

Film Review: Roger Ebert's Treasure of a Journey in 'Life Itself'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 4, 2014 - 8:44am

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CHICAGO – We will never see the likes of his kind again – the influential arbiter of cinematic taste, whose magic thumb could make or break the dreams of both filmmaker and film fan. The journey of Roger Ebert, the most influential film critic of our times, is told in the new documentary, “Life Itself.”



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Based on his excellent 2011 memoir of the same name, “Life Itself” is created with deep perspective and truth by director Steve James (“Hoop Dreams”). James develops the story through the the last few years of Ebert’s life, in which the struggle to maintain his film critique truth clashed with the realities of his battle against cancer. With the rare opportunity to go inside that situation, the film takes us through Roger’s life story in contrast to his last days, which shines a spotlight on how triumphant that amazing life was. Roger was at the right place at the right time, but also took those opportunities and soared to the highest level that he could – in film criticism, his general writings, his travels and ultimately his marriage and family. His wife Chaz called it “living out loud.”

Roger Joseph Ebert was born in 1942 in Urbana, Illinois, the only child of Walter and Annabel Ebert. His interest in journalism began in high school – where he worked as a sports stringer for the News Gazette of Champaign-Urbana – and blossomed as an college editor for the Daily Illini newspaper at the University of Illinois. He was hired after graduation in 1966 by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and took over as film critic in 1967, maintaining that position until his passing in 2013.

“Life Itself” tells the story of this remarkable man, who always sought to find the layers of intimacy within the flickering images on screen – in print, on television (in partnership with Gene Siskel) and finally the internet. His approach to those intimacies was mirrored in his life, as he fought against the twin demons of alcoholism and rapid success. He became sober in the late 1970s, found a soulmate in Chaz Hammelsmith ten years later, and continued on a path of critical influence, as he became an early online presence. In 2002, the cancer he would struggle against for the next ten years was diagnosed, and although he lost the ability to speak, he never lost his ‘voice’ in the cultural stratosphere, blogging until the day before his death in April of last year.

“Life Itself” has a limited release, including Chicago, on July 4th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Roger Ebert, Chaz Ebert, Martin Scorsese, Werner Herzog, Errol Morris and Gene Siskel. Directed by Steve James. Rated “R”



[Continue reading for Patrick McDonald's full review of “Life Itself”](#) [17]



Partners: Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel Do What They Did Best in 'Life Itself'

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures



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