ABSOLUTE WILSON

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“Sometimes you say to yourself ‘What should I do next?’ . . . you’re trying to think of the right thing to do but quite often you should think ‘what’s the wrong thing to do, what should I not do?’ . . . and then do that.”

-- American artist Robert Wilson

One of the most controversial, rule-breaking and visionary artists of our times is celebrated in this engaging journey into the center of the mystery that is the daring creative genius, Robert Wilson. More than a biography, ABSOLUTE WILSON is an exhilarating exploration of the mystifying power of creativity itself -- and also the inspirational tale of a boy who grew up as a troubled and learning-disabled outsider in the American South only to become a fearless artist with a profoundly original perspective to share with the world.

The creator of revolutionary works of theatre, opera, dance, performance and fine art that are still changing the landscape of 21st century expression, Robert Wilson has long been considered one of contemporary culture’s most insoluble mysteries. His work – which includes the groundbreaking international theatre sensations “Deafman Glance,” “Einstein on the Beach” and “The CIVIL WarS.” – pushes the limits of time and space, forging images of astonishing beauty, nightmarish psychological complexity, stark wit and haunting emotion. Many have lauded him as a mesmerizing visual genius. Others damn his productions as indulgent and costly. Incendiary, influential, contradictory, puzzling, other-worldly, mischievous, unclassifiable – Wilson is absolutely all of these.

But the one thing he has never been is forthcoming, until now. In making ABSOLUTE WILSON, writer, director and producer Katharina Otto-Bernstein (“Beautopia”) approached the notoriously walled-off Wilson like an excavator, digging deep into his life, his times and the distinctive inner workings of his mind to figure out how this compelling artist’s most extraordinary works have emerged out of a fascinating montage of his most private and personal experiences.

The result is a moving and revealing tale of a child who grew up in segregated, fundamentalist Waco, Texas plagued by learning disabilities and longing for the love of a father who could not understand him; of a young man who discovered profound liberation in the New York arts world of the 1960s; and of a visionary who used his mistrust of verbal communication; his fascination with the autistic, the brain damaged and the confined; and most of all his fierce hunger to reach out as a means towards becoming a major creative force unlike any other in the world today.

With humor, verve and a buoyant pace, Otto-Bernstein creates a unique portrait in
ABSOLUTE WILSON by inter-cutting a series of raw, intimate interviews with Wilson against archival footage of his work – moving between past and present and creating a richly woven series of major themes and playful interludes that could almost be called “Wilsonesque.”

Providing further insight into Wilson’s life and art is lively commentary from a range of collaborators, lovers, admirers, family members -- and even detractors -- including musician David Byrne, writer Susan Sontag (in one of the last interviews before her recent death), composer Philip Glass, opera star Jessye Norman, Harvard professor Arthur Holmberg, agent and former Paris Opera director Charles Fabius, artist Cindy Lubar, choreographer Andy Groat, Arnold Aronson of Columbia University, dramaturg Maita de Nescimi, Harvey Lichtenstein of the Brooklyn Academy of music, theatre critics John Rockwell and John Simon, as well as Wilson’s sister, Suzanne.

Says Katharina Otto-Bernstein of ABSOLUTE WILSON: “I started with the premise that to really understand Robert Wilson’s work you would have to understand him as a human being. It took many years -- and a lot of prodding, shouting and scheming -- to get Bob to finally open up, but we ultimately built a very strong trust that allowed the seemingly impossible to happen. Robert’s work has always been about attempting the impossible so I felt a kind of constant connection to that idea.”

She continues: “To do anything with Robert Wilson of course is an incredible learning experience. Anything you do around him becomes monumental because he’s so monumental. He thinks in terms of the superlative and is always striving for perfection. So in making this film there was always a desire to live up to that. But at the same time I did not want to compromise on what I saw as the heart of the film and the missing piece of his story: the very human side of his past that has largely been hidden.”

ABSOLUTE WILSON is written, produced and directed by Katharina Otto-Bernstein. Penny CM Stankiewicz is the producer. The editor is Bernadine Colish and the camera work is by Ian Saladyga and Eric Seefranz.

WHO IS ROBERT WILSON ANYWAY?
Robert Wilson may be the best known experimental artist in America, which is saying a lot in a culture far more devoted to pure entertainment than to art that changes the world. He has been hailed by the *New York Times* as “towering figure” in the avant-garde and he is a two-time Pulitzer Prize nominee. In Europe, he is a superstar to rival any living artist. Across the world, he is considered a pioneer in the developing new field of art as therapy, and has collaborated with many of the most creative minds in the public consciousness today, from Philip Glass to David Byrne to William S. Burroughs and Lou Reed.

But does anybody really know Robert Wilson? Throughout his career, he has cultivated and achieved a profound sense of mystery around his persona – part mystic, part showman, at once outrageous and austere – that has made him seem at times to be an impenetrable enigma.

In *ABSOLUTE WILSON*, Katharina Otto-Bernstein breaks through the opaque image surrounding Wilson to get to the moving truth of the man and his work. She does so by beginning not with his influential art but with his equally fascinating and dramatic life.

Her energetic and emotional film traces Wilson’s themes and visual motifs back to his childhood days as the son of the Mayor of Waco, Texas -- where as a shy, awkward, stuttering boy he felt like a complete outsider in a world of hunting, churchly damnation and racial segregation. Trapped between his beautiful but utterly remote mother and his ambitious, perpetually disappointed father, Wilson was inexorably lonely. To make matters worse, Wilson was a struggling, learning-disabled student whom teachers pegged as having little promise for the future. His sole friend, the African-American son of a family employee, made him even more of an outcast in a community where interracial friendships were shunned.

Yet he did have one profound experience– an encounter with a ballet teacher named Byrd Hoffman who Wilson recalls taught him to slow down his rapid-fire perception of the universe – slow it down to a dream-like crawl – a suggestion that changed Wilson forever and a theme he would later take to invigorating limits in his art work.

After high school, still yearning to prove his worth to his father, Wilson attempted at first to study law in Texas. But then he radically changed course. He came out to his un-accepting dad – who declared that Wilson’s homosexuality could be “cured” -- and headed to New York City to study architecture at the renowned Pratt Institute. The New York of the early 60s was a mind-blowing, life-changing experience for Wilson. There, he was introduced to an astonishing...
new world of design, dance and theatre that spoke to him as nothing else had before, falling in
love especially with the boundary-pushing artistry of pioneers such as Merce Cunningham and
John Cage. It was a heady time to be in New York City – a time when an idealistic group of
rising young artists truly believed that what they were doing could change art, theatre and even
America itself – and Wilson was swept up by the possibilities.

While in New York, Wilson also began earning money by doing therapeutic work with
brain-damaged, disabled and hyperactive children – an experience that would profoundly alter his
relationship to language and movement, become a catharsis and strongly influence the therapeutic
nature of his future work. After a brief return home to Texas – what he calls “a mistake” -- and a
desperate suicide attempt that resulted in a stint at a mental hospital (where Wilson was, in typical
fashion, impressed by “the aesthetic”), Wilson realized his true home was back in New York.

He returned again, quickly becoming part of a seminal community of on-the-edge artists
in Soho that included choreographer Meredith Monk, theatre director Jack Smith, minimalist
composer Philip Glass and the painter Andy Warhol. Continuing his work with the disabled, and
even choreographing theatre and dance pieces for patients confined to Iron Lungs, Wilson started
to explore an entirely new genre – *theatre as therapy*.

In the late 1960s, Wilson founded an experimental theatrical commune that became
known as The Byrd Hoffman School for Byrds – a group that ranged from professional
performers to curious housewives to the disabled -- with whom he began staging strange,
pioneering and acclaimed avant-garde performances at the cult-like Thursday night Open Houses.

Wilson’s story shifts into a whole new gear when he unexpectedly rescues Raymond
Andrews -- a deaf-mute, African-American street kid -- from a police beating and soon after
discovering he lives in a one-room apartment with people who don’t even realize he is deaf,
becomes compelled to adopt him. Raymond soon becomes the inspiration for Wilson’s first
international sensation, the 7-hour silent opera, “Deafman Glance.”

A tour de force that uses time and space, light and ritualistic movement to tell a non-
linear tale of violence and tragedy, the work thrusts Wilson into the international arena as a new
star. Hailed as a milestone in the history of theatre, the piece prompts Louis Aragon, the father of
the Surrealism movement, to write an open letter to the city of Paris, saying: “Never in my life
have I seen anything more beautiful. Robert Wilson is what we surrealists hoped would come
after us.”

Now, Wilson was suddenly surrounded by a coterie of powerful supporters, including
Man Ray, Eugene Ionesco, Jerome Robbins, Marlene Dietrich and the Shah of Iran, among
others, and began to broaden his cult-like following of devoted fans. Yet the one person who still
would not come see his play remained his father.

Wilson next pushed the theatrical format to new extremes, producing a continuous 7-day play in the mountains of Iran (KA MOUNTAIN) that explored the boundaries between real life and theatre. While trying to return to the U.S., however, Wilson was arrested for possession of narcotics. Facing a seven-year jail sentence in a foreign land, it took an international effort by the theatre and arts community to gain his safe release.

Back in the U.S., in 1974, Wilson met his most influential muse to date: the autistic, teen-aged poet Christopher Knowles, the son of a friend. Wilson’s friendship with Knowles and his fascination with Knowles’ repetitive fugues and abstract thought patterns led to such groundbreaking productions as “A Letter To Queen Victoria,” and perhaps Wilson’s most famous work in America, “Einstein on the Beach,” the landmark opera on which he collaborated with composer Philip Glass. A metaphorical look at the scientific genius whose theories led to the splitting of the atom, “Einstein on the Beach” broke the rigid structure of theatrical productions wide open and introduced Wilson to a new mainstream audience.

Wilson’s next work was his most ambitious – and ultimately tragic. The sudden death of his father, and the resulting emotional turmoil, led Wilson to explore the notion of civil wars on an immense scale, from their roots in family divisions to their global prevalence in the late 20th century.

“The Tree is Best Measure When It’s Down: The CIVIL WarS,” was originally commissioned for the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles – and Wilson spent the next five years devoting himself completely to bringing to life his vision of simultaneous productions taking place in six countries in one massive, truly global, twelve-hour performance. But Wilson’s vision was never to be realized. Increasingly nervous about Wilson’s radical ideas – and with corporate donors aghast at his concept of having David Bowie read the Gettysburg Address in Japanese -- at the last moment, the Olympic Committee balked, refusing to fund the presentation. Although portions of “The CIVIL WarS” have been performed in various cities at various times, Wilson never saw the entire piece come to light as he had conceived it.

On the heels of this artistic, not to mention financial, disaster, Wilson returned to Europe where he rebounded with the greatest popular success of his career to date: “The Black Rider,” a collaboration with inventive writer William Burroughs and composer/musician Tom Waits, that became an enormous commercial hit, with sold-out performances continuing in Europe for three years straight. The work was the culmination of one of Wilson’s biggest dreams – to have a commercial success without making any artistic compromises.

In 1992, Wilson came home to New York once again, this time to found the Watermill
Center, a new arts foundation which provides emerging artists with opportunities for unlimited creation and research and provides an outlet for Wilson’s ever deeper focus on education and therapy.

Though he is now drawn in more directions than ever, Wilson has yet to slow down his blistering pace of creation. He continues to average an astonishing 12 international productions a year. Where does his incessant drive come from? *ABSOLUTE WILSON* suggests that it all ties back to Wilson’s life-long yearning, borne out of his most primal childhood struggles to find new and more powerful ways to communicate – no matter how radical, how strange or how unexpected and no matter if it’s with a Nobel Prize winner or a disabled person.

As Harvard theatre history professor Arthur Holmberg observes: “In many ways one could see Bob’s work as a psycho drama in which he replays, reworks and transcends the traumas he had as a child, using art as therapy. The reason why Wilson’s work resonates so deeply with people is that it touches the core of our own experience.”
CRACKING OPEN ROBERT WILSON

“Bob has experienced so many traumas in his life, it would have destroyed a lesser soul. He makes theatre to transcend these traumas.”
-- Theatre Historian Arthur Holmberg

How do you get inside the soul of a man who is considered as impenetrable as he is brilliant? This was the challenge that faced Katharina Otto-Bernstein as she approached the making of ABSOLUTE WILSON.

An award-winning documentary filmmaker whose probing exploration of the modeling world, “Beautopia,” garnered accolades at film festivals around the world, Otto-Bernstein’s journey began quite accidentally – sparked by a chance encounter with Wilson that in turn led to an invitation to visit Wilson’s think tank, the “Watermill Center” in Long Island, New York. In Watermill, she encountered Wilson, this time standing in the center’s backyard, creating a rock installation on the lawn by directing two brawny young men to heave the boulders back and forth, left and right, until he intuited their ultimate placement. Wilson called Otto-Bernstein over to get her advice on placing the huge stones. For twenty minutes Otto-Bernstein became part of a Wilson collaboration, only to ultimately have her opinion discounted. Nevertheless, something happened in that moment. Otto-Bernstein was mesmerized by this glimpse into Wilson’s persona and Wilson also seemed to sense a creative affinity.

“Let’s do something together,” he suggested and Katharina’s immediate suggestion was that she make a movie about Wilson. Astonishingly, he simply agreed. “That was the beginning of a roller-coaster that led me to every corner of the world,” laughs Otto-Bernstein.

To Otto-Bernstein’s surprise, Wilson gave her free reign to make the film as she envisioned it – but that doesn’t mean he made it easy for her to pursue him. For starters, there was the simple logistical fact that Robert Wilson, an inveterate artist-nomad, rarely spends more than a week at a time in any one country, doesn’t sleep more than a few hours a night and is famously late for everything that he does. Knowing he was said to be notoriously impossible to keep up with, Katharina was prepared to follow Wilson to the four corners of the earth and even gave his assistant a video camera early on to capture as much spontaneous and up-close footage of him at work as possible.

But beyond the logistics, there was the much bigger and far more vital issue of getting Wilson to talk – not just talk in crisp sound-bites but to essentially confess and reveal the most intimate memories of his early life. It was an on-going, evolving, up-and-down process, a kind of
chipping away, that Katharina quickly realized was going to make or break the movie. There were times when, despite the enormous respect Katharina felt for Wilson, she worried she might have to pull the plug on the project because Wilson was simply too remote, too emotionally evasive.

“Over the decades of Robert career, he has been asked every question in the book, so he has learned how to give programmed answers,” explains the director. “For a long time, in our early interviews, it was very difficult for him to divorce himself from these standard responses he was so used to giving and it was unclear if he ever would. It literally took years for us to build the trust to get there and it wasn’t until one of our final interviews – the one seen in the film against the black background – at about three in the morning, when I thought we had just about reached the end, that he seemed to make some kind of internal decision to really talk.”

In the end, Wilson was far more forthcoming with Katharina Otto-Bernstein than he has been with other interviewers, revealing the full scope of his larger-than-life persona, which stands out in luminous relief against the stark backgrounds Otto-Bernstein places him against.

“There are so many moods to Robert – you see how he can come off as warm, generous, kind, eccentric, impatient, distant, manic and brilliant, sometimes all at the same time,” she observes. “He is a living contradiction and part of understanding who he is to look at those contradictions.”

What was her secret? Aside from tenacity and determination, she credits something more mysterious. “We just seemed to have some kind of strange connection,” she says. “Surprisingly, although he is so used to directing things, he never tried in any way to take control of the film. In fact, during the post-production, he has never even attempted to see it!”

In between chasing authentic responses from Wilson, Katharina was scouring theatre and museum archives in multiple countries for footage and stills from Wilson’s performances. “It was a bit of a treasure hunt,” she admits. “I would suddenly come across an entire reel of ‘Einstein in the Beach’ in some obscure archive – so you never knew what you might find and it could be very exciting.”

She also began to make contact with key figures from Wilson’s life – family members, friends, collaborators and critics, hunting them down around the globe as well. “Bob collected such an unusual, quirky and gifted circle of friends that it was a very interesting process finding and talking to them,” she notes.

One of her favorite interviews was with the writer Susan Sontag, who collaborated with Wilson on “Alice in Bed,” claimed to have seen “Einstein on the Beach” around 40 times and observed of him: “Bob is a person of infinite wisdom and infinite theatrical appetite. Luckily his own genius is so eccentric he may never have the commercial success he so desires.”
Sontag passed away shortly after Katharina’s interview, a loss felt around the world. “I found her to be extremely enjoyable and very feisty,” recalls Otto-Bernstein. “She was so vibrant and charismatic, so full of fun, that it is almost impossible to imagine that she could be dead.”

Another especially thrilling interview was that with acclaimed opera singer Jessye Norman. “She was quite humorous and wonderfully forthcoming,” says Otto-Bernstein of the woman whose majestic voice has inspired numerous artists and musicians. Also vibrant and forthcoming was David Byrne, the well-known musician and artist who founded the seminal group The Talking Heads and collaborated with Robert Wilson on “The Knee Plays” and “The Forest.” “David was polite, giving, thoughtful and very poetic,” says the director. “He was a complete joy.”

However, not everyone was quite so effusive. Some interviewees required a bit of coaxing, perhaps nervous about what Robert Wilson would think of their comments. Others were hard to track down, particularly the former members of the Byrd Hoffman School, many of whom returned to very different lives after the experimental theatre commune was dissolved.

One of the most unusual participants was theatre critic John Simon, who has often had excoriating words for Wilson’s work, but someone Otto-Bernstein considered an integral part of the story. “The interesting thing about John Simon is that he doesn’t just hate Robert Wilson, he hates him with a tremendous passion,” she laughs. “There is something fascinating about the intensity with which he dislikes his work.”

Yet no matter, who Otto-Bernstein wanted to talk to, or what controversial subject she broached, Robert Wilson never interfered. “To his credit, he allowed everyone to really speak their mind,” comments Otto-Bernstein. “There was some caution at first by some of the participants but for the most part, people had wonderful and often quite surprising stories to tell.”

With so much material to work from, Otto-Bernstein concentrated on forging a precise structure for the film. **ABSOLUTE WILSON** echoes the design of several of Robert Wilson’s operas, with their so-called “knee plays” – vaudeville-style intervals used to give his productions time to change sets – by interspersing brisk interludes of Wilson in the present against the chronological tale of his life history.

“Bob’s life and work are so organically intertwined, I looked for visual ways to express that in the film,” says Otto-Bernstein. “To me it’s so much more interesting to know where the creative process began than to simply watch it unfold. The past is to key to understanding Bob, but he is also someone who never gets jaded. He has this child-like curiosity that is always very alive. If something tickles his fancy, and it could be anything, he goes off in that direction – and that’s what makes him so fascinating as both an artist and a human being.”
THE WORLD ACCORDING TO WILSON

Robert Wilson on art and theatre:

- “Somewhere in whatever I’m saying as a director, an artist, a human being, there has to be some kind of a truth.”
- “Politics and religions can divide man, but art brings us together. So I passionately believe in art.”
- “I make theatre, not meanings.”
- “There is no difference between living and working. It is all one process.”

Wilson on his childhood:

- “I grew up in a community where if you saw someone sinning you could put their name in the prayer box and everyone would pray for them.”
- “I was very slow to read, to catch a ball, to do whatever. It’s a processing disorder. Now I understand it . . . at the time I didn’t understand it and my parents didn’t understand . . . it made for a rather complicated childhood.”
- “I had a great fear of how I would ever get through school and what I would do once I got out of school. I couldn’t imagine I would ever make it in the world, nor could my father.”

Wilson on his mother:

- “My mother was beautiful, intelligent, cold, distant and I think someone who felt things very deeply but wasn’t able to outwardly express herself . . . with my mother there was almost no personal communication.”

Wilson on his father:

- “I told my father that I can’t live my life to please him, that I was an artist, that I was homosexual, all the things he suspected but didn’t want to hear . . . He said if you’re gay we can cure it. I couldn’t wait to get away.”
- “I said, ‘Dad this play is a great success in Paris; won’t you come and see it?’ And he told me ‘if you’re going to do one of these things next year maybe I can come, but I can’t
My father came to see Einstein on the Beach at the Metropolitan Opera. We had a thirty minute studding ovation and he said; ‘This is really impressive you must be making a lot of money.’ I said ‘no dad I’m not . . . I’m $100,000 in debt’. He said, ‘Son I didn’t know you were smart enough to loose $100,000.’ It’s the nicest thing he ever said to me.”

Wilson on working with movement for the brain damaged:

“I realized by exercising suddenly it was easier for them to learn. My interest in education came to me through my roots. I connected with it, because I’d been there.”

“People have said with Chris [Knowles] I was taking advantage of a brain damaged child. So a judgment is put on it but without talking about the work.”

“Of all the people I know, Chris is the one who moves me the most. You know, Chris can’t tell a lie. That breaks my heart.”

Wilson on performance:

“I didn’t know anything about standing on the stage until I got there and I did it.”

Wilson on being an American artist:

“I didn’t want to be an expatriate. I wanted to be in my own country, even if I can’t work here I want a presence.”
ROBERT WILSON: LIFE AND TIMES

With a resume the size of a city phonebook, and four decades worth of astonishingly prolific creation, it would take a massive tome to list Robert Wilson’s full array of artistic works. Instead, following below is a timeline related to the events and works noted that come to the fore in ABSOLUTE WILSON – a quick guide to Wilson’s life and times:

1941 Robert Wilson born in Waco, Texas. A lonely child who does not fit in, he overcomes a childhood speech disability in his teens with the help of dancer, Byrd Hoffman.

1959 Wilson enrolls at the University of Texas, Austin hoping to please his father.

1963 After coming out to his father, moves to New York to study architecture at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn. While at school, takes a job doing movement therapy with brain damaged children.

1965 Choreographs dance event at New York World’s Fair.

1966 After graduating at the bottom of his class, he returns to Texas and makes a suicide attempt, overdosing on pills. He is briefly confined in a mental hospital, before deciding to leave Texas forever.

1968 Founds The Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds as an experimental workshop in a loft on Spring Street in New York’s SoHo.


1969 Two major productions premiere in New York: “The King of Spain” at the Anderson Theater and “The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud” at Brooklyn Academy of Music.


1972 The seven-day play “KA MOUNTAIN and GUArdenia Terrace” is performed in Iran. On his way home, Wilson is arrested for possession of narcotics and held in prison until an international effort helps to gain his release.


1976 Wilson’s landmark work, “Einstein on the Beach,” a collaboration with composer Philip Glass, is performed at the Festival d’Avignon and at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House.

1982 Wilson begins a long-lasting collaboration with celebrated opera singer Jessye Norman with the Paris production of “Great Day in the Morning.”

1983 Parts of the multi-national epic “the CIVIL warS” are performed in Rotterdam, followed by Cologne, Rome and Minneapolis with exhibitions in New York and Chicago. The full epic, commissioned for the 1984 Olympics, has never been seen in its entirety after the funding was halted by the Olympic Committee.

1986 “Hamletmachine,” a collaboration with German playwright Heiner Müller, opens in Hamburg. Wilson is nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for “the CIVIL warS.”


1991 Collaborates with Tom Waits and William Burroughs on the highly successful production “The Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets,” which plays to sold-out crowds and wins the German Theater Critics Award.

1993 Wins Golden Lion prize at Venice Biennale for the sculptural installation “Memory/Loss.” “Alice in Bed,” a collaboration with Susan Sontag, performed in Berlin.

1995 HAMLET, a monologue, devised and performed by Wilson, opens in Houston and begins a world tour.

1995 Wilson collaborates with rock legend Lou Reed on “Time Rocker,” which opens at Hamburg’s Thalia Theater.


2000 POEtry, a second collaboration with Lou Reed, opens in Hamburg. Wilson is invited to join the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

2000 Collaborates again with Tom Waits on “Woyzek,” which tours internationally.


ABSOLUTE WILSON

Credits

Written, Produced and Directed by
Katharina Otto-Bernstein

Produced by
Penny CM Stankiewicz

Edited by
Bernadine Colish

Camera by
Ian Saladyga
Eric Seefranz

Composer
Miriam Cutler

Technical Advisor
Chales Fabius

Contributing Editors
Robert Pennington
Shaswati Talukdar

Additional Editing
David Grosbach

Additional Camera
Katharina Otto-Bernstein
Penny CM Stankiewicz
Robert Pennington
Stephan Lang
Jorn Weisbrodt
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ABSOLUTE WILSON chronicles the epic life, times and creative genius of Robert Wilson, intimately revealing for the first time one of the most controversial, rule-breaking and downright mysterious artists of our era. More than a biography, the film becomes an exhilarating exploration of the transformative power of creativity itself – and the inspirational tale of a boy who grew up as a troubled and learning-disabled outsider in the American South only to become a fearless artist with a profoundly original perspective to share with the world. The probing yet playful narrative reveals the deep inter-connections between Wilson’s childhood experiences and the haunting beauty of his monumental works, which include the theatrical sensations “Deafman Glance,” “Einstein on the Beach” and “The CIVIL WarS.” Along the way, the film introduces an array of admirers, friends and critics -- ranging from musician David Byrne to the late writer Susan Sontag to composer Phillip Glass and singer Jessye Norman, among others – who add insight as the film peels back layer after layer to get to a raw, forthcoming and uniquely moving view of how Wilson’s work emerged from an extraordinary life and a ceaseless yearning to communicate.