



TODD HAYNES

Born: Todd Haynes, January 2, 1961 (Los Angeles, California, U.S.).

Directing style: Influential director of new queer cinema; maker of period melodramas; examinations of environment as disease, and the repressive nature of societal conventions.

A key figure in the new queer cinema of the 1990s, Todd Haynes became infamous years before the movement was named when he used Barbie dolls instead of actors in his short *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987), and the film was banned after the Carpenter family and the Mattel Corporation objected. Haynes's films reflect his background in art and semiotics, and *Superstar* juxtaposed the squeaky-clean plasticity of the singer's public image against archival footage of the invasion of Cambodia and the Watergate crisis, and played alternately and knowingly like a disease-of-the-week documentary, family melodrama, and musical biopic.

Haynes flirted with controversy once again with the award-winning triptych *Poison* (1991), which explored AIDS as a metaphor for contamination by intercutting between films. With its chilling silences and dehumanizing blank spaces, *Safe* (1995), a movie about a housewife whose affluent late 1980s environment turns on her, ushered in a new phase in Haynes's ever-deepening examination of environment as disease. Another departure and return, the gorgeously phantasmagorical *Velvet Goldmine* (1998) was a coming-of-age story that traced the David Bowie and Iggy Pop glam rock era

to the sexual and identity politics of Oscar Wilde. It was in *Far from Heaven's* (2002) revisit to 1950s female melodrama, however, that Haynes's methods synchronized perfectly. Replicating the lush color and lighting and poignant symbolism of the weepies of Douglas

Sirk—its complete lack of irony a revelation—the film brought once taboo issues of racism and sexuality to the surface in a way that deconstructed and disarmed its audience's postmodern nostalgia. **LB**

"Superstar gave me the reputation that enabled me to continue making films."

Top Takes...

- I'm Not There* 2007
- Far from Heaven* 2002
- Velvet Goldmine* 1998
- Safe* 1995
- Poison* 1991
- Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* 1987
- Assassins: A Film Concerning Rimbaud* 1985

ALEXANDER PAYNE

Born: Alexander Papadopoulos, February 10, 1961 (Omaha, Nebraska, U.S.).

Directing style: Witty writer and director of satirical comedies; Omaha, Nebraska locations; commentary on U.S. suburban life; uses non-actors to play minor roles.

Writer and director Alexander Payne is one of the brightest talents to emerge in Hollywood recently, with a distinctive style of comedy. After some student films, he worked at Universal Pictures and wrote unproduced screenplays. He then made contributions to two segments of the *Inside Out* (1992) portmanteau films, before completing his first feature, *Citizen Ruth* (1996). The film stars Laura Dern as an improvident drug user and single mother, who can only be saved from jail if she terminates her latest pregnancy. Befriended by a pro-life supporter, Dern finds herself in a tug of war between both sides of the abortion debate. From this unlikely material Payne fashioned a comedy that satirized both sides of the fence.

He followed this with *Election* (1999), starring Reese Witherspoon as an ambitious high school student determined at all costs to secure election as school president. It is a sharp and funny satire on high school life and small-town mores. In Payne's next film, *About Schmidt* (2002), Jack Nicholson plays a curmudgeonly widower who senses that life has passed him by, and makes a cross-country journey in his Winnebago to visit his daughter. The director presents a pitiless dissection of suburban ennui, and the laughter he generates keeps the audience one jump ahead of despair.

In *Sideways* (2004), Payne cast two relatively unknown actors as friends who embark on a tour of the California vineyards prior to one of them getting married. A series of disasters ensues, each more embarrassingly hilarious than the last. Payne varies the mix, successfully combining slapstick with verbal humor, and comedy based on character. The film won an Oscar for Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay for Payne and his writing partner Jim Taylor. **EB**

"It shouldn't be an epic aspiration to make simple human stories, but it is."



Top Takes...

- Paris, je t'aime* 2006 (*Paris, I Love You*)
- Sideways** 2004 ☆
- About Schmidt* 2002
- Election* 1999
- Citizen Ruth* 1996
- The Passion of Martin* 1991
- Carmen* 1985