

Remembering Philip Seymour Hoffman

What a loss! Philip Seymour Hoffman was one of my favorite actors—more than an Oscar-winning “star,” he was so talented and courageous that he never allowed himself to be pigeon holed.

Although I remember him in *Patch Adams*, he really caught my attention in his next picture *Flawless* opposite Robert De Niro. He played Rusty, a drag queen from whom a very reluctant ex-cop had to take music lessons as a part of a rehab program following a stroke. The film is a comedy and yet also filled with some dramatic moments as De Niro’s character struggles not to like Rusty. (NOTE: *Flawless* should not be confused with a Michael Caine movie of the same title. Currently, Netflix does not carry the movie, but Amazon’s streaming service does offer it online.)

Mr. Hoffman is best known for his powerful portrayal of the title character in [Capote](#), for which he received the Best Actor Oscar, but he was equally memorable in his many supporting roles, such as the unorthodox CIA agent Gustav “Gust” Avrakotos who helps a US Congressman in [Charlie Wilson’s War](#), or “The Count,” a brash DJ at an illegal British radio station in [Pirate Radio](#).

I think my favorite supporting role from Mr. Hoffman was in the movie [Magnolia](#) as Phil Parma, a male nurse tending the dying Earl Partridge, played by Jason Robards. Actually, “supporting role” is not quite accurate because Paul Thomas Anderson’s wonderful film was a production by an entire ensemble of stars. Besides Hoffman and Robards the cast included Tom Cruise, Julianne Moore, William H. Macy, John C. Reilly, Alfred Molina, and Philip Baker Hall. Pretty good

company!

In *Magnolia*, Phil lives up the poster image of the compassionate nurse, setting out to fulfill the dying father's wish to be reconciled to his misogynist son (Cruise) who has become a popular motivational speaker. This is one of several stories of lost-ness and redemption (though not for all of the characters). The film ends with a strange phenomenon that harks back to one of the plagues in the story of Moses and the Exodus, making this film a delightful and puzzling tale.

Mr. Hoffman certainly showed that he could hold his own with the greatest when he played Father Brendan Flynn opposite Meryl Streep's Sister Aloysius Beauvier in [Doubt](#). Although Sister Aloysius was probably right in her suspicion that he had sexually abused a boy, Fr. Flynn seems like such a compassionate and charismatic priest that our hearts were given over to him rather than the righteous but unlikeable nun.

Even when Mr. Hoffman's parts were small, as it was as head game-maker Plutarch Heavensbee in [The Hunger Games: Catching Fire](#), he captured our attention any time he was on the screen. Fortunately for us as moviegoers, his next *Hunger Games* movie already has been filmed and is in post production now. But I do wonder about the final film in that series: What will they be able to do with his role?

There are many other films featuring him—some that I have yet to see—but I want to close with the one in which he both starred and directed. It is a “little film” that played mainly at art house theaters, so you might have missed it. Titled [Jack Goes Boating](#), the movie reminded me a bit of a much older film called *Marty* in which two ordinary people resigned to living life alone are brought together and find themselves falling in love.

I commend this little film to you as a suitable way of remembering this wonderful actor—and a way of imagining the director he might have become had he not become one more of our great talents succumbing to drug addiction.