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presents

**CITIZEN JANE**  
**AMERICA ACCORDING TO FONDA**

A 52' film by Florence Platarets  
Produced by AGAT FILMS ET CIE and ARTE France



## LOGLINE

Few icons embody the myths and reveal the contradictions of their country as much as Jane Fonda. Heiress of the Hollywood star system, darling of French auteur cinema, Oscar winner, politically-engaged producer, feminist, queen of aerobics, activist, and formidable businesswoman: In one lifetime, Fonda has reconciled the many faces of America without ever losing her integrity. Through her story, this film retraces a social and political history, and paints a portrait of a typically American phenomenon.

## SYNOPSIS

Over Jane Fonda's face and body, a series of photographs are superimposed which may seem incoherent or irreconcilable in a single life: The pretty face of Henry Fonda's daughter on American screens in the 1950s gives way to the sex bomb of *Barbarella*, quickly superseded by the extreme-left activist who, with a change of hairstyle and bra, showed the world an ardent politician and feminist. But only a few years later, Jane's breasts get the silicone treatment and this 40-year-old woman is worshipping a different cult – that of the body and eternal youth. In the collective unconsciousness, the image of Fonda in her leotard and big hair replaces that of Hanoi Jane smiling on a Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun and the double Oscar-winning actress. Her long absence from screens from 1990-2005 fixed the image of an active and dynamic woman, who turned the battle against ageing into an aerobic routine. Her return to both the large and small screen since 2005 has done little to change things: At 70, then 80, Jane Fonda has embraced her role as woman, playing the mature mother or mother-in-law, accepting both her wrinkles and her face-lifts.

One could stop there, remaining somewhat perplexed in the face of these successive metamorphoses, seeing only surface contradictions. But that would fail to take into account just how much, throughout her career, she has resonated with her own country, its history, its dreams, ambitions, and contradictions. That is precisely where Jane Fonda is most fascinating: In the way she has embodied America, either embracing or rejecting the mythology, reflecting its various facets, becoming one of its most emblematic icons and the herald of both its triumphs and failings.

### **“Lady Jane”, an all-American girl**

Jane was born in 1937 into a family that would become a movie dynasty, comprising Henry, Jane, Peter, and later Bridget. She grew up with a father who was a national screen treasure, yet taciturn and absent, and whom she was desperate to please; brother Peter who was two years her junior; and a mother from American high society. Jane had a typical well-to-do childhood: Ballet, horse riding, elite schooling, and the great outdoors.

Independent and solitary, Jane did not bond with her depressive mother, who spent regular spells in hospital before eventually cutting her own throat in a psychiatric unit. Jane was 12, and was spared the grim truth, being told her mother died of a heart attack. It was only later that she learned the real cause of her mother's death.

While she was trying to construct her own identity as a young woman, Jane Fonda had to shed her status as “daughter of”. She tried her hand at all sorts of jobs, regularly getting fired. Torn between her urge to please her father (which meant staying away from movies) and the need to make her own choices in life, she finally opted for the stage and left for New York to study at the Actor's Studio under Lee Strasberg. To pay for her classes, she became a model with

Eileen Ford, perfectly encapsulating the ingénue of the Eisenhower era. Her light chestnut hair, well-defined features, and athletic body contrasted with the sophisticated European clothes she was given to wear.

It was this stereotypical image of the pretty young American woman that was first captured on the big screen in *Tall Story* directed by Joshua Logan. Opposite Anthony Perkins, who plays a student and basketball player, she takes on the guise of the cheerleader. Fonda's first movie role was a cliché whose contours she would have to endlessly deconstruct.

The film shot her straight to stardom (she won a Golden Globe for best female newcomer), but also marked the start of her distrust of Hollywood diktats. She may have refused all plastic surgery, but she nonetheless had to comply with what was expected of her, being sexy while not going overboard.

She then moved onto more complex roles, fragile heroines exploited by men or dominated by the system. *Walk on the Wild Side* (in which she played a prostitute), followed by George Cukor's *The Chapman Report* (she plays a frigid widow) gave her the opportunity to shape a different image. As for her father, he readily acknowledged his daughter's talent.

### **An American in Paris**

In 1965, after Brigitte Bardot, Annette Stroyberg, and Catherine Deneuve, Roger Vadim married Jane Fonda. As a couple, they were a complex blend of sexual freedom, emancipation, conformism, and alienation.

Fonda regularly returned to the USA, which meant she simultaneously provided two different images of herself in two countries: The reassuring face of the bankable star for Hollywood, and that of muse of a hedonistic French director, a dilettante who filmed her naked, as he had a few years earlier with Bardot.

Fonda was living in Paris and expecting a daughter when the turmoil of May '68 was unfolding in the street. Simone Signoret, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Roger and Elizabeth Vailland, and Vanessa Redgrave accompanied Fonda in her political education. In Paris, she met US deserters, Vietnamese from the National Liberation Front, and started to become aware that her country was taking the wrong path in Vietnam – as France had done before in Indochina.

### **“GI Jane”, a citizen at war with her own country**

Fonda gradually embraced counter-culture causes and America's protest movement. She actively supported the Black Panthers in the civil rights arena, became a militant feminist, defended native Americans, and crisscrossed the United States to proclaim her opposition to the Vietnam War.

She embarked on a project with Sydney Pollack, which denounced the exploitation of poverty, the fierce competition between individuals, and the spectacle of human degradation – a barely-disguised metaphor for capitalism.

Nixon's America was undergoing its deepest crisis since the 1929 depression. *Easy Rider*, which starred Jane's brother Peter, heralded the advent of the New Hollywood; Sharon Tate, a friend of Jane's, was brutally murdered by the Manson gang; and Vietnam was turning into a

national catastrophe. That year, Fonda went on a spiritual journey to India and returned more determined than ever to challenge American values.

Her meeting with the militant politician Tom Hayden spelt the end of her relationship with Vadim.

Her political stance did not yet unsettle the Hollywood movie industry, and she picked up her first Oscar for her role in Alan Pakula's *Klute*, in which she played a call girl pursued by a psychopath – a role which was perfectly in tune with what she was denouncing.

### **“Hanoi Jane”, public enemy N°1**

In 1972, she returned to France to shoot a film with Jean-Luc Godard about a factory occupied by its striking workers. That year, a photo of her taken in Vietnam sitting on a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun sparked a huge scandal back home, where for some, she became public enemy n°1. From then on, the knives were out for this star who denounced the system which had made her what she was. Lady Jane became Hanoi Jane. The FBI and the CIA kept her under surveillance, and she was regularly arrested for no reason.

Even today, her public appearances in the USA are accompanied by vociferous protests by Vietnam vets, who have never forgiven her “betrayal”. Aware of the risks she was taking and the contradictions between her job as an actress and her activism, Fonda created her own production company. IPC Films provided another way to push her causes, and the profits generated funded the political career of Tom Hayden, to whom she was now married.

During the 1970s, her feminist stance became more prominent. And in 1978, the movie industry was finally ready to examine the reality of Vietnam: *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* were released, and Hollywood awarded a second Oscar to Fonda. It was the start of a slow reconciliation with her country.

### **The aerobic queen**

On the cusp of the 1980s, the international star had a string of roles with directors such as Lumet, Pollack, and Pakula. The politically-engaged actress and militant feminist would surprise the whole world. Aged 40, she discovered aerobics and became its most ardent advocate. The dedicated feminist was now toning her butt. The woman seen as an opponent of Nixon paradoxically became a symbol of the Reagan years, giving lessons in clean living and materialism on VHS, looking after both her body and her bank account.

To understand this, one no doubt has to go back a little. Until the age of 40, Fonda fluctuated between anorexia and bulimia. Classical dance, aerobics, and also the defense of healthy eating and a certain asceticism finally reconciled her with her body of a mature woman. Her approach was addressed at other women; it was more a question of giving the renewed confidence rather than conforming the alienating diktats of the consumer society. The profits from the 17 million videos she sold financed Hayden's political career (and his Campaign for Economic Democracy), who had since become a Democrat senator, and the holiday camp for disadvantaged children they founded together in Laurel Springs.

In the space of a few years, Fonda became a shrewd businesswoman at the head of a fitness empire which included gyms across the country, video cassettes and books, all perfectly in

tune with the image of the female executive lauded by Reaganite ideology. In 1984, she was ranked the third most influential woman in the United States. In private, Fonda lived with her family in an eco-shack on the ocean shore, rejecting ostentatious signs of wealth and raising her children simply. On screen, as actress or producer, Fonda continued to lead crusades against white-collar crime (*Rollover*), major industrial groups which pollute and the nuclear lobby (*The China Syndrome*), poor housing, shortcomings in social security, and gender inequality (9 to 5).

Fonda may have denounced differences in treatment in all areas of private and professional life, but she herself was not beyond falling foul of sexism. During the 1980s, her big-screen roles gradually dried up, proving the inexorable rule of the star system which says that wrinkles on a man gives them sex appeal, whereas for women they are a sign of being over the hill.

### **Disappearance and renaissance**

After 17 years of marriage, Fonda and Hayden divorced. She then married Ted Turner, the billionaire media magnate. Long before the term became general currency, the Turners were the quintessential power couple, the alliance of wealth, glamor, celebrity and power. They rubbed shoulders with Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, Lech Walesa, and Mikhail Gorbachev.

Fonda was no longer to be seen in the pages of movie magazines, but she continued to use her influence for the social causes which she still defended. She regularly demonstrated in support of women's rights or against the Bush administration Bush and its involvement in the war in Iraq or its poor handling of the Hurricane Katrina aftermath.

In the mid-2000s, a contract with cosmetics giant L'Oréal saw her return to glossy magazines as an elegant sixty-something. In her autobiography, *My Life So Far*, Jane Fonda embraces it all: Her wrinkles, her plastic surgery, her age. The long introspection that led to her memoirs and her discovery late in life of Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* (which she then performed around the world) made her more aware of the disparity between her life as a woman and her engagements.

Jane Fonda took a renewed interest in cinema. She took on roles as a mother-in-law or grandmother with a spiky character (*Monster-in-Law*, *Georgia Rule*). In 2007, she was given a career Palme d'Or in Cannes, and in 2015, she climbed the festival's steps for her role as an octogenarian diva in *Youth* directed by Paolo Sorrentino.

Now in her 80s, Jane Fonda seems to have reconciled all her lives and different faces. She was one of the most influential women in the movie industry and one of the richest in the entertainment world. Still active in the struggles for women's rights, minorities, and the protection of the environment, she remains close to the American social democrat movement. In a country which elected a president who happily boasts of "grabbing women by the pussy", she was out on the street again in the latest Women's March.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

To sketch this portrait of Jane Fonda, we have chosen to rely entirely on archives. The diversity of material available and its graphic treatment (animation, visual effects, etc.) along with the editing will give the film its pace, contours, and visual identity.

The research we have carried out reveals a wide diversity of sources, spanning the archives of many US agencies and networks (AP, Getty, Reelin' in the Years, CNN, Reuters, NBC Universal), France's INA, the BBC in the UK, Belgium's SONUMA/RTBF, RTS in Switzerland and ZDF in Germany, plus various other news agencies, image banks, etc.

The nature of the images is also very varied, ranging from film extracts, makings-of, trailers, reportages, documentaries, TV interviews, press cuttings, photographs, fitness videos, award ceremonies, red carpets, press conferences, set photos and photo-calls, speeches and protests, etc. These images reflect the profusion of Jane Fonda's activities and illustrate her entire career along with some key stages of her private life (childhood, weddings, births, etc).

Making this film from France allows us to examine two key periods in Fonda's life from a dual perspective: Her French years, and her stance against her country's involvement in Vietnam. The five years she spent in the French film world left some rich archive material in the national TV library, INA. Many making-of sequences from her movies, footage of her life with Vadim, the birth of her daughter Vanessa, and their life in the countryside show another side of the glamorous Hollywood star (and reveal her progress in speaking French!). This immersion in French cultural, intellectual and political life played a key role in awakening her political awareness (before her experiences in India then her own country). Fonda's experience of the events of 1968 seen from France are not the same as what was shown back in America. And her future political engagement would not be treated in the same way on either side of the Atlantic.

Her frequent media appearances mean we can see her regularly reevaluating her life and her artistic or political positions. She does not evoke the "Hanoi Jane" episode in the same terms in 1972 as she does in 1988. Hearing her talk about Vadim in 1966 is not quite the same as in 2005. Far from renouncing her private or public choices, she reviews them in the light of her personal evolution, her concerns, changes in society, or simply the passing of time. Seeing her reassessing her path is not only touching, but is fascinating and admirable. The film's editing will strive to give these reappraisals their full dramatic power.

It should also be mentioned that listening to Fonda speaking is a real pleasure in itself. Her integrity, intelligence, humor, and the distance from which she regards things gives her words, her stances, and her acting work a coherence and power which command respect, fondness and admiration. Everyone knows Jane Fonda. She continues to exist in the collective unconsciousness of successive generations. But few really know the stuff of which she is made, which is what makes this film so compelling.

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