

Hal Hartley's

THE
UNBELIEVABLE
TRUTH

Starring
Adrienne Shelly
Robert John Burke
Edie Falco

Originally Released in the United States 1990
20th Anniversary Edition DVD re-release October 2010

PRESSBOOK

Interview & DVD Screener requests may be directed to info@possiblefilms

CAST

Adrienne Shelley - Audrey Hugo, a senior in high school
Christopher Cooke - Vic Hugo, Audrey's father
Katherine Mayfield - Liz Hugo, Audrey's mother
Gary Sauer - Emmet, Audrey's boyfriend
Julia McNeal - Pearl, Audrey's friend, an orphan
Edie Falco - Jane, a waitress and co-worker of Pearl
Mark Bailey - Mike, Vic Hugo's employee, in love with Pearl
Robert John Burke - Josh Hutton, an ex-convict, reputed killer
David Healy - Todd, an aspiring talent agent
Matt Malloy - Otis, a troubled but thoughtful drunk

CREW

Hal Hartley - Writer, Director, Producer, & Editor
Michael Spiller - Director of Photography
Sarah Cawley - First Assistant Camera
Tammi Reiker - Second Assistant Camera
Carla Gerona - Production Designer
Kelly Reichardt - Costume Coordinator
Nick Gomez - Sound Recordist & Assistant Editor
Jeff Kushner - Sound Recordist
Frank Stubblefield - Gaffer
Chris Rogers & Rick Ludwig - Grips
Ted Hope - Assistant Director
Anne Ruark - Script Supervisor
Bob Gosse - Location Manager
Jerry Brownstein - Executive Producer
Bruce Weiss - Co-Producer
Post-Production Audio Mix - Reilly Steel
(with much thanks to Bill Nisselson and Sound One)

DVD authoring and package design by Kyle Gilman for Possible Films

Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1 / Running Time: 90 minutes

BACKGROUND

The Film

The Unbelievable Truth was shot in late September and early October of 1988 in and around the director's hometown of Lindenhurst, Long Island. Most of the cast and crew had attended the same college—the State University of New York at Purchase (SUNY Purchase)—in the early eighties and had begun to form the nucleus of Hartley's filmmaking gang. The film found a welcoming and encouraging audience at the 1989 Toronto Film Festival and was licensed to Miramax Films almost immediately. Earlier that year, the international sales rights had been licensed to Overseas Film Group and—with the film's positive reception at Toronto—was quickly invited to numerous foreign festivals. However, with the exception of The Netherlands, *The Unbelievable Truth* was only released theatrically in most countries after the release of Hartley's second feature, *Trust*, which was released worldwide throughout 1992.

Hal Hartley

(Excerpted from Talking Movies: Contemporary World Filmmakers in Interview by Jason Wood (2006 Wallflower Press, London & New York))

Undoubtedly one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary American cinema, Hal Hartley has continued to plough his own independent furrow, paying scant regard to cinematic fads and fashions or the dictates of the dominant mainstream cinema, and imposing his own idiosyncratic style and sensibility on established genres and conventions... As director, writer, producer, editor, and composer Hartley has amassed a diverse and distinguished body of work that to date includes ten features and numerous experimental shorter pieces... Teasing out the potentials of the medium to their fullest, there is the overriding impression that each of his films is part of a longer, continual work in progress in which his own capabilities as a director and his relationship to his spectators is constantly being challenged and redefined.

Born in 1959 in Islip, New York, Hartley grew up in Lindenhurst, a working class commuter belt of Long Island. The environment in which Hartley spent his formative years acted as a setting for his early output and also had a lasting effect on his depiction of blue-collar lives and the struggle with the class and culture dichotomy. It also informed Hartley's astute understanding of the dynamics between aesthetics and economy, instilling in the director a low-budget mindset that was to serve him well in a career founded on being very creative on limited means.

The 20th Anniversary Edition DVD

(Hal Hartley, from an email to editor, Kyle Gilman. January 2010)

"The Unbelievable Truth was licensed to Miramax for twenty-five years. The Miramax library of films was purchased by Disney. Disney sub-licensed the home video rights to a company called Anchor Bay. Anchor Bay's sub-license has expired and Disney has no intention of exploiting the film commercially in the few years remaining to them under the license. I just got off the phone with a very nice woman from the Disney legal department who thinks I might be able to sub-license the home video rights to the film for the period remaining. After 2014, the North American rights will return to me anyway. Will you design the packaging and author the DVD? I will release it in late summer or fall of this year."

INTERVIEW with filmmaker, Hal Hartley

How did you meet the actors: Adrienne Shelly, Robert Burke, Edie Falco and the others?

Robert had been at college with me, in the acting conservatory. So was Edie, but I didn't know her. She was a few years after us. Adrienne sent her headshot to our offices either in response to an ad I had put in Backstage or just out of the blue. I can't remember. But I didn't know her before that. Gary Sauer was in school with Edie. Julia McNeal was a friend of Nick Gomez (assistant editor, later a filmmaker and television director). It was like that—we were all working on one another's little films and meeting people. Making films was our social scene. Most of my friends were actors.

What were your hopes for the film at the time?

I suppose I believed the film could get a distributor if I could just get it done. I knew it was a very simple film, but it had definite laughs and a certain kind of crude poetry to it. There seemed to be a need for new, smaller, less conventional movies somehow. Everyone sensed it. I really knew very little about the film industry. I was encouraged by Jarmusch's films and the success they had had a few years earlier. I guess I hoped for something like that to happen—distribution, more films... Beyond that, I didn't know any better.

Were you surprised at the reception it received?

I have to admit I'm glad I was so naive at the time. Otherwise, I might have been terribly disappointed. We finished the film in the first days of January 1989 and spent months carrying the print around to distributors and film festivals. No one wanted it. Then, out of the blue, we learned we were in Toronto and I was invited to attend. It was a big success with the audiences there. Yes, I was surprised. But probably too excited to think about it clearly. Bruce Weiss did all the talking, the deal making, etc. I was thinking about the next film.

What are your hopes for it now?

I hope it finds a new generation of admirers. But I think it will be hard. I'm curious to see if the younger generation has any time for something like this. But, of course, there are the old fans too—many people write in to the website asking where they can find the film on DVD. So, we really tried to produce something that would be fun and interesting for them.

You're distributing the re-release yourself.

Yes, that's not so hard to do these days. The company has a website and it's a store. It's just as easy to buy something of mine from there as it is to buy it from Amazon or wherever. Not as cheap, though! Amazon is incredible! But still it seems people like a direct contact with the artist sometimes.

How did the documentary that is included on the DVD, Years Later, come about?

In 2004 I sold some licenses to a few of my films to an Australian home video distributor and they wanted what is called added value material—behind the scenes footage, etc. We never made that sort of thing on the earlier films. But it was really important for the Australians to have these things. So I suggested that if they paid a little more for the licenses I'd come up with something. I was able to interest Kyle Gilman, who eventually became my editor, and DJ Mendel, who is mainly an actor but who also directs films... They were interested in interviewing all of us—me and the actors primarily, but as many folks as we could gather from all the films. In the end it was only a few of the actors and me. We made these little added value films for the distributor but there was a lot of other footage left over. A few years after Adrienne's death I was able to return to the original footage and thought that maybe something should be done with it. And then, of course, we needed this added value material for *The Unbelievable Truth* re-release... So, we all came back to the footage and thought about what to do with it. There was really very little discussion of *The Unbelievable Truth*, so that was a problem. Adrienne and I seem to have been discussing *Trust*. And Tom, Martin, Bob... they all had some interesting things to say about some of the later films. After a while it seemed we should just address the entire 20 years since the first film was made. Finally, DJ rattled off my resume like I was being arrested or something and we cut together a collage from all the films. Twenty years of work in about a minute and a half. It feels like that sometimes!

What's it like for you to watch The Unbelievable Truth now?

I miss Adrienne. Otherwise... I'm surprised at how many of my major preoccupations are already there in this first film. It would be a good double-bill with *No Such Thing*. Not just because Burke is in both, but... Though they are wildly different types of film they both come at this cynicism, this defeat... these things in both films are overcome by a selflessness, a humility... ultimately a sanity one or more of the characters reaches at the end.

HAL HARTLEY FILMOGRAPHY

- 2010 - Possible Films 2 (collected short films 2006 - 2009)
- 2007 - Fay Grim
- 2005 - The Girl From Monday
- 2004 - Possible Films 1 (collected short films 1994 - 2004)
- 2001 - No Such Thing
- 1998 - The Book Of Life
- 1997 - Henry Fool
- 1996 - Flirt
- 1994 - Amateur
- 1992 - Simple Men
 - Surviving Desire (includes Theory Of Achievement and Ambition)
- 1991 - Trust
- 1990 - The Unbelievable Truth

BIOGRAPHIES

HAL HARTLEY: Filmmaker

Born in 1959, Hartley attended school in his hometown of Lindenhurst, New York, before going to Boston in 1978 to study art. He left art school after a year and was accepted to the State University of New York at Purchase and studied there from 1980 till 1984. His most recent feature film, *Fay Grim*, was released in 2007 and premiered at the Berlin and Sundance Film Festivals. In the meantime, his newest collection of short films, *Possible Films 2* (made primarily in Berlin where he lived for four years), was released worldwide in April 2010 on DVD and digitally from his online retail website possiblefilms.com. His other films include: *Simple Men* (Official Selection at Cannes in 1992), *Flirt* (1996), *The Book Of Life* (1998), and *No Such Thing* (2001). He has won awards at the Sundance Film Festival for his film *Trust* in 1991, the Tokyo International Film Festival for *Amateur* in 1994, the Cannes International Film Festival for *Henry Fool* in 1998, and the “Premi Noves Visions” award at the Sitges International Film Festival in Spain for *The Girl From Monday* in 2005. There have been retrospectives of his work in Rotterdam, Spain, New York, Norway, Korea, and Poland. Hartley is an alumni of the American Academy in Berlin. He was a lecturer at Harvard University from 2001 till 2004. He was made a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des lettres of the Republic of France in 1996. He lives in New York.

ADRIENNE SHELLY (b.1966 – d.2006): Audrey

Adrienne first became known as an actor for her teaming with director Hal Hartley on the acclaimed *The Unbelievable Truth* and *Trust*. She appeared in over twenty other films, including 2005’s *Factotum* with Matt Dillon. She wrote, directed and acted in three feature films, *Sudden Manhattan*, *I’ll Take You There*, and *Waitress*, which premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. *Waitress* was purchased by Fox Searchlight Films and went on to critical acclaim and box-office success. Another of her scripts, *Serious Moonlight*, is directed by Cheryl Hines, starring Meg Ryan and Timothy Hutton, and was released in theatres December 4, 2009.

ROBERT JOHN BURKE: Josh Hutton

Robert was in the same year as Hartley at Purchase and almost starred in the director's senior thesis film, *Kid*, but was prevented by the rules of the college about acting students working with film students. It was forbidden. However, Robert was first directed by Hartley as a sophomore at Purchase within the carefully supervised actor-director scene workshop class where they did an adaptation of James Joyce's short story, *The Boarding House*. Both gentlemen seem to remember they received an honors grade for their efforts. *The Unbelievable Truth* was Burke's first film and he went on immediately to work on Martha Coolidge's *Rambling Rose*, and take up the role of RoboCop (originated by Peter Weller) in *RoboCop 3* and many other films. He worked together with Hartley again in 2000 on *No Such Thing*, which premiered at Cannes in 2001. Most recently, he is a regular recurring player as Father Mickey Gavin on *Rescue Me*.

EDIE FALCO: Jane

Edie Falco is most known and loved for her roles of Carmela Soprano in the *Sopranos* on HBO and as *Nurse Jackie* in the show of the same name on Showtime. She also attended the acting conservatory of SUNY Purchase, but a few years after Hartley had studied in the film program. They were first introduced shortly after she graduated as they had many friends in common and—unknown to either of them—Hartley had been an art department production assistant on Edie's first feature appearance, *Sweet Lorraine* (1987). She acted in Hartley's second feature *Trust* (1991) as well as a cameo appearance in his *The Girl From Monday* (2005).

MICHAEL SPILLER: Cinematographer

Michael Spiller was in the same graduating class (1984) as Hartley at SUNY Purchase Film School and shot the director's senior thesis film. That shared experience was formative and Spiller went on to shoot all of Hartley's work until 2000, when he moved on to begin directing himself. Throughout the nineties, Spiller shot many episodes of classic TV series like *Pete & Pete* and *Sex In The City*, as well as features like *The House Of Yes*, *Garden State*, and *Drop Dead Gorgeous*. He is now a busy and award winning director of television.

JERRY BROWNSTEIN: Executive Producer

Executive Producer Jerry Brownstein was Hartley's employer when *The Unbelievable Truth* was conceived and produced. Since the mid-seventies Brownstein had had a busy television commercial production company of his own called Action Productions which—by the time Hartley was running errands, answering phones, and making coffee for the office—was principally engaged in making both television and radio public service announcements. When Hartley asked his boss to co-sign his application for a small bank loan with which he intended to make a 16mm film, Brownstein suggested he do a budget for 35mm, forget about the loan, and let him finance the undertaking. It turned out to be a good investment and by the time Miramax had licensed the film for North America, he and Hartley jointly set up True Fiction Pictures, Hartley's production and management company for most of the nineties. Brownstein would be in charge of Hartley's corporate financial affairs until 2000 when he closed his own New York offices and retired.

BRUCE WEISS: Co-Producer

Another producer, Bruce Weiss, often did business with Brownstein's Action Productions and suggested he might be able to bring further capital to the project. He did and—as the months progressed—was the representative for the film in dealings with domestic and international distributors. Weiss worked closely with Hartley and Brownstein to coordinate financing for *Trust* (1991) and *Simple Men* (1992). More recently, through his company Ironworks Productions, he has produced *Somewhere Tonight* starring John Turturro, and *Interview*, directed by and starring Steve Buscemi.

TED HOPE: Assistant Director

Hal's friend and aspiring producer, Ted Hope, came on to be Assistant Director because he was the only one who knew how to schedule a feature film. It was another fruitful collaboration as Hope would be both the Assistant Director and Production Manager of Hartley's second feature, *Trust* (1991), co-producer of *Simple Men* and *Amateur* (1992 and 1994, respectively) and producer of *Flirt* (1996). Of course, by then Hope had started his greatly successful company Good Machine with James Schamus and produced a number of Ang Lee's films amongst many others. He has

more recently started This Is That Production Company with his associate Ann Carey. He was a co-executive producer on Hartley's *Fay Grim* (2006).

POSSIBLE FILMS

Possible Films is Hal Hartley's production and management company. The company has spent much of the past two years establishing its website, possiblefilms.com, as a retail outlet for his films, music, and books as well as a public relations resource.

YEARS LATER

Added-Value Interview Documentary

Running Time: 16:45 minutes

Aspect Ratio: 4x3 (conventional television shape)

Producer: Kyle Gilman

Interviewer / Narrator: DJ Mendel

Camera: Richard Sylvarnes

Featuring interviews with:

Hal Hartley
Adrienne Shelly
Robert John Burke
Martin Donovan
Thomas Jay Ryan