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# HEART OF A DOG



**A FILM BY LAURIE ANDERSON**

2015 // USA // 75 Minutes

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## **SYNOPSIS**

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**"Hello, little bonehead. I'll love you forever." So begins HEART OF A DOG, creative pioneer Laurie Anderson's wry, wondrous and unforgettable cinematic journey through love, death and language.**

**Centering on Anderson's beloved rat terrier Lolabelle, who died in 2011, HEART OF A DOG is a personal essay that weaves together childhood memories, video diaries, philosophical musings on data collection, surveillance culture and the Buddhist conception of the afterlife, and heartfelt tributes to the artists, writers, musicians and thinkers who inspire her.**

**Fusing her own witty, inquisitive narration with original violin compositions, hand-drawn animation, 8mm home movies and artwork culled from exhibitions past and present, Anderson creates a hypnotic, collage-like visual language out of the raw materials of her life and art, examining how stories are constructed and told — and how we use them to make sense of our lives.**

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

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**HEART OF A DOG began three years ago as a short personal-essay film commissioned by the Franco-German public television station Arte, as part of a series featuring artists talking about the meaning of life and work. Laurie Anderson was in Paris at the time, presenting a solo performance that featured her rat terrier, Lolabelle. The commissioner Luciano Rigolini suggested, "How about some of those stories about your dog? That's philosophy, no?"**

**Anderson's eclectic career spans decades, and includes music, theater, drawing, electronics, performance and more. In recent years, she has mounted shows that make innovative use of space, pushing the boundaries of what is typically contained within a frame or screen. One show, "Delusion," was a film performance involving multiple screens and projections onto unconventional surfaces, including crumpled paper and a white sofa. "It was fun to explode filmmaking like that and watch all the scenes happen simultaneously on different surfaces," says Anderson. "I'd developed a real**

aversion to rectangles from looking at screens all the time. I began my career as a sculptor, so fitting everything inside a rectangle has always been frustrating to me."

**HEART OF A DOG** remains in its completed state the original personal essay for Arte, although in a longer form than commissioned. Bursting open the conventions of the documentary format and the essay film, Anderson's first feature since the 1986 concert movie **HOME OF THE BRAVE** is a collage-like distillation of Anderson's key signatures and themes, among them the use of multimedia elements, a fascination with language, and an engagement with technology. Much of the film was shot on a variety of small digital cameras, including iPhone, drone cameras and GoPro. The simple animation employed in the film's surreal opening chapter, in which Anderson dreams of giving birth to Lolabelle, is the artist's own.

**HEART OF A DOG** is a meditation on the experience of death. Mingyur Rinpoche, one of Anderson's Buddhist teachers, sums up the approach when he says "You should try to practice how to feel sad without actually being sad." "My goal with the center section of the film, the scene that depicts the bardo or the Tibetan afterlife, was to juxtapose jarring, rapid-fire images — a cartoon dog, a train, a data collection center and several heavily processed scenes from the first half of the movie as a way of representing some of the ways we think," Anderson says. "These are some of the ways we associate, remember and predict."

Beginning with the dream sequence that opens the film, **HEART OF A DOG** creates a visual language out of the many linked stories comprising its 75-minute running time that is akin to dream logic. "The first story is told from the perspective of my dream self. The first words in the movie are 'This is my dream body,'" says Anderson. "So the narrator says right away that these stories come from a different time and place." But the film is as much about fractured stories as it is about the construction of stories. The narrator describes the final moments of her mother's life and the deathbed speech she gave to her eight children. "We knew we were watching a mind breaking down," Anderson says. "We were watching language and words shredding as she died. The effort she made to speak under those circumstances was breathtaking."

**HEART OF A DOG** is also a memory piece, fusing the raw materials of Anderson's life and art into a greater narrative about love and loss, life and

death, and the passage of time. While Anderson was working on the film, her brother sent several cartons filled with 8mm home movies and asked her to transfer them. While examining the many reels she became captivated at the sight of family footage from her Mid-Western childhood, preserved on aging celluloid that exuded a ghost-like feel. While viewing the footage she remembered the details of an incident from her childhood when she saved her twin brothers from drowning when they fell through a hole in a frozen lake. "There were my brothers, my mother, the stroller, the island and the lake. It was all so eerie." she recalls. "I had forgotten so much about that day."

"And the footage was so beautiful. When you slow down 8mm film it's almost hallucinatory," says Anderson. "It's warped from moldering for half a century, and you get these rich textures from the splicing and glue. And those colors! It's like the footage processed itself. All I had to do was cut the images together."

In HEART OF A DOG, Anderson also makes startling connections between the post-9/11 surveillance culture of Lower Manhattan, where the artist lives and works, and the government's obsession with data collection, resulting in vast repositories of digitized information stored in what has ominously become known as the Cloud. "What are they doing with our information?" wonders Anderson. "The conversation that you had with your boss two days ago is parked up there in the Cloud, but to what end? The idea fascinated me enough to wonder why we are recording so many things. I wanted to connect the idea of sky with fear, but also with freedom."

Another story in the movie describes how Anderson arranged for music and painting lessons for Lolabelle when she started to go blind. She segues into Lolabelle's journey into the afterlife — or the bardo, as it is known in The Tibetan Book of the Dead — depicted in a series of charcoal drawings that were originally shown in the artist's 2011 show "Forty-Nine Days in the Bardo" at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia. The multimedia exhibition included some of the same themes in HEART OF A DOG, including love and death, the many levels of dreaming, and illusion.

The penultimate story in HEART OF A DOG is also the movie's mesmerizing centerpiece. In a virtuoso weaving together of sound and image, Anderson recounts a harrowing childhood ordeal in an Illinois hospital following a swimming pool accident in which she broke her back and was confined to a children's ward for several weeks. Doctors told her she would never walk

again. She was 12 and until that point never knew anyone who had died — yet kids, some of them burn victims, were dying every night and taken away, never to be seen or discussed again. Meanwhile, volunteers read her children's stories about animals and nurses avoided acknowledging the deaths. "Reliving my time in the hospital touched a nerve and released a world of sound," Anderson says. "I was overwhelmed by the whole atmosphere — the smell, the darkness, children crying. Everything about the hospital came flooding back. This section is called 'A Story About a Story.' It's about telling a story and becoming aware how repetition wears away the meaning. And how easy it is to forget."

Throughout HEART OF A DOG there are quotes, images and stories from other writers and artists, including Anderson's late friend the sculptor Gordon Matta-Clark, the philosophers Ludwig Wittgenstein and Søren Kierkegaard, and author David Foster Wallace, whose evocative line "Every love story is a ghost story" was an initial working title for the film. Anderson's late husband Lou Reed — to whom she dedicates HEART OF A DOG — provides a coda to the film with his song "Turning Time Around," which plays over the closing credits.

HEART OF A DOG was initially conceived as a narrative piece featuring voiceover. When Anderson decided to add music the producer Dan Janvey persuaded her to focus on strings rather than beats. She eventually used a combination of music from her own records and the rest she composed with her violin and digital effects while watching the film on her laptop when she was in residency at the Rauschenberg Foundation in early 2015. "I would love to do a movie that is entirely words, just to see what happens, but maybe that's too hardcore, " says Anderson. "I was happy that I added music to this one after all."

HEART OF A DOG arrives in tandem with Anderson's landmark HABEUS CORPUS installation, premiering at the Park Avenue Armory in early October. Each work has a version of the story of Lolabelle and 9/11. The Armory installation features a live video feed and three-dimensional film pieces. This is a collaboration with a former prisoner who tells a unique and difficult story.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKER**

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**LAURIE ANDERSON** is one of America's most renowned — and daring — creative pioneers. She is best known for her multimedia presentations and innovative use of technology. As writer, director, visual artist and vocalist she has created groundbreaking works that span the worlds of art, theater and experimental music.

Her recording career, launched by "O Superman" in 1981, includes the soundtrack to her feature film **HOME OF THE BRAVE** and "Life on a String" (2001). Anderson's live shows range from simple spoken word to elaborate multi-media stage performances such as "Songs and Stories for Moby Dick" (1999). Anderson has published seven books and her visual work has been presented in major museums around the world.

In 2002, Anderson was appointed the first artist-in-residence of NASA which culminated in her 2004 touring solo performance "The End of the Moon." Recent projects include a series of audio-visual installations and a high-definition film, "Hidden Inside Mountains," created for World Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan. In 2007 she received the prestigious Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for her outstanding contribution to the arts. In 2008 she completed a two-year worldwide tour of her performance piece, "Homeland," which was released as an album on Nonesuch Records in June 2010. Anderson's solo performance "Delusion" debuted at the Vancouver Cultural Olympiad in February 2010. In October 2010 a retrospective of her visual and installation work opened in Sao Paulo, Brazil and later traveled to Rio de Janeiro. In 2011 her exhibition of new visual work titled "Forty-Nine Days In the Bardo" opened in Philadelphia, and "Boat," her first exhibition of paintings, curated by Vito Schnabel in New York. She has recently completed a three-year fellowship at both EMPAC, the multi media center at RPI in Troy, NY, and PAC at UCLA. Anderson lives in New York City.

## **CREDITS**

A Canal Street Communications Production

In Association With ARTE France – La Lucarne

In Association with HBO Documentary Films

In Association with Field Office Films

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LAURIE ANDERSON**

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LAURIE ANDERSON**

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KATHERINE NOLFI**

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**in association with  
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MARTINE SAADA**

**commissioning editor  
LUCIANO RIGOLINI**

**performers**

<b>ARCHIE</b>	<b>rat terrier</b>
<b>GATTO</b>	<b>rat terrier</b>
<b>LOLABELLE</b>	<b>rat terrier</b>
<b>LITTLE WILL</b>	<b>border terrier</b>
<b>NITRO</b>	<b>german shepherd</b>
<b>ETTA</b>	<b>poodle</b>
<b>HEUNG-HEUNG CHIN</b>	<b>dog walker</b>
<b>JENNI MULDAUR</b>	<b>wife</b>
<b>MATT VEGA</b>	<b>husband</b>
<b>ARLO WILLNER</b>	<b>boy</b>
<b>KURT GUTENBRUNNER</b>	<b>chef</b>
<b>JULIAN SCHNABEL</b>	<b>painter</b>
<b>WILLY FRIEDMAN</b>	<b>man hit by a duck</b>
<b>ELISABETH WEISS</b>	<b>dog trainer</b>
<b>JASON BERG</b>	<b>veterinarian</b>
<b>EVELYN FLEDER</b>	<b>grandmother</b>
<b>DUSTIN DEFA</b>	<b>Gordon Matta Clark</b>
<b>LOU REED</b>	<b>doctor</b>
<b>BOB CURRIE</b>	<b>doctor</b>
<b>GORDEN MATTA-CLARK</b>	<b>himself</b>
<b>TINA GIROUARD</b>	<b>herself</b>
<b>ROSALIA DEAN HUDSON</b>	<b>baby</b>
<b>LUCY HAFITZ</b>	<b>girl in pool</b>
<b>SASHA GROSSMAN</b>	<b>nurse</b>
<b>ALEX KAUFMAN</b>	<b>doctor</b>
<b>JESSICA IRISH</b>	<b>nurse</b>
<b>ELIZABETH WYMER</b>	<b>nurse</b>
<b>PAUL DAVIDSON</b>	<b>farmer</b>
<b>MARGARET HAFITZ</b>	<b>farmer's wife</b>
<b>SAM KHOSHBIN</b>	<b>farmer's son</b>
<b>CHARLIE HAFITZ</b>	<b>patient on gurney</b>
<b>PIERRE RICHES</b>	<b>priest</b>

**post-production**

**additional editing**  
**ADAM BOESE**

**digital processing and vfx**  
**MARC BOUTGES**

color correction  
JOE MC CORMACK

post supervision  
PIERCE VAROUS, NICE DISSOLVE

additional camera  
MATT KOHN  
RAY TINTORY  
PORFIRIO MUNOZ  
ELISABETH WEISS  
MARYSE ALBERTI  
JASON STERN  
CATHY GRIER  
AMY KHOSHBIN  
ARTHUR T. ANDERSON

drawings and animation  
LAURIE ANDERSON

score by  
LAURIE ANDERSON

sound mixer

images of GORDON MATTA-CLARK  
courtesy of JANE CRAWFORD

clip from Gordon Matta-Clark's "Food"  
courtesy of JANE CRAWFORD and GMC Estate

eight mm  
LISA ANDERSON  
PHIL ANDERSON  
CRAIG ANDERSON  
THOR ANDERSON  
LYNN ANDERSON  
LAURIE ANDERSON  
CHRIS ANDERSON  
MARY LOUISE ANDERSON

"The Lake" and "Flow"  
from "Homeland" 2010

"Beautiful Pea Green Boat"  
from "Bright Red" 1994

**“Rhumba Club”  
from “Life on a String” 2001**

**excerpts from “Landfall” 2011  
with Kronos Quartet**

**written and performed by  
Laurie Anderson  
courtesy of Nonesuch Records**

**“Turning Time Around”  
written and performed by  
Lou Reed  
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Records**

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**dedicated to the magnificent spirit  
of my husband Lou Reed  
1942-2013**