



Big Screen Classics

Being John Malkovich

Being John Malkovich

Director: Spike Jonze

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Presented by: Gramercy Pictures

Production Companies: Propaganda Films, Single Cell Pictures

Executive Producers: Charlie Kaufman, Michael Kuhn

Producers: Michael Stipe, Sandy Stern, Steve Golin, Vincent Landay

Single Cell Creative Executive: Farley Ziegler

Executive in Charge of Production: Tim Clawson

Unit Production Manager: Tim Clawson

Production Supervisor: Gilly Ruben

Production Co-ordinator: Karen Ruth Getchell

Production Accountant: Nour Dardari

Location Manager: Greg Lazzaro

Post-production Supervisors: Sean Wimmer, Linda Rae Shamest

Research/Clearance: Susan Nickerson

1st Assistant Director: Thomas Patrick Smith

2nd Assistant Director: Mark S. Constance

Script Supervisor: Hilary Momberger

Casting: Kim Davis-Wagner, Justine Baddeley

Written by: Charlie Kaufman

Director of Photography: Lance Acord

Additional Photography: Jim Fealy

Camera Operator: Peter Gulla

Additional Camera Operator: Tony Nakonechny

Steadicam Operator: Kirk Gardner

Video Segments by: View Studio

Visual Effects Supervisor: Daniel Radford

Special Visual Effects by: Gray Matter FX

Film Scanning/Recording: Cinesite Inc

Digital Enlargements by: Modern VideoFilm Inc.

Special Effects Co-ordinator: John Gray

Graphic Illustrator: Andy Jenkins

Editor: Eric Zumbrunnen

Additional Editor: Joe Hutshing

Production Designer: K.K. Barrett

Art Director: Peter Andrus

Set Designers: Fanée Aaron, Sloane U'ren,

Elisa Bussetti

Illustrator: Alistair Milne

Storyboard Artist: Peter Ramsey

Ballet Set Sculptures by: Diana Kunce

Property Master: Ritchie Kremer

Costume Designer: Casey Storm

Wardrobe Supervisor: Shari Gray

Head Make-up Artist: Gucci Westman

Special Make-up Effects: John Vulich, Optic Nerve

Marionettes Designed by: Kamela B. Portuges

Ballet Craig Puppet Created by: John Fifer

Puppeteer: Phillip Huber

Hair Designed by: Emanuel Millar

Hair Stylist: Lori Guidroz

Title Design: Andy Jenkins

Colour Timing: David Orr, Gloria Kiser

Music/Orchestrations/Conducted by: Carter Burwell

Music Supervisor: Dawn Solér

Music Editor: Adam Smalley

Choreography: Tony Maxwell

Ballerina Choreography: Maxine Mahon,

California Ballet

Special Sound Design: Mit Out Sound

Sound Mixer: Forrest Brakeman

Re-recording Mixers: Matt Iadarola, Gary Gegan

Supervising Sound Editors: Richard Anderson,

Elliott Koretz

Sound Effects Editor: Marvin Walowitz

Stunt Co-ordinator: Dan Bradley

Mr Malkovich's Double: Grant Mathis

Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman on 'Being John Malkovich'

Watching *Being John Malkovich* was one of the most restorative experiences I've had for a long time. Not only is it a more audacious and genuinely unpredictable commercial American film than one could possibly hope for, but it was made by self-effacing young pop-promo director Spike Jonze and debut scriptwriter Charlie Kaufman, who, so it would seem, have discovered the alchemy of Buñuel's late films with Jean-Claude Carrière and updated it to appeal to their contemporaries: the mass audience of Generation X and Y cinemagoers. The result is a dark, surreal comedy with Borgesian plot twists that get more and more confounding. Film critics love it, obviously, and so do audiences.

Jonze chose for his feature-film debut a script which almost every executive who read it admired but couldn't imagine being made, with the exception of Michael Stipe of REM who acquired the rights for his production company. New York scriptwriter Kaufman had written for a number of short-lived but cultish television comedy series including *Get a Life* and *Ned and Stacey* (he'd also spent a lot of time working in warehouses and answering the phone for a living) but his script made no concessions to commerciality and was totally reliant on John Malkovich agreeing to play a less than flattering version of himself.

What the film is about is hard to define. John Cusack plays Craig, a failed puppeteer who on discovering a portal into the brain of actor John Malkovich turns it into a consumer attraction (with the sales pitch: 'Have you ever wanted to be someone else?'). Eventually Craig becomes Malkovich's ruthless puppet master in order to defeat his dowdy wife Lotte (Cameron Diaz) in an obsessive love wrangle for his beautiful business partner (Catherine Keener). What begins as a Warholian parable on the nature of celebrity, obsessive fandom and artistic failure mutates into a fantasy about immortality and body snatching. The film opens up, in Craig's words, a 'metaphysical can of worms'. Jonze shrewdly eschews the opportunity to add any MTV-inspired mayhem to the mix (and herein lies the film's success) and opts for restrained, conventional direction and casting against type. Nevertheless, he couldn't resist including a flashback from the point of view of a chimpanzee and a parallel universe in which everyone looks like John Malkovich, be they midgets or lounge singers in drag.

How did the film get into production?

Charlie Kaufman: I wrote the script five years ago and it took me about six months to finish the first draft. I don't know where I got the idea from but I allowed the story to evolve as I was writing the draft and then refined it. The script made the rounds, but it was always, 'This is very funny but no one will ever make this movie.' Then two and a half years later Spike expressed interest in directing it at the same time as Michael Stipe's production company Single Cell Pictures optioned it. I met with Spike and saw his video work, and that was it.

What involvement did Stipe have?

Spike Jonze: Michael pretty much let us do what we wanted. He helped with getting investors – it took a long time, but he and his business partner Sandy Stern kept trying. He didn't interfere and he really believed in the film.

Cast:

John Cusack (*Craig Schwartz*)
Cameron Diaz (*Lotte Schwartz*)
Catherine Keener (*Maxine*)
Orson Bean (*Doctor Lester*)
Mary Kay Place (*Floris*)
W. Earl Brown (*1st J.M. Inc. customer*)
Carlos Jacott (*Larry, John Malkovich's agent*)
Willie Garson (*guy in restaurant*)
Byrne Piven (*Captain Mertin*)
Gregory Sporleder (*drunk at bar*)
Charlie Sheen (*Charlie*)
John Malkovich (*John Horatio Malkovich*)
Ned Bellamy (*Derek Mantini*)
Eric Weinstein (*father at puppet show*)
Madison Lanc (*daughter at puppet show*)
Octavia L. Spencer (*woman in elevator*)
Reggie Hayes (*Don*)
K.K. Dodds (*Wendy*)
Judith Wetzell (*tiny woman*)
Kevin Carroll (*cab driver*)
Gerald Emerick (*sad man in line*)
Bill M. Ryusaki (*Mr Hiroshi*)
James Murray (*student puppeteer*)
Richard Fancy (*Johnson Heyward*)
Daniel Hansen (*boy John Malkovich*)
Patti Tippo (*John Malkovich's mother*)
Mariah O'Brien (*girl creeped out by John Malkovich*)
Kelly Teacher (*Emily*)
Sean Penn (*himself, interviewee*) *
Brad Pitt (*himself*) *
David Fincher (*Christopher Bing*) *
Andy Dick *
Philip Glass *
Dustin Hoffman *
Michelle Pfeiffer *
Winona Ryder *
Gary Sinise *
USA 1999
113 mins
35mm

* Uncredited

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Did you make any changes to the script?

CK: We spent a week going through it line by line and Spike would say, 'What does the character mean here?' and I'd clarify it. It was an important process.

How easy was it to cast?

SJ: John Cusack had read the script years ago and wanted to do it. Then when John Malkovich came on board it became much easier.

Did Malkovich bring anything to the film that hadn't been there before?

CK: He didn't and he didn't want to. He was more interested in depicting the public's perception of him than in showing who he actually is.

SJ: If anything he wanted to push the character further. He said we should make things impossible for him, be mean to Malkovich, the meaner the better.

Did you know in advance exactly how you wanted each line read or did you respond to the actors' interpretations?

SJ: There were some things I knew were very important and I was very strict. But at other times I let the actors try things out and then made my suggestions.

What were you trying to explore in the twisted love triangle and the satire on celebrity?

CK: I don't know if I was consciously trying to do anything but decide what would happen to these individuals say, what would happen if Lotte went through the portal and liked the idea of being a man. A lot of people say there are a lot of surprising things in the script and I think that's because I was surprising myself. If I'd had a single idea I was trying to get to then the writing wouldn't have worked so well and people would have been better able to anticipate what's coming next.

How did you decide on a style for the film?

SJ: Before we even got close to shooting we were trying to figure out how much we pushed different things like jokes. And we decided the key to the story was the characters, so we had to make them believable and keep it as naturalistic as possible.

Why did you choose a conventional orchestrated score rather than a pop soundtrack?

SJ: We used Carter Burwell, who writes the music for all the Coen Brothers' movies, though there is some Björk in there. Like I said, we wanted to play it naturalistically. The music was designed to illustrate the emotions of the characters and the mood of each scene. When I'm making videos I try to think how the songs might be used in another context – in a movie or in a gymnastic routine. So it was a totally different experience putting music to the images to draw out what's going on with the characters and the story.

Film critics have made many highbrow references – Borges, Buñuel, Svankmajer. Did you have any sense of those influences?

CK: I don't think we tried to make the film look like anyone else. It was fun coming up with ideas of our own. I don't mind hearing the comparisons, it's very flattering. Sometimes I get mad at myself because I'm not enjoying it all like I'm supposed to. But if I force myself to consider what the alternative would have been, I know I'm really glad it's not that.

Article and interviews by John Mount, *Sight and Sound*, March 2000