



## MEMBER PICKS

# Magnolia

### Magnolia

Director: Paul Thomas Anderson

©: New Line Productions Inc.

Production Company: Ghoulardi Film Company

Presented by: New Line Cinema

Executive Producers: Michael De Luca, Lynn Harris

Producer: Joanne Sellar

Co-producer: Daniel Lupi

Associate Producer: Dylan Tichenor

Executive in Charge of Production: Carla Fry

Production Executive: Leon Dudevoir

Production Associate: Jennifer Barrons

Unit Production Manager: Daniel Lupi

Unit Supervisor: Dan Collins

Production Supervisor: Craig Markey

Special Projects Supervisor: Will Weiske

Supervising Production Co-ordinator: Emily Glatter

Production Controller: Paul Prokop

Production Accountant: Kelly A. Snyder

Location Manager: Timothy Hillman

Post-production Supervisor: Mark Graziano

1st Assistant Director: Adam Druzman

2nd Assistant Director: Tina Stauffer

Script Supervisor: Valeria Migliassi Collins

Casting: Cassandra Kulukundis

Written by: Paul Thomas Anderson

Director of Photography: Robert Elswit

Camera Operator: Paul Babin

Aerial Camera Operator: Hans Bjerno

Underwater Camera Operator: Cynthia Pusheck

Steadicam Operators: Guy Bee, Elizabeth Ziegler

Visual Effects Supervisor: Joe Letteri

Visual Effects Producer: Joseph Grossberg

Special Visual Effects/Animation:

Industrial Light & Magic

Practical Frog Effects by:

Steve Johnson's XFX Group

Special Effects: F/X Concepts Inc

Graphic Artist: Kim Lincoln

Editor: Dylan Tichenor

Production Designers: William Arnold, Mark Bridges

Assistant Art Director: Shepherd Frankel

Set Designer: Conny Boettger-Marinos

Claudia's Artwork by: Fiona Apple, Melora Walters

Costume Designer: Mark Bridges

Costume Supervisor: Karla Stevens

Key Make-up Artist: Tina K. Roessler

Key Hairstylist: Kelvin Trahan

Main Title Sequence Designed/Produced by:

Balsmeyer & Everett Inc

Music: Jon Brion

Songs: Aimee Mann

Additional Instruments/Odd Pieces:

Jon Brion, Fiona Apple

Sound Mixer: John Pritchett

Re-recording Mixers: Robert J. Litt, Michael

Semanick, Michael Herbick, Steve Pederson

Supervising Sound Editor: Richard King

Stunt Co-ordinator: Webster Whinery

Cast:

Jeremy Blackman (*Stanley Spector*)

Tom Cruise (*Frank T.J. Mackey*)

Melinda Dillon (*Rose Gator*)

April Grace (*Gwenovier*)

Luis Guzmán (*Luis*)

Philip Baker Hall (*Jimmy Gator*)

Philip Seymour Hoffman (*Phil Parma*)

Ricky Jay (*Burt Ramsey*)

Orlando Jones (*Worm*)

William H. Macy (*Quiz Kid Donnie Smith*)

Alfred Molina (*Solomon Solomon*)

Julianne Moore (*Linda Partridge*)

Michael Murphy (*Alan Kligman, Esq*)

Messy is probably the best word to describe Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia*, a grandiosely sprawling, audaciously earnest concoction that yearns to find meaning and connection among an overextended roster of characters in Southern California's San Fernando Valley during the course of one extremely eventful day and night. In structure, style and content, *Magnolia* is a magnificent train wreck of a movie, an intimate epic of full-throttle emotions that threatens to go off the rails at any moment during its three-hours-plus running time. In the inevitable media build-up to the film's US release much was made of Anderson's enviably precarious position: as the whiz-kid behind *Boogie Nights* (1997) this is his moment with the golden ticket and the keys to the castle.

Anderson's first feature *Hard Eight* (1996) was a neo-chamber piece of breathtakingly precise detail set among Nevada's casinos; *Boogie Nights*, his next, set in the 70s porn industry and significantly larger in scope and scale, leaped off the screen with a vicious exuberance. Both films did moderate box office, but the truckloads of critical praise they received left the door wide open for Anderson's perennially blossoming aspirations. And, quite simply, the kid ran with it, creating in *Magnolia* a film of rare ambition and beauty.

If Quentin Tarantino faced his post-*Pulp Fiction* moment with the sublimely understated *Jackie Brown*, Anderson has demanded the spotlight be turned up, not away. *Magnolia* contains 11 main characters and a handful of smaller roles and interweaves nine distinct storylines linked through similarities of situation and emotion as well as the extensive use of music by the singer/songwriter Aimee Mann. It doesn't really have a plot, though it incorporates a botched heist, sons searching for fathers, fathers looking for forgiveness and myriad other stock movie motivational devices. Jimmy Gator (Philip Baker Hall), a much loved television gameshow host, attempts to reconcile with his emotionally estranged and chemically addicted daughter Claudia (wonderfully captured by Melora Walters, in a performance destined to be overlooked) before he succumbs to terminal cancer. Linda Partridge (Julianne Moore) must go about the unpleasant formalities of preparing for the impending death of her husband Earl (Jason Robards) while attempting to find something akin to healing for herself. Earl's nurse and caretaker Phil Parma (Philip Seymour Hoffman) likewise does what he can to ease the pain, tracking down Big Earl's long-lost son (Tom Cruise), who has recreated himself as Frank T.J. Mackey, promoter of an extremely successful men's sexual self-help programme. *Magnolia* wends its way across the city, recording the hours of people whose lives seemingly don't relate and finding ways that they do. The film's structure is like a skeletal spine that creates connections between characters and scenes as lines of dialogue bounce off each other, ringing and rhyming in the viewer's head long after they've ambled by.

The film opens with three short vignettes interlinked by a voiceover from *Boogie Nights* alumnus Ricky Jay pondering the nature of fate and the meaning of chance. The energy and extravagance of the pre-credits sequence – an aerial shot of a plane swooping across a lake fills the frame; the camera glides across a rooftop as a man jumps from it, stopped in mid-air so the precise geometry of his trajectory can be mapped out – are already more than most movies could contain. Then, after a few title cards and a tinkling electric piano, a blooming flower fills the screen and Mann goes full force into Harry Nilsson's 'One' ('the loneliest number') as a map of Los Angeles kaleidoscopes in the background. It is only now that the film presents its own enigmatic title, quickly moving on to introduce all the main characters and their situations, the song stopping and starting and stretching itself out to seem part of the fabric of their lives. Altogether this takes about 15 minutes, the pace not that of a disciplined marathoner preparing strategically for the journey ahead but of someone simply running as fast as they can, daring exhaustion to set in.

John C. Reilly (*Officer Jim Kurring*)  
 Jason Robards (*Earl Partridge*)  
 Melora Walters (*Claudia Wilson Gator*)  
 Michael Bowen (*Rick Spector*)  
 Henry Gibson (*Thurston Howell*)  
 Felicity Huffman (*Cynthia*)  
 Emmanuel L. Johnson (*Dixon*)  
 Don McManus (*Doctor Landon*)  
 Eileen Ryan (*Mary*)  
 Danny Wells (*Dick Jennings*)  
 Pat Healy (*Sir Edmund William Godfrey*)  
 Genevieve Zweig (*Mrs Godfrey*)  
 Mark Flannagan (*Joseph Green*)  
 Neil Flynn (*Stanley Berry*)  
 Rod McLachlan (*Daniel Hill*)  
 Allan Graf (*firefighter*)  
 Patton Oswalt (*Delmer Darion*)  
 Ray 'Big Guy' Gonzales (*Reno security guard*)  
 Brad Hunt (*Craig Hansen*)  
 Jim Meskimen (*forensic scientist*)  
 Chris O'Hara (*Sydney Barringer*)  
 Clement Blake (*Arthur Barringer*)  
 Frank Elmore (*1958 detective*)  
 John Kraft Seitz (*1958 policeman*)  
 Cory Buck (*young boy*)  
 Tim 'Stuff' Sorenen (*infomercial guy*)  
 Jim Ortlieb (*middle-aged guy*)  
 Thomas Jane (*young Jimmy Gator*)  
 Holly Houston (*Jimmy's showgirl*)  
 Benjamin Niedens (*little Donnie Smith*)  
 Veronica Hart (*dentist nurse 1*)  
 Melissa Spell (*dentist nurse 2*)  
 James Kiriyama-Lem (*Doctor Lee*)  
 Jake Cross (*pedestrian 1*)  
 Charlie Scott (*pedestrian 2*)  
 Juan Medrano (*Nurse Juan*)  
 John Pritchett (*police captain*)  
 Cleo King (*Marcie*)  
 Michael Shamus Wiles (*Captain Muffy*)  
 Jason Andrews (*Doc*)  
 John S. Davies (*cameraman*)  
 Kevin Breznahan (*Geoff, seminar guy*)  
 Miguel Perez (*Avi Solomon*)  
 David Masuda (*man coroner*)  
 Neil Pepe (*officer 1*)  
 Lionel Mark Smith (*detective*)  
 Annette Helde (*woman coroner*)  
 Lynne Lerner (*librarian*)  
 Scott Burkett (*WDKK page 1*)  
 Bob Brewer (*Richard's dad*)  
 Julie Brewer (*Richard's mom*)  
 Nancy Marston (*Julia's mom*)  
 Maurey Marston (*Julia's dad*)  
 Jamala Gaither (*WDKK P.A.*)  
 Amy Brown (*WDKK page 2*)  
 Meagen Fay (*Doctor Diane*)  
 Patricia Forte (*Mim*)  
 Patrick Warren (*Todd Geronimo*)  
 Virginia Pereira (*pink dot girl*)  
 Craig Kvinsland (*Brad the bartender*)  
 Patricia Scanlon (*cocktail waitress*)  
 Natalie Marston (*Julia*)  
 Bobby Brewer (*Richard*)  
 Clark Gregg (*WDKK floor director*)  
 Pat Healy (*young pharmacy kid*)  
 Art Frankel (*old pharmacist*)  
 Matt Gerald (*officer 2*)  
 Guillermo Melgarejo (*pink dot guy*)  
 Paul F. Tompkins (*Chad, Seduce & Destroy*)  
 Mary Lynn Rajsak (*Janet, Frank's assistant*)  
 Bob Downey Sr (*a Prince*) (*WDKK show director*)  
 William Mapother (*WDKK director's assistant*)  
 USA 1999©  
 188 mins  
 35mm

Mann's music is central to the film's structure. 'It was really important to me that the movie felt like one story,' says Anderson. 'There are nine different plots, but I wanted to make sure it didn't feel like a vignette movie. So having one voice to unify it all seemed a good idea.' Anderson had access to unreleased material by Mann (her husband Michael Penn scored his two previous features) and found particular inspiration in 'Wise Up', a song that featured on the soundtrack album to *Jerry Maguire*. Anderson commissioned Mann to write a handful of new songs specifically for his film including the closing-title number 'Save Me'. Mann's 70s-esque songwriting and production are neatly analogous to the ways Anderson freely appropriates from his personal pantheon of post-studio-system maverick filmmakers (chiefly Altman, Demme and Scorsese) while at the same time striving to bring his own original vision to the screen.

If it's difficult to explain the exact course of events in *Magnolia*, it's equally hard to unravel the chain of relations that links the characters. Late on in the film Anderson uses the end credits of the television gameshow that occupies much of the second hour to complete another circuit, reveal a new piece in the puzzle of the life of the dying Earl Partridge and create a new set of implied relationships around a character who never leaves his bed. It's tempting throughout to look for the secret centre of the film, and when Ricky Jay appears briefly as a producer of the gameshow – a bizarre kids-vs-adults trivia challenge called *What Do Kids Know?* – for an instant you think it might be him. But he quickly fades back into the tableau and we realise that here everyone stars in their own film, if only for a while. It's this skilful withholding of information that keeps the viewer focused, just as in *Hard Eight* Anderson pulled the viewer ever deeper into his characters' lives by constantly revealing with one hand while concealing with the other.

Like Tarantino, Anderson belongs to a generation of film directors weaned on the video store for whom watching movies is part of everyday life, not a ritualised experience like going to church. This has in part created the cinema of referencing so common among younger directors, the nerdy delight in out-obscurring one another. *Boogie Nights* borrowed from a wide variety of sources, and in *Magnolia* Anderson uses Jason Robards (star of an Anderson touchstone, Jonathan Demme's *Melvin and Howard*) and, in smaller roles, iconic Altman actors Michael Murphy and Henry Gibson (the latter as a scathing velvet menace preposterously named Thurston Howell who flippantly tosses off a bar-room cruelty reserved exclusively for strangers). Anderson claims he chose Gibson simply because, 'I really wanted to work with that guy.'

*Magnolia* is a film obviously in thrall to the process of movie-making, but its mournful overtones ring surprisingly loud from a filmmaker barely 30 years old. By grappling with the fissure between the idealisations of the medium and the realisation of what it may lack (at one point Philip Seymour Hoffman pleads into the phone, 'This is the scene in the movie where you help me out... This is that scene'), Anderson seems to be stumbling towards a maturity beyond the confines of a movie-made life. 'I'm a product of growing up on movies, but when the movies betray you and haven't taught you how to feel something or what to do – for instance, if someone in your life dies – it's flabbergasting because the movies haven't shown you how to deal with that. I haven't been taught what to do when I can't find my car keys and I've got to go to the funeral. That's a scene you don't see.

'I hope my film is both very movie-wise and very reality-wise. I don't think you can pretend you haven't seen a movie if you're a director – I think part of my job is to acknowledge how many movies I've seen and how much that informs our lives. Movies are a big influence on how we deal with death, with family relationships, and I wanted to show that. But they can also be a complete betrayal in terms of how to live your life.'

Mark Olsen, *Sight and Sound*, March 2000