



WALK WITH ME

DIRECTED BY MARC J. FRANCIS and MAX PUGH
NARRATED BY BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH

UK release date | 5th January 2018
Running time | 94 minutes
Certificate | PG

Press information | Saffeya Shebli | saffeya.shebli@thunderbirdreleasing.com | 020 7377 1407
Sales information | Dave Woodward | dave.woodward@thunderbirdreleasing.com | 020 7377 1407

LOGLINE

Narrated by Benedict Cumberbatch, *WALK WITH ME* is a cinematic journey into the world of mindfulness and the Zen Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh. Filmed over three years and with unprecedented access, this visceral film is a meditation on a community who have given up all their possessions for a monastic life in rural France.

SYNOPSIS

With unprecedented access, 'Walk With Me' takes us deep inside the world-famous monastery of Zen Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh, and captures the life of a monastic community who have given up all their possessions for one common purpose – to practice the art of mindfulness.

Filmed over three years, this visceral film is a meditation on a community determined to develop a deep sense of presence, not just for themselves but for all those they love.

As the seasons come and go, the monastics' inner journey is amplified by insights from Thich Nhat Hanh's early journals, narrated by Benedict Cumberbatch.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENTS

MAX PUGH

Ten years ago my younger brother gave up his money, his car and his house, and ordained as a Buddhist monk in the tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. His decision did not entirely come as a surprise to me, as he had been leaning towards Buddhism since his graduation from university a few years earlier.

We spoke at length about his choice of 'career', but it wasn't until an elder monk from his community approached me about shooting a documentary during their 2011 US and Canada teaching tour with Thich Nhat Hanh that I really had a chance to experience monastic life for myself. At this point, I teamed up with my old friend and fellow film director Marc J. Francis and the film now known as 'Walk With Me' was born.

The experience of being on the road with the monastics changed my life in many ways. The practice of deep listening, sharing and living alongside the monastics moved me to dig deeper and to work harder to find ways to best represent their way of being on film.

We invested a lot of time in the film process to allow for experimentation and the chance to develop a cinematic 'language' capable of communicating the actual lived practice of a life lived differently and mindfully.

We focussed on an 'experiential' approach; to create a visceral and immersive experience which plunges the audience deep into the poetry of the present moment - a feeling so elusive in the reality of the daily grind.

When Thich Nhat Hanh suffered a life-changing stroke soon after we finished filming, it became clear that there would never be a chance to make a film with Thich Nhat Hanh and his community in this way again. We therefore felt a responsibility to accurately portray what we had experienced living with the monastics.

MARC J. FRANCIS

Before starting this film, I knew very little about Thich Nhat Hanh but I had always been curious about Zen Buddhism. I had also just become a father and I was beginning to yearn for more consciousness and presence in my life, not just for myself but for those who I loved too – particularly my children.

As soon as I saw Thich Nhat Hanh for the first time, I was really impressed by his sense of presence and the way he was so mindful, and that encounter inspired me to find a way to make a film that could capture that experience.

Traditionally most films use a few characters with clear narrative arcs, but to make this film we had to abandon these conventions because Thich Nhat Hanh didn't want to be singled out or idolized in any way. So, we had to find an approach that could somehow make the whole community the main character of the film.

I spent many weeks at the monasteries in France and the US without my camera practicing mindfulness and learning their way of seeing and being in the world. When we did finally introduce our cameras there was a trust and openness that allowed us to capture a level of intimacy that we had long been searching for.

The making of the film became a mindfulness practice in itself. We had to remain non-attached to our outcomes because we never knew what would happen each day. Some days we couldn't film anything, and on others we managed to capture great scenes.

Ultimately, we wanted to find a cinematic language that could transmit to the audience our own personal experience in the monastery so it could feel like a meditation in itself.

We avoided using exposition through talking-head devices, and left out personal interviews of the monastics themselves. Instead we focused solely on a close-up observational style to film the monastics, and combined that with wide shots to capture the natural world that the monastics inhabited.

In post-production, we amplified the natural sounds in the film to draw the audience into the heart of the scene as much as possible, and used music very sparingly – only when it felt like it was coming from the fabric of the moment itself.

Finally, to give some sense of anchor or guide for the film we selected passages from 'Fragrant Palm Leaves', a journal that Thich Nhat Hanh wrote in the 1960s, and cast Benedict Cumberbatch to play his voice. These passages capture some of Thich Nhat Hanh's most insightful and vulnerable moments of his early monkhood where he describes in wondrous detail his feelings about being true to himself and committing to his path.

BACKGROUND

Thich Nhat Hanh & Mindfulness

In the last few years, mindfulness has entered the mainstream. Armies of business consultants, lifestyle specialists, and self-styled gurus eagerly sell their own brand of mindfulness into schools, corporations, hospitals and government agencies. Record numbers of books are being published looking at every angle of mindfulness from working mindfully to living mindfully, and its impact on alleviating stress and anxiety has fuelled a global appetite to find out more.

Just as 'organic' became the new way for food, so 'mindfulness' is the new way for the mind. Widely acknowledged for introducing mindfulness to millions of people in the western world is the 90-year-old Buddhist Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh.

Today, he is avidly followed by world leaders in politics and business, particularly by CEOs in Silicon Valley, and by stars of stage and screen, including Oprah Winfrey who has twice invited him on her show.

Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by his friend Martin Luther King Jr., Thich Nhat Hanh is also a human rights activist, poet and successful author. His books have become worldwide bestsellers and he has over a million followers on Facebook.

In 1982, Thich Nhat Hanh set-up Plum Village - a monastery in rural France for monks and nuns to live, and for lay people from across the world to engage in mindful practice.

ABOUT THICH NHAT HANH:

Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is a global spiritual leader, poet, peace activist and a pioneer in bringing Buddhism to the West.

Martin Luther King called him “An Apostle of peace and nonviolence.” The media has called him “The Father of Mindfulness,” “The Other Dalai Lama” and “The Zen Master Who Fills Stadiums.” - and he is revered throughout the world for his powerful teachings and bestselling writings on mindfulness and peace

He has built a community of over 600 monks and nuns, and six monasteries and dozens of practice centers in America and Europe.

In recent years Thich Nhat Hanh has led events for US Congressmen and women, and for parliamentarians in the UK, Ireland, India and Thailand. He has addressed UNESCO in Paris, calling for specific steps to reverse the cycle of violence, war and global warming, as well as the World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne. On a visit to the US in 2013 he led high-profile mindfulness events at Google, The World Bank and the Harvard School of Medicine.

In November 2014, a month after his 89th birthday, and following several months of rapidly declining health, Thich Nhat Hanh suffered a severe stroke. Although he is still unable to speak, and is mostly paralyzed on the right side, he has no retired in his monastery in France.

THICH NHAT HANH BIOGRAPHY:

Born in central Vietnam in 1926, Thich Nhat Hanh entered Tu Hieu Temple, in Hue city, as a novice monk at the age of sixteen. As a young bhikshu in the early 1950s he was actively engaged in the movement to renew Vietnamese Buddhism. He was one of the first bhikshus to study a secular subject at university in Saigon, and one of the first six monks to ride a bicycle.

When war came to Vietnam, monks and nuns were confronted with the question of whether to adhere to the contemplative life and stay meditating in the monasteries, or to help those around them suffering under the bombings and turmoil of war. Thich Nhat Hanh was one of those who chose to do both, and in doing so founded the [Engaged Buddhism](#) movement, coining the term in his book Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire.

His life has since been dedicated to the work of inner transformation for the benefit of individuals and society.

In 1961 he travelled to the United States to teach Comparative Religion at Princeton University and the following year went on to teach and research Buddhism at Columbia University. In Vietnam in the early 1960s, Thich Nhat Hanh founded the School of Youth and Social Service, a grass-roots relief organization of 10,000 volunteers based on the Buddhist principles of non-violence and compassionate action.

As a scholar, teacher and engaged activist in the 1960s, Thich Nhat Hanh also founded the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon, La Boi publishing House, and an influential peace activist magazine. In 1966 he established the Order of Interbeing, a new order based on the traditional Buddhist Bodhisattva precepts.

On May 1st, 1966 at Tu Hieu Temple, Thich Nhat Hanh received the ‘lamp transmission’ from Master Chan That, becoming a dharma teacher of the Lieu Quan Dharma Line in the 42nd generation of the Lam Te Dhyana school (“Lin Chi Chan” in Chinese or “Rinzai Zen” in Japanese).

A few months later he travelled once more to the U.S. and Europe to make the case for peace and to call for an end to hostilities in Vietnam. It was during this 1966 trip that he first met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. Yet as a result of

this mission both North and South Vietnam denied him the right to return to Vietnam, and he began a long exile of 39 years.

Thich Nhat Hanh continued to travel widely, spreading the message of peace and brotherhood, lobbying Western leaders to end the Vietnam War, and leading the Buddhist delegation to the Paris Peace Talks in 1969.

He also continued to teach, lecture and write on the art of mindfulness and 'living peace', and in the early 1970s, he was a lecturer and researcher in Buddhism at the University of Sorbonne, Paris. In 1975 he established the Sweet Potato community near Paris, and in 1982 they moved to a much larger site in the south west of France, soon to be known as "Plum Village".

In the last decade Thich Nhat Hanh has opened monasteries in California, New York, Vietnam, Paris, Hong Kong, Thailand, Mississippi and Australia, and Europe's first "Institute of Applied Buddhism" in Germany.

Mindfulness Practice Centers in the Plum Village tradition offer special retreats for businessmen, teachers, families, healthcare professionals, psychotherapists, politicians, young people as well as veterans and Israelis and Palestinians. It is estimated that over 45,000 people participate in activities led by Plum Village monks and nuns in the US and Europe every year.

MARC J. FRANCIS (DIRECTOR) BIOGRAPHY

Marc J. Francis' is a director, producer, and documentary cinematographer whose films have been shown throughout the world in cinemas and on television.

He was chosen by Harper's Bazaar magazine as one of their top "Household names of the future", and named by the Observer newspaper as one of Britain's "Rising Stars".

His current directorial work includes the Benedict Cumberbatch narrated film about Zen Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh entitled 'Walk With Me', and "Here I Am" a feature documentary about living, loving and dying well.

Marc's early directorial work includes the Sundance hit 'Black Gold', and the award-winning BBC/ARTE feature documentary 'When China Met Africa'.

Marc also produces and amplifies stories of global significance through his production company Speakit Films where he is Creative Director.

MAX PUGH (DIRECTOR) BIOGRAPHY

Max Pugh is a Franco-British feature documentary and fiction film director who has also gained critical acclaim worldwide for his video art and installation work with the composer and filmmaker Michael Nyman. In 2010, the film NYMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA premiered at Toronto before moving to the Berlin Film Festival, Sydney Opera House and the New York Museum of Modern Art.

As well as writing and directing television drama and short films supported by the UK Film Council, his latest feature documentary THE ROAD TO FREEDOM PEAK, narrated by Djimon Hounsou and made for Fox Studios & Screen Australia was released in Australia to critical acclaim and nationwide press coverage. The film has secured deals with Netflix and National Geographic.

2014 saw the release of WAR WORK, a major new film with Michael Nyman commemorating WW1 which premiered at the Cité de la Musique in Paris before moving on to Berlin, Budapest and the 2015 Sheffield Film Festival.

Max is now in development on several documentary and fiction projects, and an essay film entitled WELCOME TO THE ANTHROPOCENE. His latest film WALK WITH ME, co-directed with Marc J. Francis will be released worldwide in 2017.

BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH (NARRATOR) BIOGRAPHY

Benedict Cumberbatch is a British screen actor best known for his role in the BBC television show SHERLOCK. He has also appeared in Hollywood films such as TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY, WAR HORSE, STAR TREK: INTO THE DARKNESS and THE HOBBIT: THE DESOLATION OF SMAUG.

He has won several stage and screen acting awards and received both Golden Globe and Oscar® nominations for his role in the acclaimed 2014 Alan Turing biopic THE IMITATION GAME. In 2015, he joined the cast of the film BLACK MASS opposite Johnny Depp, which was distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures worldwide. Cumberbatch also stars as Dr. Stephen Strange in the 2016 DOCTOR STRANGE Marvel movie.

NICK FRANCIS (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) BIOGRAPHY

Nick Francis is an award-winning filmmaker whose films have been shown throughout the world in cinemas and on television.

Nick's films include the award-winning Sundance-hit BLACK GOLD, which won worldwide critical acclaim and was released in over 40 countries.

His second feature, WHEN CHINA MET AFRICA, was "a rare, grass-roots view into one of the most important economic developments of the age" (The Times) and was a multi-broadcast project involving BBC Storyville, Arte France, and the Sundance Institute.

Nick has produced films with The Guardian, and recently executive produced the Benedict Cumberbatch narrated film about Zen Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh entitled 'WALK WITH ME'. He is also the Creative Director of Speakit Films.

CHADE-MENG TAN (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) BIOGRAPHY

Chade-Meng Tan (Meng) is a Google pioneer, award-winning engineer, international bestselling author, thought leader and philanthropist. He is Chairman of the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, and Co-chair of One Billion Acts of Peace, which has been nominated eight times for the Nobel Peace Prize.

HIMESH KAR (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) BIOGRAPHY

Himesh is Managing Director of Speakit Films where he oversees all aspects of the company across its documentary, factual and drama slate. Himesh Kar has a demonstrable ability to identify and nurture key talent from around the world, developing ideas into fully realized, award-winning productions. The talent and projects Himesh has initially spotted and subsequently overseen as a Producer and Executive have won multiple Awards including an Academy Award, BAFTA Awards, the Grierson Documentary Award and the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or. Himesh produced the acclaimed feature documentary "The Bengali Detective" by Phil Cox. The film premiered in competition at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival where Fox Searchlight acquired the fiction remake rights. "The Bengali Detective" won the 2012 Grierson Award for Best Entertainment Documentary. From 2001-2010 Himesh was a Senior Executive at the UK Film Council responsible for selecting and overseeing the development, financing and production of over 20 award-winning feature films and feature documentaries. Films commissioned by Himesh for the UK Film Council include: James Marsh's "Man on Wire" (Academy Award, Best Feature Documentary 2009) and "Project Nim", Amma Asante's "A Way

of Life”, Noel Clarke’s “Adulthood”, Sarah Gavron’s “Brick Lane” and Ken Loach’s “The Wind That Shakes The Barley” (Palme D’Or, Cannes Film Festival 2006).

WILL MOORE (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) BIOGRAPHY

Will brings 28 years experience in sector leading entertainment businesses. He has a track record in corporate strategy, corporate finance, investor relations, business model innovation and leading complex multi-stakeholder projects. After a decade leading global projects for Virgin EMI and Polygram he spent 16 years as a media and entertainment management consultant including leading an international management consultancy with clients such as the British Film Institute (BFI) and Ealing Studios. Will holds a 1st class MBA from Henley Business School with a distinction for his thesis on ‘business model innovation’.

ABOUT THE MONKS AND NUNS

Brother Phap Linh ordained as a monk in Plum Village in February 2008. Before becoming a monk he studied at Cambridge then worked as a composer a chef and a math tutor in London. As a layperson he frequently attended retreats in Plum Village. Meeting Thich Nhat Hanh for the first time in 1999, he began to see that mindfulness practice could present a real way out of the current situation of suffering for humanity. Becoming a monk eventually presented itself as the most powerful way to actively and positively engage with the suffering we collectively face, including climate change, economic instability, and war. Helping to provide a place of refuge for people to come and learn about mindfulness and living in community are now his principal sources of joy.

Sister An Nghiem was born and raised in Washington, DC and graduated with a BS in Business Administration and Accounting at Georgetown University in DC. Career plans before ordination included being an accountant or a small business owner or work in politics. Ordination took place in September 2008 and her monastic name became Sr. Chan An Nghiem, meaning Sister ‘Peace’. Sister Peace has lived at the New Hamlet for over 10 years, having arrived in 2006. She has had many roles in the community including: organizing retreats in Europe, Asia, Liberia, South Africa and the US, help handle press and PR for the community, among other things. Locally in the New Hamlet held responsibilities for office, bookshop, car maintenance, transportation logistics, etc. Peace continues writing articles for the Mindfulness Bell and recently featured in Lion’s Roar (formally Shambhala Sun Magazine).

Brother Phap Huu was born in Vietnam in 1987 and moved to Canada in 1990. He grew up in Canada until the age of 13 when he became an aspirant in Plum Village France. He ordained on February 7th 2002. His ordination name is Thich Chan Phap Huu, which means True Dharma Friend. Phap Huu mainly lives in Upper Hamlet France but spent one year 2005 - 2006 in Deer Park Monastery near San Diego in the US. Phap Huu became vice-abbot of Upper Hamlet (Dharma Cloud Temple) in February 2008, and was appointed Abbot in 2011.

Sister Dang Nghiem (Sister D) was born in Vietnam during the war, and she came to the United States as a teenager. She was trained as a medical doctor at the University of California San Francisco, School of Medicine. She became a Buddhist nun in 2000, and since then she has worked with many teenagers and young adults, helping them to heal from childhood traumas. She is the author of two books, *Healing - Journey from Doctor to Nun* and *Mindfulness As Medicine*.

ABOUT THE CREW

Germaine Franco – Composer

Germaine is one of the few women working full-time in Hollywood as a composer and music producer. She has worked as a co-composer, orchestrator, arranger, music producer, music programmer, and percussionist with some of Hollywood’s top film composers including John Powell, Hans Zimmer, Randy Newman, Lorne Balfe, and Gustavo Santaolalla. Germaine kicked off 2016 by scoring SHOVEL BUDDIES, which premiered at the SXSW 2016 Film Festival. She

composed the original score to DOPE, directed by Rick Famuyiwa, for Forest Whitaker's Significant Productions, Pharell Williams' iamOTHER Entertainment, and Open Road Entertainment. DOPE premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival. Franco received a nomination for "Outstanding Original Score" from the 2016 Black Reel Awards for her work on DOPE.

Anna Bertmark – Sound Designer

Originally from Sweden, Anna Bertmark is a supervising sound designer for drama and documentaries, who started her career working for sound designer Paul Davies (HUNGER, THE QUEEN). Her work includes the critically acclaimed and award winning films LILTING and THE GOOB. She also curates the annual Brighton-based symposium Sound Of Story, bringing together the leading world film sound professionals to talk about their craft. Anna is also a member of AMPS (The UK Film and Television Sound Technicians Guild) and is mentored by Dawn Airey.

Additional Editors:

Nicolas Chauderge (editor) credits: Special Correspondents (2016) Still Alice (2014), The Dark Horse (2014), Wuthering Heights (2011), and Fish Tank (2009).

Alan Mackay (editor) credits: Donor Unknown, True Stories, Heavy Load, BBC 'Storyville' 90 Mins, 9/11: The Falling Man

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION COMPANY, SPEAKIT FILMS

Passionately driven and highly innovative, Speakit seeks to push boundaries wherever possible to make films that impact society and leave a lasting legacy.

Speakit's most notable films to date include the award-winning Sundance hit BLACK GOLD, which won worldwide critical acclaim and WHEN CHINA MET AFRICA, a multi-broadcast project involving the BBC and Arte France.

Speakit's latest film is the Benedict Cumberbatch narrated feature documentary about Zen Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh entitled WALK WITH ME - set for release in 2018.

CREW

DIRECTED BY	MAX PUGH & MARC J. FRANCIS
NARRATED BY	BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH
FEATURING	BROTHER PHAP LINH SISTER AN NGHIEM BROTHER PHAP HUU SISTER DANG NGHIEM
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	NICK FRANCIS CHADE-MENG TANG HIMESH KAR
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY	MAX PUGH & MARC J. FRANCIS
EDITED BY	MAX PUGH & MARC J. FRANCIS
ADDITIONAL EDITORS	NICOLAS CHAUDEURGE ALAN MACKAY
SOUND DESIGNER	ANNA BERTMARK
COMPOSER	GERMAINE FRANCO