

Flashback Interview: Directors Betsy West & Julie Cohen on Their Documentary ‘RBG’

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CHICAGO – In honor of the recently deceased Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Magnolia Pictures has re-released her documentary “RBG” in a limited theatrical run ... and will also donate their net proceeds to the ACLU Women’s Rights Project, which was co-founded by Ginsburg. At the time of the film’s festival run, co-directors Betsy West and Julie Cohen were interviewed by HollywoodChicago.com.

The documentary spans the career of RBG, from her modest roots in Brooklyn to the heights of the highest court in the land. Throughout the journey, the intently modest Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a fierce fighter/advocate in her own life, especially in hurdling the obstacles of women in her early era, with the progressive support of her late husband Martin Ginsburg. We learn of the very few women that were in Harvard Law School at the time she went to that institution, the untiring interest in advancing the rights of women in several early court cases, and her rise to the upper echelons of judgeship. It’s both complex and simple... the law is the complexity, and the simplicity is RBG’s approach to speaking truth to that complexity.



Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the Oscar-nominated ‘RBG’

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

Betsy West and Julie Cohen are the co-directors of “RBG,” and both are veteran documentary makers. West’s background is mostly as a producer (she makes her directorial debut) and Cohen had directed other docs such as “The Sturgeon Queen” (2014) and “American Veteran” (2017). HollywoodChicago.com caught up with the pair in April of 2018, at Chicago’s DOC 10 festival.

HollywoodChicago.com: Not only is this a profile of Ruth Bader Ginsberg, but it seems like a background history of the fight for women’s rights from 1950 to the present day. What did you discover about RBG that was mind blowing as far as her contribution to the fight for equal gender rights?

Betsy West: We both knew her backstory going in, that’s why we wanted to make this film. Before she was a Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a lawyer who fought to secure women’s rights as equal under the Constitution in America. It’s not an exaggeration to say that it was the body of law that she established and developed.

For a variety of reasons most Americans, including many of the young women who are now big fans of hers, don’t know that history. That’s the number one reaction we’re getting at these screenings... ‘wow, I didn’t know that story.’ We just wanted to tell that story.

HollywoodChicago.com: One of the reminders in this film is the power of well chosen words, especially in a legal brief. In these divided times, and with your knowledge of the subject, what can we learn from RBG about expressing our beliefs, even if we’re not a lawyer?

Julie Cohen: Justice Ginsburg is very careful in her writing, she carefully selects every word, and she does not exaggerate. If you read her very carefully crafted briefs they are convincing because they’re not hyperbolic. They are powerful because they express the truth... that is very important to her.

One of the things to be learned from here is her attitude in facing adversity. Basically her mother taught her that anger is a waste of time, and that if she had a challenge she should meet it head on. That is how she has approached both her professional life and personal life. There is a lot to be learned from that perspective.

In the audio portion of the interview, Betsy West and Julie Cohen talk about the impact of Ginsburg’s religion, her relationship with her husband Martin and the impact of her work as an advocate for women’s rights.

Focus Features will also be re-releasing “On the Basis of Sex,” a feature film narrative highlighting the life story of RBG (portrayed honorably by Felicity Jones), and as well will contribute net proceeds to the ACLU Women’s Rights Project. For the perfect score HollywoodChicago.com review, [click here](#). [24]

“RBG” is currently in theaters again. See local listings for theaters and show times. Directed by Betsy West and Julie Cohen.



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