



## Far from Heaven

Director: Todd Haynes

©: Vulcan Productions, Focus Features

Production Companies: Killer Films,

John Wells Productions, Section Eight Productions

Presented by: TF1 International, Vulcan Productions

Presented in association with: Focus Features

Executive Producers: John Wells, Eric Robison,

Tracy Brimm, John Sloss, Steven Soderbergh,

George Clooney

Produced by: Jody Patton, Christine Vachon

Co-producers: Bradford Simpson, Declan Baldwin

For Killer Films: Pamela Koffler, Katie Roumel

Creative Executive For Killer Films: Jocelyn Hayes

Production Executive For Killer Films: Jon Marcus

Production Co-ordinator: Koula Sossiadi

Production Manager: Scott Koenig

Location Manager: Mike S. Ryan

Location Co-ordinator: Ana Lombardo

Post-production Supervisor: Bradley M. Goodman

1st Assistant Director: Timothy Bird

2nd Assistant Director: Peter Thorell

2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Kristal D. Mosley

Script Supervisor: Thomas Johnston

Casting: Laura Rosenthal

Assistant Casting: Krista Bogetich

Screenplay: Todd Haynes

Director of Photography: Edward Lachman

Camera Operator: Craig Haagensen

1st Assistant Camera: Richard Gioia

2nd Assistant Camera: Jay Feather

Stills Photography: David Lee, Abbot Genser

Process/Rear Screen Projections:

William G. Hansard, Don Hansard Jr

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Steve Kirshoff

Graphics: Holly Watson

Edited by: James Lyons

Associate Editor: Shelly Westerman

Production Designer: Mark Friedberg

Art Director: Peter Rogness

Assistant Art Directors: Jeff McDonald,

Miguel Lopez-Castillo

Set Decorator: Ellen Christiansen

Assistant Set Decorator: Rena DeAngelo

Set Dresser Foreman: Harvey Goldberg

On-set Dresser: JoAnn Atwood

Set Dressers: Henry Kaplan, Janine Pesce,

Joanna Hartell, Roman Greller

Costume Designer: Sandy Powell

Assistant Costume Designer: Lisa Padovani

Costume Co-ordinator: M.J. McGrath

Wardrobe Supervisors: Susan J. Wright,

David Davenport

Make-up Supervisor: Elaine Offers

Make-up Artist: Hildie Ginsberg

Key Hairstylist: Alan D'Angerio

Hairstylist: Michael Kriston

Title Design: Bureau, NY, Marlene McCarty

Titles/Opticals: Custom Film Effects,

Mark Dornfeld, Susan Shin George

Music: Elmer Bernstein

Piano Solos: Cynthia Millar

Orchestration: Emilie A. Bernstein

Choreographer: Ginger Thatcher

Production Sound Mixer: Drew Kunin

Boom Operators: Joseph White Jr,

Jeanne L. Gilliland

Re-recording Mixers: Leslie Shatz,

Marshall Garlington

Supervising Sound Editor: Kelley Baker

Researcher: Sheri Von Seeburg

Stunt Co-ordinator: Peter Bucossi

## Too Much: Melodrama on Film

# Far from Heaven

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

Todd Haynes has managed, surprisingly successfully, to build different levels of audience access into *Far from Heaven*, almost like the branching paths of possibility built into a videogame. The *Far from Heaven* screen world seen by a fan of 1950s Hollywood melodrama will not be the same as that seen by someone who can't 'get' the film's range of reference and layers of quotation. On the face of it, there could be a hierarchy here whereby the knowing spectator achieves a superior relation to the film. But *Far from Heaven* has a visual richness and social significance that works in its own right. Haynes locates the film – which focuses on wealthy suburbanite Cathy's unhappy domestic life – at a precise moment in American history: 1957 was a time when well-to-do suburbs were no longer a novelty, when McCarthyism was in retreat and commodity culture had become integrated into a middle-class way of life. Haynes' view of this suburban America is inspired by hindsight, and especially by post-1960s awareness of racial and sexual politics. A weight of repression and fear hangs over both Cathy and her black gardener Raymond's tentative relationship and husband Frank's cruising, but the film hints that desires deviating from the norm were already pushing at the doors of sexual respectability and racial segregation. At first *Far from Heaven* might seem to suggest that these two social oppressions are equal and parallel in intensity, but as the plot unfolds social anxiety at homosexuality is shown to be infinitely less deep rooted than the hysteria caused by intimacy across the racial divide. Cathy and Raymond's friendship touches an absolute taboo in Hartford, Connecticut. While gayness may be persecuted by law, Haynes suggests that Frank might well find not only happiness with his lover but also a new form of friendship with Cathy and the children.

Frank's story hints at a 'happy end'; Cathy's story ends in tears. Even audiences unaware of film history cannot but recognise a degree of self-consciousness in *Far from Heaven*. The carefully constructed *mise en scène* is a reminder that collective memory of the 1950s is, by and large, a product of media imagery – of advertising, of lush, widescreen, highly coloured Hollywood movies, of early television and the sanitised, family fare promoted then. Haynes takes this 50s American 'heritage' as the concoction it is, and inserts a political subtext into media imagery as memory. It would, in fact, be difficult for any spectator, however movie illiterate, not to pick up some of the clues suggesting that Hollywood cinema itself is an essential part of *Far from Heaven's* frame of reference. Once its world mutates from a 'historical' 1950s into the movie world of 1950s Hollywood melodrama, the film's political significance takes on a different edge.

For the fan of Hollywood melodrama, however, the cinematic frame of reference is unavoidable from the beginning. *Far from Heaven's* opening moments play as a direct quotation. The credit sequence maps out leafy, autumnal, Douglas Sirk territory and his *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) is immediately recognisable when a high-angle shot shows a station wagon pulling up outside a typical suburban house. The scene is then set for Jane Wyman's Cary Scott, conventional resident of this milieu, to fall in love, unconventionally, with her gardener, Rock Hudson's Ron. But this quotation is

#### Cast:

Julianne Moore (*Cathy Whitaker*)  
Dennis Quaid (*Frank Whitaker*)  
Dennis Haysbert (*Raymond Deagan*)  
Patricia Clarkson (*Eleanor Fine*)  
Viola Davis (*Sybil*)  
James Rebhorn (*Doctor Bowman*)  
Celia Weston (*Mona Lauder*)  
Michael Gaston (*Stan Fine*)  
Ryan Ward (*David Whitaker*)  
Lindsay Andretta (*Janice Whitaker*)  
Jordan Puryear (*Sarah Deagan*)  
Bette Henritze (*Mrs Leacock*)  
Barbara Garrick (*Doreen*)  
Olivia Birkelund (*Nancy*)  
Kyle Smith (*Billy Hutchinson*)  
Stevie Ray Dallimore (*Dick Dawson*)  
Mylrika Davis (*Esther*)  
Jason Franklin (*photographer*)  
Gregory Marlow (*Reginald Carter*)  
C.C. Loveheart (*Marlene*)  
June Squibb (*elderly woman*)  
Laurent Giroux (*man with moustache*)  
Alex Santoriello (*Spanish bartender*)  
Matt Malloy (*red-faced man*)  
J.B. Adams (*Farnsworth*)  
Kevin Carrigan (*soda jerk*)  
Chance Kelly (*Tallman*)  
Declan Baldwin (*officer 1*)  
Brian Delate (*officer 2*)  
Pamela Evans (*Kitty*)  
Joe Holt (*hotel waiter*)  
Ben Moss (*Hutch's friend*)  
Susan Willis (*receptionist*)  
Karl Schroeder (*conductor*)  
Lance Olds (*bail clerk*)  
Nicholas Joy (*blond boy*)  
Virl Andrick (*blond boy's father*)  
Jonathan McClain (*staff member 1*)  
Jezebel Montero (*hooker*)  
Geraldine Bartlett (*woman at party*)  
Ernest Rayford III (*glaring man*)  
Duane McLaughlin (*Jake*)  
Betsy Aidem (*pool mother*)  
Mary Anna Klindtworth (*pool daughter*)  
Ted Neustadt (*Ron*)  
Thomas Torres (*band leader*)  
Blondell Cooper (*hostess*)  
USA-France 2002©  
107 mins  
Digital

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undermined by another, and the cinematic reference shifts abruptly. While the production values of Sirk's Universal A picture stay on screen, the opening lines of dialogue conjure up a black-and-white Columbia picture of 1949: Max Ophuls' *The Reckless Moment*. Julianne Moore's Cathy calls out 'Sybil' as a black maid walks down the garden path, then 'David' to her son playing on his bike. ('Put your shirt on, David'; 'Help Sybil with the groceries, David'.) Moore thus occupies a similar role to Joan Bennett's Mrs Harper in Ophuls' melodrama of small-town family life. Although the maid from *Far from Heaven* echoes the original Sybil's understanding and dignity, Haynes has other interests at stake in his citation of *The Reckless Moment*.

On this level *Far from Heaven* operates within the critical history that surrounds Hollywood 50s melodrama: as inability to express emotion torments its characters, so camera, colour, music and so on suggest what cannot be said in words. In *Far from Heaven* Haynes tries to find a voice for melodrama's silences while also paying tribute to its cinematic style. He looks back at the stories in the spirit of 'what if...' Does the social shock caused by cross-class romance in *All That Heaven Allows* hide another, taboo, story of cross-race romance?

This experiment (which occasionally acknowledges Fassbinder's brilliant 1973 reworking of the Sirk story *Fear Eats the Soul*) has no possible social foundation. For instance, when Ron takes Cary into the country, the beautiful old mill stands by the stream offering an alternative and idyllic lifestyle. In the equivalent scene, Raymond takes Cathy into the woods, but there is no suggestion of a marginal culture or Thoreauesque ideal in which they can find refuge.

On the other hand, Haynes turns the premise of *The Reckless Moment* on its head: it is not the father's absence that allows a louche underworld to threaten the respectable, middle-class home but rather his presence. The atmosphere of seedy downtown bars (brilliantly lit by Edward Lachman with green and purple highlights) is not displaced on to the blackmailer as in *The Reckless Moment* but represents the repressed within the home itself. The two stories come together at the end. Cathy lies on her bed, crying for her lost love, and at the cruelty of their world, just as Lucia Harper in the same *mise en scène* weeps for the petty criminal who had fallen in love with her. In both movies the telephone rings and Sybil calls out 'Mr Harper/Mr Whitaker on the telephone, Mrs Harper/Mrs Whitaker!' Here the films diverge. In *Far from Heaven*, a cutaway shot shows Frank talking on the telephone in his hotel room, with his lover in the background. Of course, there's no such cutaway in *The Reckless Moment*. But the fan of the Hollywood melodrama cannot but pick up the implications behind Haynes' suggestion. Tom Harper's absence from the family might well be due to other reasons apart from engineering work in Berlin. While *Far from Heaven* can be appreciated on any level, these cross-narrative implications, poignant and witty, suggest that now that cinema is history, the filmmaker can also be the film historian.

Laura Mulvey, *Sight and Sound*, March 2003