

# Cinéaste. Queer. Portlander.

**Possibly the best director of the year.  
Meet Todd Haynes.**

by Christopher McQuain



**A**vant-garde cinema sensation Todd Haynes has become an internationally hailed indie director and, not so long ago, a Northeast Portland resident. (Valuing the peaceful, relatively anonymous existence so much, he requested his countenance not appear on the cover of *Just Out*.)

An unqualified master of the medium, Haynes explores radically varied styles with assurance and is possessed of major cachet among critics and cinephiles alike.

He's also one of the world's most respected, uncompromising and innovative queer filmmakers, a fact apparently forgotten by *The Oregonian*, which failed to mention this or any of his new film's gay content when it put Haynes of the cover of the Nov. 3 ArtsWeek section (even while referencing Jean Genet, Gus Van Sant and *American Beauty*).

It did, however, call his just-released movie, *Far from Heaven*, "the first great American

drama of the new century." At least it got something right.

**F**rom *Superstar*—a 1987 Karen Carpenter biopic acted entirely with hand-held Barbies—to *Heaven*, Haynes' career consists of an exhilarating series of adventuresome creative peaks.

His first feature, 1991's Jean Genet-inspired *Poison*, was a disturbingly graphic triptych of social hierarchy, AIDS paranoia and repressed homosexuality. Funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the film was publicly blasted by prominent right-wingers as taxpayer-funded homosexual pornography.

1995's complex, subtle *Safe*, starring Julianne Moore as a privileged housewife whose alienation and identity crises manifest themselves as physical illness, was named "Best Movie of the Decade" in a millennial *Village Voice* poll, while 1998's *Velvet Goldmine* used a fablelike recon-

struction of England's '70s-era glam rock scene to sing a uniquely radical vision of sexuality, gender and culture onto the screen.

On the surface, *Far from Heaven* is as unlike the rest of Haynes' films as they are from each other. But, like all his other work, it's a parable about identity and conformity.

The 41-year-old began writing *Heaven* in Portland three years ago, just after he moved here from New York. The end result is his most accessible film, though there isn't a frame that doesn't radiate Haynes' recognizable sensibility. A modern take on '50s Technicolor melodramas uncannily true to the movies that inspired it—most specifically those of Douglas Sirk (see sidebar)—*Heaven* reunites the director with the always-arresting Julianne Moore.

She plays Cathy Whitaker, a seemingly comfortable, well-adjusted denizen of Eisenhower-era suburban America. But trouble lurks: Her husband, Frank (Dennis Quaid), is a

closet case, and her camaraderie with their African American gardener (Dennis Haysbert) ostracizes her from the community.

Critics came away from this year's Toronto International Film Festival effusing praise for *Far from Heaven*, including the assertion that Oscar will come knocking at Haynes' Rose City door.

**N**ot one to play the big-shot director, Haynes was casually garbed in thrift-chic polo shirt, slacks and sneakers and smoking a hand-rolled cigarette during his recent day-long press confab at a downtown Portland hotel. He graciously granted *Just Out* a long moment to discuss his career, his love of this adopted hometown, the ever-elusive Stephen Sondheim/Todd Haynes connection and, oh yeah, revolutionizing gay cinema.

**Christopher McQuain:** Let's start with *Poison*. You kind of had your name made for you

**Bertucci's**  
Chocolates

**More Than  
Candy...**

Panache Espresso™  
Tillamook Ice Cream™  
Cards & Gifts

1560 Columbia Blvd.  
St. Helens  
(503) 366-9602

every sleeping beauty  
needs beauty sleep

mention Just Out for a free  
cheval mirror with purchase

**Beds Plus**  
52567 Columbia  
River Hwy  
Scappoose, OR  
503/543-3066

VISUALIZE YOUR  
*Inner Beauty*

- Personal Image Design
- Hair & Wig Styling
- Specializing in Trans-Formation
- Professional Makeup
- Exp. with feature film & TV
- Friendly Private Salon

CHRISTINA'S  
*Authentic  
Creations*

503  
286-7000



**Protect Your Assets  
Through Estate Planning**

Call the Law Office  
of James D. McVittie  
503-224-6611



To Receive Your  
FREE Booklet *A  
Practical Guide to  
Estate Planning.*

Schedule a FREE 30  
minute consultation to  
discuss your personal  
estate plan.

James D. McVittie  
Attorney at Law  
2310 NW Everett  
Suite 200  
Portland, Oregon  
97210  
503.224.6611