

Podtalk: Writer/Director Paul Schrader Blesses ‘First Reformed’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 21, 2018 - 4:17pm

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CHICAGO – Paul Schrader can absolutely claim the title of Cinema Icon with his 40 plus years of influence and involvement as writer or director in memorable films such as “Taxi Driver,” “American Gigolo,” “Raging Bull” and “Auto Focus.” His latest written-and-directed-by film is “First Reformed,” featuring Ethan Hawke.

“First Reformed” centers on Reverend Toller (Hawke), whose past includes a role as a military chaplain, and later as a father of a soldier who dies in battle. He ministers at a First Reformed Christian church, but the ministry is carried out mostly through historical tours (the church was a prominent stop for the Underground Railroad of the American Civil War era) and less through church membership. Toller’s life is altered when the wife (Amanda Seyfried) of a troubled environmentalist (Phillip Ettinger) seeks counseling for her husband. The results of that counsel upends all their lives, especially the minister who suddenly cannot face his own difficult circumstances.



Ethan Hawke in ‘First Reformed,’ Directed by Paul Schrader

Photo credit: A24

Writer/director Paul Schrader has had a lifelong fascination with flawed and isolated characters through his film work. He was born in Michigan, grew up in the Calvinist Christian Reformed Church, and the strict guidelines of that sect meant he did not see his first film until age 17. But that launched his career, as he received his Masters Degree in film studies, and became a film critic for the Los Angeles Free Press. In 1974, he wrote his first film, “The Yakuza,” which brought his work to the attention of the 1970s generation of “New Hollywood”... including Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma and Steven Spielberg.

Schrader first collaborated with Martin Scorsese by writing the script for “Taxi Driver,” (1976) and followed up with the director on “Raging Bull” (co-writer), “The Last Temptation of Christ” and “Bringing Out the Dead.” His first directorial effort was “Blue Collar” (1979), followed by high profile films including “American Gigolo,” “Cat People,” “Patty Hearst,” “Auto Focus” and “The Canyons” (a notoriously troubled 2013 production featuring Lindsay Lohan). “First Reformed” is Schrader’s 23rd film as director, and 24th as writer. HollywoodChicago.com caught up with Paul Schrader at the 6th Chicago Critics Film Festival screening of “First Reformed.”



Paul Schrader at the 6th Chicago Critics Film Festival
Photo credit: Deirdre Hayes for DeirdreHayesPhotography.com

In the following Podtalk, Paul Schrader speaks of his religious past as an influence for “First Reformed,” and his connection to the 1970s film era.

“First Reformed” opens in Chicago on May 25th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Ethan Hawke, Amanda Seyfried, Cedric the Entertainer, Phillip Ettinger and Victoria Hill. Written and directed by Paul Schrader. Rated “R”



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