

In the Shadow of the Moon

USA 2007

100 min

Credits

Directed David Sington
 Music Philip Sheppard
 Cinematography Clive North
 Film Editing David Fairhead

Buzz Aldrin
 Neil Armstrong
 Alan Bean
 Eugene Cernan
 Michael Collins
 Charles Duke
 John F. Kennedy (archive footage)
 Jim Lovell
 Edgar D. Mitchell
 Harrison Schmitt
 Dave Scott
 John Young
 Lyndon Johnson (archive footage)
 Queen Elizabeth II (archive footage)
 Sam Rayburn

Synopsis

A documentary about NASA's Apollo lunar space programme in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the Apollo 11 mission which became the first to put men on the moon. Interviews with several Apollo astronauts are interspersed with archive footage showing life on the rocket, views from space, trips out on to the lunar surface, and ground control at Cape Canaveral. The pilots talk about being chosen for the programme and about what it is to have 'the right stuff'; they discuss feeling apart from the social climate of the 1960s, and their status as heroes, both in the US and abroad. The notoriously abortive Apollo 13 mission is briefly detailed. The astronauts refer to a sense of awe at the magnitude of space, and at being able to view earth from a vast distance. Finally, they dismiss the theory that the moon landing was staged.



David Sington's *In the Shadow of the Moon* moved me to the extremes of nostalgia, regret and outright admiration as no other movie has moved me this year, even though—or perhaps because—it is a mere documentary. Mr. Sington is well-served by his many collaborators, particularly 10 of the surviving astronauts who once actually walked on the moon and gazed upon the earth as a beautiful but fragile presence in the vast universe. Mr. Sington and his producers, made a brilliant decision at the outset to confine all the narration and commentary to the astronauts themselves, aged as they have become in the almost four decades since their heroic feats. For much of the time in the film they are rendered in eloquent, enormous close-ups that take the camera lens as close as it can ever come to the human soul.

NASA did the rest by releasing staggering amounts of never-before-seen footage not only of the flights themselves, but also of the incredible inventiveness involved and the fantastically varied hazards that were overcome for these first—and, sadly, perhaps the last—manned voyages to the moon.

Curiously, the film's roster of moon astronauts does not include Neil Armstrong, actually the first man to step on the moon, on July 20, 1969, with, in his own words, "one small step for man." Still, though Mr. Armstrong does not participate in this film, the tributes from his fellow astronauts, and the actual images of the event, make him come alive for us as the self-created everyman of moon exploration, a marvelously modest, non-narcissistic and stoical representative of our species. Anyone who lived through that period of tumult, an unpopular war and multiple political assassinations may be forgiven for forgetting how short a time the inhabitants of this planet looked up to and admired the United States for embracing, all of mankind in its conquest of space. It had never happened before, and it certainly hasn't happened since. Everyone should see *In the Shadow of the Moon* for its artistically inspiring reminder of what Tom Wolfe described as the "right stuff" of which real heroes like the lunar astronauts were made.

New York Observer, Andrew Sarris