



Finding Your Way: The Films of Peter Weir

Fearless

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Directed by: Peter Weir

©: Warner Bros.

Production Company: Spring Creek Productions

Presented by/Author: Warner Bros.

Produced by: Paula Weinstein, Mark Rosenberg

Co-producers: Robin Forman, William Beasley

Associate Producers: Christine A. Johnston,

Alan B. Curtiss

Production Associate: Craig Dietrich

Production Manager: William S. Beasley

Production Accountant: Alan B. Curtiss

Los Angeles Location Manager: Robert Decker

San Francisco Location Manager: Rory Enke

2nd Unit Director: William S. Beasley

1st Assistant Director: Alan B. Curtiss

2nd Assistant Director: John Rusk

Script Supervisor: Julie Pitkanen

Casting by: Howard Feuer

Screenplay by: Rafael Yglesias

Based upon the novel by: Rafael Yglesias

Director of Photography: Allen Daviau

2nd Unit Director of Photography: Tom Cannole

Aerial Photography: R. Stanton McLain

Camera Operator: Paul C. Babin

Steadicam Operator: Larry McConkey

1st Assistant Camera: Reggie Newkirk

2nd Assistant Camera: Elise Couvillion

Chief Lighting Technician: Larry Wallace

Key Grip: Michael Kenner

Still Photographer: Merrick Morton

Special Visual Effects by: Introvision International

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Ken Pepiot

Film Editor: William Anderson

Assistant Film Editors: Plummy Tucker,

Tara McKinley

Production Designed by: John Stoddart

Special Design Consultant: Wendy Stites

Art Director: Chris Burian-Mohr

Assistant Art Director: Roger Fortune

Art Department Co-ordinator: Suzanne Peck

Set Decorator: John Anderson

Illustrator: David Negron Jr

Property Master: Bill Petrotta

Construction Foremen: Marco Campos,

Christopher Windisch

Costume Designer: Marilyn Matthews

Costume Supervisor: Elaine Maser

Make-up Artist: Ed Henriques

Hair stylist: Bette Iversen

Title Design by: Nina Saxon Film Design

Titles/Opticals: Pacific Title

Negative Cutter: D. Bassett & Associates

Colour Timer: Bob Kaiser

Colour by: Technicolor

Filmed with: Panavision Cameras & Lenses

Original Music Composed and Conducted by:

Maurice Jarre

Sound Mixer: Charles Wilborn

Boom Operator: Kenny Schwarz

Stunt Co-ordinator: Chris Howell

Disaster/Rescue Consultant: Gordon Black

Unit Publicist: Spooky Stevens

Cast:

Jeff Bridges (*Max Klein*)

Isabella Rossellini (*Laura Klein*)

Rosie Perez (*Carla Rodrigo*)

Tom Hulce (*Brillstein*)

John Turturro (*Dr Bill Perlman*)

Benicio Del Toro (*Manny Rodrigo*)

Deirdre O'Connell (*Nan Gordon*)

John De Lancie (*Jeff Gordon*)

Spencer Vrooman (*Jonah Klein*)

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

The conventions of the air-disaster movie are well established. First we're introduced to a stock company of passengers and crew (nervous old lady, pompous businessman, etc.), then they're all herded on to a plane marked 'Destination: Catastrophe'. *Fearless*, living up to its title, jettisons this whole weary scenario. Instead, it plunges us straight into the aftermath of a crash, with Jeff Bridges wandering out of a cornfield into a scorched-earth desolation of shattered fuselage, burst luggage and dismembered human fragments. (This film, it's fair to bet, is unlikely to do great business on the inflight movie circuit.)

The uncompromising opening is typical of a film which rarely takes the expected route or the easy option. Its central crux – the liberating epiphany experienced by Max Klein in the last moments before the crash – is never explained, still less explained away. Peter Weir and Rafael Yglesias (scripting from his own novel) offer us various hints, but in the end what's happened to Max remains as enigmatic as what became of the vanished schoolgirls in Weir's first hit, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. It's refreshing to see a mainstream Hollywood film that so resolutely refuses to manipulate its audience, but rather invites us to watch and reflect and make up our own minds.

The metaphysical dimension is neither endorsed nor ruled out. Sometimes Max seems to be conducting a feud with a vindictive deity ('You want to kill me, but you can't!' he yells triumphantly at the sky, having walked unscathed through hurtling traffic), at other times he comes close to setting up in competition. 'So there's no god, but there's you?' Carla asks half-jokingly when he expounds his ideas, and taking a shower soon after the crash he thoughtfully fingers a small, stigma-turn-like wound in his left side. In a diner he gazes enraptured at a waitress's name-tag inscribed 'Faith', but whether he's found faith, and in what (himself, or some outside principle?) is left undefined.

The one certainty is that Max has freed himself from his previous phobic, inhibited self. 'I can't get back. I don't want to,' he tells Laura. But where a more glib film might present this as pure gain, a man liberated to 'live life to the full', *Fearless* makes clear that in many ways Max (played by Jeff Bridges with something of the same disquieting ambiguity, at once affable and remote, that he brought to the alien in John Carpenter's *Starman*) has become a lesser human being. The young boy, Byron may see him as a hero and second father, and Carla feels 'it's like God sent him to me' – but to his wife and son he's a monster of selfishness, blandly shutting off the pain he's causing them. He talks of feeling more alive than ever, but part of him – a good part, in both senses – has died.

Another reading of the film, of course, would be that Max has in fact died in the crash, and that everything bar the flashbacks is his moment-of-death experience. 'We're safe because we died already,' he assures Carla, and on his drawing board Laura finds a series of mysterious vortices that resolve themselves into two celestial images: Doré's depiction of the heavenly host from Dante's *Paradise*, and Bosch's *Ascent into the Empyrean*. These images are echoed in the final scene, where the dying Max finds himself walking through the tunnel of the fuselage towards a brilliant light. Here as in *The Last*

Daniel Cerny (*Byron Hummel*)
 Eve Roberts (*Gail Klein*)
 Robin Pearson Rose (*Sarah*)
 Debra Monk (*Alison*)
 Cynthia Mace (*Cindy Dickens*)
 Randle Mell (*Peter Hummel*)
 Kathryn Rossetter (*Jennifer Hummel*)
 Craig Rovere (*FBI agent 1*)
 Doug Ballard (*FBI agent 2*)
 Molly Cleator (*IHOP waitress*)
 Rance Howard (*bald cabby*)
 Schylar Gholson (*Sam Gordon*)
 Trevor Gholson (*Benjamin Gordon*)
 Anne Kerry Ford (*mother of baby*)
 Michael Mulholland (*Red Cross volunteer*)
 Cliff Gober Jr (*paramedic*)
 Sally Murphy (*Jackie*)
 Steven Culp (*emergency doctor*)
 John Towey (*Wilkenson*)
 Stephanie Erb (*Lisa*)
 Cordis Heard (*flight attendant*)
 Paul Ghiringhelli (*reporter*)
 Ryan Tomlinson (*Jonah's friend*)
 Eric Menyuk (*Sears salesman*)
 Don Amendolia (*male survivor*)
 Rondi Reed (*woman survivor*)
 Elsa Raven (*grey haired lady*)
 William Newman (*elderly man*)
 Jeanine Jackson (*redhead*)
 Don Boughton (*middle aged man*)
 David Carpenter (*young man in group*)
 Rome Owens (*'Bubble' Rodrigo*)
 Kevin Brophy (*TV reporter*)
 Joe Paulino (*reporter 2*)
 Michael Ching (*doorman*)
 Roger Hernandez (*priest*)
 Antoinette Peragine (*Laura's sister*)
 Ramoncita Hernández (*Abuela*)
 Isabel R. Martinez (*Tia*)
 I. Rodrigo Martinez (*Tio*)
 Mel Gabel (*reflecting can hobo*)
 Jama Smith (*flight attendant 2*)
 Donna Keegan (*flight attendant 3*)
 Trisha Brittenham (*flight attendant 4*)
 Linda Lee (*flight attendant 5*)
 Daryl Hemmerich (*flight attendant 6*)
 Gerald L. Kersey (*pilot*)
 Randy Danekas (*co-pilot*)
 Gene Deangelis (*intercity captain*)
 Danielle Clegg (*young survivor*)
 Joan Murphy (*ice cream man*)
 Shannon Ratigan (*harassed husband*)
 Adelaide M. Wolf (*harassed wife*)
 Loyd Catlett (*Texan*)
 Rebecca Hardt (*ballet student*)
 Suzanne Q. Burdeau (*Danielle's mother*)
 Maria Bembenek (*Jackie's sister*)
 Richard Blum (*passenger 1*)
 Ashley Cemo (*passenger 2*)
 Norman Fessler (*passenger 3*)
 Lisbeth Rasmussen (*passenger 4*)
 Ken Mofhitz (*passenger 5*)
 James E. Flannigan (*passenger 6*)
 Lavina Wilkerson (*passenger 7*)
 Robert 'Bobby Z' Zajonc, Mike Tamburro
 (*helicopter pilots*)
 USA 1993©
 122 mins
 35mm

With thanks to

Peter and Ingrid Weir

The Cars That Ate Paris and *The Plumber* will be released on BFI Blu-ray on 25 May

Wave (which offered its own unorthodox take on death and visions), Weir taps into mystic levels.

If religion gets sceptical treatment in *Fearless*, the same goes for the secular alternatives. At one point Dr Perlman (subtly portrayed by John Turturro as a man hamstrung by his own sense of inadequacy) stages a group therapy session for the crash survivors. Far from offering us reassuring scenes of traumas being sobbed out on supportive shoulders, the session degenerates into an agonised mess, with angry accusations tearing the group apart and leaving everyone in a worse state than before. Facile comfort, once again, is not on offer.

The film sounds only one false note, when in its final moments Max is brought back to life. Dramatically and emotionally it would work far better if he died, and the last-ditch reprieve smacks of a loss of nerve on somebody's part. That apart, though, *Fearless* strikes audaciously out on its own individual track, and it's a melancholy thought that it will probably fare far worse at the box-office than Weir's meretricious crowd-pleasers like *Green Card* and *Dead Poets Society*.

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, May 1994

As a mainstream film about profound issues and emotions, *Fearless* will deeply affect some viewers who will personally respond to its serious consideration of mortality in a way that combines the psychological, mystical and spiritual. Others, however, will find that Peter Weir's distinctive study of the aftermath of a plane crash breaks apart from undue symbolism and pretension.

In one of his best performances, Jeff Bridges portrays Max Klein, a man who, after walking away from a plane crash that kills his business partner and many other passengers, enters an exalted state in which he feels that he has 'passed through death' and believes that nothing can harm him. The crash, he says, is 'the best thing that ever happened me,' and he is suddenly afraid of nothing and compelled to speak bluntly on every subject.

Weir's handling of the six-minute opening sequence is haunting, with Bridges emerging from a Central California cornfield, handing a baby to its hysterical mother, then wandering away from the smoking chaos.

Bridges is fine, especially in the ethereal early moments, and manages throughout to convey an altered state of mind that rivets the viewer. As his confused wife, who tries to proceed cautiously with the marriage, Rossellini gives by far the best performance of her uneven career. As interest in the Max-Carla interaction wanes, attention increasingly turns to the wife, and Rossellini rewards it with sensitive, impassioned work.

Film is beautifully made in all respects. Weir handles certain scenes with exceptional grace. Allen Daviau's photography has a lovely clarity, and the soundtrack is outstanding – dense and rich.

Todd McCarthy, *Variety*, 19 May 1992