

# Playfully Pondering the Infinite

## Roger Nygard's *The Nature of Existence*

BY ANDREW FISH PHOTOGRAPHY BRIAN LOWE



It's a liberating experience sitting down with Roger Nygard to chat about his new documentary, *The Nature of Existence*. The possibilities for discussion are literally endless. The man who brought us *Trekkies* and *Trekkies 2* spent four years traveling the world interviewing over 100 subjects, including guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, string theory physicist Leonard Susskind, science fiction author Orson Scott Card (*Ender's Game*), Roman Archbishop Domenico D'Ambrosio, outspoken atheist Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*), Ultimate Christian Wrestler Rob Adonis, director Irvin Kershner (*The Empire Strikes Back*), Stonehenge Druid King Arthur Pendragon, and scores of others who tackled Nygard's 85 questions, which included: "What is our purpose?" "Is there a God?" "Can religion and science coexist?" "Is masturbation a sin?" On an existential road trip across the U.S. and through England, India, Israel, China, and beyond, the filmmaker offers a journey that's at once moving and hilarious in its profundity. With an impossibly broad topic to cover, we turn the tables and ask Nygard for the answers.

**Venice Magazine: We've been looking forward to the freedom of having a conversation with a guy who made a movie called *The Nature of Existence*.**

Roger Nygard: Imagine how pretentious that title would be if I truly claimed to know the nature of existence in every facet. That's why our subtitle is kind of the clue to people. "All the mysteries of human existence explained in one movie." It's a little wink. We're going to tell you a lot of information and you're going to come out of this a changed person — but come on, life is absurd. If you don't laugh you'll go crazy.

**How has the film been received so far?**

The people in the middle of the spectrum, who are so open-minded, really absorb the film in the most positive way. Because if you have the answer with a capital "A," new information is a threat. If you're open-minded then new information is a joy. It's a pleasure.

**Did you enjoy connecting with so many different kinds of people?**

No matter where I went — China, India, into the Muslim neighborhood in Mumbai — I made friends everywhere. I've got friends all over the world because I went and I listened to them. People just want to be heard. One big problem with our country is we go places and tell people what they need to do. You have much more effect if you go and listen to people and ask them what they feel or think or need or want or believe. I went with respect. I didn't challenge people to a debate; I went to hear what they believe.

**Do you have any favorite answers to your 85 questions?**

One kid says at the beginning, "We exist to experience emotions." Wow, that kid's brilliant! No one else said that, out of 170 people. It took a 13-year-old!

**Did you have a favorite interview?**

I can't pick out one person that I liked the most, but I will tell you one group of people that are the most fun to interview are probably the elderly. The older they are, the more they'll tell you the way it is. They don't censor themselves. They're not afraid anymore of what people think so they will tell you the truth. And kids, too, will be very honest. It's people in the ages in the middle that have a much harder time with truth. You and I. It's hard for me to tell the truth because we want to say to people the things that will make them accept us, and that's not always the truth. When people presented me with the truth, those were the moments that I enjoyed the most. ▼

*The Nature of Existence* screens from July 2-8 at Sunset 5 Theaters in West Hollywood and Edwards University Town Center 6 in Irvine. Visit [www.thenatureofexistence.com](http://www.thenatureofexistence.com) for more information. Look out for the seven-disc set coming in November.