

Interview: Director Jimmy Chin on What is There in ‘Meru’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 5, 2015 - 10:54am

- [Because it's There](#) [2]
- [Conrad Anker](#) [3]
- [Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Interview](#) [6]
- [Jimmy Chin](#) [7]
- [Jon Krakauer](#) [8]
- [Meru](#) [9]
- [Mount Everest](#) [10]
- [Mount Meru](#) [11]
- [Mountain Climbing](#) [12]
- [Music Box Films](#) [13]
- [Music Box Theatre](#) [14]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [15]
- [Ronan Ozturk](#) [16]

CHICAGO – There is a fictional film about to be released called ‘Everest,’ but now there is the real deal, a documentary about climbing Mount Meru, one of the most difficult and spiritual peaks in the world. “Meru” is co-directed by Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin. On the expedition itself, Chin was also a climber and cameraman.

Mount Meru is located in Northern India, and has a sacredness that is recognized by three different spiritual practices – Hindus, Jains and Buddhists consider it's location to be the center of the metaphysical universe. The difficulty of the climb is such that only the most experienced could attempt it. “Meru” chronicles the two climbs made by three such experienced men – Conrad Anker, Ronan Ozturk and Jimmy Chin.



Director & Climber Jimmy Chin of ‘Meru’
Photo credit: Music Box Films

Chin is a professional climber, mountaineer, skier, producer, director, photographer and cinematographer. His lists of accomplishments in those disciplines are truly remarkable, with “Meru” is his first credit as director (with Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi). Jimmy Chin is also a spiritual guru, which may be not as expected, But in a sense, as we understand his journey, is entirely expected.

He spoke to HollywoodChicago.com at the historic Music Box Theatre on Chicago's north side, and through their Music Box Films entity, “Meru” is distributed. The Music Box recently expanded to include a bar/lounge area and outdoor gathering place, and is a beckoning center for film expansiveness in the Windy City.

Jimmy Chin's approach to his cinematic art and the craft of climbing is as one, as he spoke about all the multi-faceted angles of “Meru.”

HollywoodChicago.com: How much of the old cliché about mountain climbing, 'because it is there' applies to challenges like Mount Meru?

Jimmy Chin: There is a lot of irony in the that statement, which was its intention. As a climber, we hear that, and we say 'sure,' but it's not necessarily what a mainstream audience would have got out of that same answer. When I say, 'because it's there,' it's true. When I see something like a mountain that inspires me, I'll want to climb it. It's as simple as that.

I grew up playing music, practicing the martial arts and swimming competitively. The drive and the motivation for climbing, to me, feels no different than the drive I had in those disciplines and as a photographer – to evolve constantly and push the edge. Admittedly, the stakes are different. But the passion I feel for climbing is also the way that artists and athletes feel.

HollywoodChicago.com: Mount Meru is considered the center of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes to Hindu, Jain and Buddhist cosmology. What are examples of how each of those characteristics were felt by you when you climbed that peak?

Chin: Climbing, in a way, is like a religion, because you're seeking a connection to something that is greater than yourself. What was interesting, we met with the holy men in preparing for the climb, because of the spirit that you mentioned. I find that whole valley to be incredibly sacred, and when we told them of our intention to climb Mount Meru, they totally got it. It is their center of the universe, and they didn't skip a beat in saying, 'tell us what you see up there.' It didn't matter whether we were being literal or not, they totally got it.

When we look at the mountain, we don't think of it in terms of 'conquering.' When you've been climbing as long as I have, you realize you can't conquer shit. If that is your attitude, you will probably be killed. You ask for safe passage, and if the mountain chooses to give you safe passage, that is great. If not, you turn around and come back another time.

HollywoodChicago.com: Do climbers, because of their connection with the spirit of nature, tend to believe in God, or a God figurehead? Or does their spirituality go in a different direction?

Chin: Most of my friends who are climbing in this space, aren't necessarily religious, but they all are spiritual. It's like what the naturalist John Muir once noted, the wilderness is a church. There is a connection to something greater. I won't deny anybody's religion or beliefs, because in my study of comparative religions, I saw many parallels. The deities and gods have different names, but they are centered on similar beliefs. Compassion, love, respect and dignity for all human beings are all compatible.

HollywoodChicago.com: The challenge that you had in facing the mountain again after the first attempt was your near suffocation by an avalanche. Do you have any opinion about the notion of how man has tried to control nature, and how nature tends to fight back?

Chin: Nature will always come out ahead. Nature has time on its side, and we are small blips in overall geologic time. We may think we're having our way, but in the end it will be the cockroaches that will or most simply, the rocks. We can't really compete.



Jimmy Chin in Action

Photo credit: JimmyChin.com

HollywoodChicago.com: Climbing Mount Everest has become a bucket list challenge for the wealthy yet inexperienced. Who should never climb Everest, and if you choose to do, how long should you train or climb other peaks before you attempt it?

Chin: I think that everyone who wants to climb Mount Everest, or has the means to climb it, should think about their motivations for doing so. I will never say you should not climb Everest to anybody, because I never truly know a person's true motivations. If I have a dream or passion for something, I don't want anyone else telling me I can't do it.

Having said that, your intention and motivation for anything you do in life is fairly important to examine. There are many reasons for climbing Mount Everest – some people climb it because they can say they did it, others do it for the personal challenge and others just have passion for the pure climb. You've got to be thoughtful regarding the risks that other people are taking as you climb the mountain. Having that risk awareness – and acknowledging it – and taking all those elements into account when you do climb it, that's a good place to start and a good place to end.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are a cinematographer, producer and director. How much of the artist is fed by your climbing, and how much of your climbing feeds you as an artist?

Chin: They intersect equally. Half of my art is about getting there. I consider climbing a creative pursuit, and the image shooting aspect is as satisfying. It's a perfect marriage for me. The goal is to be in the moment in both dynamics, it's that intersection that I built my career upon.

HollywoodChicago.com: What has been the biggest breakthrough in technology for climbers in the last ten years?

Chin: In the last ten years, it's become about reducing weight. Lighter equipment, lighter ropes and thinner, warmer clothing. Weight is an inhibitor in climbing, so dropping that weight is key. The material is also much more weather protective and waterproof. It's really allowed climbers to move faster and go bigger.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the 'it' factor beyond the equipment?

Chin: The greatest catalyst for progression in this sport is mental. It's all in about pushing the edge, and trying something new. I've been around long enough to experience things that were thought to be impossible or not even considered when I started out, but then somebody found a way to do it. The 'mental' athlete themselves are the innovators, they shape the future, and they are the ones that the next generation builds upon. That's how we progress.

HollywoodChicago.com: What can you tell us about the fellow climbers in your film, Conrad Anker and Ronan Ozturk, that the rest of the world doesn't know?

Chin: I think the film says a lot about their character. Conrad is an incredible climber, because he is an incredible human being. He is the inspiration behind the film, because to me the film is a tribute to him. I've spent 15 years going on expeditions with him, and you see the culmination of our relationship when he gives me the lead to the summit. He is one of the greats for a reason. I am eternally grateful for his mentorship and friendship. I've seen him in the most difficult and darkest times, but he never really has wavered. You would be lucky to be as passionate about anything as he is about climbing.

Ronan is an interesting character, he has a lot of heart. He obviously had the hardest journey coming back before the second climb [Ozturk had a head injury], I saw that because after his accident I was the one that found him.

HollywoodChicago.com: What's next for you?

Chin: People ask me that all the time, thinking I've done it all. I've only hit the tip of the iceberg. I sometimes have problems thinking about what is next because there are too many things I would love to do. I feel like I'm just getting started.

"Meru" is in select theaters now, including Chicago's Music Box Theatre. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Conrad Anker, Jimmy Chin and Ronan Ozturk. Directed by Jimmy Chin and Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi. Rated "R"



[17]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [18]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

© 2015 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on Mar 29 2024 - 8:43am):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/25840/interview-director-jimmy-chin-on-what-is-there-in-meru>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/because-it-s-there>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/conrad-anker>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/elizabeth-chai-vasarhelyi>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jimmy-chin>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jon-krakauer>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/meru>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mount-everest>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mount-meru>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mountain-climbing>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/music-box-films>

- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/music-box-theatre>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/ronan-ozturk>
- [17] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>