

Finding the frequency of the Velvet Underground: Todd Haynes

By Jake Coyle

The most often-repeated thing said about the Velvet Underground is Brian Eno's quip that the band didn't sell many records, but everyone who bought one started a band.

You won't hear that line in Todd Haynes' documentary "The Velvet Underground," nor will you see a montage of famous faces talking about their vast influence. You won't even really hear a fairly full Velvet Underground track until nearly an hour into the two-hour film.

Haynes, the reliably unconventional filmmaker of "Carol," "I'm Not There" and "Far From Heaven," rejects a traditional treatment of the Velvets — fittingly, considering his uncompromising, pioneering subject. "The Velvet Underground," which debuted last Friday in theaters and on Apple TV+, is, like the Velvets, boldly artful, boundless and stimulating. You sense that even Lou Reed would be pleased by how the film refuses the obvious.

"I didn't need to make a movie to tell you how great the band is," Haynes said in an interview earlier this year ahead of the film's Cannes Film Festival premiere. "There were a lot of things I was going to be like: 'OK, we know this.' Let's get right to how this happened, this music, where these people came from and how this miracle of this group of people came together."

"The Velvet Underground" plums little-seen footage and fea-

tures a host of rare interviews, including founding member John Cale (who describes the band as striving for "how to be elegant and how to be brutal"), early disciple Jonathan Richman of the Modern Lovers, and Jonas Mekas, the late pioneering filmmaker who filmed the Velvet Underground's first live performance in 1964 and to whom the film is dedicated.

Resurrects

"The Velvet Underground" is most singular in how it resurrects the 1960s downtown New York art scene that birthed and fermented the group. Haynes patiently traces the fertile downtown landscape of Warhol's Factory, the explosion of queer New York and how Lou Reed and the Velvets were turned on by acts like the experimental drone music of La Monte Young or the subversive poetry of Delmore Schwartz. Art, avant-garde film and music collided. More than anything, the documentary is a revelatory portrait of artistic crosspollination.

"You really felt that coexistence and the creative inspiration that was being swapped from medium to medium," says Haynes, who notes such localized hotbeds now seem a victim of a digital world. "I crave that today. I don't know where that is."

"The Velvet Underground" is Haynes' first documentary. Previously, he's made knowingly artificial fictions of great musicians. His "Velvet Goldmine" was a glam-rock fantasia of David Bowie.

In "I'm Not There," rather than attempt the impossible task of finding a single actor who could play Bob Dylan, he cast seven.

"When I was doing research on the Bowie of 'Velvet Goldmine' or all the Dylans of 'I'm Not Here,' you come across the real thing," says Haynes. "I always felt like if I'm going to recreate this in a fiction form, I better do something different with it. So you're not comparing it with the real thing, apples to apples. You're in a different language, putting it in a different context and the frame is visible."

Haynes never met Reed, who died in 2013. But he saw him a few times at events like the Whitney Biennial ("I was too scared," he says). Reed gave Haynes his permission to use "Satellite of Love" in "Velvet Goldmine." Laurie Anderson, Reed's widow and a filmmaker, endorsed Haynes directing the film, and other estates, like Andy Warhol's, were supportive.

Footage by Warhol, the only one to previously really document the Velvets, is laced throughout the film. In split screen, the band members' screen tests for the Factory (usually seen as still photographs) play at length, with Reed or Cale staring provocatively out at you.

"The only film on them is by one of the greatest artists of the 20th century. That's so rare and weird," says Haynes. "There is no traditional coverage of the band playing live. There's just Warhol films. We just have art within art within art to tell a story about great art." (AP)

Film

Variety



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Rebecca Ferguson, (left), and Timothee Chalamet in a scene from 'Dune.' (AP)

Film

Villeneuve adds poetic touch to adventure film

"Dune' designed to be seen on big screen'

By Lindsey Bahr

It was the eyes that drew Denis Villeneuve to "Dune."

Long before he'd decided to become a filmmaker, he was just a teenager browsing a bookstore when he spotted the cover of Frank Herbert's 1965 novel. But it wasn't a hard sell for the biology-obsessed 14-year-old who had already learned that science fiction was a way to dream on a grand scale.

Then he read it and was mesmerized by the poetic, atmospheric story of a young man's heroic journey that dealt with religion, politics, destiny, heritage, the environment, colonialism and giant space worms.

"It became an obsession," Villeneuve, 54, said.

And it was just the beginning of a decade-spanning dream that is finally coming to fruition as his own version of "Dune" makes its way to North American theaters Friday.

Villeneuve is not the first filmmaker who has dared to fantasize about making "Dune," but he's the first to see his vision realized in a way that might satisfy both fans and novices. For a book that has inspired so much science fiction over the past 50 years, from "Star Wars" to "Alien," filmed adaptations have proved difficult. First there was Alejandro Jodorowsky's near-mythic movie slash 14-hour event that would have starred Mick Jagger, Orson Welles, Gloria Swanson and Salvador Dalí (chronicled in the 2013 documentary "Jodorowsky's Dune"). Then David Lynch's swing was a critical and commercial flop when it was released in 1984.

"Dune" seemed cursed until producers Mary Parent and Cale Boyter acquired the rights through Legendary and found out that Villeneuve, who had established himself as a filmmaker with that rare ability to make large scale films that are cerebral and commercially viable, was a lifelong fan. Plans were set in motion to try to make "Dune" once more — with a \$165 million production budget.

"My movie is not an act of arrogance," Villeneuve said. "It's an act of humility. My dream was that a hardcore fan of 'Dune' would feel that I put a camera in their mind."

The book was his bible and compass throughout the process. He kept it close on set so that the spirit of it was always nearby and encouraged his crew and

cast to read it closely as well. And he wasn't daunted by the outsized expectations. He's the one who made a sequel to "Blade Runner" after all (although that is a whole different story and one that he still thinks was a bad idea even though he'd do it again in a heartbeat).

"I will not say 'Dune' is an impossible task. I think it's a difficult one," Villeneuve said. "Creativity is linked with risk. I love to jump in with no safety net. It's part of my nature."

Part of that difficulty was homing in on a film that would appeal to die-hards and newcomers. The first step was convincing the studio that he'd need two films to complete the story. Although they agreed, the second has yet to get the official "go."

Universe

He and screenwriters Jon Spaihts and Eric Roth simplified the structure to focus on Paul Atreides, the young aristocrat whose family takes control of the dangerous, desert planet Arrakis, home to the universe's most valued resource, as an intergalactic power struggling between ruling families heats up. He had only one name in mind for the part: Timothée Chalamet.

"There's not a lot of actors like Timothée in the world," he said. "Timothée has an old soul. For a young man of his age, he has a really impressive maturity. At the same time, Timothée looks really young on camera."

And there's that "rock star" charisma that would lend credence to his evolution into a messianic figure that "will lead a world into chaos."

The film is packed with lauded actors, including Rebecca Ferguson as Paul's mother and Oscar Isaac as his father. The movie also has Jason Momoa, Josh Brolin, Stellan Skarsgård, Javier Bardem, Charlotte Rampling, Stephen McKinley Henderson and Zendaya, whom he led on a globetrotting journey to Hungary, Jordan, Abu Dhabi and Norway.

"I've been in these adventure films that really try to add a lot of emotion. But there's something that is so poetic in the way that Denis approaches this massive film and the scale of it," Isaac said. "Even if there's explosions, even if there's giant worms, he's just always looking at it through his poetic lens, which for me is totally, totally unique."

It was especially important to be in the desert to film the Arrakis scenes, which meant harsh conditions and sand getting, well, everywhere. But it was vital to do it on location.

"It would have been impossible to do on the stage or on a backlot," Villeneuve said. "Maybe I'm too old fashioned but that's the way I work."

"Dune" was originally slated to come out last year before the pandemic upended most theatrical releases. Villeneuve used that time to his film's advantage.

"It was very nice for me to have the chance to let the movie sleep a little, coming back to it, sizzle it," he said. "If people don't like the movie, I have no excuses because I had the time to do it and the resources."

But as welcome as the added time was, the pandemic also led to the decision to release all of Warner Bros. 2021 slate simultaneously in theaters and on HBO Max. Villeneuve responded at the time with a strongly worded open letter that ran in the trade publication Variety, that wasn't just about his film but the implications for the future of cinema.

Ten months later, the pandemic is still going and the release strategy has held its course, even as theatrical attendance ramps up.

"We are in a pandemic and that reality is twisted right now, and I totally understand if people can't go to the theater or people are afraid of the theater. I respect that and that's the priority. Health is the priority," Villeneuve said. "But the movie has been made, designed, dreamed to be seen on a big screen."

The film has made \$129 million so far during its international roll out. Now comes the test of the North American audience, who will have the option to go to the theater or watch it on HBO Max. Hanging on the line is the sequel — or, more accurately, the conclusion to the first film.

"I don't know when it's going to be decided, but it will come down to if the movie generates enough enthusiasm, if there's enough passion about it. We'll see. I'm at peace with that. I hope there will be a Part 2," he said.

Villeneuve's grateful that he gets to show the world at least part of what he's been dreaming about for almost 40 years.

"I had the time of my life making 'Dune,'" Villeneuve said. (AP)

HIBBING, Minn. A public art tribute to **Bob Dylan** was unveiled in Hibbing with the hopes of inspiring a new generation of young artists.

The display of the Iron Range town's most famous resident is located outside Hibbing High School, where the 80-year-old Dylan was a 1959 graduate.

On one side of the display, a brick wall features the announcement of the Nobel Prize in Literature that Dylan was awarded in 2016. The opposite side of the wall features a series of stainless steel panels that contain lyrics from more than 50 of his songs.

There's also a bronze chair, similar to one he would have sat in, that faces the school so people who use it will "have their backs to the lyrics, a physical representation of the songwriting process," said **Katie Fredeen**, president of the Hibbing Dylan Project.

The volunteer group spent five years and raised about \$100,000 to design and build the tribute.

The unveiling followed another tribute by group known as the Year of Dylan, which engraved a Dylan quote on a large rock on the Mesabi Bike Trail in Hibbing. The trail covers 135 miles of the Iron Range.

Dylan is an American singer-songwriter, author and visual artist. Often regarded as one of the greatest songwriters of all time, he has been a major figure in popular culture during a career spanning 60 years. Much of his most celebrated work dates from the 1960s, when songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind" (1963) and "The Times They Are a-Changin'" (1964) became anthems for the civil rights and anti-war movements. His lyrics during this period incorporated a range of political, social, philosophical, and literary influences, defying pop music conventions and appealing to the burgeoning counterculture. (Agencies)

CHICAGO: **Al Capone** may have died nearly 75 years ago but it's clear interest in the infamous Chicago gangster is very much alive after some of his prized possessions were auctioned off over the weekend for at least \$3 million.

The Chicago Tribune reports that Capone's family sold several of his belongings, including what was billed as his favorite gun, at auction in **California**, where his three surviving granddaughters live.

The event, called "A Century of Notoriety: The Estate of Al Capone," was held at a private club

in **Sacramento** and attracted nearly 1,000 registered bidders, including 150 who attended the nearly four-hour-long event in person.

Among the items up for auction was a bear-shaped humidifier as well as diamond jewelry and some family photographs. The most popular item proved to be Capone's favorite Colt .45-caliber semi-automatic



Fredeen



Dylan

pistol, which went for \$860,000. Most of the buyers' identities were kept private. But one whose name has been made public is **Kevin Nagle**, a Sacramento investor and business owner. Among the items that once belonged to "Scarface" Capone that he picked up was a decorative humidifier for \$120,000 and an 18-karat yellow

gold and platinum belt buckle for \$22,500. Capone's story is a familiar one, thanks in large part to a host of movies, television shows and books about the mobster. Called Public Enemy No. 1 after the 1929 "Valentine's Day Massacre" in which seven members of a rival bootlegger gang were

gunned down in a parking garage. Capone was convicted of income tax evasion in 1934. He spent 11 years locked up in **Alcatraz**, a federal prison in the middle of the **San Francisco Bay**, and died of a heart attack in 1947 in the **Florida** home where he and his associates were believed to have plotted the massacre years earlier. (AP)