



MEMBER PICKS

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

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Director: Milos Forman

Production Company: Fantasy Films Productions

Producers: Saul Zaentz, Michael Douglas

Associate Producer: Martin Fink

Unit Production Manager: Joel Douglas

Production Office Co-ordinator: Rhonda Kramer

Location Auditors: Frank Noonan, Jim Young

Location Co-ordinator: Denise Schreiter

Post-production Supervisor: Irving Saraf

Production Assistant: Leonard Lipton

1st Assistant Director: Irby Smith

2nd Assistant Director: William St John

Script Supervisor: Natalie Drache

CASTING: Mike Fenton, Jane Feinberg

Screenplay: Lawrence Hauben, Bo Goldman

Based on the novel by: Ken Kesey

Play Version: Dale Wasserman

Director of Photography: Haskell Wexler

Additional Photography: Bill Butler, William Fraker

Camera Operators: Hugh Gagnier, Robert Stevens, Dick Colean, Robert Thomas

Gaffers: Gary Holt, Bill Tenny, Dennis Marks

Best Boys: Walter Nichols, Doug Willis

Key Grip: George Hill

Stills Photography: Peter Sorel

Supervising Editor: Richard Chew

Editors: Lynzee Klingman, Sheldon Kahn

Assistant Editors: Bonnie Koehler, Jay Miracle, Arthur Coburn, Constance Field

Production Designer: Paul Sylbert

Art Director: Edwin O'Donovan

Props: Terry Lewis

Construction Co-ordinator: Joe Acord

Production Painter: Tom Bartholomew

Costumer: Agnes Rodgers

Make-up: Fred Phillips

Hairdresser: Gerry Leetch

Title: Wayne Fitzgerald

Music: Jack Nitzsche

Additional Music Arranger/Conductor: Ed Bogas *

Saxophone Solo on 'Call of the West':

Stanley Turrentine *

Music Editor: Ted Whitfield

Sound Recording: Lawrence Jost

Post-production Sound Director: Mark Berger

Sound Editors: Mary McGlone, Veronica Selver, Robert Rutledge, Pat Jackson

Assistant Sound Editor: Kirk Schuler

Technical Adviser: Dean R. Brooks *

Transportation Captain: Tom Thomas

Cast:

Jack Nicholson (*Randle P. McMurphy*)

Louise Fletcher (*Nurse Ratched*)

William Redfield (*Harding*)

Will Sampson (*Chief Bromden*)

Brad Dourif (*Billy Bibbit*)

Sydney Lassick (*Cheswick*)

Christopher Lloyd (*Taber*)

Danny DeVito (*Martini*)

Delos V. Smith Jr. (*Scanlon*)

Marya Small (*Candy*)

Louisa Moritz (*Rose*)

Dean R. Brooks (*Dr Spivey*)

Scatman Crothers (*Turkle*)

William Duell (*Sefelt*)

Michael Berryman (*Ellis*)

Peter Brocco (*Colonel Matterson*)

Alonzo Brown (*Miller*)

Mwako Cumbuka (*Warren*)

Josip Elic (*Bancini*)

Lan Fendors (*Nurse Itsu*)

Nathan George (*Washington*)

'Nothing can defeat the human spirit' – Toby Kearton, BFI Member

The question of what constitutes mental illness, how to depict it and the proper attitude towards it, was Milos Forman's biggest challenge on *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the film adaptation of Ken Kesey's celebrated novel. Published in 1962, the book presaged the apocalyptic youth rebellion, capturing the imagination of a generation, and Kesey more than any other figure, including Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary, personifies the anti-authoritarian, acid-tripping counterculture of yesteryear. The flower children are long gone, but Kesey continues to make news, and any major change in his book would evoke cries of betrayal from the very audience for whom the film was intended. Yet things have changed in the ensuing years, both in society at large and in certain psychiatric treatment modalities which play an important role in the story. All these things had to be dealt with, gingerly.

Since the *Cuckoo* project has been 13 years in the making, a number of important decisions had been made prior to Forman's coming aboard. Jack Nicholson was signed to star as McMurphy, the Oregon State Hospital would provide a suitable location, and a script existed – the second of two, actually. The first, by Kesey, had been rejected by the producers as simply reinforcing problematical areas of his book. Kesey refused to have anything to do with the production thereafter.

Forman quickly took the reins into his hands, getting himself to the hospital in Oregon with all due speed. He lived there for several weeks, collaborating on a third draft screenplay with Lawrence Hauben, a young writer who had already been through two drafts on his own. 'I had to do it to clear my head,' Forman said. 'When I agreed to direct the film, I was flooded with psychiatric magazines from well-meaning friends. Finally, I refused them all, because the more I looked into it, the more confused I became. One of the challenges of the story is that you are describing mentally ill people at a time when doctors don't know what mental illness really is.'

'I resolved just to concentrate on the story of a man, and to see with my own eyes the behaviour of the patients. I was practically living with them, and I can tell you how they walk and how they talk, but I do not know what kind of disease they have. I can only define "mental illness" as an incapacity to adjust within normal measure to ever-changing, unspoken rules. If you are incapable of making these constant changes, you are called by your environment crazy. Which of course indicates that mental illness is a social disease. And that's what the book is about: it's a metaphor of society.'

Work on the screenplay continued for months, with Lawrence Hauben eventually superseded by a second writer, Bo Goldman. It's important to remember that Forman was trained at the Czech Film School as a writer, not a director. Though his films may look improvised, they are in fact carefully calibrated, and this insistence upon meticulous form has brought him into conflict with several American screenwriters. (There were four or five on *Taking Off* before he was satisfied.) Forman is the soul of discretion and never acknowledges differences with anybody, but Hauben was more candid. 'There was a definite division in our points of view,' he said. 'I created a warp and woof of time and space, like a trip in a nut house, using contrapuntal sound. Milos didn't want any of that. He was always asking, "But what happens next?" He goes from A to B to C; his main interest is how you get upstairs.'

Ken Kenny (*Beans Garfield*)
Mel Lambert (*harbour master*)
Kay Lee (*night supervisor*)
Dwight Marfield (*Ellsworth*)
Ted Markland (*Hap Arlich*)
Phil Roth (*Woolsey*)
Mimi Sarkisian (*Nurse Pilbow*)
Vincent Schiavelli (*Frederickson*)
Tin Welch (*Ruckley*)
Saul Zaentz (*captain on shore*) *
Anjelica Huston (*woman waving from shore*) *
USA 1975©
133 mins
Digital

* Uncredited

Contains racist and sexist language and outdated depictions of people with mental health issues

MEMBER EXCLUSIVES

Member Mondays: It Follows
(voted no.3 Best Horror Film)

Mon 4 Nov 18:20, 18:30 BFI Stephen Street

Member Exclusive:

BFI Southbank and BFI IMAX Tour

Mon 11 Nov 10:00 Foyer

Member Mondays: The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (voted no.2 Best Horror Film)

Mon 18 Nov 18:40, 18:50 BFI Stephen Street

Member Salon: Point Break

Tue 19 Nov 20:15 BFI Reuben Library

Behind the Scenes: BFI Home Entertainment

Tue 26 Nov 18:30

Member Mondays: Rosemary's Baby

(voted no.1 Best Horror Film)

Mon 2 Dec 17:35, 17:45 BFI Stephen Street

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Believability was the biggest hurdle. Kesey wrote the book under the influence of various drugs, primarily LSD and peyote, and it often spins out into paranoid fantasies that are hilarious or poignant or shattering; but the overall effect, in some instances, is that of a psychedelic cartoon – and not to be endured on film, according to Forman.

The hospital has only 600 patients (it used to have almost 3,000), so it had been possible to make an entire ward available to the company for both filming and administrative offices. For three months, everyone associated with the production, from co-producers Michael Douglas and Saul Zaentz to property masters and secretaries, literally lived in the hospital during long working hours. I had heard that patients, as well as doctors and aides, were working on the crew, but it never occurred to me that I wouldn't be able to tell them apart. However, within minutes of walking into the ward, I became totally disoriented.

Jack Nicholson was involved in a pool game with a group of unsavoury looking men, all dressed in sloppy white hospital garb. When I said hello, he said, 'How's Billy?' and right there reality turned upside down. Later, I learned from Michael Douglas that I bore a striking resemblance to the wife of Billy Redfield, the leading supporting actor, who was ill, but we certainly didn't look like twins, and that was my first awareness of a kind of eerie insularity that pervaded the entire company. Cinematographer Haskell Wexler seemed to be flying rather than walking around the corridors, but he did recognise me and asked, 'What are you doing here?' before taking off again. I found Milos Forman upstairs with his editor, Richard Chew, looking a little glazed. Early next morning, I learnt that Haskell Wexler had just been fired because of 'conceptual differences'. (Wexler, whose concern for the misbegotten has been demonstrated in the many political documentaries he has shot and in his feature *Medium Cool*, apparently disliked Forman's overtly comic approach to the material, and couldn't hide his feelings.) He had been Forman's personal choice, and the decision to let him go was clearly painful; he continued on the film until Bill Butler, who also replaced him on *The Conversation*, arrived.

Once the script was set, Forman put his primary energy into working with the actors. He spent a year selecting his supporting cast, finally culling 20 from more than 900 interviewed and 'tested' in make-believe group therapy sessions. 'Each and every one had to be instantaneously identifiable and unique,' he told me, 'but they also had to work as a unit.' I learned later that the ominous looking group surrounding Nicholson at the pool table were seasoned professionals, the lobotomy scars on their skulls put there by an adept make-up artist. But they might as well have been patients, because the politics of the situation was little different from that described in Kesey's novel or what I observed while touring the hospital and sitting in on a group therapy session. Jack Nicholson was crown prince of this particular kingdom, and just as his character commandeered the ward, Nicholson took over the film. He cajoled, joked, charmed; he was unfailingly polite and helpful to everyone – but he always got his way. When he would silently withdraw, even in the middle of the room, no one dared to approach him.

The staff was both relieved and saddened when filming was finally completed, according to Forman. 'I have never experienced actors carrying their roles afterwards as they did on this film,' he said. 'Everyone feels a little lunacy in himself. We were all humbled in confronting these problems.'

Beverly Walker, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1975