



# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

FRIDAY  
SEPTEMBER 18, 2015  
7:00PM • WHITNEY  
HUMANITIES CENTER

# BEING JOHN MALKOVICH

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM  
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



When *BEING JOHN MALKOVICH*, hailed by critics as “endlessly inventive,” “breathlessly imaginative,” and “delightfully nutty,” hit theaters in the fall of 1999, it heralded the arrival of not one but two major talents: director Spike Jonze, making his feature film debut, and screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, writing his first script for the big screen.

Beginning in the early 1990s, Spike Jonze (born Adam Siegel in Rockville, Maryland, in 1969) created mind-bending and visually imaginative music videos for musicians like the Beastie Boys, Weezer, R.E.M., Björk, and Pavement, among others, as well as award-winning and widely-seen commercials for brands including Nike, the Gap, Sprite, and IKEA. On the heels of his now classic music videos for Weezer’s “Buddy Holly” (the “Happy Days” video) and the Beastie Boys’ “Sabotage,” (the ‘70s crime show homage that was robbed at the 1994 MTV Music Video Awards, losing in every category for which it was nominated), Jonze was in a position to make the move to feature films, and was looking for the right script.



Enter Charlie Kaufman (born in New York in 1958, moved to West Hartford in 1972), who began his career writing for Chris Elliott’s “Get a Life,” where, as Kaufman described it, his job was to write in the voice of the show’s creators, Elliott and Adam Resnick. “I was frustrated with the results, but it occurred to me that there was no solution as long as my job was trying to imitate someone else’s voice. The obvious solution was to find a situation where I was doing me, not someone else. The major obstacle to this is your deeply seated belief that ‘you’ is not interesting.” While waiting for the next sitcom pilot season in 1994, Kaufman wrote the script for *BEING JOHN MALKOVICH*. The script gathered praise as it circulated through Hollywood over the years, but no one actually stepped forward to make it until Kaufman managed to get it into the hands of Francis Ford Coppola, who passed it onto his daughter Sofia’s then boyfriend, Spike Jonze.

DIRECTED BY **SPIKE JONZE** (1999) 112 MIN.  
SCREENPLAY BY **CHARLIE KAUFMAN**  
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **LANCE ACORD**  
PRODUCED BY **PROPAGANDA FILMS**  
STARRING **JOHN CUSACK, CAMERON DIAZ, CATHERINE KEENER, ORSON BEAN, MARY KAY PLACE, AND JOHN MALKOVICH**

John Cusack, who plays struggling puppeteer Craig Schwartz, reportedly asked his agent to give him “the craziest, most unproduceable script you can find.” After reading Kaufman’s script, Cusack said, “All right, I want to do this. Track this. If anyone else does this, and I’m not the first in the door, I’m leaving you guys.” John Malkovich received the script through his production company, who were somewhat reluctant to pass it onto him. He read it and loved it, but didn’t think too much about the fact that his name was in the title, and that the character of Malkovich was a version of him. His company contacted Kaufman to ask if the Malkovich character could simply be rewritten as someone else, and offered that Malkovich could direct the film. Kaufman said no, he wouldn’t change the titular character, to which Malkovich said “Good luck.” “It never occurred to me that anyone would be goofy enough to actually make that movie, but of course I hadn’t met Spike Jonze then,” Malkovich said later.

As Charlie Kaufman’s unproduced script was making the rounds in Hollywood, New Line producer Bob Shaye turned it down, reportedly asking for a higher profile actor in the title. “Why can’t it be *BEING TOM CRUISE*?” he said. Luckily for us Charlie Kaufman held his ground, Spike Jonze had the vision to direct the film, and John Malkovich lent his name, his mind, his body—his Malkovich—to help get the film made.

**DID YOU KNOW:** IF THE FILM SEEMS STRANGE AS IT IS, IMAGINE IT WITH THE ENDING IN THE ORIGINAL SCRIPT: CRAIG IS VISITED BY THE GREAT MANTINI, THE WORLD’S GREATEST PUPPETEER, WHO CHALLENGES HIM TO A DUEL IN WHICH CRAIG’S MALKOVICH PUPPET AND MANTINI’S HARRY S. TRUMAN PUPPET WILL ACT TOGETHER IN A PRODUCTION OF “EQUUS,” AFTER WHICH THE PUPPET FANBASE WILL DECIDE WHO IS THE GREATER PUPPETEER.

**NEXT UP:** JOIN US FOR ANOTHER BREAKTHROUGH FILM FROM THE ‘90s, DIRECTOR HAYAO MIYAZAKI’S 1997 TRIUMPH **PRINCESS MONONOKE**. THE ANIME / ART-HOUSE HIT SCREENS IN A SPECIAL MATINEE PRESENTATION **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11 AT 2:00 P.M.**