



ONE DAY PINA ASKED...

A film by Chantal Akerman
An Icarus Films Release

"Akerman's film is a work of modestly daring wonder, of exploration and inspiration. With her audacious compositions, decisive cuts, and tightrope-tremulous sense of time-and her stark simplicity-it shares, in a way that Wenders's film doesn't, the immediate exhilaration of the moment of creation. Akerman's film is of a piece with Bausch's dances." —**Richard Brody, The New Yorker**

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LOGLINE

Chantal Akerman documents choreographer Pina Bausch and her dance company on a five-week tour across Europe.

SYNOPSIS

An encounter between two of the most remarkable women artists of the 20th century, ONE DAY PINA ASKED... is Chantal Akerman's look at the work of choreographer Pina Bausch and her Wuppertal, Germany-based dance company. "This film is more than a documentary on Pina Bausch," a narrator announces at the outset, "it is a journey through her world, through her unwavering quest for love."

Bausch, who died in 2009, was one of the most significant figures of modern dance, and the pioneer of a unique style drawn from the German theatrical dance tradition known as *tanztheater*. Her striking dances and elaborate stagings explored personal memory and the relationships between men and women, among other things, through a mixture of movement, monologue and narrative elements that drew upon explosive, often painful emotions.

Capturing the company's rehearsals and performances over a five-week European tour, Akerman takes us inside their process. She interviews members of the company, who Bausch chose not only for their talents, but for certain intangible personal qualities as well. The dancers describe the development of various dances, and the way that Bausch calls upon them to supply autobiographical details around which the performances were frequently built.

Akerman also shows us excerpts from performances of Bausch dances, including *Komm Tanz Mit Mir (Come Dance with Me)* (1977), *Nelken (Carnations)*

(1982), *Walzer* (1982), and *1980* (1980), all recorded with Akerman's singular visual touch.

"When I watched one of Pina's performances for the first time a couple of years ago, I was overcome by an emotion I can't quite define," Akerman says. *ONE DAY PINA ASKED...* is an attempt to define that emotion by traveling deep into Bausch's world.

ABOUT DIRECTOR CHANTAL AKERMAN

"Comparable in force and originality to Godard or Fassbinder, Chantal Akerman is arguably the most important European director of her generation."

—J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

"The films of Chantal Akerman are the single most important and coherent body of work by a woman director in the history of the cinema."

—Film Center Gazette of the School of the Art Institute

"In 1976 the French newspaper Le Monde heralded Chantal Akerman's Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles as 'the first masterpiece in the feminine in the history of the cinema.' The unconventional style and subject made the film a powerful sign of a decade when feminism erupted into the arena of politics and film. Akerman the filmmaker came of age at the same time as the new age of feminism, and her films became key texts in the nascent field of feminist film theory. Feminism posed the apparently simple question of who speaks when a woman in film speaks (as character, as director ...); Akerman insisted convincingly that her films' modes of address rather than their stories alone are the locus of their feminist perspective. The many arguments about what form a 'new women's cinema' should take revolved around a presumed dichotomy between so-called realist (meaning accessible) and

avant-garde (meaning elitist) work; Akerman's films rendered such distinctions irrelevant and illustrated the reductiveness of the categories.

— Professor Janet Bergstrom, UCLA, in *Sight and Sound*

Born in Brussels, Belgium in 1950, Chantal Akerman is a filmmaker whose work gives new meaning to the term "independent film." An Akerman film is an exercise in pure independence, pure creativity, and pure art. The viewer must give him- or herself over completely to the experience of the film, to watch with open eyes and an open mind. To label Akerman's work "minimalist" or "structuralist" or "feminist" is to miss most of what she is about. Strong themes in her films include women at work and at home, women's relationships to men, women, and children, food, love, sex, romance, art, and storytelling. Each Akerman film is a world unto itself and demands to be explored on its own terms. Her films are the subject of recent books including *Identity and Memory: The Films of Chantal Akerman* by Gwendolyn Audrey Foster and *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* by Ivone Margulies.

Icarus Films is proud to distribute six Chantal Akerman films:

- **One Day Pina Asked** - Chantal Akerman follows choreographer Pina Bausch and her dance company on a five-week tour across Europe.
- **From the East** - Chantal Akerman retraces a journey from the end of summer to deepest winter, from East Germany, across Poland and the Baltics, to Moscow.
- **From the Other Side** - With technology developed for the military, the INS has stemmed the flow of illegal immigration in San Diego. But for the desperate, there are still the dangerous deserts of Arizona, where renowned filmmaker Chantal Akerman shifts her focus.

- **South** - The heart of this journey is the brutal murder of James Byrd, Jr in Jasper, Texas. But this is not an anatomy of his murder, rather, it is an evocation of how this event fits in to a landscape and climate as much mental as physical.
- **Chantal Akerman by Chantal Akerman** - A self-portrait by experimental & feminist Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman.
- **Chantal Akerman, From Here** - An hour-long, single-shot conversation with Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman about her films and her directorial philosophy.

Filmmaker page: <http://icarusfilms.com/filmmakers/chant.html>



IN THE PRESS

THE NEW YORK TIMES

By Stephen Holden, July 7, 1989

It is perfectly fitting that Chantal Akerman, the Belgian experimental film maker whose work is being shown retrospectively at Film Forum 2, should be attracted to the dance-theater of Pina Bausch and her international multi-lingual company from Wuppertal, West Germany. Both artists create reflective, large-scale visual compositions that convey a powerful but ambiguous emotional intensity. In examining their own compositions, both artists fixedly concentrate on nuances of image and behavior that tap into the unconscious mind.

"On Tour With Pina Bausch," ["One Day Pina Asked..."] which Miss Akerman filmed during a five-week European tour of the company, was originally shown on European television in 1983 as part of a series on modern dance. More a documentary than an art film, the moody 58-minute work, which is having its American premiere at Film Forum 2, still exhibits many of the hallmarks of Miss Akerman's longer, more abstract works.

In her minimalist nondocumentaries, which dispassionately contemplate people moving through specific environments, we are subtly coaxed into sharing the film maker's view of life as an impenetrably melancholy mystery passing before our eyes. Miss Akerman is especially fond of examining objects, light and movement glimpsed through windows and doors in a way that suggests a spiritual longing to know the secrets that lie beyond. And in one of the documentary's early scenes, looking from a distance at an open door, the dancers are shown in the adjoining room running in a circle and chanting. One has the uneasy sense of approaching a very private kind of group exorcism.

Where in the theater Miss Bausch's works unfold as largely nonverbal, emotionally charged rituals that suggest a grand social design, Miss Akerman in

her documentary zeroes in on specific moments both on the stage and behind the scenes that engage her. The most striking fragment of a Bausch work shows a male dancer signing the words of "The Man I Love" in the language of the deaf to a scratchy old recording of the song. In another ritual, the members of the company one by one step forward proudly to name national symbols of their respective countries, to the strains of "Pomp and Circumstance."

The themes in Miss Bausch's work on which Miss Akerman dwells most insistently have to do with the conflict between social regimentation and self-expression, between the need to belong and the impulse to be free. And the somber backstage shots of the dancers preparing for performances suggest that having joined the company they have found ways to engage that personal drama in a way that is deeply but mysteriously rewarding.

"On Tour With Pina Bausch" ["One Day Pina Asked..."] plays today through Monday at Film Forum 2. On the same bill are two shorter Akerman films, "J'ai Faim, J'ai Froid" (1984) and "Saute Ma Ville" (1968).

THE NEW YORKER

By Richard Brody, June 30, 2009

The choreographer Pina Bausch died today, in Wuppertal, Germany, at the age of sixty-eight. Two of her dances were featured in Pedro Almodovar's "Talk to Her," but her most important cinematic activity is in a film that bears her name: Chantal Akerman's "Un jour Pina a demandé..." (One Day Pina Asked), from 1983. Akerman is herself a formidable choreographer (see the exquisitely-arranged comings and goings in "Toute une Nuit," from 1982), and her incisive angles into the dances reveal Bausch's blend of emotional realism and gestural stylization with intimate understanding; they are themselves dancing images—graceful, rhythmic, vibrant with physical energy, even in stillness. Has a

choreographer's work ever been filmed so well? Or rather, have choreography and cinema ever coalesced so fruitfully

THE NEW YORKER

By Richard Brody, December 12, 2011

Wim Wenders's "Pina," his documentary featuring dances by the late choreographer Pina Bausch (which Anthony Lane reviews in the magazine this week), is an excellent film insofar as Bausch is an excellent artist. Thanks to Wenders, some of Bausch's dances are preserved on film, in a sensitive, intelligent, occasionally witty, library-quality recording. But its cinematic added value is slight. In effect, "Pina" is only a moderate improvement on standard-issue television recordings of dance performances. I wholeheartedly agree with Anthony that the movie is very much worth seeing, for Bausch's dances and for the clips of her own dancing that Wenders provides. Yet the movie is European Cultural Product, a genteel and sumptuous packaging of great art works that elides their fury to establish them on the altar of the cult of art-veneration that substitutes, in secular modernity, for religious submission.

Wenders is so devoted to Bausch's dances that he makes sure to catch everything. His camera work and his editing are risk-free; he shows dancers making high-risk moves (the free falls and precarious balances in Bausch's work are nerve-racking to see) but he himself doesn't risk missing them. His framings and his cuts show, never hide, and to the extent that they do more than show, they mainly divert. By contrast, here's a clip from a prior documentary film of dances by Bausch, "Un Jour Pina a Demandé" ("One Day Pina Asked"), from 1982, in which the director, Chantal Akerman, films one of the dances that Wenders also features prominently in his film: [clip]

The difference is apparent at once: Akerman doesn't show the whole stage, or

even the whole action. Her tight framing on the woman being molested by men shows their bodies crowding her and their hands darting at her with what, for the viewer, is a complex musical rhythm but, from the woman's perspective, is an unpredictably harrying barrage. The duration of the shot is as aesthetically gratifying for a viewer as it is uncomfortably long for the woman. The composition gets to the heart of Bausch's dance by what it omits as much as by what it shows—by a framing that's as much an act of blocking out as of depicting.

The same is true of the circular processional steps that follow. An eye-level wide shot that seemingly begins as a relatively uninflected composition soon slices the circle into two arcs of dancers, the one in the foreground crossing in front of the other in the background, moving in opposite directions, creating a rhythmic visual counterpoint that—by concealing significant parts of the stage and of the action—reveals, analytically, incisively, one of the quiet aesthetic ecstasies of Bausch's art. She uses the camera to reveal what the naked eye might not; she doesn't convey, she discovers.

Akerman is herself one of the greatest choreographic filmmakers, as seen in her 1975 film "Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles" (which I wrote about in the magazine several years ago) and in her 1982 film "Toute Une Nuit" ("One Whole Night"), which is even more dance-like in its delicately staged comings and goings than in its expressly danced sequences.

Unfortunately, Akerman's film about Bausch hasn't been released here (even on home video); I caught it, by chance, on television in France about fifteen years ago (the best of all chances—flipping channels, having my eye captivated by something I couldn't identify, and watching with rapt attention to the end before finding out what I had been watching).

Of course, Akerman didn't have 3-D, and Wenders's film offers the intrinsic pleasure of seeing dance in perspective. But he doesn't do much more than

preserve and transmit the dances—with admirable skill and care and a slightly heavy-handed wit. His filming of the dances is in the same spirit as the bland spoken tributes to Bausch that punctuate the soundtrack. Akerman's film is a work of modestly daring wonder, of exploration and inspiration. With her audacious compositions, decisive cuts, and tightrope-tremulous sense of time—and her stark simplicity—it shares, in a way that Wenders's film doesn't, the immediate exhilaration of the moment of creation. Akerman's film is of a piece with Bausch's dances; Wenders's is not.

P.S. There's more to say about the peculiar parallels and divergences of the filmmaking careers of Akerman and Wenders, both of whom started in the late sixties and made grand yet intimate films ("Jeanne Dielman," "Kings of the Road"); that's for another time.



FILM CREDITS

Jean-Michel Meurice, Program Department Presents

in the "Repères sûr la Modern Dance" series

PINA BAUSCH

A Production by A2, RM Arts, INA, RTBF, BRT

Based on an idea by Alain Plagne

Directed by Chantal Akerman

"One Day Pina Asked..."

With the collaboration of the dancers of the Wuppertal Tanztheater troupe:

Jakob H. Andersen	Elena Majnoni
Anne-Marie Benati	Anne Martin
Bénédicte Billiet	Dominique Mercy
Marion Cito	Jan Minarik
Joséphine Ann Endicott	Nazareth Panadero
Lutz Forster	Héléna Pikon
Mechthild Grossmann	Hans Pop
Sylvie Hopf-Kesselheim	Arthur Rosenfeld
Kyomi Ichida	Monica Sagon
Urs Kaufmann	Jean-Laurent Sasportes
Ed Kortlandt	Janusz Subicz
Béatrice Libonati	Francis Viet
Mélanie Lien	

With excerpts from the following shows:

KOMM TANZ MIT MIR – 1977
Bühnen Theater de Wuppertal
June 1983

1980 EIN STUECK
Teatro Malibran de Venise
July 1983

KONTRACTOHF – 1978
Scala de Milan
July 1983

WALZER – 1982
Palais des Papes à Avignon
July 1983

NELKEN (LES OEILLETES) – 1983
Palais des Papes à Avignon
August 1983

Image: Babette Mangolte, Luc Benhamou

Sound: Jean Minodo

Graphics: Jean-François Schneider

Editing: Dominique Forgue, Patrick Mimouni

Mixing: Jean Mallet

Assistant Director: Timothy Miller

Production: Marie Christine Meynard, Michèle Boig

The production would like to thank:

The Wuppertal Tanztheater
The Bühnen Theater in Wuppertal
The Scala in Milan

The Théâtre Malibran in Venise
and the Avignon Festival

Executive producer: I.N.A.

© A2, INA, RM Arts, RTBF, BRT 1983

One Day Pina Asked...

A film by Chantal Akerman / 1983 / 57 minutes

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