

New documentary explores life and work of medical maverick, “grandfather of small incision surgeries”

Through My Eyes: The Charlie Kelman Story

Premieres nationwide January 2010 on public television (check local listings)

Through My Eyes: The Charlie Kelman Story celebrates the jazzy double life of ophthalmologist Dr. Charles D. Kelman. The one-hour documentary is at once a fascinating study of scientific discovery; a rumination on the dynamic of fathers and sons; a cloak-and-dagger adventure; and a one-of-a-kind success story launched at the intersection of failure, fame and fate that gives hope to anyone who has ever harbored a secret dream. Produced by New York metro area public television station WLIW21, the program premieres nationwide on public television January 2010 (check local listings). Preview video and more at wliw.org/kelman.

“WLIW21 has introduced U.S. television audiences to people and places they might not discover on their own, from performers like Celtic Thunder to the cities we fly over in our *Visions*® travel series,” says Executive Producer Roy A Hammond. “***Through My Eyes: The Charlie Kelman Story*** finally pays homage to the man whose inventions have touched millions of lives worldwide and whose name should be a household name.”

In ***The Charlie Kelman Story*** public television viewers meet a man who reached the pinnacle of success in the wrong profession: the musician who invented the groundbreaking surgical procedure known as phacoemulsification. Interviews with Kelman’s friends, foes, colleagues, wife, daughter, and the late Dr. Kelman himself are interspersed with performance footage of the showman surgeon in an exploration of one man’s tumultuous ride to success. Viewers will discover why millions of cataract, gall bladder, brain, and spinal cord surgery patients worldwide have Chubby Checker to thank for their quick recovery – and how a visit to the dentist paved the way for today’s medical business model.

Before Charlie Kelman, cataract surgery was a complicated and costly procedure that immobilized patients in the hospital for eight to ten days, followed by four to six weeks of recovery at home and extremely thick glasses that magnified and distorted but never truly repaired the vision originally lost to the degenerative damage in the eye’s lens. ***The Charlie Kelman Story*** provides an eye-opening look at how the most common surgery in the world was transformed by a most uncommon man. The program reveals Kelman as an upstart who charmed his way into residency at the prestigious Wills Eye Hospital in

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Philadelphia; made his nightclub act required attendance at the end of week-long training sessions for his groundbreaking cataract procedure; promoted his renegade work with a public relations campaign that landed him on *The Tonight Show*; and generally spit in the eye of establishment with his unconventional actions and flashy style.

The surgeon with *shtick* was a polarizing figure in ophthalmology, decried as a “charlatan” and a “nutcase” or hailed as a “genius,” and this new public television documentary explores Dr. Kelman’s struggle for recognition and respect over three decades of research and private practice. Kelman put the “me” in medicine in ways that were controversial and even scandalous for the time. As described in the program’s interviews with his ophthalmologic colleagues, Kelman’s groundbreaking business partnership with the makers of his phacoemulsification device was decades ahead of industry acceptance; his experimental methods brought the balance between patient safety and medical progress into question; and his refusal to share developmental data for fear of being beaten to the punch after too many false starts made him a pariah among his peers.

Despite whatever controversy paved his road to success, there is no doubt Dr. Kelman’s impact is as unique as his personality and practices. Charlie Kelman’s phacoemulsification surgery has proven to be the rare technology with longevity – it is still the most common method used worldwide for the procedure. The program cites unheard of statistics for a 30-year-old innovation: nearly 100% of the almost 3 million cataract surgeries performed each year in the United States are done with phacoemulsification, and nearly 10 million each year worldwide. The procedure saves millions in healthcare costs both in the way the procedure is done and by the outcome of preventing blindness, thus allowing people to continue to contribute to society. Kelman spawned an empire that thrives to this day. Additionally, as his colleague Dr. Jack Dodick, chairman, department of ophthalmology, New York University Langone Medical Center and attending in ophthalmology at the Manhattan Eye, Ear, and Throat Institute, notes in the program, “When Charlie was first able to remove an unwanted tissue inside the human body through a small hole, he basically became the grandfather of all small incision surgery in the whole body.”

Dr. Kelman received some of the highest honors in science and technological innovation including the National Medal of Technology and Innovation (formerly known as the National Medal of Technology), the highest honor for technological achievement bestowed by the President of the United States on America’s leading innovators; and the American Academy of Ophthalmology’s prestigious Laureate Award, awarded six months before he died of cancer. Posthumously, Kelman was honored with the Lasker Award, the nation’s highest award for medical science, among other accolades.

“Give into that secret dream inside you,” Kelman advises his stage act audience during a performance of “I’ve Gotta Be Me” at the program’s end. If the struggle

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between the forces of medicine and music defined Charlie Kelman's life, then his legacy as depicted in ***Through My Eyes: The Charlie Kelman Story*** finally unites both sides of his duality as an inspiring ode to the power of persistence.

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