later free-wheeling journey, in the always entertaining, if wilfully unpredictable, company of Ralph Steadman, we were also joined by Ralph's great artistic hero (and alter ego) Leonardo da Vinci, about whom he was in the process of completing *I Leonardo*, one of the most unusual, brilliant and beautiful flights of graphic imagination ever to have appeared in book form.

Where Leonardo leaves off and Steadman begins is difficult to say, but when we arrived at his large house in Kent, Ralph was surrounded by an amazing array of his Leonardo inspired drawings and paintings, as well as a perfectly constructed flying machine based on the master's original design. Later in the film Ralph launches it from his roof (thankfully without him in it) where it glides gently into a tree...

Elsewhere we learn much of Leonardo's life, as written and illustrated by Ralph, with the text perfectly read by Michael Hordern. We also hear the evocative music Leonardo himself would have heard (and attempted to play), in this case specially recorded for us by Anthony Rooley's Consort of Musicke. Finally we watch Ralph putting the finishing touches to his meticulous version of *Leonardo's Last Supper* for which he completely eschewed caricature and even broke eggs to make the tempera he needed for his paints. Years later this huge painting is still there on Ralph's bedroom wall, looking as good as new. Indeed, given the fact that Leonardo's original has suffered so much damage over the years and has had to be constantly touched up and 'restored', maybe Steadman's version is now equally authentic!