



DREAM PALACE

Hair

With a pre-recorded introduction by director Kleber Mendonça Filho.

'I didn't understand a word of it because of my bad English but I loved the music and loved the whole spirit of the piece,' Milos Forman said of his first experience of seeing the off-Broadway production of *Hair* in 1967. Afterwards he rushed backstage to congratulate the creative team of James Rado, Jerry Ragni and Galt MacDermot. For them, this opening saw their three-years-in-the-making project reach its first audiences.

Forman had headed backstage after that show in 1967 to ask Rado, Ragni and MacDermot whether they would allow him the opportunity to mount a production of the show in Prague. However, the 1968 Soviet invasion put a stop to that idea, so Forman began his enquires into getting the film rights. The same year, with the financial support of Paramount and the endorsement of the authors, Forman began working on a screenplay with Jean-Claude Carrière, a French novelist and screenwriter and a frequent collaborator with Luis Buñuel.

Their concept for opening up the stage show for the screen was to shoot it as an audition for a musical in a semi-documentary style. However, Forman and Carrière's script presentation with Rado and Ragni ended in disappointment, because the show's originators were now keen to make their own film adaptation.

In 1973 the musical's Broadway producer, Michael Butler, bought the rights from Rado and Ragni, but having Forman's name attached made funding elusive. At this point Forman only had one US feature film under his belt, *Taking Off* (1971), which had been critically panned despite winning the Grand Prix at the 1971 Cannes Film Festival. Two years later, following the multi-award-winning box office success of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), Forman was far more bankable. Producer Lester Persky stepped in and secured finance from United Artists and West German sources. *Hair*, with Forman attached as director, was announced.

Since Forman had used the semi-documentary style audition framework for *Taking Off*, a new approach was needed. Forman saw dozens of screenwriters until, on the recommendation of Peter Schaffer, he met playwright Michael Weller whose play *Moonchildren* (1970), about communal living in the 1960s, had been highly praised. Forman and Weller worked to shape the stage show's series of musical episodes concerning a group of hippies living in Central Park into a workable screen adaptation. Having created a plot structure, next came the integration of the music. With Rado and Ragni not actively involved in the film adaptation, it was MacDermot who repurposed the songs to support their new assignments in terms of character and integration into the story.

In the same way that Forman had interviewed a number of potential screenwriters, he was equally assiduous in his choice of choreographer. When he saw Mikhail Baryshnikov in *Push Comes to Shove*, choreographed by Twyla Tharp, he was struck by its humour and originality in movement style. Initially dismissive of the stage show of *Hair*, the new framing device and

the opportunities this would give to create innovative, provocative and humorous dance sequences won Tharp's support.

Forman was keen to avoid casting familiar faces and drew up a list of requirements: 'First that they had to look right – that is, they had to look like the kind of person that might be in the situation that the role demanded. Secondly, they had to be able to sing – because everyone does their own singing in the film. Thirdly they had to be able to dance; fourthly they had to be able to act, and fifthly they had to be nice people.' In the four key young roles, Forman first spotted John Savage (Claude) on stage in David Mamet's *American Buffalo*, Treat Williams (Berger) playing Danny Zuko in the stage version of *Grease*, Annie Golden (Jeannie) was the lead singer of the punk band The Shirts and Beverly D'Angelo (Sheila) had been making a name for herself in small but pivotal film roles for a couple of years. The other significant piece of casting was that of the General within the film's final segment at the military base. Forman wanted an older actor with gravitas but fearing the role was too small for icons of the Hollywood studio system turned to veteran film director Nicholas Ray, who took on the role despite being ill. *Hair* would be his final film appearance.

Principal photography began on 11 October 1977, with the entire film scheduled to be shot on location, mostly in and around New York including Central Park, East Village, Brooklyn, the US Customs House in Manhattan (doubling for the US Army Induction Center), an inactive jail near Foley Square, Washington Square Park, New Jersey, Jersey City and Long Island. The large-scale gathering at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC that appears in the film's finale was really filmed there, with 20,000 extras present. Claude's military training was shot at Fort Irwin, a functioning California National Guard Installation in the town of Barstow near the Nevada border, with the support of California's governor, Pat Brown, and the National Guard, 1,500 of whom were used as extras. The original plan for the entire film to be shot on location was scuppered when the church selected for the LSD fantasy wedding pulled out due to the number's content. Eventually, it was filmed at a studio in Astoria, New York.

In a somewhat perverse piece of scheduling, the film's recreation of a 1960s summer 'Be-In' (a hippie festival) was set for the 6 December 1977 at Sheep Meadow in Central Park West. The initial shooting day did not go quite as planned 'We were in big trouble weather-wise,' Forman recalled. 'In the middle of shooting summer scenes, I suddenly looked out of my window at Sheep Meadow and it was under snow. We had to stuff the dancer's mouths with ice [which they spat out when 'action' was called] because it was the only way to stop their breath from showing.' The terrible weather meant that production had to shut down for six weeks over Christmas. Filming started again in January 1978 in California for the airbase sequences.

The New York 'Be-In' was rescheduled for May 1978. Two musical numbers were filmed there ('LBJ' and 'Electric Blues') but, to encourage the required thousands of unpaid extras, the filmmakers also staged a three day-festival with live entertainment from well-known bands including Talking Heads. These were the last three days of production, ensuring that filming ended on a high. The revellers enjoyed themselves, with the most photogenic and authentically dressed being assigned to visible positions. However, hundreds of residents living near the Park complained about the noise generated by a six-metre-high wall of amplifiers and the thousands in attendance – a far cry from similar events a decade earlier.

Once filming was completed, the nine months of editing began, helmed by Lynzee Klingman with Stan Warnow and Alan Heim. Forman was very hands-on in the process, with key musical numbers being edited and re-edited as many as 20 times. Tharp spoke about her regret that much of her choreography was cut from the final version but acknowledged that the director's vision was paramount.

With a somewhat surprising PG rating in the US (it was given an AA by the BBFC), *Hair* opened in March 1979. Its first screening outside of the US was on 10 May at the first night of the Cannes Film Festival, where it played out of competition before opening wide the following day. In July, Forman returned to Czechoslovakia for the first time since he had left in 1968. There was a Gala screening in Prague as part of an initiative by Jirí Pils, general secretary in charge of Czech cinematography, to bring back and support projects by former Czech New Wave artists. The same month South African government censors banned the film as 'harmful and indecent to public morals and offensive to local religious convictions.'

Critical reception for the film was mixed. Frank Rich in *Time* wrote that, '*Hair* succeeds at all levels – as lowdown fun, as affecting drama, as exhilarating spectacle and as provocative social observation.' Roger Ebert in the *Chicago Sun-Times* was worried that this iconic musical of the 1960s would feel anachronistic a decade later but was wowed from the outset: '*Hair* opens with such confidence and joy, moves so swiftly and sustains itself so well that I wondered why I had any doubts.' Al Auster in *Cineaste* focused on the strength of the casting, 'an excellent group of young actors and actresses' highlighting Treat Williams' 'appropriate mixture of bravado and innocence that pulls the group together and supplies its energy.' The film did have its critics. John Coleman in the *New Statesman* noted: '*Hair* positively invites us to applaud a collection of king-size creeps.' Ian Christie in the *Daily Express* commented on the 'somewhat feeble songs and uninspired dancing,' while Michael Billington in *The Illustrated London News* felt it was '... in many ways a distinct improvement on the stage show.'

The film cost \$12m and it barely recovered its production costs on its original theatrical run with a box office of \$15.28m. In his memoir, Forman reflected: 'It didn't do as well as everyone had hoped... it came out both too late and too soon for commercial success.' But he added that it is the film of his he shows guests most often, as 'musicals are almost always a pleasure to watch'.

Ellen Cheshire, booklet essay from *Hair* (40th Anniversary Dual Format Edition) (BFI, 2019)

HAIR

Director: Milos Forman
Production Companies: United Artists, CIP Filmproduktion
Producers: Lester Persky, Michael Butler
Production Manager: Robert Greenhut
Production Co-ordinator: Lois Kramer
Location Manager: Martin Danzig
Location Manager (California): Ronald Colby
Production Assistants: Michael Peyser, David Dreyfuss, Jennifer Ogden, Shawn Hausman, Barry Strugatz, Barbara Pettick, Tom Fritz, Steve Montgomery, Carol Clemente
Assistant Directors: Michael Hausman, Joe Ray, Joel Tuber
Screenplay: Michael Weller
Original Musical Play (Music): Galt MacDermot
Original Musical Play (Book/Lyrics): Gerome Ragni, James Rado
Directors of Photography: Miroslav Ondricek, Dick Kratina, Jean Talvin
Additional Photography: Richard Pearce
2nd Unit Photographer: Gerald Cotts
Camera Operator: Tom Priestley
Camera Operator (California): Jan Kiesser
Special Effects: Al Griswold
Puppet Creations: Larry Reehling
Supervising Editor: Lynzee Klingman
Editors: Stan Warnow, Alan Heim
Associate Editor: Michael Jablow
Production Designer: Stuart Wurtzel
Art Director (California): Harold Michelson
Set Decorator: George De Titta
Set Decorator (California): Gerald Wunderlich
Scenic Artist: Jon Linder
Costumes: Ann Roth
Make-up: Max Henriquez
Makeup (California): Bob Mills
Title Design: R/Greenberg Associates
Choreography: Twyla Tharp, Kenneth Rinker
Sound Recording: Chris Newman
Sound Re-recording: Bill Varney
Dolby Consultant: Don DiGirolamo
Sound Re-recording: Steve Maslow, Bob Minkler
Supervising Sound Editor: Milton C. Burrow
Sound Editors: William A. Sawyer, Gordon Davidson
Equestrian Trainer (Dance Sequence): Albert Ostermaier
Unit Publicist: Larry Kaplan

Hair (40th Anniversary Dual Format Edition) is available to buy now from the BFI Shop.
shop.bfi.org.uk

In partnership with:



Cast:

John Savage (Claude)
Treat Williams (Berger)
Beverly D'Angelo (Sheila)
Annie Golden (Jeanie)
Dorsey Wright (Hud)
Don Dacus (Woof)
Cheryl Barnes (Hud's fiancée)
Richard Bright (Fenton)
Nicholas Ray (General)
Charlotte Rae (lady in pink)
Miles Chapin (Steve)
Fern Tailer (Sheila's mother)
Charles Denny (Sheila's father)
Herman Meckler (Sheila's uncle)
Agness Breen (Sheila's aunt)
Antonia Rey (Berger's mother)
George J. Manos (Berger's father)
Linda Surh (Vietnamese girl)
Jane Boone (1st debutante)
Suki Love (2nd debutante)
Joe Acord (Claude's father)
Michael Jeter (Sheldon)
Janet York (prison psychiatrist)
Rahsaan Curry (Lafayette Jnr)
Harry Gittleson (judge)
Donald Alsdurf (MP)
Steve Massicotte, Mario Nelson (barracks officers)
Twyla Tharp, Rose Marie Wright, Tom Rawe, Jennifer Way, Shelley Washington, Christine Uchida, Raymond Kurshals, Richard Colton, Anthony Ferro, Sara Rudner, Johanna Baer, Carolyn Brown, Colleen O'Callaghan, Susan Clark, Jannifer Douglas, Karen Mays, Megan Murphy, Vicki Lynn Powell, Anna Spellman, Lauralee Stapfer, Deborah Wagman, Pat Benoye, Cameron Burke, Richard Caceres, Tony Constantine, Ron Dunham, Leonard Feiner, Ken Gilden, Kate Glasner, Christian Holder, Chris Komar, Nancy Lefkowitz, Joseph Lennon, Robert Levithan, France Mayotte, Hector Mercado, Sharon Miripolsky, Marta Renzi, Donna Ritchie, Ellen Saltonstall, Radha Sukhu, Byron Utley, Earlise Vails, Ronald Weeks, Kimmary Williams, Deborah Zalkind (dancers)

USA/West Germany 1979
121 mins

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