

Program note for **Pinewood Dialogue with David Lynch** and
screening of **Lost Highway**

February 16, 1997

Series: *The Complete David Lynch*

LOST HIGHWAY

October Films, 1997, 135 mins., 35mm print courtesy of October Films.

Directed by David Lynch. Written by David Lynch and Barry Gifford. Produced by Deepak Nayar, Tom Sternberg, and Mary Sweeney. Photographed by Peter Deming. Edited by Mary Sweeney. Production and Costume design by Patricia Norris. Original score composed and conducted by Angelo Badalamenti. Sound design by David Lynch and Susumu Tokunow.

With Bill Pullman (Fred Madison), Patricia Arquette (Renee Madison and Alice Wakefield), Balthazar Getty (Pete Dayton), Robert Blake (Mystery Man), Robert Loggia (Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent), Michael Masee (Andy), Henry Rollins (Guard Henry), Gary Busey (Bill Dayton), Lucy Butler (Candace Dayton), Natasha Gregson Wagner (Sheila), Richard Pryor (Arnie), and Jack Nance (Phil).

From press notes for Lost Highway, October Films:

Set in a city that looks suspiciously like Los Angeles but which is actually a place of Lynch's own imagining, *Lost Highway*-like L.A.-is both blazingly modern and resolutely retro in look and feel. Dubbed by Lynch and Gifford "a 21st-century noir horror film," the film draws its plot, or rather, its plots, from classic film noirs filled with desperate men and faithless women, expensive cars and cheap motels....

Lynch trained and began his artistic career in painting-(he still creates canvases that are exhibited internationally)-so it is unsurprising that even his earliest work on film has been described in terms of painting. From *Eraserhead* onwards, his distinctive style has been called "expressionistic" and, like the expressionists, he places a premium on conveying emotions that are communicated by the distortion of color, shape, space, and time in a highly personal way. He has also been compared to the surrealists who, in the words of Andre Breton, believed in "the omnipotence of the dream." In keeping with this movement, his films are rebellious experiments in irrationality and absurdity that bring an almost psychoanalytic approach to sex,

dreams, and the unconscious.

Lynch himself disavows membership in any specific artistic "school," even as he acknowledges certain preferences and influences. "I love Surrealism and I love Expressionism," he says, "but I have never seen *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* until after I had done *Eraserhead*." He goes on to say, "Ideas are the thing, and they just come out in a certain way, based on what you love and what you're feeling. Later on, you find out that you're in some sort of school!"

Regardless of what label one tries to put on him, Lynch, like all modern artists-irrespective of their labels-brings a radically new attitude toward both the past and the present and, in his exploration of the film medium-a medium that has remained surprisingly realistic in its first century of existence-he reveals a modernism that has long been taken for granted in painting and music but which is rarely exhibited on screen. "In my mind," he says, "it's so much fun to have something that has clues and is mysterious-something that is understood intuitively rather than just being spoofed to you. That's the beauty of cinema, and it's hardly ever even tried. These days, most films are pretty easily understood, and so people's minds stop working."

Displaying an obvious affection for abstraction, Lynch's films have become increasingly non-narrative, fueled less and less by what one might call "story" and increasingly emphasizing mood, tone, feelings, and a highly subjective vision of the world. Unlike *Wild at Heart*, which was drawn from a pre-existing novel by Barry Gifford, *Lost Highway* was actually born from a mere phrase from one of Gifford's novels: "Barry wrote this book *Night People*," Lynch recalls, "and in it, it has a phrase called 'Lost Highway,' and he said 'Let's write it.'" Apart from this, Lynch and Gifford drew inspiration from film noir. "Barry and I called it 'a 21st century noir,'" Lynch recalls, explaining his affection for the genre as follows: "There's a human condition there-people in trouble, people led into situations that become increasingly dangerous. And it's also about mood and those kinds of things that can only happen at night. You can just take that," he concludes, "and run with it your own way."

From this departure point, Lynch and Gifford fashioned a script that actually subverts the rules of conventional filmmaking. Ending virtually where it begins (and full of interior repetitions), the film is structured somewhat like a circle, although it is far

less simple than that. Taking a twist at a pivotal point—a twist that turns the narrative inside out—"it's a Moebius strip," observes Lynch. "We talked about that while we were making it."

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