

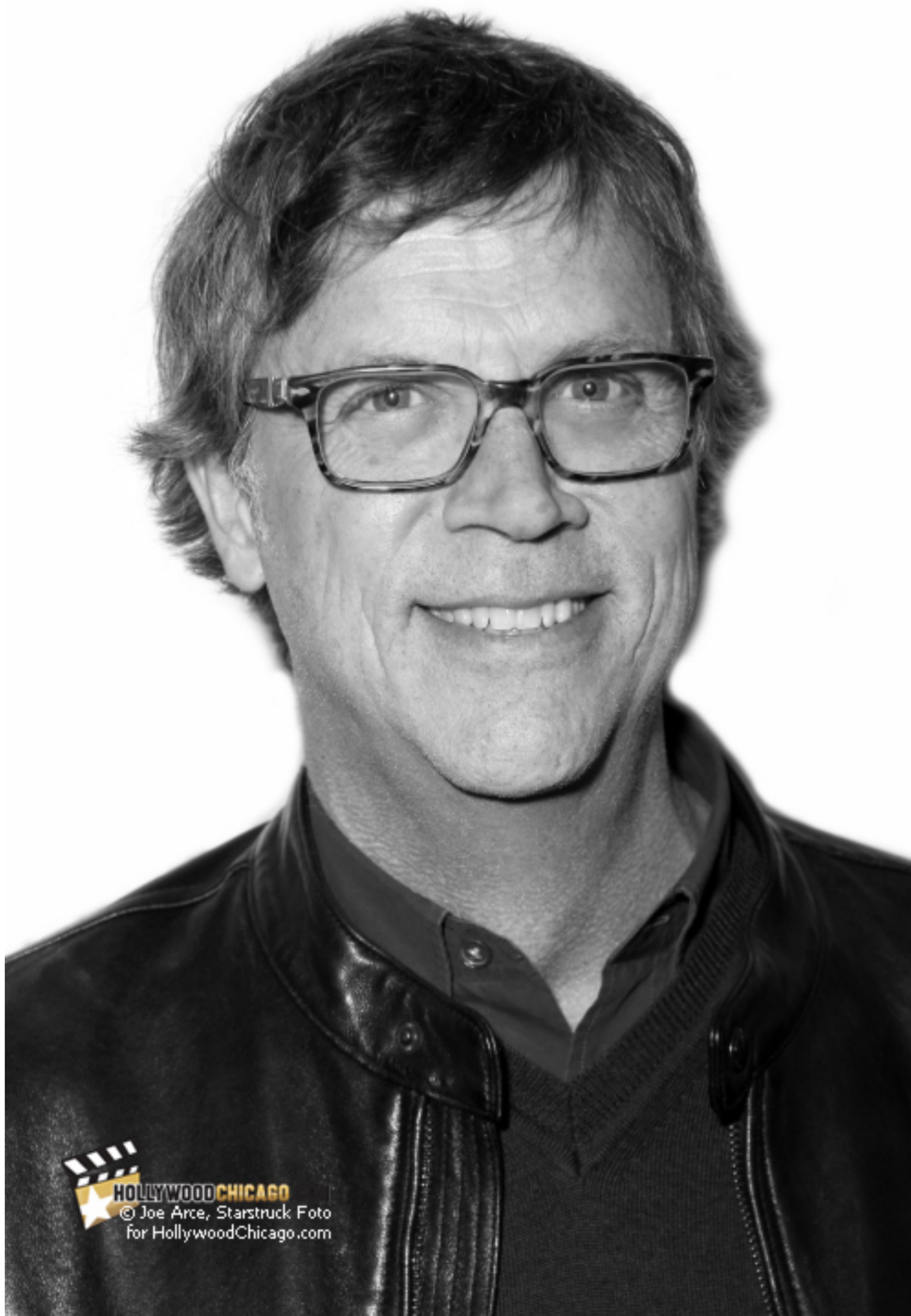
Interview, Audio: Director Todd Haynes Becomes ‘Wonderstruck’

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- [Brian Selznick](#) [2]
- [Carol](#) [3]
- [Deaf](#) [4]
- [Far From Heaven](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Interview](#) [7]
- [I'm Not There](#) [8]
- [Julianne Moore](#) [9]
- [Michelle Williams](#) [10]
- [Millicent Simmonds](#) [11]
- [New York City](#) [12]
- [Oakes Fegley](#) [13]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [14]
- [Podcast](#) [15]
- [Roadside Attractions](#) [16]
- [Superstar](#) [17]
- [Todd Haynes](#) [18]
- [Wonderstruck](#) [19]

CHICAGO – Todd Haynes is an American auteur, as every one of his films bear the distinct mark of his creativity. From his beginnings with the indie masterpiece “Safe” (1995) through unforgettable films like “Far From Heaven” (2002), “I’m Not There” (2007) and “Carol,” Haynes has made cinematic art. His latest film is “Wonderstruck.”

The film is adapted from a popular young adult novel by Brian Selznick, which was combined with distinct graphic art. Haynes use the art to dreamily interpret the book, as the film is set in the 1920s and 1970s New York City. Jumping from era to era is the catch of the story, as a deaf girl (Millicent Simmonds) from the ‘20s is interconnected to a newly deaf boy (Oakes Fegley) in the 1970s. The film features Julianne Moore in a dual role, and also features Michelle Williams.



Todd Haynes at the Chicago International Film Festival in 2015

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Todd Haynes first got attention with a controversial short film way back in 1987, entitled "Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story." It was the life story of the famous singer, told entirely by having the characters represented by Barbie dolls. His feature film debut, "Poison" (1991), won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, followed by "Safe" in 1995. The director and Moore teamed up again in 2002 for "Far From Heaven," which was nominated for four Academy Awards. The Bob Dylan biography meditation, "I'm Not There" (2007) teamed Haynes up with Cate Blanchett for the first time (she would also portray the title role in "Carol"), and his HBO miniseries "Mildred Pierce" (2011) garnered five Emmy wins. "Wonderstruck" is Haynes's seventh feature film.

HollywoodChicago.com spoke Todd Haynes for a second time, via a phone interview from Los Angeles.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your precision on re-creating eras are almost without peer. Which was more difficult in design and execution, the 1920s or 1970s, and why?

Todd Haynes: I have to say that the 1970s was more difficult, because there are many people who knew them better... also, the cinema of the '70s that we looked at showed the grit and garbage of New York back then. We knew all of that mattered, and all the textures had to be there. From the body types we cast, to the lack of underwear under their polyester clothing, [laughs] it was a method approach to casting the era.

The 1920s was a more lyrical perspective, drawn from the aesthetic of silent movies of that era. It was less subjective in style, because the newly deaf boy in the '70s was experiencing his problem for the first time.

HollywoodChicago.com: New York City has always been a lifeblood destination for the outsider and the rebel. Why do those personality types thrive in an environment like NYC, in your opinion?

Haynes: It varies – and even that statement varies – in the experience from era to era, and all the freedom that goes along with it, depending on who you are and what challenges you face. But New York is a city that also fought back against society's challenges, whether it was labor, civil rights, class and sexual orientation. It is a city that stirs up this dignity in a collective, and allows people to stand up for who they are.

What I found interesting about the film was the relationship between the girl and the boy in being deaf. What that entailed, and how different they were between the 1920s and the 1970s. How that was a story in itself, the change in the understanding of deafness and the belief that society could respect them.

HollywoodChicago.com: That seems to parallel the acceptance of other groups in our society...

Haynes: Yes, in my research, I found there was an affinity with the gay community and the deaf community. Many deaf people have remarked that gays seem to understand, because you can't tell whether you're gay or deaf from the outside, and there are ways you have to stand up to make yourself known... the way that minority cultures in general have to find their voice.

HollywoodChicago.com: 'Wonderstruck' is driven by the magic of connection and serendipity. Is it your point of view that we are all connected in some way, in the sense that we could all influence each other's destinies?

Haynes: Well, what we were trying to do in the film was produce a specific story about family, and a search for connectivity across generations, and the family you're searching for isn't necessarily that family that you find. And that the three people who find each other at the end of the film have to create their own family. That was another kind of sub-story of the New York City tapestry.



Millicent Simmonds in 'Wonderstruck,' Directed by Todd Haynes

Photo credit: Roadside Attractions

HollywoodChicago.com: What about the connection of cutting back-and-forth between the two eras?

Haynes: I love that Brian Selznick's story is about time travel, straddling that 50 year gap. It felt like there was a destiny, driving and offering serendipity, producing an inevitability. There were questions being posed whenever we cut from black & white (1920s) to color (1970s).

These questions of the two stories – that were sharing one movie – were going to be answered the way all mystery stories are, but first it had to work out the turns. Also, at a certain level, it would bring up questions about the definitions of time itself... by connecting these stories we show that it's both always changing and never changing.

In the audio portion of the interview, Todd Haynes talks about re-creating the silent movie era in the film-within-the-film, the glow of the 1970s cinematography and the force of nature that drives "Wonderstruck."

"Wonderstruck" continues its release in Chicago on October 27th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Julianne Moore, Michelle Williams, Millicent Simmonds and Oakes Fegley. Screenplay adapted by Brian Selznick, from his novel. Directed by Todd Haynes.

Rated “PG”



[20]

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