



## The Rain People

Director: Francis Ford Coppola

Production Companies: American Zoetrope,  
Warner Bros.-Seven Arts

Producers: Bart Patton, Ronald Colby

Production Associates: George Lucas,  
Mona Skager

Production Assistants: John Blair, Sharon Compton,  
Joel Cox, Tony Dingman, Ken Gagnon, Tom Gavin,  
Marcia Griffin, Charles Hanawalt, Richard Marks,  
William Neil, Tom Ryan, James Sabat,  
Sully Sullivan, Fred Talmage, Steve Wilson

Assistant Directors: Richard Bennett,  
Jack Cunningham

Screenplay: Francesco Coppola

Director of Photography: Wilmer C. Butler

Editor: Barry Malkin

Art Director: Leon Ericksen

Music: Ronald Stein

Music Associate: Carmine Coppola

Sound Recording: Nathan Boxer

Sound Montage: Walter Murch

Cast:

Shirley Knight (*Natalie*)

James Caan (*'Killer' Kilgannon*)

Robert Duvall (*Gordon*)

Tom Aldredge (*Mr Alfred*)

Marya Zimmet (*Rosalie*)

Laurie Crews (*Ellen*)

Andrew Duncan (*Artie*)

Margaret Fairchild (*Marion*)

Sally Gracie (*Beth*)

Alan Manson (*Lou*)

Robert Modica (*Vinny*)

USA 1969

101 mins

Digital 4K

## Wanda and Beyond: The World of Barbara Loden

# The Rain People

## Francis Ford Coppola on 'The Rain People'

*How did The Rain People originate?*

I had originally written *The Rain People* in 1960 in college. I could never get on top of it. It was first called *Echoes*, and it was the story of three housewives – a newly married one, an older woman, and one who had a few kids. All go off in a station wagon and leave their husbands. I wrote it for a creative writing class and never finished it; I put it aside and forgot it. Then several years later I got this very romantic idea in my head about Shirley Knight. I didn't know her, but I thought she was very good. She seemed like an American actress who had some substance. Most of my life has been influenced by romantic preconceptions. The idea of writing a film for an actress and making it together, like Antonioni and Monica Vitti, really appealed to me. I saw Shirley Knight at a film festival. She was there with *Dutchman*, and she was crying because someone had been rude to her or whatever. I went up to her and said, 'Don't cry, I'll write you a movie.' And she said, 'You will? That's sweet.' And I did. I went back and I took out this old college draft and decided to make it just one character.

It's my favourite film of all that I've done, including *The Godfather*, but I don't think it works as well as a total film as some others. But the parts that I like, I like a lot, and I felt that *The Rain People* was a good step in the right direction.

*Did you shoot in sequence?*

Yes, that was the beauty. I was writing it while we were shooting it. It wasn't pre-scouted. We just drove. When I saw something, we would stop. The big parade sequence in Chattanooga, we literally just came across. It was not an ordinary schedule. We shot over a four-month period, but we travelled so much that I would say we shot the equivalent of two or two and a half months. The film was tough because I started having tremendous arguments with Shirley Knight. She's very talented, but she's the only actor I really haven't gotten along with. Usually I get along with actors.

*Were your disagreements over the conception of the role?*

I don't think Shirley Knight trusted me. I don't think she felt that if she did what I asked her to do it would be a good movie. Whenever an actor starts to distrust the director, he begins to do two things – he's acting and he's also watching out for himself. As I look back on it now, I feel that the real problem was that she had a bad taste in her mouth from her experience in Hollywood; she preferred the theatre. I came along and promised this wonderful idealistic kind of filmmaking. When we started to work, she realised that it had some realities to it as well, and perhaps she started to feel that this was just another Hollywood movie.

*The film loses her character as it goes along.*

That was an editorial decision. Maybe I was angry at her, I don't know. The character as I had written it had a lot of the schizophrenia that comes out in the film, but there was also a tremendously compassionate side. The whole basis of the character was that she was a mother, a mother figure. And I didn't feel that I was getting that from Shirley. I would get the high-strung, nervous

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## Wanda and Beyond: The World of Barbara Loden

**Los Olvidados** The Young and the Damned

Sun 1 Jun 15:40; Tue 17 Jun 20:50

**Mouchette**

Sun 1 Jun 18:30; Fri 20 Jun 20:45

**Wild River**

Mon 2 Jun 18:15; Sat 7 Jun 20:40;

Thu 26 Jun 20:30

**Wanda**

Tue 3 Jun (+ extended season intro by Elena

Gorfinkel); Sat 7 Jun 18:00 (+ intro by Jo Molyneux,

BFI Archive Access Researcher); Wed 11 Jun 20:40;

Sun 22 Jun 12:50; Wed 25 Jun 20:45

**The Feminist Moment:**

**Non-fiction and Experimental Shorts** + intro

Thu 5 Jun 18:25

**Splendor in the Grass**

Thu 5 Jun 20:30; Sun 8 Jun 15:00

**Vagabond** Sans toit ni loi

Fri 6 Jun 18:15; Sat 21 Jun 15:15; Fri 27 Jun 20:30

**Barbara Loden Symposium**

Sat 7 Jun 12:00

**The Rain People**

Sun 8 Jun 18:20; Tue 17 Jun 18:20;

Tue 24 Jun 20:50

**Fade In**

Mon 9 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by season curator

Elena Gorfinkel); Mon 23 Jun 20:45

**Sentimental Educations: Barbara Loden's**

**Classroom Films** + intro by season curator

Elena Gorfinkel

Mon 9 Jun 20:40

**Diary of a Mad Housewife**

Wed 11 Jun 18:15; Sat 21 Jun 20:40

**Sisters of the Gion** Gion no Shimai

Mon 16 Jun 20:50; Sat 21 Jun 13:20

**Queen of Diamonds**

Thu 19 Jun 20:40; Sat 28 Jun 18:15

**The Chelsea Girls (unconfirmed)**

+ intro by season curator Elena Gorfinkel

Sat 21 Jun 13:15

**A Woman under the Influence**

Sun 22 Jun 15:10; Sat 28 Jun 14:20

**Milla**

Tue 24 Jun 18:00; Sat 28 Jun 20:30

**River of Grass**

Thu 26 Jun 18:20; Sun 29 Jun 18:30

Read more in Elena Gorfinkel's new BFI Film  
Classic on *Wanda*, available at the BFI Shop  
and online



intensity. I don't know how much I liked that character I saw, whereas I liked the character I had written. I think that affected the cut. I started to throw more weight to Jimmy Caan's character. That is definitely the flaw of the film. Having stated the premise, which is a really interesting premise – even more so when you think of the time it was written – then it should have stuck with her. I chickened out, partly because I didn't have enough time. When a writer doesn't know what else to do with a character, he brings in a new character, you know? So I kept bringing in new, interesting characters, like the cop or the animal farmer, hopefully keeping the audience interested but denying what I should have been doing, which is to explore that main premise.

*What were you finally trying to say about women? It's a particularly interesting film in the light of the women's movement.*

I'm very interested in women in films. I'd like to write and make films about women, and I have some ideas. Maybe some of them are very romantic. But there's a kind of feminine, magical quality, dating back to the Virgin Mary or something I picked up in catechism classes, that fascinates me. I think I've always been empathetic enough to put myself in a woman's place, although they say it's impossible. I felt that there must be women who are married and expected to perform in a certain way who are really dying on the inside. I thought it was an interesting statement, that a woman could just wake up and leave. I guess I was reading about existentialism, and I was fascinated by 'the simple, pure act'.

Ultimately, I became fascinated by the idea of the responsibility that we have to one another. And it seemed like a beautiful metaphor to me: a woman decides that she doesn't want this thing that's been parcelled out for her – she doesn't want to be a wife and mother. She goes on this symbolic trip to avoid that, and in the course of it picks up this guy who's a metaphor for her baby that she's pregnant with. It's like a woman driving in the car and having a discussion with this kid who isn't born yet, saying, 'I really can't be responsible for you, I've got to take care of myself.' At the same time she feels a very definite instinctive attachment to him. I never resolved it. I never really said, 'What does all that mean? Does that mean that woman is destined, through her biological make-up, to be at home with her husband?' I don't know if that's what it means, but I wish the film had answered that. I ended the movie with a *deus ex machina* and a very emotional plea to have a family. She comes to the conclusion that somehow her destiny is to be a mother, and that there is something overwhelming about that.

*I wonder if women today wouldn't reject that conclusion?*

They rejected it then. They said because I'm a woman and can have a baby does not mean that I should be at home. That's not what I was saying. I was trying to work on an emotional level. I'm fascinated with the whole idea of a family. In the things I'm writing that is constant. Even *The Godfather* is about that, to an extent.

Interview by Stephen Farber, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1972