

Movies



'The Mushroom Speaks' Review

What the fungi can tell us

Sections



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(Courtesy Intermezzo Films S.A.)

By Jeff Proctor

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Mushroom folks have dirty fingernails. They scratch pens across paper with a care that seems at once overly obsessive and whimsical. And they harbor deep

ideas about what fungi can tell us about our surrounds and, indeed, ourselves that could quickly spook the uninitiated.

Director Marion Neumann (*Wild Plants, Naturales Historiae*) has an eye for the searchers, the scientists and the pickers: hunched and tiptoeing through the forest in search of different species'; mixing solutions in a garage in search of an antidote to poisoned soil; and facing her camera with maps of the world on their faces, recounting an experience many decades hence, at the age of 11, fully in the psilocybin dance.



This is the beating heart of Neumann's latest film, *The Mushroom Speaks*: the humans who have taken the time to know what they do not know. The answer, conclude the humans and, indeed, the film, may rest with the fungi.

Poorly understood, but now having their moment, mushrooms are so much more than expensive novelties at a Japanese market or tasty additions to a salad or a way to kick down the doors of perception. (On that last one, we were delighted if not surprised by the cameo from the late, great Terence McKenna in this documentary—directly after the appearance of a mushroom cloud, no less.)

Rather, mushrooms—the “fruit,” or, the portions we see above ground—and their underground network of mycelia present a living lesson. We are, all of us, connected and interdependent.

The film's greatest triumphs are in the unspoken bits, the brilliantly filmed and presented time-lapses showing various mushroom species, molds (there exists such a thing called “Chernobyl Mold”) and spore pathways, set over the disquieting original soundtrack of beeps, breaths, strings and industrial scrapes by Olga Kokcharova.

Passages from Sylvia Plath, McKenna and other famous mushroom-curious thinkers flash occasionally and confusingly across the screen when Neumann wants to really get her metaphor across, marking the film's less successful attempts.

But watching a be-dreadlocked seeker muse about whether mushrooms might “eat” the chromium in contaminated water near Los Alamos, thereby saving

some Indigenous lives, was enough to keep us engaged. (Guy makes a compelling case, too.)

✉ “Spores secretly rule the world.”

📘 Maybe.



Trailer | The Mushroom Speaks | Marion Neumann



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+Time lapses; soundtrack

-The connectedness metaphor is as tenuous as a Porcini vein

The Mushroom Speaks

Directed by Neumann

[Santa Fe Independent Film Festival](#), NR, 104 min.

Letters to the Editor

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