

ALEXANDER VAN DER POLL
Correspondent

'He was as...tough and romantic as the city he loved. Behind his black-rimmed glasses was the coiled sexual power of a jungle cat. New York was his town. And it always would be.'

Manhattan (1979)



Woody Allen

Sex and the City

College of New York), he still managed to impress his English teachers and fellow learners with his satirical essays and creative writing assignments. Teachers would often call other teachers to the classroom when Allan Konigsberg was about to read his latest offering.

It was during his later years at high school that Allan Konigsberg legally changed his name, and started submitting material to major New York papers and magazines.

Later, during his unsuccessful college years, Allen would be paid \$20 a week for writing 250 jokes, all of which were used by established comedians; sadly, without credit. One of Bob Hope's most famous jokes, came from this time in Allen's career.

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s Allen continued working as a writer, for summer theatre, Broadway, and eventually television. He worked with some of the great comedians and writers of that time. In a dream come true for Allen, he managed to find a job writing jokes for the legendary Sid Caesar on his numerous television shows and specials. Earlier collaborations with Danny Simon (brother of Neil) also proved successful and provided him with many career-advancing opportunities.

During this time, Allen realised that he could use his own material to better effect if he developed a stand-up routine for himself.

In this new venture as stand-up comedian, Allen met with great success, and honed his craft on stages throughout the country.

By the mid 1960s Woody Allen made his cinematic debut. The Famous Artists Company approached Allen to write the screenplay for **What's new, Pussycat?** (1965). Starring Peter O'Toole, Romy Schneider, Capucine and Allen himself, it was a commercial success, but had suffered greatly on the editing floor. This caused Allen to disavow this picture, as little of his creative output survived the final cut.

In 1966, Woody took on another project. This project involved re-dubbing the plot of an inane Japanese film, called, **Kagi no Kag**. It had a foolish pseudo 'James Bond' plot, and

Allen's job was to change the story, through humorous dubbing. The result is an uproariously funny film about the hunt for a top-secret eggroll

New York. Nostalgia. Neurosis. A park bench overlooking the Brooklyn Bridge. These are all words and images that strongly call to mind the cinema of Woody Allen.

At once an enigmatic persona, and a familiar character, the best way to understand the nature of Allen is through his body of work. It is in his professional output that the spirit of that ultimate New Yorker may be found.

Born Allan Stewart Konigsberg on December 1, 1935, to second-generation Jewish immigrant parents, young Allan grew up in Brooklyn, New York, for most of this time living in double family apartments with a large extended family. (An experience which undoubtedly was the reference point for some of the vignettes in 1987's **Radio days**).

The young Woody Allen (he changed his name in 1952) had two great loves. Going to the movies, and New York City. It should come as no surprise then that these two passions feature prominently in his films.

Attending picture shows, or being obsessed by them, as in **Play it again, Sam**, (1972), feature strongly in such films as **The purple rose of Cairo**, **Annie Hall**, **Stardust memories**, **Crimes and misdemeanours**, **Manhattan murder mystery**, **Celebrity** and **Hollywood ending**.

Naturally, all these films are set in New York City or surrounds.

One cannot overemphasise the importance of New York City in Woody Allen's life, both personally and professionally. When, in 1953, 17-year-old Woody crossed the East River into Manhattan, it was his personal Rubicon. There was no going back for this young, aspiring comic, who had fallen in love with 'The City That Never Sleeps'.

Such success has Allen had with

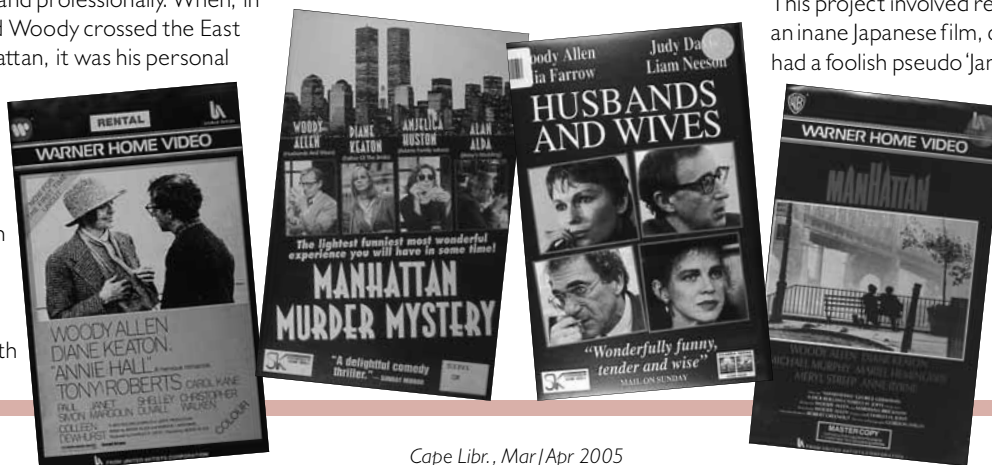
location shooting in New York that other directors filming in the city are hard pressed to find virgin territory for their projects. His Big Apple style and characters have influenced many other successful projects. Think of **When Harry met Sally** (1989), and the long running hit television series, **Sex and the City** (1998-2004). Indeed, the title of that show may very well provide an umbrella for Allen's output of the last thirty years. Sex and human relationships, both external, and internal (as in **Another woman**) form the essential key to all of his films.

Who could forget the endearing romance of Alvy Singer (Allen) and Annie Hall (Diane Keaton - her real name is Diane Hall) in that classic 1977 film? Or the turbulent marriage of Gaby (Allen) and Judy Roth (Mia Farrow) in **Husbands and wives** (1992). (The latter film, incidentally, uncannily foreshadowed the 'Soon-Yi scandal' of that same year)

All these elements of the cinema of Woody Allen make it difficult to pinpoint that single ingredient that makes a Woody Allen film. Of course, there is the humour. Perhaps the essence of an Allen movie! (Few people know of, or for that matter, remember, his dramatic output, in such underrated films as **Another woman** and **September**).

In fact, Allen seems to have been blessed with a talent for comedy from an early age.

Although, in his own estimation, an underachiever at school (he would later drop out of New York University and City



recipe. It was released in the United States as **What's up, Tiger Lily?** and laid the path for Woody Allen seriously entering the world of film.

Apart from a small role as Jimmy Bond in a humorous adaptation of Ian Flemming's **Casino Royale** in 1967, Allen's next foray in the world of cinema would see his debut as a director. In addition to writing the screenplay and starring in the lead, 1969's **Take the money and run** was the first bona fide Woody Allen film. Relying on slapstick for its kicks, it was an instant success, and laid the foundation for his next half dozen films, most presented in a similar slapstick style.

A major move away from his early style can be noted in his 1977 release, **Annie Hall**, in which he starred with Diane Keaton (the inspiration for the title character). Woody Allen had now broken onto the mainstream circuit, with what is today considered a modern classic.

Though he was disappointed with the result (a murder mystery sub-plot was cut from the final edit, to re-emerge years later as **Manhattan murder mystery**), the film

made Allen instantly recognisable to audiences.

His next success was **Manhattan** (1979). Perhaps the quintessential Woody Allen/New York film. Audiences were now more than familiar with the character of Woody Allen, and could not help believing that the funny little person, with the dark-rimmed glasses was making them laugh by playing himself on screen.

This blurring of the parts of actor/writer and the real Woody Allen, became the crux of his next project, **Stardust memories** (1980). In the film, Woody Allen plays a disgruntled comedian-turned-film-director, angry with an insatiable public, continually looking for hidden profundities and similarities between his work and real life. The film has an angry tone, which audiences took to heart, and the film was fiercely rejected and scorned by a dejected public.

From here on, Woody Allen never quite met with the same mass-public adoration, and his films of the next few years, became the estate of art-cinema, and his die-hard fans.

Yet despite this, Allen has continued

working, releasing at least one picture every 16 months or so, consistently for the last twenty-five years.

Woody Allen is currently the only director with a no-questions asked pre-approved film production contract. This means that his producers are happy to back any film Woody Allen wishes to make, with the only provision being that it comes in at under (a very limited) budget.

Fortunately, for Allen, top Hollywood actors, such as Julia Roberts, and many others line up for even the smallest part, at very small salaries, just for the privilege of the experience.

Though there have been some critical failures, Woody Allen has continued to produce a high level of cinema for decades on end. Allen has stated that he will continue to do this, for as long as he physically can. He admits to having an obsessive, workaholic need to continue, even if just for the sake of it.

Of his dozens of films since 1980, perhaps the most notable are **Hannah and her sisters**, **Radio days**, **Husbands and wives**, **Manhattan murder mystery**, **Bullets over**

Filmography

*1965	What's new, Pussycat?	(actor, screenwriter)	1987	Radio days	(narration, director and screenwriter)
*1965	Casino Royale	(actor, co-screenwriter)	1987	September	(director and screenwriter)
*1967	What's up, Tiger Lily?	(actor, and compilation and English screenplay)	1988	Another woman	(director and screenwriter)
*1969	Take the money and run	(actor, director and screenwriter)	*1989	Crimes and misdemeanours	(actor, director and screenwriter)
*1969	Don't drink the water	(screenwriter)	*1989	New York stories	(actor, director and screenwriter)
*1971	Bananas	(actor, director and co-screenwriter)	*1990	Alice	(director and screenwriter)
1972	Everything you always wanted to know about sex	(actor, director and producer and screenwriter)	*1991	Scenes from a mall	(actor)
1972	Play it again, Sam	(actor, screenwriter)	1992	Shadows and fog	(actor, director and screenwriter)
1973	Sleeper	(actor, director and co-screenwriter)	1992	Husbands and wives	(actor, director and screenwriter)
1976	Love and death	(actor, director and co-screenwriter)	1993	Manhattan murder mystery	(actor, director and co-screenwriter)
1976	The front	(actor)	1994	Bullets over Broadway	(director and screenwriter)
1977	Annie Hall	(actor, director and co-screenwriter)	1995	Mighty Aphrodite	(actor, director and screenwriter)
*1978	Interiors	(director and screenwriter)	1996	Everyone says I love you	(actor, director and screenwriter)
1979	Manhattan	(actor, director and screenwriter)	1997	Deconstructing Harry	(actor, director and screenwriter)
*1980	Stardust memories	(actor, director and screenwriter)	1998	Celebrity	(actor, director and screenwriter)
1982	A midsummer night's sex comedy	(actor, director and screenwriter)	1998	Antz	(voice only - animated feature)
1983	Zelig	(actor, director and screenwriter)	*1998	The imposters	(actor)
1984	Broadway Danny Rose	(actor, director and screenwriter)	1999	Sweet and lowdown	(actor, director and screenwriter)
1984	The purple rose of Cairo	(director and screenwriter)	2000	Small time crooks	(actor, director and screenwriter)
*1986	Hannah and her sisters	(actor, director and screenwriter)	*2000	Picking up the pieces	(actor)
			*2001	Company man	(actor)
			2002	The curse of the jade scorpion	(actor, director and screenwriter)
			*2002	Hollywood ending	(actor, director and screenwriter)
			*2003	Anything else	(actor, director and screenwriter)
			*2004	Melinda and Melinda	(director and screenwriter)

* Titles marked with an asterisk denote titles not available in WCPLS libraries.

Broadway, and **Mighty Aphrodite** (a huge success with the general public, not seen since the success of **Annie Hall** and **Manhattan**), and winner of an Oscar for its star, Mira Sorvino).

Woody Allen has achieved so much success in various aspects of the arts, that an article such as this could hardly attempt to cover it all. Allen is an accomplished clarinet player in a New Orleans jazz band (see Barbara Kopple's brilliant 1998 documentary, **Wild Man Blues** for more on this aspect of Woody Allen's career).

He has written, and published numerous plays and collections of humorous essays.

For now, let us consider the continually-growing legacy Woody Allen has given cinema-goers for the past 40 years. Love him, or hate him - Woody Allen, or more specifically the cinema of Woody Allen - has made an indelible impression in the world of celluloid. So, maybe we should take another look at the career and accomplishments of perhaps cinema's only true neurotic.

Academy of motion picture arts and sciences, and British Academy of film and Television Arts

Annie Hall (1977)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Picture
- Best Actor Nomination (Woody Allen)
- Best Actress (Diane Keaton)
- Best Director (Woody Allen)
- Best Original Screenplay (Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman)
- Bafta Awards*
- Best Picture
- Best Director (Woody Allen)
- Best Actress (Diane Keaton)
- Best Original Screenplay (Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman)

***Interiors (1978)**

- Academy Awards*
- Best Actress Nomination (Geraldine Page)
- Best Supporting Actress Nomination (Maureen Stapleton)
- Best Director Nomination (Woody Allen)
- Best Original Screenplay Nominations (Woody Allen)
- Best Art Direction Nomination (Mel Bourne and Daniel Robert)
- Bafta Awards*
- Best Supporting Actress (Geraldine Page)

Manhattan (1979)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Supporting Actress Nomination (Mariel Hemingway)
- Best Original Screenplay Nomination (Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman)

Broadway Danny Rose (1984)

- Academy Awards*

- Best Director Nominations (Woody Allen)
- Best Original Screenplay Nominations (Woody Allen)

Bafta Awards

- Best Original Screenplay (Woody Allen)

The purple rose of Cairo (1985)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Original Screenplay Nomination (Woody Allen)
- Bafta Awards*
- Best Film
- Best Original Screenplay (Woody Allen)

***Hannah and her sisters (1986)**

- Academy Awards*
- Best Picture Nomination
- Best Supporting Actor (Michael Caine)
- Best Supporting Actress (Diane Wiest)
- Best Director Nomination (Woody Allen)
- Best Original Screenplay (Woody Allen)
- Best Editing Nomination (Susan E Morse)
- Best Art Direction Nomination (Stuart Wurtzel and Carol Joffe)
- Bafta Awards*
- Best Director (Woody Allen)
- Best Original Screenplay (Woody Allen)

Radio days (1987)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Original Screenplay Nomination (Woody Allen)
- Best Art Direction Nomination (Santo Loquasto)
- Bafta Awards*
- Best Art Direction (Santo Loquasto)

Crimes and misdemeanors (1989)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Supporting Actor Nomination (Martin Landau)
- Best Director Nomination (Woody Allen)
- Best Original Screenplay Nomination (Woody Allen)

Husbands and wives (1992)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Supporting Actress Nomination (Judy Davis)
- Best Original Screenplay Nomination (Woody Allen)

Bafta Awards

- Best Original Screenplay (Woody Allen)

Bullets over Broadway (1994)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Actress (Diane Wiest)
- Best Supporting Actor Nomination (Chazz Palminteri)
- Best Supporting Actress Nomination (Jennifer Tilly)
- Best Art Direction Nomination (Santo Loquasto)

Mighty Aphrodite (1995)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Supporting Actress (Mira Sorvino)

Deconstructing Harry (1997)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Original Screenplay Nomination (Woody Allen)

Sweet and lowdown (1999)

- Academy Awards*
- Best Actor Nomination (Sean Penn)
- Best Actress Nomination (Samantha Morton).

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