

## Interview: Iconic Director Wim Wenders Dances With ‘Pina’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 22, 2012 - 7:00pm

- [3-D](#) [2]
- [Buena Vista Social Club](#) [3]
- [Choreographer](#) [4]
- [Dance](#) [5]
- [Documentary](#) [6]
- [Germany](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Interview](#) [9]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [10]
- [Pina](#) [11]
- [Pina Bausch](#) [12]
- [Until the End of the World](#) [13]
- [Wim Wenders](#) [14]
- [Wings of Desire](#) [15]

CHICAGO – Wim Wenders has entertained audiences for over 40 years with his wide range of film subjects, both in narrative and documentary form. His latest film is the delicate and emotionally charged ‘Pina,’ an overview and exposition of his friend, the famous German choreographer Pina Bausch.

Born in Düsseldorf, Wenders came upon film after dropping out of university in the mid-1960s. After moving in Paris to try his hand as a painter and engraver, he became fascinated with film, seeing up to five a day at the local cinemas. He returned to Germany and enrolled in the University of Television and Film Munich, and became a film critic for several publications. He became part of the New German Cinema movement at the end of the 1960s, and made his feature directorial debut with “Summer in the City” (1970).



Dancers in a Modern Setting in ‘Pina’  
Photo credit: Donata Wenders for IFC Films

After evolving through the 1970s with his “Road Movie Trilogy,” he began to gain an international reputation with films like “The American Friend” (1977), “Hammett” (1982) and “Room 666” (1982), a documentary which captured directors Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Fassbinder and Steven Spielberg at the Cannes Film Festival. Acclaim came soon thereafter, with “Paris, Texas” (1984) and the essential cinema of “Wings of Desire” (1987). Through the 1990s to the present there was the Wings sequel “Faraway, So Close!” (1993), the Oscar nominated documentary “Buena Vista Social Club” (1999) and his recent collaboration with Sam Shepard (who co-wrote “Paris, Texas”), “Don’t Come Knocking” (2005).

“Pina” is a personal project for Wenders, as it features the work and life of his friend, German choreographer Pina Bausch. HollywoodChicago.com interviewed Wim Wenders during the Chicago International Film Festival in October, when it screened his 3-D documentary. In this candid conversation, Wenders talked about his career and art.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is it about the choreography and dance performances of Pina Bausch that transcends the nature of reality and allowed you to admirably render and tell the story of her art?

**Wim Wenders:** It is the fact that Pina didn't look at dance as an aesthetic experience at all. She did something different than any other choreographer before her, and she summed it up herself when she said 'I'm not interested on how my dancers move, I'm strictly interested in what moves them.' And that of course puts the whole art form upside down.

She's trying to tell us that dance can reveal something about us, that dance is something that comes out of life, and that choreography is not something imposed on us, but it's life expressing itself through dance. Nobody had done that before, nobody thought that dance was something that came out of us, everybody thought that dance is what we make people do. And by radically turning that notion of the art upside down, she put dance on its feet.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How long have you been in a relationship with 3-D filming technology and how did you alter your directing style to work with it in Pina?

**Wenders:** I had no idea at first how to shoot with 3-D and how to use the technology. On the other hand, I wouldn't had made the film if it hadn't been for the arrival of 3-D. For twenty years, I desperately tried to find a way to translate Pina's work onto the screen, and the two of us wanted to do that together, except I didn't know how to it. I thought my craft didn't have the goods to appropriately film Pina's work. I always felt that watching her work was like the dancers were fishes in an aquarium, and I was standing outside looking in. Like they were in their element in that water, and I was not.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Did you feel then that you captured it with the 3-D technology?

**Wenders:** With the 3-D, I realized I could be in the water. The 3-D put me in the very same element with the dancers, which is in their space. Space in film, until 3-D arrived, was fiction, it was fake. Movies do amazing things to make up for that deficit, but until 3-D came along whatever they did, it always just ended up on a two dimensional screen and therefore fictitious. Now for the first time, we are in the element of the dancers. For dance, 3-D is necessary.



The Synchronized Line Dance in 'Pina'  
Photo credit: Donata Wenders for IFC Films

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Which of the four dances revealed in the film did you find yourself in production and post-production the hardest not to think about or shake off? How and why did it effect you in that way?

**Wenders:** I have no hesitation, it is 'Café Mueller.' For the very simple reason it was the first piece that I saw, it was my baptism into Pina's universe. It was the first thing I saw even before I knew who she was. Before that, I thought dance had eluded me, and I actually had to be dragged into the first Pina Bausch performance.

I thought it would be a boring night, and it was the opposite, it was one of the most exciting nights of my life, for it changed tremendously both my life and my work. It was 'Café Mueller,' it blew me away and I watched most of it through tears. It stayed that way for me, and I saw new elements as I watched it again.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Did you see new things while you were filming that dance?





Wim Wenders in Chicago, October 2011  
*Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com*

**Wenders:** Filming it, especially in 3-D, and being in this privileged position where I was actually with the dancers on stage, I could see it at every angle and could walk around it. I realized that I hadn’t really understood its architecture before, how intricately structured it was and how perfectly it was built. As an audience member, I has seen it in the first row, last row and balcony, and had discovered new things about it. In the privileged position of using cameras that were penetrating the essence of it, I discovered a whole new aspect of it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Dance is an ancient ritual, given a status as art long after its tribal roots. How do you think Pina Bausch celebrates the tribalism of dance with her work?

**Wenders:** Well, the dance that begins the film, “The Rite of Spring,” it is about man and woman in a tribal state. It is outrageously violent and sexual, it’s about sacrifice and scapegoats, it’s about death. I’ve seen it several times, and I’m completely wasted afterward.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You were convinced to finish this film after Ms. Bausch passed away during the filming. How do you think the film is best as a memory of her as an artist?

**Wenders:** It does that for one very particular reason. Pina literally died from one day to another. She was unprepared and she certainly couldn’t prepare the dances for the film. None of the 36 dancers could say goodbye, nor were prepared for the death of a person that was the center of their lives. When we decided to make the film after all, months after I had pulled the plug, it was the dancers who pushed me into knowing that not making the film would be a mistake. It was also in order for them to say goodbye.

If the film does represent Pina’s universe now, it was in itself a goodbye, a thank you and a process for us to come to terms with the loss. I think if it hadn’t been for fulfilling this incredible hole in our lives, that Pina was gone all of a sudden, I don’t think we wouldn’t have been able to make a film that would really be able to represent her.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since we recently lost the great Peter Falk, what memory of him on the set of ‘Wings of Desire’ that came back to you when you heard of his passing?

**Wenders:** The first thing that came back to me is how I got in touch with him in the first place. And that is really telling about who Peter was. The way we met was quite amazing. I was already shooting ‘Wings of Desire,’ for about two or three weeks. There was no fixed script, we were working on a day-to-day basis. I was sitting there one night with my assistant, and I told her there was something wrong with this movie. We had all these characters and they were all bloody serious, the angels weren’t funny and the people they were meeting weren’t funny. The movie was getting too cerebral. So I thought what if there was somebody who had been an angel and then became a human, if he could ironically look at this experience and tease the other angel to come to the other side. And I thought wouldn’t it be poignant if that ex-angel was someone that everybody knew. That would give it a fantastic twist.

We thought of politicians, sports figures, but then thought the only people that everyone around the world knew were actors. We had to find an actor that was well known. But who was that actor, and would he come and join us? And I said, ‘Columbo.’ There is a man who everybody knows, and everybody likes. I’d never met anybody who didn’t like Columbo. We both laughed, and thought it was impossible. I didn’t know Peter Falk.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How did you get in touch with him?



Peter Falk (right) in ‘Wings of Desire’  
Photo credit: The Criterion Collection

**Wenders:** I had met John Casavettes, and had his number. I got him on the phone and asked him if he could help me get in touch with Peter Falk. John said sure, Peter has an office and he goes there every morning if he isn’t shooting, you can call him. I asked him shouldn’t I go through an agent? He said no, just call him. So I did. Very quickly on on the other end there was that unmistakable voice, [affecting a Peter Falk voice] ‘yeah, who’s there?’ I mean, that Columbo voice. [laughs]

So I said, this is Wim Wenders, and he didn’t know me. I told him we were calling from Berlin, told him about Casavettes, and that we’re making movie and we’re thinking of adding a character. And he asked, ‘oh yeah, what’s the character?’ I told him it was an ex-angel. There was a long silence, until he said, ‘what?’ I explained it, and he laughed and asked me if I was out of my mind. He asked me if I had a script, and I said no. Then there was another silence, and then he said, ‘I will come.’ He told me he had it in his head, and he did his best work that way.

He came on a Friday night, and the two of us wrote the part on Saturday and Sunday. Monday we shot, and he was with us for ten days. It was one of the best times we ever had – Peter and I – on a film set.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You have worked in other mediums of art, including painting and photography. How does the art of cinema make your perspective different, as opposed to the other methods of expression?

**Wenders:** I am, as we speak, of two professions – I am a photographer and a filmmaker. They are distinctly different. As a young man, I thought I could do both, and I sort of was able to do that. But now it’s completely impossible. If I’m going on a journey as a photographer, I don’t think of any stories, I just take photographs. I don’t need a crew or trucks behind me, I can do it entirely on my own. It is a very different than being a filmmaker. I cannot do the two at the same time any more, but still one is complimentary to the other.

*“Pina” continues its limited release on January 20th. See local listings for show times, theaters and 3-D presentations. Featuring interviews with Pina Bausch, Regina Advento, Malou Airaud, Ruth Amarante and Rainer Behr. Written and directed by Wim Wenders. Rated “PG.”*  
[Click here \[16\]](#) for the HollywoodChicago.com review of “Pina.”



[17]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [18]  
Senior Staff Writer  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [17]

© 2012 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

**Source URL (retrieved on Mar 28 2024 - 4:32pm):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/17184/interview-iconic-director-wim-wenders-dances-with-pina>

#### Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/3-d>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/buena-vista-social-club>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/choreographer>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/dance>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/documentary>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/germany>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/pina>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/pina-bausch>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/until-the-end-of-the-world>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/wim-wenders>



- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/wings-of-desire>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/17165/director-wim-wenders-celebrates-choreographer-in-3-d-pina>
- [17] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>