

Finding Vivian Maier

★★★

Dirs. John Maloof and Charlie Siskel. 2013. N/R. 83mins. Documentary.

In life, she was an eccentric: a French-accented nanny with a comical striding gait who took her charges on excursions into Chicago's more colorful neighborhoods. Her name (at least the one this alias-prone lady was born with) was Vivian Maier, and John Maloof and Charlie Siskel's intriguing yet slapdash doc uncovers a side of her that friends and employers never saw. Turns out this oddball governess was a secret street photographer who used her daily outings as an excuse to shoot whomever interested her.

Maier's images are truly stunning—vivid documents of the working class that are off-the-cuff yet rigorously composed. You can see why Maloof—a preservationist who discovered and established an ever-expanding archive of her work—was smitten at first sight.

Yet Maloof (a very aggravating onscreen presence) tries way too hard to force Maier's genius down our throat: His outrage at the snootily dismissive art-world establishment, however genuine, comes off like a childish tantrum. And his hemming and hawing over the ethical issues in releasing work that its creator may never have wanted seen is pure lip service since his true intentions—to get the work seen by any means necessary—are clear. Only when the film delves into Maier's later years do we really get a sense of the complex person behind the clandestine talent. (Local theaters; opens Fri)—*Keith Uhlich*

THE BOTTOM LINE Great subject, middling movie.

Mirror, mask The real Maier might just be a reflection of her art.

