



SCALA: SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK AND ROLL CINEMA

Pee-wee's Big Adventure

Pee-wee's Big Adventure

Directed by: Tim Burton

©: Warner Bros Inc.

Production Companies: Aspen Film Society,
Robert Shapiro Productions

Distributed by: Warner Bros.

Executive Producer: William E. McEuen

Produced by: Robert Shapiro,
Richard Gilbert Abramson

Unit Production Manager: David Silver

Location Manager: Sam Mercer

1st Assistant Director: Robert P. Cohen

2nd Assistant Directors: Robert Engelman,
Harvey Waldman

Script Supervisor: Jan Kemper

Casting: Wally Nicita

Written by: Phil Hartman, Paul Reubens,
Michael Varhol

Director of Photography: Victor J. Kemper

Camera Operator: Robert Thomas

1st Camera Assistant: Bill Roe

2nd Camera Assistant: Mario Zavala

Gaffer: Earl Gilbert

Key Grip: Gaylin Schultz

Still Photographer: Peter Sorel

Special Visual Effects by: Dream Quest Images

Special Effects Supervisor: Chuck Gaspar

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Joe Day

Animated Effects Supervisor: Rick Heinrichs

Cel Animator: Jorgen Klubien

Animated Effects Consultants: John Scheele,
Stephen Chiodo

Film Editor: Billy Weber

Assistant Film Editor: Claudia Finkle

Production Designer: David L. Snyder

Assistant Art Director: Marjorie Stone McShirley

Set Designer: James E. Tocci

Set Decorator: Thomas Roysden

Illustrator: Paul H. Chadwick

Property Master: Steven M. Levine

Construction Co-ordinator: Bruce Gfeller

Costume Designer: Aggie Guerard Rodgers

Make-up Artist: Frank Griffin

Hair Stylist: Linda Trainoff

Main Titles Designed by: Anthony Goldschmidt

Lenses and Panaflex Camera by: Panavision

Colour by: Technicolor

Colour Timer: Dick Ritchie

Music Composed by: Danny Elfman

Musical Arrangements by: Steve Bartek

Music Editor: Bob Badami

Production Mixer: Petur Hliddal

Re-recording Mixers: Terry Porter,

David J. Hudson, Neil Brody

Supervising Sound Editors: Cecelia Hall,

David B. Cohen

Stunt Co-ordinator: Paul Baxley

Special Thanks to: Linda Koulisis, Randy Pitkin

Cast:

Paul Reubens (*Pee-wee Herman*)

E.G. Daily (*Dottie*)

Mark Holton (*Francis*)

Diane Salinger (*Simone*)

Judd Omen (*Mickey*)

Irving Hellman (*neighbour*)

Monte Landis (*Mario*)

David Glasser, Gregory Brown, Mark Everett
(*BMX kids*)

Daryl Roach (*Chuck*)

Bill Cable (*1st policeman*)

Peter Looney (*2nd policeman*)

Starletta Dupois (*Sergeant Hunter*)

Professor Toru Tanaka (*butler*)

*The screening on Friday 12 January will be introduced by Ben Roberts,
BFI CEO*

Pee-wee Herman, the on-screen persona of comedian Paul Reubens, is perhaps the most consistently developed comic creation in recent cinema. With his pan-stick facial make-up, rosy cheeks, red lips and slicked-back hair, Pee-wee is a nervous, dapper little man in a child's suit and a red bowtie (the obvious maturity of the actor hidden not so much by the cosmetic mask as by the schoolboy smirk and gonzoid expressions). The spindly arms emerge from too-short sleeves, the hands flapping in a fey, slightly camp fashion. The feet, too, clad in clown-like white shoes, emerge from half-mast trouser legs, sticking out at strange angles which suggest that they might just stroll off on their own. In between, the bendy body strikes bizarre poses, the skinny torso contorting itself in unison with the akimbo arms and rubbery legs. And to cap it all, the voice and the laugh: the mocking nasal whine of a veteran pig-tail puller, and the self-conscious chuckle of the practised prankster. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Pee-wee persona, though, is his utter ingenuousness, an innocence which not only inspires affection in others, but which also brings out the best in them.

The film's plot is episodic to the point of surreal juxtaposition, Pee-wee's roaming about the country in search of his red bicycle taking him, in quick succession, from the giant dinosaurs of the prehistoric museum which adjoins the diner where Simone works, via the freight train and its singing hobo, to the superbly lampooned PR-speak of the guide who shows Pee-wee and the rest of the party around the Alamo museum. Not content with this level of digressiveness, the plot also introduces some imaginative and hilarious dream sequences, in one of which Pee-wee's prized bicycle is eaten by a dinosaur. These sequences introduce an overtly fantastical element, but from the very outset – Pee wee woken by a Heath Robinson alarm clock to eat his breakfast with a giant fork (and dutifully clean his teeth with an equally giant toothbrush – the film's visual inventiveness offers the audience a unique, not say oblique, Pee-wee-centred view of the world. There is a preternatural quality to much of the imagery, as if we – like Reubens himself – rediscover our capacity for childlike wonder through our identification with Pee-wee's point of view.

Where some adults may experience a slight difficulty with Pee-wee's world is in sharing his none too sophisticated sense of humour, his infantile delight in terrible jokes and wince-inducing puns. On the other hand, there is about *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* something of the anarchic physicality and slapstick cartoon energy of the best Frank Tashlin and/or Jerry Lewis films. That said, Pee-wee's naïve goodness contains none of that undercurrent of cruelty and destructiveness which one sometimes finds in the frustrated dementia of Lewis' films. There is more of the self-mocking than the self-destructive about Pee-wee's character. In the final sequence, for example, we see the film-within-the-film starring Pee-wee – in which he has only a walk-on part between the glamourpuss pouting of Morgan Fairchild and the hairy-chested posing of her co-star. To which Pee-wee's reaction is a resigned shrug of the shoulders and a look which seems to say, 'Well, what did you expect? That's Hollywood.' With his debut feature having taken \$45 million at the U.S. box-office, his own successful TV series, *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, and assured cult status with children and adults alike, Pee-wee's creator can scarcely say the same.

Nigel Floyd, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1987

Ed Herlihy (*Mr Buxton*)
 Ralph Seymour (*Francis' accomplice*)
 Lou Cutell (*Amazing Larry*)
 Raymond Martino (*gang member*)
 Erica Yohn (*Madam Ruby*)
 Bill Richmond (*highway patrolman*)
 Alice Nunn (*Large Marge*)
 Ed Griffith (*trucker*)
 Simmy Bow (*man in diner*)
 Damon Martin (*Chip*)
 Jon Harris (*Andy*)
 Carmen Filpi (*Hobo Jack*)
 Jan Hooks (*Tina*)
 John Moody (*bus clerk*)
 John O'Neill (*1st cowboy*)
 Alex Sharp (*2nd cowboy*)
 Chester Grimes (*1st biker*)
 Luis Contreras (*2nd biker*)
 Lonnie Parkinson (*3rd biker*)
 Howard Hirdler (*4th biker*)
 Cassandra Peterson (*biker mama*)
 Jason Hervey (*Kevin Morton*)
 Bob McClurg (*studio guard*)
 John Paragon (*movie lot actor*)
 Susan Barnes (*movie lot actress*)
 Zachary Hoffman (*director*)
 Lynne Stewart (*Mother Superior*)
 George Sasaki (*Japanese director*)
 Richard Brose (*Tarzan*)
 Drew Seward (*1st kid*)
 Brett Fellman (*2nd kid*)
 Bob Drew (*fireman*)
 John Gilgreen (*policeman at pet shop*)
 Noreen Hennessy, Phil Hartman (*reporters*)
 Michael Varhol (*photographer*)
 David Rothenberg, Pat Cranshaw,
 Sunshine Barker (*hobos*)
 Gilles Savard (*Pierre*)
 James Brolin (*'P. W.'*)
 Morgan Fairchild (*'Dottie'*)
 Tony Bill (*Terry Hawthorne*)
 Twisted Sister (*themselves*)
 Speck (*dog*)
 USA 1985©
 90 mins
 Digital

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Are you ready for the Invasion of The Fruitgum People? Are you ready for The Geek in The Tight Suit? Are you quite prepared for the likely invasion of catchphrases that will wash up on our novelty-hungry shores when Pee-wee-nia comes to town?

The omens are not precise, but they are unmistakable. A children's TV show, *Pee-wee's Playhouse* (the only one networked featuring a live human being) is drawing a massive audience of adults along with its 'official' viewership of tinies. A bit like *Tiswas*, only more so. Much, much more so. Everything talks, everything dances, everything walks around the Playhouse.

Pee-wee Herman, the media phenomenon, descends upon our happy heads when his first feature film, *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* is released. And so he is installed in two suites at the Savoy hotel, to entertain the press ('entertain' in the loosest possible sense of the word) for a limited season.

I have had more dynamic interviewees.

There are no special influences, but he acknowledges the similarities to almost everyone you might suggest – Jerry Lewis, Harry Langdon. Since his encounter with the French media, he is getting used to the idea of being compared to Jacques Tati, although he confesses not to be all that familiar with his work.

The film actually pre-dates the TV series which has made him a household name in the Altered States of America. Pee-wee evolved out of a little boy character Paul Rubinfeld/Reubens came up with at The Groundlings Theatre in Hollywood. The character turned into a one-man club entertainment, which was videotaped and became a big hit on Home Box Office. *Big Adventure* came next, and then the *Pee-wee's Playhouse* TV series. At which point Pee-wee went mega. At which point Paul Reubens ducked out of the picture.

Big Adventure incorporates many of the original features of the Pee-wee Herman stage show, but the animation, which provides the picture with some startling moments, must have been a new avenue for him? 'No, actually we did animation on the stage – or a simulation of it, using shadow puppets and things. That element was important right from the beginning.'

The Pee-wee Herman Interview Experience is not designed for openness. He insists on doing all interviews in character. He is projected at the interviewer in full battle drag (the famous ill-fitting grey suit, prissy white shoes and make-up from an original idea by Fred Fellini). It's late in the day, he's done a lot of these just lately, and the man-boy is getting a little grizzly, so no questions about reality please, thank you. How, for instance does he switch off Pee-wee at the end of his working day?

'Well, I work most of the time... I'd rather not comment on that...'

Nor is Pee-wee particularly keen to comment on interpretations of the film. Certainly no comment on the tommy-gun burst of sexual innuendo that riddle his *Big Adventure*. He must be aware of the fragility of his success. He must wonder to himself how people miss the weird aftertaste that the character leaves in the mouth.

But such musings, if he has them, are not to be aired in front of strangers carrying tape recorders. There is, after all, a lot at stake here: there is a second film about to be launched in the States, which he hopes will find its way across the Atlantic rather faster than the first. And there is a theme park, Pee-wee Land, which he hopes to open in Hollywood soon. Don't rock the boat, Pee-wee, old son.

Marc Issue, *City Limits*, 13 August 1987