

Article

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***Paris, Texas: Forty-Year Fresh***



*“When Paris, Texas won Cannes it was terrible” - Wim Wenders*

WIM WENDERS is said to be the father of Road Movies in Germany; it then rolled over to the world.

It is the flow of literature that fascinated Wim Wenders to America; he loved it above all things. However, it didn't happen from one day to another. When he grew up, the first input he got from America was literature. Said he: “When I started reading, I read a book every day and very soon my two favorite books were *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. They were by far my favorite books when I was a kid. The next thing I really liked were comic strips. They were unknown in Germany, but I became a collector.

“I collected every comic strip that existed, from Mickey Mouse to Superman. The next thing that arrived was rock ‘n’ roll when I was around 10 or 12 years old. I had not been interested in music so much before because the German songs my mother listened to on

the radio didn't interest me at all. But when rock ‘n’ roll arrived I realized that this was the best music in the world. This was also American, so there was already a certain tendency. So everything I really liked when I grew up was American.”

In fact, he started watching movies at the Cinemathèque because it was the cheapest cinema... So, first he saw one film, then two films a day, and finally, he saw everything they had, and it was the entire world cinema. He saw a huge dose of Indian films with subtitles. Later on, he realised Satyajit Ray was one of the great filmmakers of his generation, and “he was still alive,” Wenders said.

His first stay in America was sort of unhappy phase. The film that he travelled to America for was *Hammett*. It took an eternity to make and in the end he was not happy with the result. Then he was very lucky that he was able to make *Paris, Texas*, which allowed him

to come back : Said he– “Because I didn't want to come back defeated. I wanted to come back with something.”

The *Paris, Texas* is Wim Wenders' iconic vision of American alienation, grimy state of life and blurred sketch of family destruction; the protagonist Travis (Harry Dean Stanton) as a weather-beaten drifter, vexed and lost over loss is said to be a glaring mystery for 40 years.

The film is of 150 minute duration.

Said Peter Bradshaw “After almost 40 years, Wim Wenders's Euro-Americanist masterpiece ; *Paris, Texas* feels as richly mysterious and mesmeric as ever: an outsider's connoisseur-perspective on the US with its wailing, shuddering slide guitar by Ry Cooder which became as much of an instant classic as Ennio Morricone's film *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. It mimicked the desolate beauty of the Texas desert and the micro-landscape of the star's own weather-beaten face. He was, of course, the unforgettably gaunt and haunted Harry Dean Stanton, who at 58 years old, and after a lifetime of self-effacing supporting roles, suddenly leapfrogged mere star status to become an icon.

*Paris, Texas* is a gloomy looking, devastating film, although we have to confess to being unsure about the ending that stands out as reaching nowhere. However, when one first watched it, one was hugely relieved about the way it turned out for Nastassja Kinski. very worried about a sudden, final reappearance from Slater, the sinister, tough-looking guy that runs the peep show, played by Jarmusch regular John Lurie.

Stanton is Travis, a wayward guy seen at first walking surreally alone through the

parched west Texas desert in a shabby suit and tie, mute and clearly in some traumatised state, agonised by a secret history of guilt and shame. Then, he is picked up by his longsuffering brother Walt, a wonderful performance from Dean Stockwell. Walt has, these four years, been looking after Travis's infant son Hunter, son of the writer, after Travis suddenly vanished at the same time as his wife, Jane (Kinski).

What the hell has been churning all this time? Walt and his French wife Anne (Aurore Clément) take Travis into their home, if not yet their hearts; and he lives with them in suburban LA, hardly more than a kid himself. Travis opens up about his dreamy long-forgotten plan to live in the little town of Paris, Texas where he was conceived, and he gets it together sufficiently to take Hunter on a road trip with him to Houston where he has discovered Jane is living. It is there he finds her working in a sleazy and somewhat bizarre peep show, a Lynchian touch.

The tone of topology of Texas and the unglamorous Los Angeles suburbs are genuinely caught, and along with it Wenders and Shepard indulge a love of motels with their heartbreaking neon signs about TV and air-con; this film has done much to make motels the signifier of roadside reality and the American heartland, and rescue them from the taint of *Psycho* and the Bates motel. The narrative has it Walt, incidentally, has a job creating billboards, the occasion for some humorous scene-splitting: he shows us a poster of Barbra Streisand's face, distorted and foreshortened like the skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. There's a great speculative scene as Travis walks across a highway bridge to the accompaniment of a

male voice ranting hysterically. Is it the radio? No: it's a disturbed guy screaming into the traffic who Travis has been calmly approaching whole time, and melts out with a casual pat on the shoulder.

Finally, there are those amazing, climactic scenes in the peep show, a metaphor for Travis and Jane's alienation from each other. Kinski has the supremely difficult job of showing us Jane's back-story in just two scenes. As Travis starts telling her their story (without revealing who he is), Kinski shows how Jane is at first bemused, then startled, then moved by what she still thinks is this story's fortuitous resemblance to her own, and then her devastation at the truth.

The sordid loneliness and weird alienation of these sequences, coming after the more reassuring story of domestic comfort and father-son bonding, delivers the film's enduring impact. It is an eerie, sad story whose meaning disappears over the vast horizon as if on a highway heading away through the desert.

Where or what the destination? Wim Wenders offers no hint or suggestion but only a slice of speculation the film-buffs can take or refuse!!!

*Paris, Texas* seems to me a jumble of something of nothing at all? Or is it the breaking and splitting the very survival possibility of US people caught up in a tenebrous conundrum where breaking of homemakers is apparent and unavoidable?

*Paris, Texas* is a film that does not care about what we or admirers of Wim Wenders think of or shut off.

Does Wim Wenders, one of my favorite directors, make perfect films? Hardly — and therein, at least for me, lies the

appeal. Perfection strikes me as a singularly uninteresting goal for art, and Wenders has made some of the most interesting pieces of motion picture art going for the past thirty years: *Wings of Desire*; *Paris, Texas*; *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*; *Tokyo-Ga*. Perhaps, it occurs to me, he has achieved his own kind of very specific, inimitable perfection. But if you seek to imitate it nevertheless, have a look at "Wim Wenders' Rules of Cinema Perfection" above. In this video (actually a kind of spot for Stella Artois, a brand with which the auteur has worked before), we see humorously revealed several of Wenders' best filmmaking practices: "You need a good title from the beginning," "Continuity is clearly overrated," "Try to welcome and incorporate" the unexpected, and "If you like football, don't shoot during the world championship." If you've done your reading on Wenders, you can probably tell that the clip draws from a published list of the director's "50 Golden Rules of Filmmaking." Other helpful recommendations include "Before you say 'cut,' wait five more seconds," "A 'beautiful image' can very well be the worst thing that can happen to a scene," and "There are no rules." Will following these if-not-rules-then-guidelines turn you into the next Wim Wenders? Unlikely. Will drinking Stella Artois do it? Certainly not. But it could hurt none of us, whatever our creative endeavor of choice, to emulate his willingness on display here to learn from his mistakes (based on his list, I'd say he's taken his share of hard knocks hiring couples, adapting novels, and working with animals); to share his wisdom; and (maybe most importantly of all) to learn

not to take ourselves too seriously. Sure, his detractors tend to accuse him of pretentiousness, but we true fans (who pay close attention even to his commercial acting gigs) know the truth.

It may be mentioned it is Wim Wenders who is called the father of "road movies" staying at any point or place in the country and connect with people, their emotions and hopes and achievements; this is matter of pride for his contemporary filmmakers in Germany. Reinhard Hauff when well did a lot by other means; his films reflect social realities and daily life styles of ordinary people of Germany; his *Paule Paulender* is one of his best films along with *Man On the Wall*; *Man On the Wall* is the first ever film that dreams of unification of both Germanies. This is path breaking film so far made in 1983.

Wim Wenders is another kind of filmmaker who believed in using cars running mile after miles in the country to spark off new connectivity with new generation of Germany hitherto unknown.

### *Wim Wenders On himself*

I lived in New York City through the 1980s, and one of the glories of that time was attending performances presented at the Brooklyn Academy of Music under Harvey Lichtenstein. I have a vivid memory of taking the subway from Lower Manhattan to Brooklyn (riding in the same crowded car with Lucinda Childs, Laurie Anderson, and Philip Glass) to see Pina Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal for the first time. I watched *Café Müller* and *Le Sacre du Printemps* from the far side of the first balcony and was so moved by what I had seen

that I couldn't speak. I remember hundreds of people standing motionless on the huge front steps of the theatre after the performance. Since then I have experienced the astonishing work of Pina Bausch many times. In 2001, Bausch's accomplishments were being celebrated by Toronto's Harbourfront Centre, and I was invited to perform. When I took my place on stage, I found myself standing directly in front of Pina, who was seated in the front row. We met eyes and then her face took on a radiant, benevolent expression and she said to me with her gaze: "You and I have never met, but we are both dancers, so we know each other." Late in August of 2011,

I received a surprising and thoroughly intimidating invitation from Jutta Brendemuehl of the Goethe-Institut Toronto to interview auteur/filmmaker Wim Wenders prior to the Toronto International Film Festival screening of *Pina*, his homage to the iconoclastic choreographer. Jutta's idea was that a unique conversation might ensue if Wenders were conversing with a dance artist. I was familiar with Wenders's work, films that I find surreal and haunting, and I could not refuse the opportunity of speaking with him in relation to Pina Bausch. I spent the time leading up to the interview watching every film by and about Wenders that I could get my hands on. Then I watched a preview copy of *Pina* on a small television screen in the library of the Goethe-Institut. Bausch's stunning choreography is captured in the studio, on the stage, and also in a succession of unexpected locations throughout Wuppertal. Wenders alternates this performance footage with intimate portraits of the dancers and fragile-feeling archival footage of Bausch at work. Even without the

vivid spatial and kinetic capabilities of 3-D that Wenders considers crucial to this film, the shocking physical and emotional urgency of Pina's work and world is inescapable.

Well, dance is not appreciated by a huge portion of the population, so it's not too surprising. But you did have this very powerful experience with Pina's work in Venice. Yes, it was in 1985. At a retrospective of her work. And did you just happen to be there? What brought you to the performance? Wenders: I didn't want to go. I had no intention to spend a beautiful evening in Venice in the theatre instead of walking around eating ice cream or pasta. But my girlfriend insisted because she had seen Pina's piece, *Café Müller*, a couple of years earlier and was convinced that it was the greatest thing on the planet and I needed to see it. And was it *Café Müller* that you saw? It was the double-bill of *Café Müller* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

Wim Wenders in wonder:

As much as I didn't want to go, after ten minutes I realized this was a life-changing event, and I cried the whole evening through, and we prolonged our stay in Venice so we could see the entire retrospective. So it hit you first on a personal level. You didn't think immediately, Oh, I need to get involved. No. And it couldn't have hit me on a more personal level because I was completely unprepared. I had not even heard of Pina. I had not been living in Germany, I had been living in America until 1984. Otherwise I would have been aware of her. So I went there against my will and was totally blown away,

like nothing else ever before.: And when did you meet Pina? Did you meet her on that trip? Said Wim Wenders, "I met her two days later after seeing two more pieces. We met in a little café right next to the Venetian theatre, and we talked for ten minutes. I shouldn't say we talked because she didn't talk. I'm not talkative, but I was just so enthusiastic—this was a huge discovery for me, her work—that I kept babbling on, and because she didn't say anything I had to keep talking."

When asked Was she aware of your work? Had she seen it?

Wim Wenders revealed : "She had seen some of my films. She was aware, for instance, of *Alice in the Cities*, which I shot in Wuppertal the same year that Pina took over the Wuppertal Opera in 1973. But of course, we didn't know each other. So in this ten minutes that I had with Pina, I also said in my enthusiasm that eventually we should do a film together. And again Pina didn't say a thing. She lit a cigarette, smiled a very enigmatic smile, and made me feel quite foolish because I thought she probably thought this was a preposterous idea. And I changed the subject. That was our first encounter. She didn't say anything. So when did you raise this idea of making a film with her again? I didn't, but the next time I saw her was a year later in Wuppertal, and she said, as if it had been the other day."

Paris Texas is Wenders's film glorious, touching and a classic! Whether one agrees or not, the film sounds yet valid and *sui generis*, a class by itself. One can seldom beat it!

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