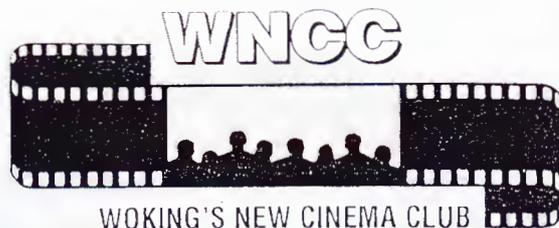




**STOCKARD
CHANNING**

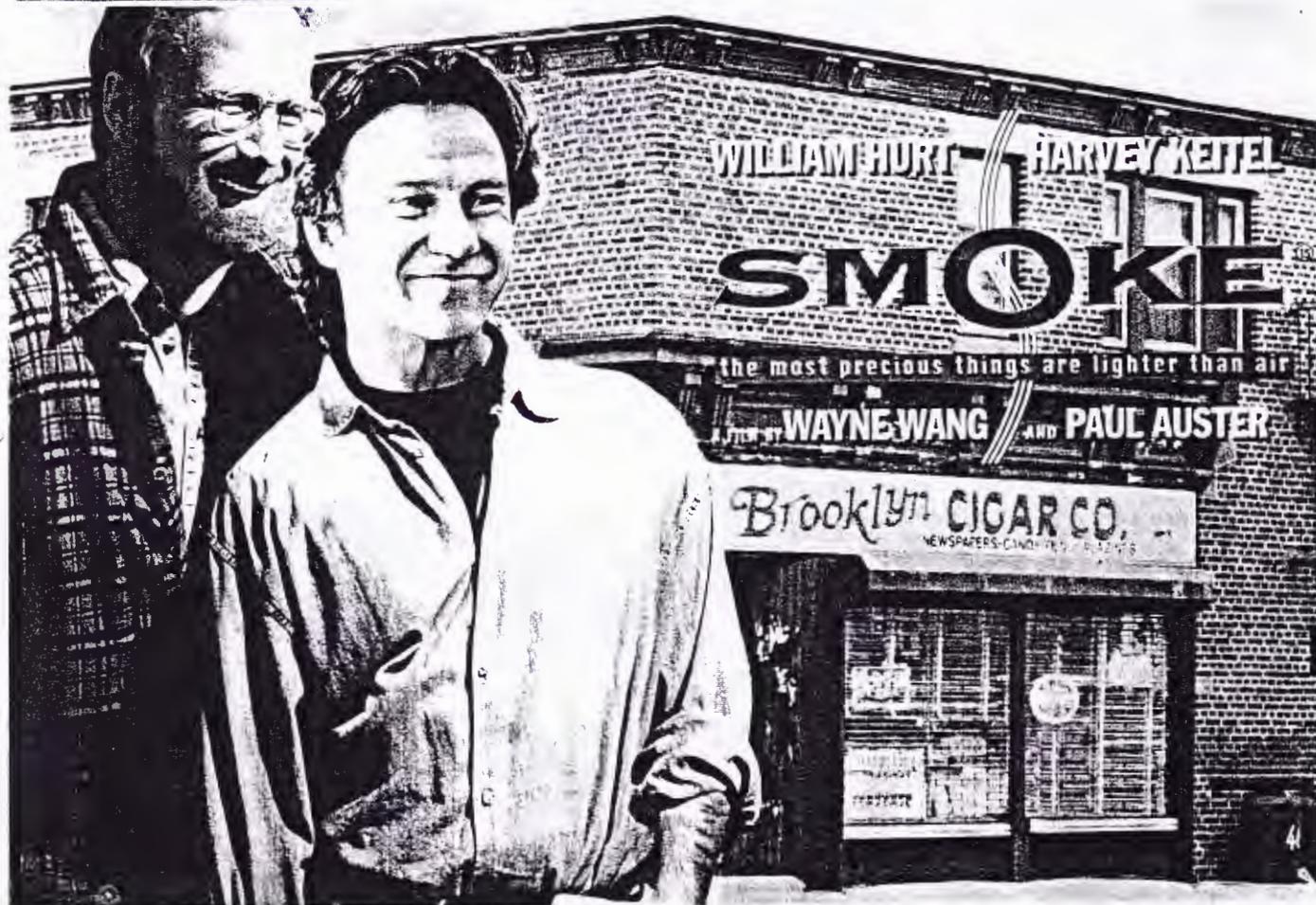


**HAROLD
PERRINEAU JR.**

**GIANCARLO
ESPOSITO**

**ASHLEY
JUDD**

**FOREST
WHITAKER**



The characters in *Smoke* represent "an undogmatic view of human behaviour. No one is simply one thing or the other, they're all filled with contradictions, and they don't live in a world that breaks down neatly into good guys and bad guys".

- Paul Auster

The director Wayne Wang (*The Joy Luck Club*), picked up *The New York Times* on Christmas Day in 1990, read 'Auggie Wren's Christmas Story', a short story by highly regarded Brooklyn-based novelist Paul Auster, and was instantly charmed. He contacted Auster and asked him to adapt it into a screenplay that formed the basis of the film *Smoke*.

It is a delicate tale about fatherhood, camaraderie and cigars, and tells the story of the intertwined lives of Auggie Wren, Paul Benjamin and Rashid, respectively the manager of a smoke shop in Brooklyn, a widowed novelist and a young man from the projects (as played by Harvey Keitel, William Hurt and Harold Perineau Jnr). Every day Auggie takes a photograph of his store before he starts work because, as he explains to Paul, though each one is the same, every photograph is also different. This notion of the subtle uniqueness of the everyday pervades the film. Chance encounters lead to life-changing events; odd details resurface in disparate lives. Rashid saves Paul from being run over by a truck. This prompts Rashid to seek out his father in up-state New York. Auggie's long lost love seeks him out in order to implore him to help her save 'their' daughter - she's pregnant and on crack. A stolensum of money circulates amongst the characters until it finds a worthy recipient.

aside from their shared professions and first names, Auster disavows any autobiographical connection with the film's Paul Benjamin character. Nonetheless, Auster worked closely with the film's production designer to ensure that Benjamin's apartment was an authentic recreation of a working writer's environment. Like Auster, Benjamin writes in longhand. So adamant was Wang about the importance of Auster's contribution to *Smoke* that he insisted, against tradition, that the film should bear the credit "A Film by Wayne Wang and Paul Auster".

It is not often that one can argue for the screenwriter-as-*auteur* but *Smoke* demonstrates that a novelist's fictional world can make it to the screen without being compromised by approximation or a stolid fidelity to detail. What is so pleasing about *Smoke* is that Auster's 'voice' as well as his preoccupations and motifs are recognisably intact and cinematically effective.

From *The New York Trilogy* (metaphysical doubt sweated out in hard-boiled pulp idiom) to *The Invention of Solitude* (metafictional memoirs) to the grander historical scope of *Moon Palace*, Auster has increasingly placed his fascination with the self-as-fiction in specific settings and peopled these with regular guys in crisis. The crisis privileged above all in his work is fatherhood; so it is with *Smoke*. Each of the three main characters are "still being born" according to Chris Darke in his *Sight & Sound* review, "their identities forged by wrong turnings and everyday catastrophes", each unable to come to terms with his past without the help and friendship of the other.



If *Smoke* is predominantly male in focus, its men are shown to have been cut loose, often against their will, from family and intimate relationships. Paul, who has suffered writers-block since his pregnant wife was accidentally shot dead outside Auggie's store, is a man disorientated by his own grief until he is delivered back to the world by Rashid's incursion. Auggie's friendship with Paul is also shadowed by the guilt Auggie feels at having served Paul's wife on the day of the robbery and not having kept her in the store for a few seconds longer. Rashid conceals a fear and isolation that comes from his mother having died in a car driven by his drunken father, Cyrus (Forest Whitaker), who he has not seen in twelve years. The stories within *Smoke* are driven by coincidence which allows Auster to suggest lives that once were and lives that might have been, as well as lives to come.

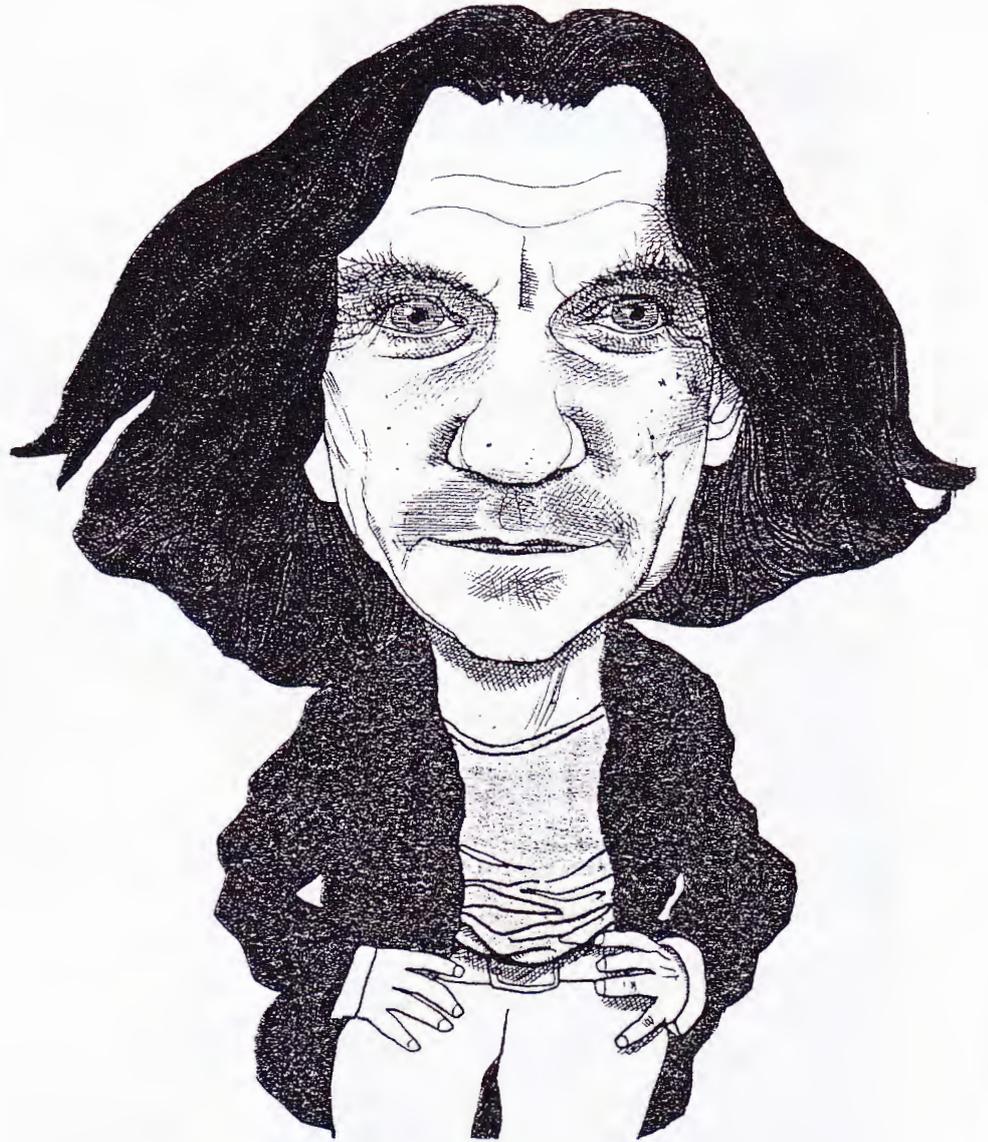
David Thomson once asked of Wayne Wang: "Can he make American picture?". He need only watch this remarkably faithful rendition of Auster's world and voice, to realise that *Smoke* is American cinema at it's most humane and life-affirming.

The cast and crew of *Smoke* apparently so enjoyed making the film that they talked the studio into funding an instant sequel which they then shot in six days. The result is *Blue In The Face* and now, in addition to Keitel reprising his role as Auggie Wren, there's a whole gallery of famous faces adding cameos in the continuing story of the Brooklyn Cigar Co. It is a home movie conceit that was shot in the same location, and is an improvised succession of sketches and monologues with the participation of such stars as Madonna, Mira Sorvino, Michael J Fox, Roseanne, RuPaul, Lily Tomlin, Jared Harris, Jim Jarmusch and Lou Reed!

Geraldine Beare

HARVEY KEITEL
US actor (1939-)

Born in New York and a product of the Actors Studio, Keitel joined the marines after school, then worked in summer stock before meeting the director Martin Scorsese (qv) in the early 1970s to form a lasting partnership. He came to prominence in Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (73) and international recognition in the same director's controversial *Taxi Driver* (76). After a disagreement with Francis Ford Coppola (qv) he was fired on location from the lead in *Apocalypse Now* (79) and replaced by Martin Sheen (qv). Highlights of his career include *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (75), *The Duellists* (77), *Bad Timing* (80), *Wise Guys* (86), *Last Temptation of Christ* (88), *Thelma & Louise* (91) and *The Bad Lieutenant* (92). He also acted in and part-financed Quentin Tarantino's (qv) *Reservoir Dogs* (92). He received a best supporting actor Oscar nomination for his role in the director Jane Campion's (qv) *The Piano* (93).



Scent of Green Papaya 16/10/97

29 reactions, average score 6.34

Comments

Loved the wildlife in the garden.

Excellent photography and fascinating insight into another culture.

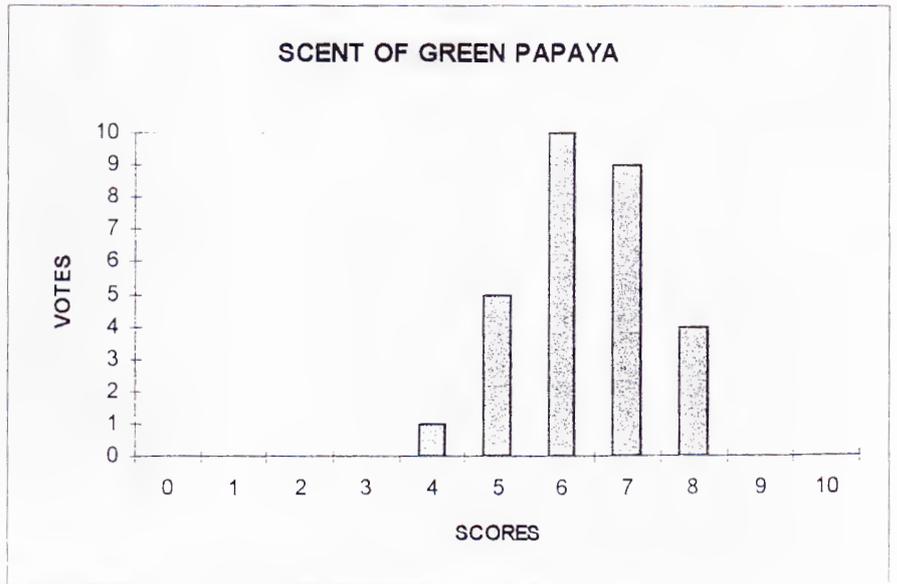
Stretched the limits of my patience.

I don't think the soundtrack album will make the charts!

Slightly pretentious.

Excellent - a bit of a sudden ending after such a slow and sensual second half.

Hypnotic! As they said - "To move harmoniously" - glide, glide, glide!



STAGECOACH 30/10/97

39 reactions, average score 7.44

REACTIONS

Comments

Excellent clichés and hats!

Classic Western - fast action, horses and speech.

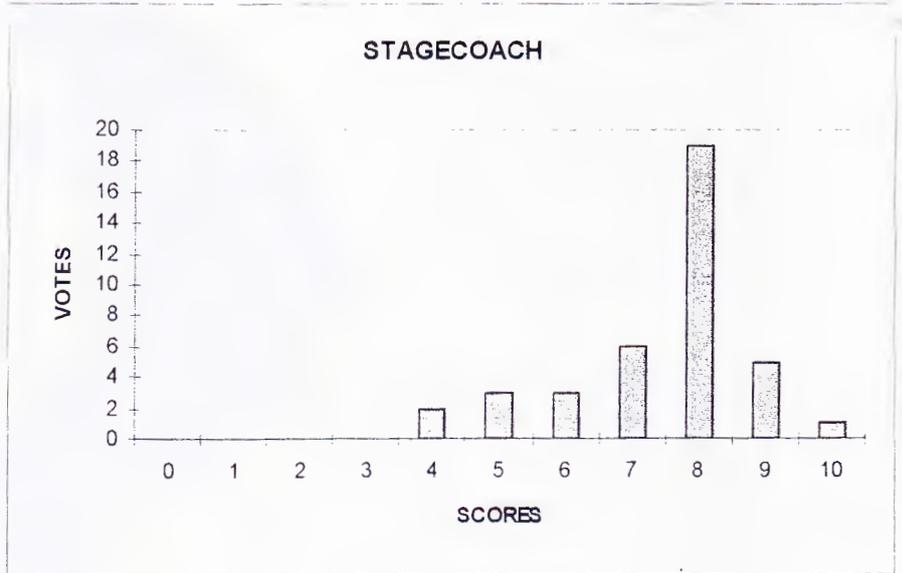
Uncomplicated. Good photography.

Certainly had everything in it - the music, shifty eyes etc!

Still as much fun as when I saw it 40 years ago.

Don't usually enjoy Westerns but I really was surprised at how much I liked this.

Helen Sayers



**COMING
NEXT**

**ON
THE**

**BIG
SCREEN**

the promise

November 27

(1994-German-French-Swiss) **C-119m.** *** D: Margarethe von Trotta. Corinna Harfouch, Meret Becker, August Zirner, Anian Zollner, Pierre Besson, Hans Kremer. Pointed account of star-crossed German lovers, covering a thirty-year timespan, beginning with their separation while trying to escape from East to West in 1961. Their relationship mirrors German history during this period, and serves as a metaphor for a divided, and then reunified, nation. Another provocative, politically savvy drama from von Trotta.



Performance Ends 10.25pm (approx.)

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