

Actor Philip Seymour Hoffman dead at 46

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Actor Philip Seymour Hoffman has died at the age of 46. Hoffman's body was discovered in his Manhattan apartment on Sunday. The cause of death was an apparent drug overdose.

Hoffman had spoken candidly about his struggles with drug addiction in the past. Seeking treatment for addiction early in his adult life, the actor had reportedly been sober for more than two decades before suffering a recent relapse. His sudden, premature death is a genuine tragedy.

Hoffman was a talented performer of both stage and screen who was able to bring to life a remarkably wide variety of characters. Director Mike Nichols, who directed Hoffman on stage, once paid him this compliment, during an interview with Lynn Hirschberg: "I don't know how he does it. Again and again, he can truly become someone I've not seen before but can still instantly recognize."

Some of his best known films included *Boogie Nights* (1997), *The Big Lebowski* (1998), *Happiness* (1998), *Magnolia* (1999), *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), *State and Main* (2000), *Owning Mahowny* (2003), *Capote* (2005), *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007), *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), *Doubt* (2008), *The Ides of March* (2011), *Moneyball* (2011), *The Master* (2012) and *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2013).

In total, Hoffman amassed a remarkable 63 film and television credits (in addition, he performed regularly on stage) in his relatively brief career. His popularity with filmmakers and, more importantly perhaps, filmgoers belies the entertainment industry claim that the population wants only glamorous-looking performers. Here was someone who developed a following solely on the basis of the intelligence and seriousness of his characterizations.

If the majority of Hoffman's films were unsatisfying that was not the actor's fault. It speaks to the lack of

truly serious and substantial material available in both Hollywood and independent filmmaking today. Unquestionably, Hoffman sought out what seemed most interesting to him. No one could accuse him of not rising to a challenge. But often what the film industry considers "daring" and "cutting-edge" at present has mostly to do with various psychological and sexual entanglements, entanglements that are intriguing primarily to industry insiders and the social milieu they inhabit. Too often, one found Hoffman providing the only genuine or affecting moments in an otherwise disappointing film.

At times, his performances could be somewhat mannered or self-conscious, but one feels, again, this had to do, more than anything else, with an attempt to overcome deficiencies in the material available. He was trying to do a bit too much, because the given film was not doing enough.

Hoffman would win the Academy Award for a strong performance as author Truman Capote in the intelligent but limited *Capote*, which treated the writer's efforts to research and write *In Cold Blood* (1966), an account of a brutal quadruple murder in 1959. Hoffman was nominated three other times, for performances in *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007), *Doubt* and *The Master*.

Hoffman was also nominated for Tony Awards for his three appearances on the Broadway stage, which included performances in Sam Shepard's *True West* (2000), Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (2003) and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (2012).

Among Hoffman's most frequent collaborators was writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson. Hoffman was particularly memorable as Scotty in Anderson's *Boogie Nights*, a crew member on adult film sets who becomes infatuated with Dirk Diggler (Mark Wahlberg), a new star of the films. Hoffman's Scotty is the most outcast of a group of outcasts working in the porn industry,

hoping to somehow find their way to more mainstream success and recognition. Scotty is awkward and unfulfilled and, in the end, can't live with himself. Sometimes comic, sometimes tragic, Hoffman's performance is generally thoughtful and sympathetic.

In *Magnolia*, another of Anderson's films, Hoffman was Phil Parma, a nurse caring for terminally ill television producer Earl Partridge (Jason Robards). Parma is given the improbable task of reuniting Partridge with his estranged son. Here again Hoffman provided something warm and genuine in a very uneven and ultimately unsatisfying work.

Hoffman is also worth watching in veteran director Sidney Lumet's *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*, where he is one of two brothers, burdened by enormous financial pressures, who take part in a desperate plot to rob their parents' jewelry store. In *The Savages* (2007), directed by Tamara Jenkins and produced by Alexander Payne, Hoffman contributes another strong performance in the story of two siblings who must become the caretakers of their ailing father. Both of these latter films allowed Hoffman an opportunity to appear in works that addressed in one form or another the present social crisis. Such opportunities were rare.

Performances in Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), David Mamet's *State and Main* (2002) and Richard Curtis's *Pirate Radio* (2009) are also noteworthy, even if the films themselves are often lacking.

More recently, Hoffman had been portraying Plutarch Heavensbee, the manipulative propagandist and Secretary of Communications in the *Hunger Games* series.

One marks his passing with genuine sadness.



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