Biography: Alexander Payne

Alexander Payne is one of the most unique filmmakers working today. His respect for cinema and care for storytelling sets him apart from the studio system which owns Hollywood. In a time when most films cost tens of millions in A-list actors and special effects, Payne’s films are simplified to the core of storytelling - the characters. Each of his films mimic real life, with situations and people to which most everybody can relate. Perhaps one of the boldest elements of Payne’s filmmaking style, is his risk to handle characters which are neither good nor bad. Instead, he examines normal lifestyles, along with dramatic and comedic elements which we can find in our own experiences.

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Alexander Payne made his feature film debut with the critically acclaimed Citizen Ruth, which won first prize at the Munich Film Festival and for which Laura Dern won best actress at the Montreal Film Festival. He followed up with Election, a film which, in addition to enthusiastic reviews, earned him and writing partner Jim Taylor best screenplay awards from the WGA, the New York Film Critics Circle and the Independent Spirit Awards, as well as an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. At the Independent Spirit awards, Election also won Best Film and Payne Best Director. Reese Witherspoon garnered a Golden Globe nomination.

Originally from Omaha, Nebraska, Payne received B.A. degrees in History and Spanish Literature from Stanford University. Payne later earned an M.F.A. in filmmaking from UCLA. His thesis film, The Passion of Martin, screened at the 1991 Sundance Film Festival and at over 20 other festivals around the world and won many awards.
TRIVIA
- Has two brothers, Dr. George and Nick.
- Of Greek Ancestry. Family name was changed from Papadopoulos.
- Payne grew up down the street from billionaire Warren Buffett.
- Attended Creighton Prep High School in Omaha, Nebraska.
- Studied Spanish Philology at the University of Salamanca (Spain).
- Graduate of Stanford University.
- In 1984, Payne considered attending Columbia School of Journalism in New York, but went to UCLA instead.
- Alexander Payne graduated in 1990 from UCLA Filmschool with a MFA in Theater Arts.
- His thesis film "The Passion of Martin" was his breakthrough work, which is very uncommon.
- Worked at Universal Pictures, and wrote unproduced screenplays
- While in Los Angeles, he roomed with co-screenwriter Jim Taylor
- In 1992, he turned down the offer to direct "Romeo is Bleeding" and began writing "Meet Ruth Stoops"
- In 1999, he signed a $1 million deal to write and direct "Sideways" for Artisan Entertainment
- Owns the Winnebago driven by Warren Schmidt (Jack Nicholson) in "About Schmidt"
- Is on the short list of directors who has final cut rights to his films.
- Is a friend of David O. Russell.