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[berlinale](#)  
[cannes](#)  
[los](#)  
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[new york](#)  
[park city](#)  
[san](#)  
[francisco](#)  
[sxsw](#)  
[toronto](#)

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[awards](#)  
[events](#)  
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[industry](#)  
[moves](#)  
[people](#)  
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[berlinale](#)  
[cannes](#)  
[sundance](#)  
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Celia Maysles, director of "Wild Blue Yonder," pictured over the weekend at IDFA in Amsterdam. Photo by Eugene Hernandez/indieWIRE

## DISPATCH FROM AMSTERDAM | Daughter's Personal Search for Her Father Exposes Maysles Family Rift

by Brian Brooks (November 26, 2007)

A provocative new first person documentary by a member of the Maysles family has stirred audiences at the **International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam** (IDFA) in recent days and it will likely garner more attention as the filmmakers seek wider awareness for the project. Among the hot tickets in The Netherlands has been "**Wild Blue Yonder**," the directorial debut of **Celia Maysles**, daughter of the late **David Maysles** and niece of **Albert Maysles**. Sifting through the list of IDFA's three hundred-plus titles this year reveals a roster of films about war, the environment, love, cult of personality and drugs, and the almighty name of Maysles also grabbed a significant share of buzz on the first weekend of the festival in Amsterdam.

Usually the legendary Maysles name itself would be enough attract the attention of documentary aficionados, but the disclosure that "Wild Blue Yonder" was made without the blessing of Celia's uncle **Albert Maysles** stirred even greater interest among audiences clamoring for tickets. Told with a handheld, first person approach, Celia Maysles' first film explores the life of her father, the work of the Maysles' brothers, and includes a number of scenes with Albert Maysles. She also probes her mom about key moments in David Maysles' life. Interactions with her uncle become more emotional as Celia digs deeper and deeper to try and learn more about her father who died in 1987, when she was seven years old.

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Initially, the elder Maysles seems supportive of his niece's desire to make a film about her father, but, as seen in the film, begins to resist when she seeks archival footage to use in her personal documentary. "I was thinking of just filming this... that it was something inside me that I just needed to get out," commented Celia Maysles, who sold her house in Oregon where she worked as a social worker, to make the film. Made with **Charlene Rule**, the film is produced by Celia Maysles and **Xan Parker** and executive produced by **Henry Corra**, who worked with Maysles Films in the 1980s and early '90s. **Cactus Three** is handling sales of the film.

Now 27, she explained, in the film and at a Q & A in Amsterdam this weekend, that she set out to gain insight into her father who remained an enigma, also hoping to learn more about the autobiographical film "**Blue Yonder**" which he was working on at the time of his death. For her exploration of his life and death, she hoped to use footage controlled by **Maysles Films** but ran into a roadblock when Albert Maysles refused her access to material. In telling her story, Celia Maysles exposes a deeper family rift that emerged after her father David Maysles' death, when her own mother battled Albert Maysles for control of previous films, against an internal pact made by the two brothers.



Celia Maysles with her film's executive producer Henry Corra at IDFA.  
Photo by Brian Brooks/indieWIRE

some of their films.

In the doc, and in a subsequent conversation with indieWIRE on Monday, Albert Maysles cited an agreement between himself and his brother that if either of them died, the other would control their entire library of work for a sales price of \$50,000. Celia's mother Judy, however, apparently did not honor that agreement and a subsequent lawsuit resulted in a ruling where Albert had to pay \$350,000 (in addition to an equal amount in legal fees), to retain control.

Albert Maysles, who said in New York on Monday that he has not been given an opportunity to see "Wild Blue Yonder" despite asking to screen it, is in the midst of making his anticipated autobiographical film, "**Handheld and From the Heart**." He explains to his niece on camera in her film that he is concerned their movies might overlap or compete with each other if they use similar footage. Celia counters that she simply wants images of her dad, and in an emotional phone call seen from her perspective, when pressed about the context for the footage she asks her uncle Albert, "What better context is there than a daughter's search for her father?"

"In some ways, I'm grateful to Al because I wouldn't have dugged so hard and found what I did about my Dad," an emotional Celia Maysles said after the IDFA screening this weekend. "I also had a lot of help from the very filmmakers that my dad taught. When I asked them for help, they dropped everything," she noted, citing help from **Charlotte Zwerin**, **Bruce Sinofsky**, and **Joe Berlinger**, among others.

The new documentary includes interviews with **D.A. Pennebaker**, **Susan Froemke**, Lois Wright (who appeared in "Grey Gardens"), **Christo** and **Jean-Claude**, among others and Celia Maysles uses clips from the Maysles Films "**Grey Gardens**," "**Gimme Shelter**," "**Salesman**," "**Christo in Paris**," and "**Running Fence**." She also visits the "Grey Gardens" house today in one of the many extended sequences devoted to the Maysles' acclaimed documentary about the Beales of East Hampton. According to a statement in the credits, the copyrights to those films are owned by Maysles Films and, "Celia used clips from these films by applying the 'fair use' doctrine of the U.S. copyright act." Albert Maysles confirmed on Monday that Celia Maysles has not secured permission for use of the clips in her film.

Pressed about the conflict with her uncle Albert during a Q & A this weekend in Amsterdam, Celia said that she hopes to avoid a lawsuit and expressed relief over finally screening the movie for an audience. Relieved she added, "I was scared he would try to stop it from showing here." But, festival insiders indicated that there was never a question about whether or not the film would screen at IDFA.

[Eugene Hernandez contributed to this article.]



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