

American Museum of the

Moving Image

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SPECIAL PREVIEW SCREENING

A PINEWOOD DIALOGUE WITH TIM BURTON

Wednesday, November 19, 2003

7:00 p.m.

BIG FISH

Columbia Pictures, 2003, 35mm print courtesy Columbia Pictures.

Directed by Tim Burton. Written by John August, from the novel by Daniel Wallace. Produced by and Richard D. Zanuck, Bruce Cohen, Dan Jinks. Original music by Danny Elfman. Cinematography by Phillipe Rousselot. Film editing by Chris Lebenzon and Joel Negrón. Production design by Dennis Gassner. Art direction by Jack Johnson and Richard L. Johnson. Costume design by Colleen Atwood. Principal cast: Ewan McGregor (as Young Edward Bloom), Albert Finney (Old Edward Bloom), Billy Crudup (William Bloom), Jessica Lange (Sandy Bloom), Alison Lohman (Young Sandy Bloom), Helena Bonham Carter (Jenny), Danny DeVito (Amos), Steve Buscemi (Nother Winslow), and Jeff Campbell (Jump Leader).

Screening followed by a Pinewood Dialogue with Tim Burton, moderated by David Schwartz, Chief Curator of Film.

Films directed by Tim Burton:

1979	<i>Stalk of the Celery Monster</i> (CalArts student film)
1980	<i>Doctor of Doom</i> (CalArts student film)
1982	<i>Vincent</i> (short film)
1982	<i>Faerie Tale Theatre: "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp"</i> (for television)
1982	<i>Luau</i> (short film)
1982	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i> (for television)
1984	<i>Frankenweenie</i> (short film)
1985	<i>Pee-Wee's Big Adventure</i>
1985	<i>Alfred Hitchcock Presents: "The Jar"</i> (for television)
1988	<i>Beetlejuice</i>
1989	<i>Batman</i>
1990	<i>Edward Scissorhands</i>
1992	<i>Batman Returns</i>
1994	<i>Ed Wood</i>
1996	<i>Mars Attacks!</i>
1999	<i>Sleepy Hollow</i>
2001	<i>Planet of the Apes</i>
2003	<i>Big Fish</i>

From the Columbia Pictures press kit:

If there's one thing that Oscar-winning veteran producer Richard D. Zanuck learned from his legendary father and Hollywood pioneer, Darryl F. Zanuck, it's to go with his instincts. "I know it may sound like a cliché, but he said that if a piece of material moves me emotionally, I should go with those feelings," says Zanuck. "The script for *Big Fish* moved me to tears every time I read it. Not only is it a story about fathers and sons, but there's a great deal of fun in it as well—giants, witches, circus performers. It's very entertaining as well as being a metaphor for living life to the fullest."

August initially approached Academy Award-winning producers Dan Jinks and Bruce Cohen (*American Beauty*) with his script. "What was so fascinating about the story was that we all have journeys in life, but Edward Bloom goes on his quests with more gusto than most of us would have the nerve to," says Jinks, "and that's what made it such a delight to read."

"Also," adds Cohen, "Dan and I were very much in sync with Edward's belief that what is so powerful about stories is that they can teach you how to live a great life and maybe how to think bigger and dream larger."

Jinks and Cohen were also in sync about who they wanted to direct the project—Tim Burton, to whom they sent the script. At the time, Burton was planning another project with Zanuck, a follow-up to their recent successful collaboration on *Planet of the Apes*. "But I thought *Big Fish* was one of the best scripts I'd ever read and so did Tim," Zanuck contends. "And we wanted to do it right away."

When August heard Burton was interested in directing the film, he knew he was the ideal choice to create that special blend of ingenuity and alchemy needed to bring the story of *Big Fish* to life on the screen.

What struck Burton about the material was its delicate balance between the epic scope of the tall-tales and the simpler, more intimate story about family dynamics. "I enjoyed the fact that it would go into moments of fantasy and then return to the poignant reality of losing a parent," says Burton. "The challenge for me was to maintain that balance in the visualization of the story."

Burton was perhaps the only person who had even a moment of self-doubt about his ability to do justice to the story. Zanuck certainly didn't. "As he's shown in films like *Edward Scissorhands*, Tim's stories have whimsy and fantasy with great heart. And when you think of the wacky, almost surreal *Ed Wood*, you also remember Martin Landau's moving performance as Bela Lugosi, which won him an Oscar as Best Supporting Actor. *Big Fish* offered him the opportunity to go even further, to delve into the complex universal issues that resonate between fathers and sons and also to exercise his great gift for visualizing the exotic and bizarre."

Burton's enthusiasm was palpable—and infectious—recall Jinks and Cohen. "One of the great things about Tim's response was that he would point to scenes in the script and say 'I can't wait to shoot that,'" says Cohen. "He also brought imaginative and tangible ideas that John then worked into the script."

Jinks adds "I'd say that one of the big selling points for Tim was that he is known as a great storyteller and this was a movie *about* great storytelling. If you look at such films as *Sleepy Hollow*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, they're exactly the kinds of stories Edward Bloom might tell."

Bloom's storytelling was definitely an attraction for Burton, the director says. "Here's someone who invents himself into an extraordinary person, someone who doesn't have much use for ordinary life and needs to embellish it, make it exciting. His stories are what make his life exciting. They give him a touch of magic."

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