



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Five Easy Pieces

Five Easy Pieces

Director: Bob Rafelson

©: Five Easy Pieces Productions

Production Company: B.B.S. Productions

Executive Producer: Bert Schneider

Producers: Bob Rafelson, Richard Wechsler

Associate Producer: Harold Schneider

Production Co-ordinator: Marilyn Schlossberg

Location Representative: Kent Remington

Assistant Director: Sheldon Schrager

Script Supervisor: Terry Terrill

Casting: Fred Roos

Screenplay: Adrien Joyce

From a story by: Bob Rafelson, Adrien Joyce

Director of Photography: Laszlo Kovacs

Key Grip: George Hill

Dolly Grip: Howard Hagadorn

Gaffer: Richmond Aguilar

Best Boy: Bill Curtis

Editors: Christopher Holmes, Gerald Shepard

Assistant Editors: Pete Denenberg, Harold Hazen

Interior Design: Toby Rafelson

Property Master: Walter Starkey

Wardrobe: Bucky Rous

Solo Pianist: Pearl Kaufman

Sound Mixer: Charles Knight

Sound: Audio Tran

Re-recording: Producers Sound Service

Sound Effects: Edit-Rite, Inc

Transportation Captain: Al Schultz

Cast:

Jack Nicholson (*Robert 'Bobby' Eroica Dupea*)

Karen Black (*Rayette Dipesto*)

Billy 'Green' Bush (*Elton*)

Fannie Flagg (*Stoney*)

Sally Ann Struthers (*Betty*)

Marlena MacGuire (*Twinky*)

Richard Stahl (*recording engineer*)

Lois Smith (*Partita Dupea*)

Helena Kallianiotis (*Palm Apodaca*)

Toni Basil (*Terry Grouse*)

Lorna Thayer (*waitress*)

Susan Anspach (*Catherine Van Ost*)

Ralph Waite (*Carl Fidelio Dupea*)

William Challee (*Nicholas Dupea*)

John Ryan (*Spicer*)

Irene Dailey (*Samia Glavia*)

USA 1970©

98 mins

Digital

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

Three years after Jean-Luc Godard's weekend couple Corinne and Roland became caught up in the interminable traffic jam that blocks routes out of Paris in an early scene of his apocalyptic *nouvelle vague* masterpiece *Week End*, oil rigger Bobby Dupea finds himself delayed by this most modern and atomising of frustrations as he returns home from the rig near the start of Bob Rafelson's *Five Easy Pieces*. With an imposing grid of static vehicles lining the freeway, and to the bemusement of his passenger, co-worker Elton, Dupea leaves his car to take a wander through the traffic, amidst infuriated hoots and shouts from fellow drivers. These persevere – indeed intensify – when he climbs onto the back of an immobile truck where an upright piano is secured and proceeds to play an impromptu classical piece with unforeseen virtuosity.

Blue-collar Bobby is actually Robert Eroica Dupea, named for Beethoven's third symphony, a classically trained pianist who has rejected both his own musical potential and the conservatism of his upper-middle class background. It is clear from the outset, however, that Dupea is as incongruous with the alternative lifestyle he has chosen for himself as a labourer as he is straightjacketed by the genteel bourgeois life that his family leads in their secluded home in the Pacific Northwest. He experiences equal frustration listening to the inanities of his kind-hearted but illiterate girlfriend Rayette (lying together in a motel room he tells her that if she wouldn't open her mouth 'everything would be just fine') as he does with the pretentious after-dinner conversations of his family's friends. This estrangement from conventional society marks Dupea as an alienated protagonist in the tradition of other heroes of New Hollywood countercultural cinema. But whereas the anti-heroism of, for instance, Bonnie and Clyde or the bikers in *Easy Rider*, is couched in terms of rebellion and lawlessness, Dupea's struggle remains largely internal, arising from his inability to connect with or relate to others.

Similarly, while these earlier benchmarks of the new Hollywood revealed an American cinema re-energised by, but still in thrall to (and arguably in the shadow of), the radical films and formal innovations of the European new waves, *Five Easy Pieces* indicated a subtler and matured absorption of this influence by eschewing the kaleidoscopic stylistic effects that its predecessors had borrowed from Godardian art cinema in favour of filmmaking with an uncommon eye for stillness, gesture, and milieu.

Not that this had been expected from Bob Rafelson, a figure known previously only for his hand in creating pop group/television series The Monkees and for directing them in the feature-length *Head*, which aped the dizzying technical experimentation of Richard Lester's Beatles films. Nor can such formal restraint have been anticipated from what would have been seen as the follow-up to the groundbreaking success of *Easy Rider* by its production company BBS, an independent branch of Columbia set up by Rafelson along with producers Bert Schneider and Steve Blauner. In place of that breakthrough film's hallucinogenic imagery, glamorised rebellion, and overt appeal to a drop-out mentality, *Five Easy Pieces* offers a raw and uncluttered delineation of American life and landscape, preparing us for subsequent BBS releases, such as Peter Bogdanovich's *The Last Picture Show* and Rafelson's own *The King*

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SIGHT AND SOUND

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Les Parapluies de Cherbourg)

Fri 1 Dec 14:40; Wed 13 Dec 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large);
Sun 17 Dec 18:45; Wed 20 Dec 20:55

The Passenger

Sat 2 Dec 20:20 (+ pre-recorded intro by Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences); Sun 10 Dec 15:45;
Wed 27 Dec 17:50

After Life (Wandafuru Ralfu)

Sun 3 Dec 12:45; Tue 12 Dec 17:15;
Wed 27 Dec 14:40; Sat 30 Dec 20:20

My Night with Maud (Ma Nuit chez Maud)

Mon 4 Dec 18:15; Thu 14 Dec 20:50;
Thu 28 Dec 18:15

Five Easy Pieces

Tue 5 Dec 14:30; Tue 9 Dec 20:55;
Tue 19 Dec 18:15; Fri 29 Dec 18:20

White Material

Wed 6 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by film curator Abiba Coulibaly); Fri 29 Dec 20:45

Boyz n the Hood

Thu 7 Dec 20:35; Sat 16 Dec 18:15;
Sat 23 Dec 20:40

Meet Me in St Louis

Fri 8 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by writer Richard Dyer);
Wed 20 Dec 14:30; Thu 21 Dec 18:10;
Sat 23 Dec 11:50

It's a Wonderful Life

Wed 13 Dec 18:10; Sat 16 Dec 20:25; Mon 18 Dec 20:25;
Wed 20 Dec 18:10; Fri 22 Dec 14:30, 20:25;
Sat 23 Dec 18:10

The Shop around the Corner

Fri 15 Dec 18:20; Mon 18 Dec 14:30;
Thu 21 Dec 20:45; Sat 30 Dec 12:20

Remember the Night

Sun 17 Dec 12:15; Tue 19 Dec 20:40

Fanny and Alexander (Fanny och Alexander)

Sat 23 Dec 14:20; Fri 29 Dec 13:30;
Sat 30 Dec 13:00

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of *Marvin Gardens* (again with Jack Nicholson), which share its unique sensitivity to the poetic textures of mundane locales.

If *Five Easy Pieces* prompts comparisons to continental models (and it should be emphasised that at this time the aimlessness of the film's protagonist, the rambling narrative with its ambiguous and inconclusive denouement, and the attention to mood and character still represented a significant affront to the classical Hollywood paradigm that was entirely European inspired), then it is less to the Godard-Truffaut movies that informed *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Easy Rider* than to the chamber dramas of Ingmar Bergman. The eccentric hitchhikers that Dupea picks up on his journey to visit his ailing father may be the only obvious allusion to Bergman's work, recalling the hitchhikers in *Wild Strawberries*, but the tenor of repressed emotions and tangible psychological disquiet, the stifling sense of physical enclosure and existential pointlessness, and the bleak, autumnal locations are all anticipated in works like *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Persona*. However, whereas the blatant appropriation of the Bergman mode for other New Hollywood movies, principally Robert Altman's *Images* and Woody Allen's *Interiors*, can appear merely imitative, Rafelson is less interested in reverential flattery of the Swedish master than he is adapting a particular idiom to the needs of a specifically American narrative.

Thus, far from feeling ersatz or forced, *Five Easy Pieces* develops a quite considerable emotional undercurrent. This begins early in the film and works gradually to counter the initial impressions we have of Dupea as boorish and chauvinistic. In the scene at the bowling alley we witness Dupea's unpleasant scorn at Rayette's poor performance, but before we are able to develop an appropriate dislike for Dupea we are privy to a brief moment of character revelation that allows us past his macho charade. As his friends and his girlfriend leave for the car park, Dupea is left momentarily alone with his thoughts, each of which is traceable in his downcast facial expressions thanks to Nicholson's extraordinary portrayal, and we are left in little doubt as to the anguish within. It is a moment of quiet observation, emblematic of the film's strengths as a whole, but one which seems doubly effective in the context of a national cinema that is not always attuned to such subtleties.

It is fleeting moments of restrained insight such as this that enable the viewer to accept the understated, but nevertheless almost overwhelming, pathos of the film's emotive climax, when Dupea confronts his ageing, wheelchair-bound and insensible father on a wintry cliff top. Here, Dupea's heartrending admission of the insurmountable generational differences that have estranged them from each other is made all the more devastating in that his outpouring of regret fails even to register in the impassive and uncomprehending gaze of the disabled patriarch.

Samuel Wigley, BFI Digital Features Editor