



Portland transplant Todd Haynes displayed his affability while discussing *Far from Heaven*.

Douglas Sirk or Fassbinder were, this is where I became convinced that depicting seemingly irresolvable human pain is a profoundly effective way for a filmmaker to transfix, disquiet and thereby politicize the audience.

### March 1998

After a screening of Michael Moore's new film, *The Big One*, at Bagdad Theater, I spot Van Sant standing by himself in a dark corner, all quiet and mysterious. During this period I'm writing on film and queer culture for a short-lived Portland arts monthly, and I see this as a bit of a chance for a scoop. I introduce myself to him and tell him I'd love

to do an interview for our little monthly, which he's never heard of. He's diffidently polite in a way that suggests shyness rather than arrogance. Sensing that he, like Garbo, just wants to be left alone, I give him my card and thank him for his time.

We never hear from him, but the encounter—my only one with Van Sant to date—renders me dizzy and starstruck, burning into my mind the probably inaccurate but still indelible assumption that he is, in his poker-faced, ultra-noncommittal cool, Portland's own private Andy Warhol. My only regret now is that I tried to play it professional and resisted the temptation to gush with awkwardness-inducing gratitude for the life-changing Campfire Scene.

### 2000-2002

Todd Haynes unexpectedly moves from New York to Portland, and while my reaction stops well short of truly creepy or grotesque stalker territory, I do develop an unhealthy fixation that turns this period into a hazy blur of quasi-unhealthy Haynes-turned-local-hero fandom on my part. Whenever he is present for a Q & A after, say, a screening of one of his films at Portland Art Museum, I'm there. I have to restrain myself from gasping and pointing when I spot him attending a Sonic Youth concert at the Roseland; a friend accompanying me at Fred Meyer on Northwest 21st and Burnside will never let me forget how excited I got when we spotted Haynes there buying a garden hose. (Any Freudians out there can now have their field day with *that* one.) Stare at Haynes ever so discreetly out of the corner of my eye when I spot him in the crowd at a Miranda July performance, or catching John Waters' lecture tour? Check, and check.

It all culminates in an hourlong in-person interview slot in the publicity suite of a downtown hotel during the promotion for 2002's *Far from Heaven*, wherein I discover that the most shocking thing to report about Haynes is his utter affability. He nonchalantly smokes a cigarette throughout and responds with complete engagement, erudition, cooperation and friendliness to my geeky questions. He is no one's answer to Andy Warhol. Instead, he's so accessible and down to earth that I can easily imagine saying a casual hello if I ever

run into him again. I can now sleep easy at night knowing that we inhabit the same city.

### 2006

My latest recollection is, in an odd way, actually the earliest. An invitation to write up a revival of Van Sant's then-rare first film, 1985's *Mala Noche* (the film has since been released on DVD) affords me the opportunity to see it for the first time. As I watch it, I'm struck by a strange sense of nostalgia. I'm acutely aware that this rough, sad, tender, lovely little debut film, with its same-sex flirtation between a punk-poet convenience store clerk and a young Mexican immigrant in the seedy inner-Northwest area later gentrified into the Pearl District, was being filmed not so far away from the outer-Southeast suburbs where I was still getting in trouble for playing with dolls.

The film—based on Portland queer poet Walt Curtis' chapbook of the same name—has its thematic similarities with *My Own Private Idaho*, but no famous stars; an authentic, shabby, loving vision of Portland is the film's real star. It is my remedial, somehow exhilarating glimpse of another, much more interesting Portland that was always there waiting for me. It depicts a time and place—the same little city with a big spirit in which *Just Out* had recently begun publication—where a gay community could dare proudly show its face. The physical Portland of *Mala Noche* has effectively disappeared, but our town is still known for its tolerance, progressiveness and queer-friendliness. Here's to 25 more years of our little city's big-spiritedness. ☺

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