



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Adaptation.

Adaptation.

Director: Spike Jonze

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Presented by: Columbia Pictures Corporation

Presented in association with: InterMedia

Production Companies: Magnet, Clinica Estetico

Executive Producers: Charlie Kaufman, Peter Saraf

Producers: Edward Saxon, Vincent Landay,

Jonathan Demme

Production Associates: Krista Parris,

Emma Wilcockson

Unit Production Manager: Karen Koch

Production Supervisor: Andrew J. Sacks

Production Supervisors (2nd Unit):

Maria K. Chavez, Shoshana Horowitz

Production Co-ordinator: Rick C. Taplin

Location Manager: Rick Schuler

2nd Unit Director: Dan Bradley

1st Assistant Directors:

Thomas Patrick Smith, Brian O'Kelley,

Gregory J. Smith, Nick Satriano

2nd Assistant Directors (2nd Unit): Dave Riebel,

Matthew D. Smith

Script Supervisor: Chiemi Karasawa

CASTING: Justine Baddeley, Kim Davis-Wagner

Casting Associate: Cate Engel

Screenplay: Charlie Kaufman, Donald Kaufman

Based on the book *The Orchid Thief* by:

Susan Orlean

Director of Photography: Lance Acord

2nd Unit Director of Photography: James Fealy

Camera Operator: Thomas H. Lohmann

Steadicam Operator: Paul Taylor

Visual Effects Supervisor: Gray Marshall

Scanning/Recording: Riot Pictures

Visual Effects: Gray Matter FX

Gray Matter FX Supervising Producer:

Margaux Mackay

Gray Matter FX Digital Producer: Albert Mason

Special Effects: Gary D'Amico

Motion Control Operator: Joseph Stevenson

Editor: Eric Zumbrunnen

Additional Editing: Larry Law

Production Designer: K.K. Barrett

Art Director: Peter Andrus

Set Designers: Lynn Christopher, Peter R. Davidson

Set Decorator: Gene Serdena

Costume Designer: Casey Storm

Wardrobe Supervisors: Stacy M. Horn,

Shari D. Gray

Make-up Department Heads: Joel Harlow,

Lynn Barber, Isabel Harkins

Make-up: Allen Weisinger

Make-up and Hair for Ms. Streep: J. Roy Helland

Prosthetic Make-up for Mr. Cage: Kevin Yagher

Special Make-up Effects: Artists' Asylum

AA Make-up Effects Designer: Tony Gardner

Alligator Puppeteer: Conor McCullagh

Hair Department Heads: Roz Music,

Joseph Coscia, Larry Waggoner

Title Design: Geoff McFetridge

Titles: Pacific Title

Digital Opticals: Rods and Cones

Music: Carter Burwell

Music Editor: Adam Milo Smalley

Score Mixer: Michael Farrow

Sound Design: Richard Beggs

Production Mixer: Drew Kunin

Re-recording Mixers: Lora Hirschberg,

Kent Sparling

Supervising Sound Editor: Michael Kirchberger

Dialogue Editors: David A. Cohen, David Bergad

Sound Effects Editor: Peter Staubli

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

One of the best jokes in *Being John Malkovich*, the previous film by writer Charlie Kaufman and director Spike Jonze, was the flashback from the point of view of a pet chimpanzee to its childhood trauma in the jungle. It was the flashback's very irrelevance that made it so funny. In their follow-up, *Adaptation.*, Kaufman and Jonze push the joke to its logical conclusion, using any excuse to interrupt the action with flashbacks that defiantly do nothing to advance or explain the plot. 'How did I get here?' asks the film's protagonist, self-doubting screenwriter 'Charlie Kaufman' (played by Nicolas Cage), outside the set where *Being John Malkovich* is being filmed. Cue a short helter-skelter stream of images chronicling the history of the world from the beginnings of creation – which brings us back to where we started. Later, as Charlie wrestles with the script he is writing, an adaptation of Susan Orlean's non-fiction book *The Orchid Thief*, he reads a quotation from Darwin. Cut to: England, 139 Years Earlier, Darwin in his study, writing the passage. In both cases, it's the complete superfluousness of the flashback that gets the laugh.

No American film since John Brahm's *The Locket* (1946) has used flashback with such zeal. Apart from occasional throwaways such as those above, the bulk of the film moves skilfully between three timescales: the present, in which Charlie tries to write his script; three years earlier, as Susan Orlean researches and writes the book Charlie is now struggling to adapt; and two years before that, as the original orchid thief, John Laroche, carries out the exploits that inspired the book. As the film progresses, all three timescales are revealed to be scenes from drafts Charlie is writing.

This idea in itself isn't all that radical: the writer whose imaginings blur with reality has long been a staple of European art cinema (Alain Resnais' *Providence*, 1977, being perhaps the ultimate example), and has already penetrated mainstream American cinema, notably via Woody Allen's *Deconstructing Harry*. What's new is the obsessive thoroughness with which Kaufman and Jonze work through the idea. Their playfulness even extends to the credits: the screenplay is credited to Charlie and Donald Kaufman, Donald being the fictional twin brother (also played by Cage) whose advice helps Charlie finish his script. Charlie and Donald are the two sides of Kaufman's creative personality – artistic introvert versus commercial extrovert. In order to work his way out of his creative block, Charlie has to listen to Donald, learn his lessons – then kill him off. It's typical of Kaufman's hall-of-mirrors sensibility that the film simultaneously sends up its central idea by way of the idiotic serial-killer script Donald is writing, in which cop, serial killer and victim are all revealed to be different facets of one multiple personality.

As in *Being John Malkovich*, Kaufman and Jonze delight in using 'real' people in their stories, though in this case they are played by actors, with Meryl Streep as Susan Orlean, the real-life *New Yorker* journalist whose book *The Orchid Thief* the real-life Charlie Kaufman was hired to adapt. A running gag revolves around the Hollywood story-structure guru Robert McKee (wonderfully impersonated by Brian Cox). Charlie at first claims to have no time for McKee's principles (a claim borne out initially by the film he's writing, with its gratuitous misuse of flashback and voiceover, two McKee bugbears). Twin brother Donald, by contrast, spouts McKeeisms as he works on his thriller. With a bad case of writer's block, Charlie eventually goes to one of the guru's seminars,

Loop Group: Reel Team
ADR Editor: David Bach
Foley Supervisor: Bill Storkson
Foley Artist: Marnie Moore
Foley Recordist: Jory Prum
Foley Mixer: Nick Peck
Stunt Co-ordinator: Dan Bradley
Cast:

Nicolas Cage (*Charlie Kaufman/Donald Kaufman*)
Meryl Streep (*Susan Orlean*)
Chris Cooper (*John Laroche*)
Tilda Swinton (*Valeria*)
Cara Seymour (*Amelia*)
Brian Cox (*Robert McKee*)
Judy Greer (*Alice the waitress*)
Maggie Gyllenhaal (*Caroline*)
Ron Livingston (*Marty*)
Jay Tavare (*Matthew Osceola*)
G. Paul Davis (*Russell*)
Roger Willie (*Randy*)
Jim Beaver (*Ranger Tony*)
Doug Jones (*Augustus Margary*)
Stephen Tobolowsky (*Ranger Steve Neely*)
Gary Farmer (*Buster Baxley*)
Peter Jason (*defence attorney*)
Gregory Itzin (*prosecutor*)
Curtis Hanson (*Orlean's husband*)
Agnes Badoo, Paul Fortune, Paul Jasmin,
Lisa Love, Wendy Mogel, David O. Russell
(*Orlean dinner guests*)
Bob Stephenson (*David*)
Bob Yerkes (*Charles Darwin*)
Lynn Court (*Laroche's dad*)
Roger E. Fanter (*Laroche's uncle*)
Sandra Gimpel (*Laroche's mom*)
Caron Colvett (*Laroche's wife*)
Larry Krask (*EMT*)
John Etter (*McKee lecture attendee*)
Ray Berrios (*police officer*)
Nancy Lenehan (*Kaufman's mother*)
Harris Mann, Marc Coppola (*Kaufman twins*)
Catherine Keener (*herself*) *
John Malkovich (*himself*) *
John Cusack (*himself*) *
USA 2002©
114 mins
Digital 4K

* Uncredited

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where he takes to heart McKee's advice on how to end the film. In due course the final act of the film we're watching – now being 'co-written' with Donald – becomes a more conventional Hollywood drama, complete with guns, chases, alligators and scenes of fraternal bonding.

If this sort of self-reflexive fun and games is your thing, it's hard to see how it could be done better. If it's not, the good news is that beneath all the structural shenanigans Kaufman writes very engaging comic characters – not surprisingly, perhaps, given that one of them is himself. Seldom noted for his subtlety, Nicolas Cage is affecting as the shy, sweaty, tormented Charlie, and counterpoints his performance brilliantly with an extrovert tum as the dumb but likeable Donald. As he showed with John Malkovich himself, Spike Jonze has a talent for loosening up actors not known for their humour. Here, Meryl Streep has what is undoubtedly her funniest ever scene, alone in her hotel room tuning in to the telephone's dialling tone while high on a drug extracted from orchids. Playing it as straight as he can, Jonze succeeds in grounding very whimsical material, shooting in a relaxed, unfussy style and limiting himself to flourishes of visual brilliance such as the remarkable time-lapse trick in the closing shot.

John Wrathall, *Sight and Sound*, March 2003

In 1999, just as screenwriter Charlie Kaufman's *Being John Malkovich* was being brought to the screen by director Spike Jonze, he had been commissioned, by Academy Award-winning director/producer Jonathan Demme and his producing partner Ed Saxon, to adapt New Yorker writer Susan Orlean's best-selling nonfiction book *The Orchid Thief*. The book is a widely praised tale of a journalist who discovers the roots of her own passion while chronicling the adventures of John Laroche, a man who is obsessed with his love for rare orchids. Discursive and introspective, the book lacked a conventional narrative structure, which initially frustrated Kaufman. Yet, at the same time, he was intrigued by the unique nature of the source material. 'I remember being cocky and thinking, yeah, I like this. I can turn this into a movie.'

However, when he was unable to conceive of a suitable way to shape the material into a narrative screenplay, his self-confidence soon turned into depression. 'If it had been a spec script of my own, I might have abandoned it at a certain point,' Kaufman admits. 'In this case, though, I had been hired by others. They had expectations of me. So I had to adapt to being an adaptor.'

Throughout the torturous process, Kaufman remained steadfast in his commitment of finding a way to address the theme of passion. 'Passion was something I wanted to write about, because it's what Susan Orlean was writing about,' he says. 'It was always in my head to try and capture the emptiness people feel when they don't have passion, and the directionless longing it can cause.'

Since, by its very nature, passion requires 'stepping over the edge, moving away from what feels safe and taking some kind of risk,' Kaufman reasoned, the idea of incorporating the emotional process of writing a screenplay into the script evolved. 'It became a kind of metaphor for ideas feeding upon themselves and how they eventually tie together in the end,' he says.

Production notes