



RACHEL CARSON'S THE SEA AROUND US is a January, 2016 LVCA DVD donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that documentary film.

16 of a possible 20 points

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**United States / Australia 1953 Technicolor 63 minutes live action feature documentary
RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. / Irwin Allen Productions Producer: Irwin Allen**

Points:

- Direction: Irwin Allen**
 - Technical Advisor: Allan Hancock**
 - 2 Editing: Frederic Knudtson* (Supervising), Doane Harrison***
 - 2 Photography: Stock**
 - 2 Commentary: written by Irwin Allen, suggested by Rachel Carson's 1951 book**
 - 2 Lighting**
 - Visual Effects: Linwood Dunn**
 - 1 Music: Paul Sawtell Musical Director: C. Bakaleinikoff**
 - 1 Sound**
 - 2 Commentators: Don Forbes, Theodore von Eltz**
 - Continuity: Irwin Allen**
 - 2 Locations: Great Barrier Reef, Australia**
 - Marineland of Florida, United States**
 - Tarpon Springs, Florida, United States**
 - Pribilof Islands, Alaska, United States**
 - 2 Creativity**
 - 0 Insightfulness**
- 16 total points**

Irwin Allen's rendering of Rachel Carson's book **THE SEA AROUND US** is a splendidly colorful and engrossing 1953 live action feature documentary retaining much of its original potent vibrancy. Though the director incorporated a plenitude of stock photography, judicious editing by Doane Harrison and Frederic Knudtson keeps sequences exciting, humorous and engagingly compact. Even combat between octopus and shark is trimmed to exclude a gratuitous bloody finale. The film won an Oscar® for Best Documentary Feature and deservedly so. Its concluding warning about global heating and rising sea levels is still relevant.

Opening with a recapitulation of Chapter One in the Book of Genesis, the blackness of primeval void gradually gives way to sparkling stars and an explosive fireball whirling through space. Through a series of eruptions transpiring over the course of millennia, a dusty, mountainous planet comes into being. It is lifeless, silent except for gusting winds, possibly monotone in color.

Then comes rain, torrential, laden with nutrients from which the possibility of life will emerge. Water slices through rock, creating alluvial valleys, cooling the surface of a planet in its childhood. Air and liquid combine to erode and carve, preparing a necessary silt and sand foundation for organisms. Lightning darts from clouds formed through evaporation of surface liquid, generating fire and ash. What it leaves behind will produce molecular structures containing nucleic acids. From diatoms in the sea will come increasingly more complicated life forms, some remaining in their ancestral home, others moving eventually onto land.

This progression is awesomely realized by selected scenes in the opening section of film, accompanied by clarifying commentary authored by director Allen. Commentary readers are Canadian Hollywood announcer Don Forbes and American actor Theodore von Eltz, son of a Yale language professor, both of whom declaim with considerable dramatic gravitas, concluding with an ominous query: "Is this ... **THE END?**" Which may refer to an apocalypse, or merely the conclusion of a marine documentary.

Lighting is generally excellent, even under strained underwater conditions. Choice locations add to the film's attractiveness as cameras explore the Great Barrier Reef's corals in Australia, sea lions and cormorants on Alaska's Pribilof Islands, porpoises at Marineland of Florida and sponge divers harvesting specimens near Tarpon Springs, also in Florida.

At times Paul Sawtell's music score overdramatizes visual action, not atypical of a decade featuring hysterically overwrought cumulative crescendos, particularly in science fiction sagas such as **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS**.

Notable for finely detailed close-up photographs of marine life, **THE SEA AROUND US** acquaints viewers with unusual vocational options, such as crab farmer and shark walker, the latter occupation involving sharing pool space with drugged sharks. To each his own.

Allan Hancock, who served as technical advisor, was probably instrumental in proposing which creatures would be highlighted. A mix of entertainment and instructional values was

apparently the goal, leading to showcasing fish called gurnards, which walk on ocean floors as well as swim through currents, and a diving cormorant experiencing less than satisfactory hunting. Humorous remarks from the commentator accompany these photographs to further involve and fascinate younger spectators. These anthropomorphic parallels, dismissed easily by scientifically erudite adults, are useful educational tools making the exotic more comprehensible to youngsters whose conceptual world is still largely shaped through personifications.

A whale hunting episode may repel viewers sensitive to animal rights. However, it serves the useful function of spotlighting a practice then common and not illegal. Its bloody climax may have been instrumental in prodding world governments to ban such unnecessary and ecologically damaging activities.

Since the film's operative premise is that ocean inhabitants live in a world where "eat and be eaten" is the overriding commandment, contemporary viewers may find its supporting evidence suspect and revolting. Little time is spent on symbiotic undersea relationships. Violent encounters predominate to keep eyes of action movie enthusiasts riveted to the screen. Few attempts are made to supply ecological instruction. The ardor with which mass netting scenes are announced as gourmet feasts or sporting contests cannot cancel spectator disgust over wasteful overkill and squandering of today's resources, leading to future depopulation and extinction, not a happy prospect. But it is senseless to judge past practices through enlightened hindsight. In the 1950s, maximizing world food supply for a proliferating humanity overarched considerations of conservation on behalf of generations not yet born.

THE SEA AROUND US offers spectacular, glorious views of the then largely unexplored watery territory which comprises the bulk of Planet Earth. It's a wonderfully illuminating experience for families and highly recommended to them.