

The Tragically Hip

LONG TIME RUNNING **Directors' Notes**

We have known the guys in the Hip for a number of years. Nick filmed them on 16mm playing in North Bay in 1994 (the overlaid shots from the opening sequence are from that concert and the train footage is from the Polar Express to Moosonee) and also shot the video for Gord's song *Chancellor* from his solo album *Coke Machine Glow*. We filmed them doing a pop up concert at the Great Moon Gathering in Fort Albany in 2012 when they were releasing *Now For Plan A*. We became closer with Gord through the environmental group Lake Ontario Waterkeeper (now Swim Drink Fish Canada), an organization we are all still very committed to.

A few years ago, we made the onstage video installations for their *Fully Completely* tour, and they asked us to do it again for *Man Machine Poem*. When the diagnosis came down, we thought the tour was off. And then it wasn't. So in June 2016 we started making 30 short pieces, not knowing what songs they were going to play because they kept adding more and more in rehearsal (to the point of having 90 songs in rotation, representing every record they have ever made). Nick was filming for our other project *Anthropocene* in China and Australia and Jennifer stayed home to work on the videos with our exemplary team at Mercury. Not knowing what Gord's capacity for sustained performance was going to be, we were asked to build in a break midway through the concert so he could have a rest and the stage could be reset. This became a modified version of the lightning storm from our 2009 documentary *Act of God*.

Five days before the first show in Victoria, Hip managers Bernie Breen and Patrick Sambrook asked us if we could make a film of the tour. They thought the historic nature of it needed to be documented; that given our shared experience and despite our lack of familiarity with the genre, we were the right people to do it. There were still many question marks. There was the real, ongoing possibility that the tour would not happen, or could end at any moment, or that there might be a very public exposure of vulnerability. It was perhaps not the right time to have cameras rolling. We went to talk to Gord. We said if he wanted to do it, we would drop everything. He did, so we did.

August 5th, 2017

Some notes. We tried to create a fluid dialectic of audience and performance throughout, punctuated by intimate moments behind the scenes and reflection from the guys. This reaches an apex in Kingston. We organized 10 remote crews across the country to film people watching the concert (which became the second most watched broadcast in Canadian history; 11.7 million viewers). The fans of this band are ardent and varied. As Leslie Feist says, "The Hip have their army." We were deliberately non-linear in structure, which bothered some people, but west to east didn't feel like the right organizing principle. Roland Schlimme, our longtime editor, was a vital part of this exploration. The handwriting you see occasionally is taken from Gord's ubiquitous notebooks. The northern lights and the more abstract landscape footage reference the video installations that played every night on screens above the stage.

We would have liked to linger more on Gord's First Nations reference in Kingston and its implications, but it was not the right context and that is a film of its own, which his brother Mike Downie is making about Chanie Wenjack and The Secret Path. There were a lot of moving parts and a lot of partners—not our usual way of working. Bernie and Patrick championed our vision throughout. Our Banger producers Scot McFadyen and Rachel McLean were steadfast in their support of our somewhat hermetic process and skillful in negotiating the many perspectives. For the release, we decided not to do press, interviews or promotion in the traditional sense. Given the circumstances, the film does not require any extra explanation from us.

We are deeply honoured by the trust put in us by Gord, Rob, Paul, Johnny and Gord. Thank God they all liked it. In some ways it was the hardest documentary we've ever made—hard and beautiful—because there was no distance or pretense of objectivity possible. We are friends, and have been listening to their music since the beginning. What the film became, a kind of reciprocal love letter from the band to the fans, from the fans to the band and from us to both, is tied up with that.

Jennifer Baichwal and Nick de Pencier