



## STOP MOTION: CELEBRATING HANDMADE ANIMATION ON THE BIG SCREEN

# Anomalisa

### Anomalisa

Directed by: Charlie Kaufman, Duke Johnson  
©: Anomalisa LLC

Production Company: Snoot Entertainment  
Studio Services Provided by: Starburns Industries  
Executive Producers: James A. Fino, Dan Harmon, Joe Russo II, Keith Calder, Jessica Calder, Aaron Mitchell, Kassandra Mitchell, Pandora Edmiston, David Fuchs, Simon Oré, David Rheingold, Adrian Versteegh

Produced by: Rosa Tran, Charlie Kaufman, Duke Johnson, Dino Stamatopoulos  
Production Managers: Nathanael Horton, Jennifer Newfield

1st Assistant Director: Nathanael Horton

Written by: Charlie Kaufman

Director of Photography: Joe Passarelli

Visual Effects Supervisor: Derek Smith

Visual Effects: Drawn by the Light

Additional Visual Effects: Boundary, Tangerine

Apps, Digikore VFX, Temprimental Films Inc.,

Skulley Effects, Legion Entertainment

Animation Supervisor: Dan Driscoll

Edited by: Garret Elkins

Production Design: John Joyce, Huy Vu

Art Director: John Joyce

Costume Designer: Susan Donym

Head of Puppet Fabrication: Caroline Kastelic

Main Titles Design and Animation: Picturemill

Music Composed and Orchestrated by:

Carter Burwell

Celli: Felix Fan

Violin: Conrad Harris

Woodwinds: Bohdan Hilash

Trumpets: Brandon Ridenour

Guitar: Kevin Kuhn

Piano and Keyboard: Matt Herskowitz

Bass: Jim Whitney

Marimba and percussion: John Ferrari

Re-recording Mixers: Aaron Glascock,

Christopher Aud

Supervising Sound Editors: Aaron Glascock,

Christopher Aud

Michael Character Likeness Based on:

Christopher Wilkins

Lisa Character Likeness Based on: Leslie Murphy

Original stage play produced by:

St. Ann's Warehouse at Royce Hall, UCLA

Voice Cast:

Jennifer Jason Leigh (*Lisa Hesselman*)

Tom Noonan (*everyone else*)

David Thewlis (*Michael Stone*)

USA 2015©

90 mins

Digital

As motivational writer and speaker Michael Stone spends time in his hotel room while on tour, he dwells on the emotional distance he feels towards everyone. He befriends a woman named Lisa at the hotel and is surprised how quickly an intimacy – unlike any he experiences with his family – grows between them. Stop motion turns out to be the perfect form for writer Charlie Kaufman's (*Being John Malkovich*) distinctive cinematic voice; some hilarious set-pieces aside, it accentuates Michael's sense of loneliness and alienation.

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

### A contemporary review

Aside from making the 2014 sitcom pilot *How and Why*, Charlie Kaufman has been missing in action since his directorial debut *Synecdoche, New York* seven years ago. The hiatus has scarcely diluted his authorial view that modern life is intolerable, a series of humiliating, futile quests to achieve material, artistic, romantic or spiritual goals likely to be impeded by the seeker's maladaptive behaviour. Though fellow fatalists Woody Allen (when in Dostoevskian mode) and Todd Solondz occupy similar territory, the arrival of Kaufman's stop-motion drama *Anomalisa* (co-directed by animation specialist Duke Johnson) reiterates the uniqueness of his surreally skewed metaphysical inquiries.

Kaufman originated *Anomalisa* as a 'sound play'. It was read by David Thewlis, Jennifer Jason Leigh and Tom Noonan as part of a double bill called Theater of the New Ear at UCLA in 2005. In the movie, everybody – with one exception – who enters the orbit of the existentially strung-out antihero Michael Stone (Thewlis) speaks with the same flat voice (Noonan's) and has the same benign face plastered on the same rounded head. An unmotivated motivational speaker and sales guru, Michael has become so infected by the insincere empathy he touts professionally that he can no longer differentiate one person from another.

The soullessness of his career as an avatar of consumerism has engulfed him with ennui and paranoia. *Synecdoche's* theatre director Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman) – named for the Cotard delusion, whose sufferers believe they are dead – experiences a similar malaise, but grapples with it for decades by mounting a self-reflexive opus. Michael numbs himself through jouissance, preying on vulnerable women such as Lisa (Leigh), a fellow guest at Cincinnati's fictional Fregoli hotel. Kaufman named it after Fregoli delusion, a neuropsychiatric condition that causes sufferers to misidentify different people as a single person apparently disguised or able to change his or her appearance.

Equating digital-age conformism with non-individuation, Kaufman and Johnson made everyone except Lisa a virtual cyborg: Michael hallucinates that his jaw falls off, revealing a metallic rictus grimace worthy of Lon Chaney; lines on the puppets' temples and noses indicate where their modular parts join. Whereas live-action mimesis might have muted the characters' distinguishing traits – Michael's slumped gait, the half-curtain of mousy hair hiding Lisa's facial disfigurement – the puppets' movements invite anthropological scrutiny. The distancing effect of the animation limits subjective identification with the characters while heightening audience awareness of the film's social and sexual dynamics.

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**SIGHT AND SOUND**

## **STOP MOTION: CELEBRATING HANDMADE ANIMATION ON THE BIG SCREEN**

**Dougal and the Blue Cat** Pollux et le chat bleu  
Sun 1 Sep 12:10; Sun 15 Sep 15:20

### **Alice**

Wed 4 Sep 18:10; Sat 21 Sep 15:10

### **Little Otik**

Wed 4 Sep 20:15 + intro by musician and Starve  
Acre composer Matthew Herbert; Sat 21 Sep 17:45

### **21 Years of dwarf studios**

Sun 6 Oct 15:30

### **Coraline**

Sun 8 Sep 12:00

### **King Kong**

Sun 8 Sep 13:00 + intro by Douglas Weir, Content  
Remastering Lead

### **James and the Giant Peach**

Sat 7 Sep 12:10; Sat 21 Sep 12:00

### **The Pied Piper** Krysar

Sat 7 Sep 18:40; Sun 22 Sep 15:00

### **Anomalisa**

Sat 7 Sep 20:40; Wed 2 Oct 18:30

### **King Kong**

Sun 8 Sep 13:00 + intro by Douglas Weir, Content  
Remastering Lead; Mon 16 Sep 2045

### **Mighty Joe Young**

Sun 8 Sep 15:45; Wed 18 Sep 20:55

### **Mary and Max**

Wed 11 Sep 18:00; Wed 25 Sep 20:35

### **ParaNorman**

Sat 14 Sep 12:20

### **Marcel the Shell with Shoes On**

Sat 14 Sep 15:40; Sun 6 Oct 12:20

### **My Life as a Courgette** Ma vie de Courgette + **Manipulation**

Sun 15 Sep 12:20; Tue 8 Oct 18:40

### **Library Talk: A Study in Stop Motion**

Mon 16 Sep 18:30

### **Stop-Motion Masters + Q&A with Barry Purves, Suzie Templeton and Osbert Parker**

Fri 20 Sep 18:10

### **Chuck Steel: Night of the Trampires + Q&A with director Mike Mort**

Fri 20 Sep 20:30

### **The Boxtrolls**

Sun 22 Sep 12:00

### **Kubo and the Two Strings**

Sat 28 Sep 11:40

### **Wendell and Wild**

Sun 29 Sep 15:10; Mon 7 Oct 20:40

### **Missing Link**

Sat 5 Oct 12:00

Thanks to Jez Stewart, BFI National Archive

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Typically, Kaufman examines the way people hide behind masks and the psychological significance of why Michael should perceive multiple versions of the same person. Playing with notions of projection and control, Kaufman has multiplied individuals before. *Being John Malkovich* (1999) mass-produced the eponymous actor, who was puppetised by the lowly puppeteer (John Cusack) in his head. In *Adaptation.* (2002), Nicolas Cage's insecure screenwriter is threatened by his freeloading twin-cum-alter ego. When *Synecdoche's* Caden starts creating doppelgängers for his epic meta-drama, he contrives to triple his amanuensis (Samantha Morton), having sabotaged their love affair when they were younger.

On returning home, Michael idly presents his young son Henry with a gift: an ornate antique sex toy in the guise of a mechanical singing geisha, which unexpectedly leaks semen. The incident has baffled some *Anomalisa* viewers, but there's no mistaking the semen's provenance. Michael has either masturbated into the automaton's mouth, or his seed has been magically transposed there, at no great risk to the film's logic, given that the toy is a substitute for the pliant Lisa.

The mystery concerns Michael giving Henry the automaton in a defiled state. Is he so befogged by self-absorption that he's oblivious to his actions, as he is oblivious to others? His reluctance to talk to Henry when he calls home suggests he detests him for tying him to a tedious bourgeois family life and unconsciously wants to feminise (i.e. emasculate) him by contaminating him with his semen. That Henry was fixated on receiving a gift – and is thus a pushy little consumer – adds grist to this sinister mill.

Like Thewlis's demonic drifter in *Naked* (1993), Michael is a disaffected, unstable exploiter of women; both mirror social flux as they explore labyrinths (the Fregoli; inner-city London) symbolising the murky pathways of their minds. There's a troubling antecedent for Lisa, too: Leigh's phone-sex operator Lois in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993). They're linked by their caressing voices and their commercialising of them. Lois's clients respond to her pornographic spiel; Lisa's affect is soothing, like the YouTube cult ASMR. Leigh, in fact, steals the show with her a cappella 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun', especially poignant because Lisa – constitutionally cheery though she is – clearly hasn't had that much.

Graham Fuller, *Sight and Sound*, March 2016