



## RE-RELEASES

# Days of Heaven

### Days of Heaven

*Directed by:* Terrence Malick  
*©/Production Company:*  
Paramount Pictures Corporation  
*Production Company:* O.P. Productions  
*Executive Producer:* Jacob Brackman  
*Produced by:* Bert Schneider,  
Harold Schneider  
*Production Manager:* Les Kimber  
*2nd Unit Manager:* Coulter Adams  
*Senior Accountant:* Edward Hill  
*Location Accountant:* Heather McIntosh  
*Executive Assistant to Bert Schneider:*  
Blue André  
*Researchers:* Irene Malick, Susan Vermazen,  
Rosalia Purdum, Peter Neufeld,  
Nathalie Seaver  
*2nd Unit Director:* Jacob Brackman  
*Assistant Director:* Skip Cosper  
*2nd Assistant Directors:* Rob Lockwood,  
Martin Walters  
*Special Assistants to the Director:*  
Nancy Kaclik, Peter Broderick  
*Script Supervisor:* Wally Bennett  
*Casting:* Dianne Crittenden  
*Written by:* Terrence Malick  
*Director of Photography:* Nestor Almendros  
*Additional Photography:* Haskell Wexler  
*2nd Unit Photographer:* Paul Ryan  
*Time Lapse Photography:* Ken Middleham  
*Colour Consultant:* Bob McMillian  
*Camera Operators:* John Bailey, Rod Parkhurst  
*Special Camera Assistants:* Kent Remington,  
Bob Eber  
*Gaffer:* James Boyle  
*Best Boy:* Malcolm Kendall  
*Electrician:* Andy Wilson  
*Key Grip:* Clyde Hart  
*Dolly Grip:* Frank Merrells  
*Title Sequence Photographs:* Lewis Hine,  
Henry Hamilton Bennett, Frances Benjamin  
Johnston, Chansonetta Emmons, William  
Notman, Edie Baskin  
*Special Stills:* Edie Baskin  
*Stills:* Bruno Engler  
*Special Effects:* John Thomas, Mel Merrells  
*Editor:* Billy Weber  
*Additional Editors:* Caroline Ferriol,  
Marion Segal, Susan Martin  
*Assistant Editors:* Roberta Friedman,  
George Trirgoff  
*Editorial Consultants:* Jeffrey Schneider,  
Dessy Markovski, Tikki Goldberg  
*Art Director:* Jack Fisk  
*Set Decorator:* Robert Gould  
*Property Master:* Allan Levine  
*Assistant Property Master:* Barry Merrells  
*Set Construction:* Get Set  
*Painter:* John Lattanzio  
*Costume Designer:* Patricia Norris  
*Men's Wardrobe:* Gerard Green  
*Make-up:* Jamie Brown  
*Hair stylist:* Bertine Taylor  
*Title Design:* Dan Perri  
*Music/Music Conductor:* Ennio Morricone  
*Additional Music:* Leo Kottke  
*Harmonica:* Rick Smith  
*Music Co-ordinators:* Gabriella Belloni,  
Enrico Demelis, Denny Bruce  
*Music Editors:* Dan Carlin Jr, Ted Roberts  
*Music Mixer:* Robert Glass Jr  
*Sound Mixers:* George Ronconi, Barry Thomas  
*Special Audio Assistants:* Allen Byers,

Like many American directors who emerged in the early 1970s, Terrence Malick went to film school – to the American Film Institute, where, indeed, his fellow students included Paul Schrader and David Lynch. But unlike many film school graduates, Malick arrived there, in 1969, with an already rich and varied past – in the study of philosophy (he translated a book by Martin Heidegger) and in journalism (*Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*). He also arrived with a script fully worked out down to the last detail: *Badlands*. Immediately after graduating, he was pushing to get *Badlands* produced as a truly independent, ‘on the run’ project, gathering financing through a partnership with several investors and ultimately shooting with a nonunion crew on a budget of less than \$350,000. Warner Bros. released it to great acclaim in 1973.

*Badlands*, for all its exceptional qualities of style and tone, seemed to blend in with the general drift of 1970s New American Cinema. But his next feature, *Days of Heaven*, scrambled all presumptions (even the most glowing) about Malick. He put the project together quietly, with producers Bert and Harold Schneider and close collaborators who included art director Jack Fisk, and shot in the wheat fields of Alberta, Canada, in 1976. He then spent two years in the editing room with another friend, Billy Weber, crafting the material to achieve the aura he first dreamed of: ‘a drop of water on a pond, that moment of perfection.’

I vividly remember the experience of sitting in a large, state-of-the-art theatre in 1978, encountering this work, which seemed like the shotgun marriage of a Hollywood epic (in 70 mm!) with an avant-garde poem. Wordless (but never soundless) scenes flared up and were snatched away before the mind could fully grasp their plot import; what we could see did not always seem matched to what we could hear. Yes, there was another ‘couple on the run’ – Richard Gere and Brooke Adams as the lovers Bill and Abby, he fleeing a murder he inadvertently committed working in a Chicago steel mill, she pretending to be his sister during the wheat harvest season in the Texas panhandle near the turn of the 20th century – but this time, the filmmaker’s gaze upon them was not simply distant or ironic but positively cosmic. And there was so much more going on around these two characters, beyond even the dramatic triangle they formed with the melancholic figure of the dying farmer (Sam Shepard) – now the landscape truly moved from background to foreground, and the work that went on in it, the changes that the seasons wreaked upon it, the daily miracles of shifting natural light or the punctual catastrophes of fire or locust plague that took place... all this mattered as much, if not more, than the strictly human element of the film.

Above all, the radical strangeness and newness of *Days of Heaven* was signalled to its first viewers by its most fragmented, inconclusive, ‘decentered’ feature: the voice-over narration of young Linda Manz as Linda, Bill’s actual sister, who is along for the ride, often disengaged from the main action but always hovering somewhere near. It might have seemed, at first twang, like a reprise of Spacek’s ‘naïve’ viewpoint from *Badlands*, but Manz’s thought-track goes far beyond a literary conceit. It flits in and out of the tale unpredictably, sometimes knowing nothing and at other times everything, veering from banalities about the weather to profundities about human existence. Sometimes even her sentences go unfinished, hang in midair. In this voice we hear language itself in the process of struggling toward sense, meaning, insight – just as, elsewhere, we see the diverse elements of nature swirling together to perpetually make and unmake what we think of as a landscape, and human figures finding and losing themselves, over and over, as they desperately try to cement their individual identities or ‘characters.’

Today, with the hindsight allowed by Malick’s more recent *The Thin Red Line* (1998) and *The New World* (2005), it is clear that it was *Days of Heaven*, not *Badlands*, that truly announced his characteristic style and manner of filmmaking. Where his debut was tightly scripted, its successor was, deliberately, a much more loosely structured affair. Malick gave himself the freedom to shoot material not always centred on the lead actors, but also on the land, animals, little spectacles with groups of extras... with the intention of finding the best final form for the whole in postproduction (sound editing being as crucial as picture editing to his work). He has taken this approach to greater and ever more adventurous lengths in his subsequent films. While some

Robert Burton, Alan Splet  
Sound: Glen Glenn Sound  
Glen Glenn Sound Crew: Robert Thirlwell,  
Jean Marler, Peter Gregory, Joe Wachter  
MGM Supervising Engineer: Chet Luton  
Dolby Consultants: Steve Katz, Philip Boole,  
Clyde McKinney  
Boom Men: Louie Hogue, Glen Lambert  
Re-recording Mixer: John Wilkinson  
Negative Cutter: Barbara Morrison  
Special Sound Effects: James Cox  
Sound Effects: Neiman-Tillar Associates  
Sound Effects Mixer: John Reitz  
Sound Effects Editors: Colin Mouat,  
Charles Campbell  
Stunt Flying: Erin Talbott, Joe Watts  
Technical Adviser: Clenton Owensby  
Wranglers: John Scott, Isabella Miller,  
Reg Glass, Bob Wilson, Joe Dodds, Dixie Gray  
Cast:  
Richard Gere (*Bill*)  
Brooke Adams (*Abby*)  
Sam Shepard (*the farmer*)  
Linda Manz (*Linda*)  
Robert Wilke (*farm foreman*)  
Jackie Shultis (*Linda's friend*)  
Stuart Margolin (*mill foreman*)  
Tim Scott (*harvest hand*)  
Gene Bell (*dancer*)  
Doug Kershaw (*fiddler*)  
Richard Libertini (*vaudeville leader*)  
Frenchie Lemond (*vaudeville wrestler*)  
Sahbra Markus (*vaudeville dancer*)  
Bob Wilson (*accountant*)  
Muriel Jolliffe (*headmistress*)  
John Wilkinson (*preacher*)  
King Cole (*farm worker*)  
USA 1978©  
94 mins  
Digital 4K (restoration)

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industry-minded pundits tut-tut Malick's preferred shooting method as wasteful and unfocused, it is an entirely valid creative process that aims to discover the film in the course of its material making, rather than in the 'abstract' phase of its writing.

Writing, of course, remains important for Malick, who is an extraordinary word stylist. The shooting script of *Days of Heaven* does not much resemble the finished film – in many cases, elaborate dialogue scenes have been reduced in editing to a line or two, a mysterious reaction shot, and a cutaway to some natural phenomenon. The literary qualities of the project are, however, already evident on the page: the richly stylised and poetic vernacular of ways of speaking, the expressive cycle of seasons, and an elemental story line that is derived (in its essence) from various biblical sources. But this primal, mythic story ends up as thoroughly displaced. It is hardly surprising to learn that Shepard (who is a superbly haunting presence in the film) thought himself to be playing someone who was less a flesh-and-blood, three-dimensional psychological character than a kind of sketch, silhouette, or ghost.

The Australian critic Meaghan Morris once suggested that *Days of Heaven* is a film in constant motion, and indeed about movement in all its forms: human, natural, mechanical. Cinematographer Nestor Almendros loved to describe the form of the film's complex setups: the camera tracking and dollying in and through, up and down the farmer's house, this odd mansion plunked in the middle of a vast field, while various players enter and exit the frame in elaborate choreography. In fact, even the simplest shots have a trace of this type of structure: the *mise-en-scène* of *Days of Heaven* aims less at fluid continuity between images or gestures – indeed, it is a remarkably elliptical film – than at the creation of each filmic 'unit' as a cell that refers, in a nonlinear way, to all other parts of the film, via echoes, comparisons, subtle flashbacks, and flash-forwards.

Malick's underlying aesthetic aim – which was already evident in *Badlands* – is to encourage the proliferation of a wide range of moods, sights, sounds, and surface textures, while simultaneously arriving at an overall, unifying form. Nothing expresses this better than one of the most beloved elements of *Days of Heaven*, its play of different musical 'inputs,' those Malick appropriated alongside those he commissioned: the music veers from classical to folk, but what holds the ensemble together is that Ennio Morricone's grave score literally inverts the melody of Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*. One reflects the other, just as land and sky reflect each other in those characteristic Malick panoramas bisected by the horizon line.

Malick's films have sometimes been frozen, by those unsympathetic to them, into pious homilies or grand statements: Man versus Nature, the redemptive path to God via love and sacrifice, the corrupting effects of Civilisation encroaching upon an idyllic Wilderness... Yet nothing is so certain or schematic in his work. As always, everything is in motion, seeming opposites ceaselessly transforming each other. *Days of Heaven* shows us, in myriad inventive ways, how nature and culture are always intertwined, how a certain kind of technology, a certain kind of civilising process, is part of even the humblest garden arrangement, the most elementary use of a cloth to cover the body, the fashioning of a piece of a tree to make music... This is part of the deep Heideggerian legacy in Malick: there is no pure Being, only the action of hands upon the world, fashioning (for better or worse) a living space, a temporary arrangement of people and materials.

Malick is a true poet of the ephemeral: the epiphanies that structure his films, beginning with *Days of Heaven*, are ones that flare up suddenly and die away just as quickly, with the uttering of a single line (like 'She loved the farmer'), the flight of a bird or the launching of a plane, the flickering of a candle or the passing of a wind over the grass. Nothing is ever insisted upon or lingered on in his films; that is why they reveal subtly different arrangements of event, mood, and meaning each time we see them. Because everything is in motion, everything is whisked away quickly, and the elements of any one cellular moment are very soon redistributed and metamorphosed into other moments. Just look at and listen to the last minutes of *Days of Heaven*, with their split-second swing between end-of-the-line melancholic emptiness and wide-open possibility, for a sublime illustration of this ephemerality, which is miraculously caught and formalised in the language of cinema.

Adrian Martin, The Criterion Collection, 23 March 2010