

Documentary Examines Enduring Relevance of Rumi

University Communications
April 2008

To commemorate the 800th anniversary of the birth of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, the prominent Muslim poet commonly known as Rumi, The University of Arizona is screening a documentary about his life and the following he inspired.

The screening of "Rumi Returning" will be held Tuesday at 7 p.m. in Room 120 of the UA's Manuel Pacheco Integrated Learning Center, 1500 E. University Blvd. The UA's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, religious studies program and the department of Near Eastern studies are co-sponsoring the event, which is free and open to the public.

Rumi is a 13th century mystic known widely for his spiritual writings. He also is the inspiration for the dance performed by the Whirling Dervishes. The dervishes are members of the Sufi order of Islam that was founded by followers of Rumi. Their dance is meant to mimic the movement of planets and is a journey of "spiritual fulfillment."

"He was a spiritual teacher advocating earthly and divine love and realizing we're all part of the same thing," said semi-retired faculty member Donna Swaim, who has used Rumi's poetry in her classrooms for the last 12 years.

Swaim, senior lecturer emerita in religious studies and a clinical lecturer of medicine, worked to bring the documentary to Tucson.

Most profound about Rumi's work is his "inclusive nature," Swaim said. "I think he was simply looking at the world from his point of view, which is that we're all the same, at least when it comes to our basic needs."

The film asks, "Does an 800-year-old mystic hold the secret to world peace?"

Filmed in Turkey, where Rumi lived, the documentary has been shown to sold-out audiences in cities around the world, including Santa Fe, N.M., Chicago and Washington, D.C. The film also has been shown internationally in Canada and Mexico and is scheduled to screen in Morocco and Tel Aviv, Israel.

Filmmakers Kell Kearns and Cynthia Lukas will attend the UA screening and will speak after the presentation. The two have signed an agreement with American Public Television that will allow for the documentary to be aired on PBS in September.

"In 25 years as a documentary maker I've never seen anything like this," Kearns, the film's co-producer and director, said about the popularity of the film. "Everywhere we've test-marketed 'Rumi Returning' it sells out."

"Our film has become a phenomenon because Rumi speaks to a deep hunger in humankind to realize its oneness, and live in peace," said Lukas, the film's co-producer and writer.

Rumi was a preacher and philosopher and, later, a mystic. His life's path took him to Konya, Turkey, where his family moved from modern day Afghanistan to escape the Mongols.

Swaim, who has visited Rumi's burial site, saw the film during its Canadian premiere while attending the Middle East Studies Association's annual conference and thought "it would be perfect" to show it in Tucson.

"It's a truly magnificent example of putting a poet, who has universal appeal, in both a geographical and historical context," Swaim said.

"As the producers of film recognize, Rumi's poetry is the largest selling poetry in the United States today. This is not because he was Sufi, this is not because he was born in what is now Afghanistan and that he migrated to what is now Turkey," Swaim added. "It is because what he says speaks to so many of us," she said. "He speaks of unification between human beings, the connections we have to other human beings and the sanctity of life itself."

For more information about the screening, call 621-5450. For more information about the film, visit <http://www.rumireturning.com> [1].

Source URL: <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/documentary-examines-enduring-relevance-rumi#comment-0>

Links

[1] <http://www.rumireturning.com>