

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

RIP Ken Russell, Who Challenged Cinema

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British director Ken Russell, who died this week at age 84, liberated cinema as few others have done. He was most well known for his film versions of *Women in Love* and *The Who's Tommy*, and for *The Devils* and *Altered States*. In his free-form and highly personal biographies of musicians and artists, he made his most personal statements, and approached storytelling with a flamboyant freedom that influenced generations of filmmakers to follow – these movies were *The Music Lovers*, *Lisztomania*, *Mahler*, *Savage Messiah*.

Here, in 6 parts, is his 1970 television film *Dance of the Seven Veils*, which I didn't think we'd ever be able to see, so God Bless YouTube (and thank you BBC Omnibus). It's Russell's controversial "biography" of composer Richard Strauss, and as soon as you'll start watching you'll see why I put *biography* in quotes (and why the Strauss family tried to squelch this project). This film has everything Russell brought to his long and fiery career – obsessions with the Church and sexuality, with the Artist and the State, with the pleasures and perils of creativity, and, above all, passion, passion, passion.

– Adam Leipzig

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