

Episode 8 - Annie Hall (1977)

ALVY: There's an old joke. Uh, two elderly women are at a Catskills mountain resort, and one of 'em says: "Boy, the food at this place is really terrible." The other one says, "Yeah, I know, and such ... small portions." Well, that's essentially how I feel about life. Full of loneliness and misery and suffering and unhappiness, and it's all over much too quickly.

Introduction

ANNIE HALL is the 6th film written and directed by Woody Allen, first released in 1977.

Woody Allen stars as Alvy Singer. He has broken up with Annie, played by DIANE KEATON, and he's looking back on his whole life to see if he can figure out how he got here.

What do you say about ANNIE HALL? It's been over analysed to death. Every frame has been considered. Every scene has been parodied. Every line has been printed on a t-shirt. But hey, lets talk about one of the greatest films ever made one more time.

Welcome to the Woody Allen Pages Podcast, from me the creator of the Woody Allen Pages website. This week, episode eight, we look at 1977's ANNIE HALL - where it started, how it was made and how it changed everything for Woody Allen. Of course spoilers are everywhere - so go watch the film first.

ALVY: I feel that life is-is divided up into the horrible and the miserable. Those are the two categories, you know. The horrible would be like, uh, I don't know, terminal cases, you know? And blind people. Crippled. I don't know how they get through life. It's amazing to me. You know, and the miserable is everyone else. That's-that's all. So when you go through life you should be thankful that you're miserable, because you're very lucky to be miserable.

Conception and story

Woody Allen had no ambition to make a big step up from his films he had made so far when he approached making a sixth film. What would be ANNIE HALL started as just the next step on the journey he was taking.

He had made five fairly critically acclaimed, moderately successful slapstick comedies. In each film he was becoming a better director, and finding people he wanted to work with consistently.

His films had kind of been the same so far. Funny first - script and plot second. They were based around a premise - the future, or a South American country in revolution. And then jokes on top. He shot more than he needed and would find the film in the edit, depending on how the performances worked out.

And so it was that Allen approached his 6th film with the same idea. More jokes. More disconnected sketches. More of the same. The premise this time would be a murder mystery set in Victorian England. And after working with his friend MICKEY ROSE for his first two films, he chose MARSHALL BRICKMAN to help him write it.

Brickman was a TV comedy writer who had a previous life as a musician. Both aspects drew Allen to him. Allen liked funny people, and he started playing music with Brickman. Soon the two became friends and collaborators. They were actually going to make the murder mystery Allen's fifth film, to follow SLEEPER. As the pair came up with more and more ideas, Allen felt stuck and changed track. He knocked out the script for LOVE AND DEATH instead and managed to make it first.

When that was done, he was back on the murder mystery. He looked at Boston as a stand-in for Victorian England, but decided very quickly that it would be easier to just film in New York, and in contemporary times. Interesting that Allen still hadn't considered New York his default shooting location yet.

Back to the murder mystery. So who is killed and who investigates? Allen had a victim - Professor Levy. He's a neighbour who died by apparently committing suicide. But our characters know Levy - a philosophy professor who is an optimist. That sweet old man would never kill himself. Something was up. Our heroes start to investigate.

The origin of those heroes would lay elsewhere. Allen in the 70s really wanted to write a novel. He explored a couple of ideas and completed at least one novel that he sent to friends (which he ultimately rewrote as a script and filmed as ANYTHING ELSE). Another was about relationships, and starred Alvy Singer and his various ex lovers. The novel opened with a monologue from Alvy, talking about his break ups and introducing himself. It was a little like the

classic introduction to JD SALINGER's CATCHER IN THE RYE. That monologue remained intact to all the way to the final film.

ALVY: Annie and I broke up and I-I still can't get my mind around that. You know, I keep sifting the pieces of the relationship through my mind and examining my life and tryin' to figure out where did the screw-up come, you know,

So for whatever reason - Allen decided to mix the novel with his murder mystery, and put Alvy and his girlfriend Annie in the murder mystery. Allen and Brickman would walk around New York and Central Park, discussing ideas. Allen would then write it up, and send it to Brickman for comments, and the walks would continue.

Somewhere along the line, the novel essentially ate the murder mystery, and the mystery was abandoned, after much of it was written. Allen famously took a lot of it and made it into MANHATTAN MURDER MYSTERY in 1993. The Professor Levy character was added to CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS in 1989. There's more of this early script that ended up in other films - but we'll get to that later.

Ultimately where Allen and Brickman got to with the script was another fish out of water comedy. This time, it was an Allen type, in New York, going through his relationships, but we see what's going on in his mind.

Allen and Brickman wrote a whole bunch of sketches and strung them together, hanging them off a thread about Alvy and his exes. There was a trip to the underworld to meet the devil. There was an awkward dinner with a girlfriend's racist grandmother. Or Alvy talking to strangers on the street to get relationship advice.

It's actually amazing to discover the original idea and approach for Annie Hall wasn't that much different from how Allen approached his so-called Early Funny Ones. They had a fun through line and lots of sketches strung together. There wasn't much of an ending, just like his other scripts at this point. But that's ok, they would find the story in the edit.

There were two main innovations in Allen's screenwriting. One was the breadth and range of the sketches. They were starting to be funnier, show wider influences and become more cinematically ambitious. Innovation number two was Allen using his own life for material.

It wasn't really obvious to his fans, and he didn't talk about it that much in the years before ANNIE HALL, but Allen was a huge cinephile. He loved films and going to the cinema as a kid, and dreamt of being a filmmaker. He enrolled into film school at New York University but famously dropped out. You can see Allen's love of cinema in his early films - but they were references more than influences.

Allen was a product of his upbringing of New York in the 50s and 60s. New

York City was full of cinemas, probably more cinemas per square kilometre than any other part of the world. And they showed more than just the commercial stuff. Allen loved the Arthouse stuff, and the European stuff. Filmmakers he would talk about forever more like INGMAR BERGMAN, FREDERICO FELLINI, FRANCOIS TRUFFAUT and BILLY WILDER.

Then Allen became a comedy writer. Then a comedian himself. Then wrote plays and screenplays. Then starred in other people's films. His managers convinced him to do all this - as each step would lead to being a filmmaker. He made those early films that relied just on Allen's comedy skill as he learnt the craft of making cinema. But now, with the film that would be ANNIE HALL, he would bring those influences together.

COMIC: Oh, I met a big lumberjack...

ALVY: Jesus, this guy's pathetic. Look at him mincing around, like he thinks he's real cute. You wanna throw up. If only I had the nerve to do my own jokes.

You can see so much of Truffaut in the early sequence with the kids in school. It's the drab colours and street level style that resembles Truffaut's wonderful 1959 film THE 400 BLOWS. THE 400 BLOWS was semi-autobiographical, and sometimes I wonder if Allen started being semi-autobiographical because Truffaut did it. That its all just Allen playing around with another genre.

Allen threw linear narrative out the window, with a nod to the French New Wave. He had played around with French New Wave's erratic storytelling in BANANAS back in 1971. Now he was using it with style.

Then there's Bergman. Swedish director INGMAR BERGMAN is Allen's favourite filmmaker. And there's so much Bergman here. Bergman loved playing around with magical realism, and the way ANNIE HALL breaks into some impossible silliness is Allen's take a Bergman twist. Bergman usually does it for beauty - Allen is doing it for the jokes. The scenes where the characters walk into and actually talk to the past is a very Woody Allen take on Bergman.

ALVY: Look at you, you-you, -re such a clown.

ANNIE: I look pretty.

ALVY: Well, yeah, you always look pretty, but that guy with you...

JERRY: Acting is like an exploration of the soul. It's very religious. Like a kind of liberating consciousness. It's like a visual poem.

ALVY: Is he kidding with that crap.

YOUNG ANNIE: Oh, right. Right, yeah, I think I know exactly what you mean, when you say "religious."

ALVY: You do?

ANNIE: Oh, come on. I mean, I was still younger.

ALVY: Hey, that was last year.

Bergman is also an influence when it comes to music - or lack thereof. Bergman tended to avoid music as a cheap way of getting emotions. Allen tried to follow and would do so for this and INTERIORS. There is very little music in ANNIE HALL outside of DIANE KEATON's singing. But he would back out of that thinking completely by MANHATTAN in 1979.

There are so many other examples, and there's plenty of film classes that teach this stuff. But the point I want to make is Allen was using his cinematic influences better and in more obvious ways in ANNIE HALL. They were now part of the storytelling.

Allen was also throwing out cinematic conventions. He was growing more confident and didn't give a damn about the rules. It's easy to break the fourth wall in a novel where you read the character's thoughts. Allen thought nothing about bringing that into the script, and now ANNIE HALL is one of the most celebrated examples of breaking the fourth wall in all of cinema.

There's no better example of Allen mixing his European Arthouse love with his lack of care with convention than the subtitle scene. Alvy and Annie are on the balcony, making small talk while the subtitles tell a very different story. Allen spent years watching subtitled films - it's an aesthetic he is used to. But here he rewrites the rules, making the subtitles a mainline into our characters thoughts.

ALVY: So, did you do shoot the photographs in there or what?

ANNIE: Yeah, yeah, I sorta dabble around, you know.

ALVY: They're wonderful, you know. They have a quality.

ANNIE: Well, I would like to take a serious photography course soon.

ALVY: Photography's interesting, 'cause, you know, it's a new art form, and a set of aesthetic criteria have not emerged yet.

ANNIE: Aesthetic criteria? You mean, whether it's, uh, good photo or not?

It's pretty clear that the women in the film were based on the women Allen had known. Allison Portchnick has many similarities to HARLENE ROSEN, Allen's first wife. In a scene that was shot but never released, Portchnick, played by CAROL KANE, plays a cello. And Rosen was a piano player. They met young and their marriage floundered. Alvy's late night panic attacks, his existential dread and unhappiness, is similar to Allen's recollection of his first marriage in his memoir. He was basically a miserable git.

ALVY: You're like New York, Jewish, left-wing, liberal, intellectual, Central Park West, Brandeis University, socialist summer camps? The father with the Ben Shahn drawings? The really strike-oriented... Stop me before I make a complete imbecile of myself. ALLISON: No. That was wonderful. I love being reduced to a cultural stereotype. ALVY: Right. I'm a bigot. But for the Left.

Robin, the second wife played by JANET MARGOLIN, is a little like Allen's second wife, LOUISE LASSER. Although Lasser was funny and an actress in her own right, and she appeared in Allen's earlier films. She was more sophisticated and outgoing than Allen, who just wanted to stay home and watch sports. Allen would really write about his time with Lasser in the film ANYTHING ELSE.

ROBIN: What is so fascinating about a group of pituitary cases trying to stuff a ball through a hoop?

ALVY: What is fascinating is that it's physical. Intellectuals prove you can be absolutely brilliant and have no idea what's going on.

Then there is Annie. There's no point denying Annie is anything other than based on DIANE KEATON. Annie is one of her nicknames, and her real last name was Hall. It seems like a bigger deal now because it ended up being the film's title, but Allen did this sometimes. Like how he named a character in SMALL TIME CROOKS May because he had ELAINE MAY in mind.

Allen and Keaton met and dated in the 60s and had broken up by the mid 70s, and before she and Allen really had any major roles together onscreen. But she was a big influence on Allen - and until SOON-YI PREVIN, probably the love of his life. Allen gets lots of credit for writing great female roles, and Allen credits that to his relationship with Keaton. And surely any list of great Woody Allen female roles would have Annie on it, probably at the top.

Both Diane Keaton and Annie Hall were small town girls who moved into the big city. Both of them sang. Both have a brother who suffers from mental problems. And both wanted to be great and moved to LA, leaving someone behind.

There were apparently other elements in the original draft and it was far more about Alvy. Annie was just one of the strands. The rest was very much Alvy, a Woody Allen type, going from strange sketch to strange sketch.

Alvy would be based on Allen himself, as much as Annie was based on DIANE KEATON. Although Allen would later lament that people thought he actually lived under the roller coaster at Coney Island. But he did grow up in Brooklyn, and he wrote for other comics before getting into standup. Alvy's journey ends with him writing a play - a more serious play than what Allen had written by

this point, but it follows Allen's journey nonetheless.

Beyond the superficial similarities, Allen's worldview is on show here, in a way he hadn't done before.

Audiences knew Allen was a bit of a neurotic, but if you listen to his stand up and see his early films, he's the competent above-it-all smart ass. Or at least he believes he is, even when he gets beaten up. Here, he paints Alvy as a bit more of sophisticated character - three dimensional, with anxieties and flaws. He is undecided, confused and lost at the crossroads. And let's face it, unlike the leading men you would find in films in the 60s. Alvy was an unconventional leading man, adding another to a memorable series unconventional leading men starting to dominate Hollywood. See DUSTIN HOFFMAN in THE GRADUATE, AL PACINO in THE GODFATHER or JACK NICHOLSON in ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOOS NEST.

There are so many good moments in this film, but in terms of Alvy, I can't get past the scene where he rewrites his history with Annie into that new play. And then he tells us he knows what it is, it's his first play. That this is him coping, and you'll just have to bear with him. It's this kind of emotional grey area and direct honesty that hits home.

ALVY: What do you want? It was my first play. You know how you're always trying to get things to come out perfect in art because it's real difficult in life.

In his early films, there's barely a second that isn't designed to illicit a laugh. Here, Allen was willing to sacrifice a few laughs to bring a different feeling. But the film was still packed with ideas. Every scene was filled with references, super fast dialogue, and this frenetic energy. Especially Alvy and Annie, who talk super fast and are just sparking off each other.

ALVY: You're not gonna give up your apartment, are you?

ANNIE: Of course.

ALVY: But why? I'm moving in with you. But you've got a nice apartment.

ANNIE: I have a tiny apartment. I know it's small. And it's got bad plumbing and bugs.

ALVY: Granted. It has bad plumbing and bugs. You say that like it's a negative thing. You know, bugs are... Entomology is a rapidly growing field.

ANNIE: You don't want me to live with you.

ALVY: I don't want you to live with me? Whose idea was it?

ANNIE: Mine.

ALVY: It was yours, actually. But I approved it immediately.

ANNIE: I guess you think I talked you into something, huh?

ALVY: No! We live together, we sleep together, we eat together. Jesus! You don't want

it to be like we're married, do you?

ANNIE: How is it any different?

ALVY: Cos you keep your own apartment. We don't have to go to it. We don't have to deal with it. It's like a free-floating life raft. That we know that we're not married.

ANNIE: That little apartment is \$400 a month, Alvy.

ALVY: That place is \$400 a month?

ANNIE: Yes, it is.

ALVY: It's got bad plumbing and bugs.

But there are places where it slows down, which brings real contrast. They are the truly romantic scenes - like on the pier where Alvy and Annie share their feelings.

ANNIE: You know what? I like you. I really do like you.

ALVY: Do you love me? That's the key question. I know you've only known me a short while. ANNIE: I think that's sort of. Yeah. Do you love me? ALVY: Love is too weak a word for the way I feel. I lurve you. You know, I loave you. I luff you. With two Fs. Yes, I have to invent... Of course I do. Don't you think I do? ANNIE: I don't know.

More importantly, Allen wasn't just working on a surface level, with simple jokes that made you laugh and nothing else. There's the subtle joke in the Los Angeles part where Alvy thinks he's sick and can't eat. But he slowly starts to eat once he learns he doesn't have to go to an award show. It's not a laugh out loud joke, but it's clever. And it's a joke that says so much more about the character.

It's Allen becoming a great writer, using subtext, irony and more. Take the spider scene. It's one of Allen's super long takes. Keaton goes from coy to crying. And the boy that gets me is when Annie asks if anyone was at Alvy's when she called and Alvy lies. It's harmless, it doesn't matter, and he does it to spare Annie, who he loves. It's such a human decision - but it starts this second part of their relationship on a lie. It's so full of subtext and Allen doesn't do anything to highlight it - he just throws it in.

ALVY: I did it. I killed them both. What are you sad about? What did you want me to do? Capture 'em and rehabilitate 'em?

ANNIE: Oh, don't go, ok, please?

ALVY: What do you mean, don't go? What's the matter? Are you expecting

termites? What's the matter?

ANNIE: I don't know. I miss you.

ALVY: Oh, Jesus. Really?

ANNIE: Alvy? What? Was there somebody in your room when I called you?

ALVY: What do you mean?

ANNIE: I mean, was there... I thought I heard a voice.

ALVY: I had the radio on. I'm sorry - it was the television set. I was watching...

Not that this film isn't packed with laughs, regardless. Many of them have been parodied to death, referenced in other films and used as names of books and essays. The dead shark. I forgot my mantra. Brooklyn is not expanding. Such small portions. We need the eggs. La dee da, la see da. There's at least a dozen more.

A lot of the humour is situational as well. There was scene written where Allen played basketball with philosophers. Another was a parody of 50s suburban monster films but instead of the Blob it was a Jewish family. There's a parody of the animated Disney classic SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS.

Allen brought all his influences into the script. There's lots of Jewishness. There's psycho-analysis and sex. There's parents and death. There's a long section making fun of Los Angeles. And there's even a few shots at fame. Allen would later make films that focussed on just one or two of these ideas. But here he was trying to get them all in this one.

There's some wonderful payoffs within the sketches. Alvy's habit of using bumper cars to work out his aggression comes back when he's in California and he loses Annie again. Or the way Alvy suggests Annie go to college to meet interesting professors, and then she meets and falls for a professor. It brings structure to a film that seems to jump all over the place.

Allen was just full of ideas. In musician terms, it was like Bob Dylan circa *Blonde On Blonde*, or the Beatles circa *the White Album*. An artist with an overflow of creative power. He wrote more than he needed, and like a rambling double album, proceeded to record them all.

There's so many themes explored. Of course, there's love and relationships. Which Allen sums up so well with the egg joke. Throughout the film, Allen seems to pit open-heartedness with closed-heartedness.

I think it's odd that Woody was 40 something by the time the film came out. Brickman reckons that Allen put a lot of his feelings about turning 40 into the film. But he's also looking back. There is something very young adult about this film. The journey in your twenties, trying to make it as something. Annie in particular is trying to be a singer, and is lonely in the big city. Alvy is lonely in the big city when Annie is in California. That ache of trying to meet people. It's a

wonderful capture of those mid twenties when you're trying to find yourself.

ALVY: Lately the strangest things have been going through my mind. Cos I turned 40, and I guess I'm going through a life crisis. I'm not worried about ageing. Although I'm balding slightly on top. That's about the worst you can say about me. I think I'm gonna get better as I get older. I think I'm gonna be the balding virile type as opposed to, say, the distinguished grey, for instance.

The strongest element for me in this film is memory. This isn't a story told in order - it's a story told, and remembered. Even one of the key songs used in the film in SEEMS LIKE OLD TIMES, which is sung by DIANE KEATON. We know Allen likes to use songs where the lyrics echo his themes. And a song about remembering the past, with rose tinted glasses, is right on the money.

All those fantastic scenes are how Alvy remembers the events. We get it right from the beginning - the house under the rollercoaster at Coney Island. There's no house - just the memory that it felt that way.

That memory element makes the film seem incredibly intimate. All the filmmaking tricks help that intimacy. Alvy breaks the fourth wall and talks directly to us. Alvy let's all his anxieties and doubts show, just like in a memory, where we have no shield.

So as much of this film is about romance, or anxiety, or break ups or whatever, for me it's always about memory, and the intimacy of memory. The way it jumps around, the way it looks like references from films you love and the way it makes no narrative sense but makes sense to you. It seems like old times.

ALVY'S MOTHER: Brooklyn is not expanding!

Production and cast

Up until this point, Allen didn't really shoot a script in a real traditional sense. He had a lot of scenes, some through line, a cast, and shot more than he needed. He made sketch comedies. So even though Allen was growing in terms of ambition and better using his influences - the original script, which was unnamed at this point, was not unlike the ones that came before. What would really lift the film is the production and the editing, which were far from straight forward.

It actually took Allen six films before he made a one mainly in New York (and of course he shot scenes in Los Angeles). And if you include New Jersey, he

would not shoot a second of footage more than two hours from his house for another 18 years, until 1995's MIGHTY APHRODITE.

Over the course of those five early films, Allen slowly put together a team. Casting director JULIET TAYLOR was on board and would work with Allen for another 40 years. RALPH ROSENBLUM was editing, having worked with Allen since his first film.

New to an Allen production was ROBERT GREENHUT. He had met Allen on the set of THE FRONT, the 1976 film about the blacklist that starred Allen which was produced by Greenhut. He joined Allen's team on this film and would work with him for another two decades. MEL BOURNE starts a productive run as Art Director. And then a pair that would become an inseparable part of Allen's team for two decades - FERN BUCHNER on make up and ROMAINE GREENE on hair styling. Allen called the two of them The Salad Sisters.

But the real immediate and dramatic change in the production quality came with the cinematographer - GORDON WILLIS. Even if Willis had never worked with Allen, his place in cinematic history would be assured. He manned the camera for THE GODFATHER and ALL THE PRESIDENTS MEN. Allen had so far worked with people from TV or commercials. Now he had the cinematographer from the bloody Godfather.

Willis was a technical wizard. Over the next few films that they worked together, Willis brought to life any crazy idea that Allen had. There is an immediate improvement in the shot choices, the framing, the camera movement, the lighting and the colour palette. There's probably essays about all those elements in use in this film. Indoor, outdoor, day or night. Didn't matter. Willis made it look great. He also made it look consistent. And everything was cinematic. And he taught Allen how to think cinematically.

That wizardry helped Allen to openly experiment. Let's just talk about just two of the many inventive scenes.

Right early on there's something funny when Allen and Willis stage a scene that seems to be an empty street in New York. But we hear the conversation at a regular volume. Is this a voice over? Or a point of view shot? And then slowly two characters - Alvy and Rob, with Rob played by TONY ROBERTS - walk into the scene.

It is Allen's longest take at this point and it's disorientating compared to a more conventional tracking shot. It's even more jarring for a comedy where quick cuts to go with the timing of jokes helps with the laughs. Here Allen and Willis decide to mix the establishing shot with the meat of the scene. Allen would take this long take stuff much further in the years to come.

ROB: California, Max. Get the hell out of this crazy city.

ALVY: Forget it.

ROB: We move to sunny LA. All of show business is there.

ALVY: No. I don't wanna live in a city where the only cultural advantage is that you can make a right turn on a red light.

The other innovative scene that Allen would further refine is how he doesn't show who's talking sometimes. There's a scene in Central Park where Alvy and Annie go people watching. This time it is a POV shot but again it starts with the audience not knowing what we're seeing. We try and follow who is being talked

about. And then we work it out and it's hilarious. There's also a scene where we just hear voices and see a Long Island sunset. The result is extremely intimate. Like someone whispering into your ear.

ALVY: I think you're pretty lucky I came along.

ANNIE: Oh, really? Well, la-de-da.

But those are the more showy shots in a film full of inventive film techniques. I don't think it can be credited to either Allen or Willis completely. Allen had wild ideas but Willis was also willing to play. Take the simple scene with the teachers on the blackboard. To arrange them on the same blackboard as we pan across is a wonderful little cinematic trick. It doesn't mean much - it's just flair.

I love the look of the film. That scene at the pier at sunset is particularly beautiful. And modern, contemporary New York has never looked so romantic. Previously, New York on film was SERPICO or THE TAKING OF PELHAM 123 or MEAN STREETS. The gritty gangs and dirty roads are not here.

This was a very different New York on film. This is a world of rooftop apartments and late night book shops. Of lovers in Central Park and waiting in line at cinemas. And there's also Coney Island childhoods and Long Island holidays. Allen was starting to show the world what he loved about New York and the world would fall in love with it, starting here.

ALVY: Right, right. To get back to what we were discussing. The failure of the country to get behind New York City is anti-Semitism.

ROB: Max, the city is terribly run.

ALVY: But I'm not discussing politics or economics. This is foreskin.

ROB: No, no Max. It's a very convenient out. Every time some group disagrees with you, it's because of anti-Semitism.

ALVY: Don't you see the rest of the country looks upon New York like we're left-wing, Communist, Jewish, homosexual pornographers? I think of us that way sometimes, and I live here.

As well as the returning crew, Allen was still most comfortable working with people he knew on screen.

It's amazing that there was a moment when DIANE KEATON was not going to play Annie Hall. Allen based the characters on people he knew, but like the other two main women in the film, he was happy to just cast a strong actress in the role. Keaton herself was worried about being typecast. She had already started breaking away from Allen, and did more dramatic roles like THE GODFATHER and LOOKING FOR MR GOODBAR.

No matter where she wanted to take her career, this was the best performance she ever gave onscreen. And she was rightly awarded with every major acting award. How do you even analyse this performance? That she's likeable? Or that she's convincing? It's so much more than that. She is utterly unforgettable, decades on.

Keaton's range is incredible in this film. She has to be just as random and crazy as the script. She is fragile and broken in the scene with Alvy and the spider. And then later she is a woman on top of the world and in full control when she sings IT SEEMS LIKE OLD TIMES. And Keaton's singing didn't go unnoticed. The record companies came calling with contracts for albums, all of which Keaton turned down.

MUSIC - Seems Like Old Times, by Diane Keaton

Keaton wore some of her own clothes or put her unique spin on the clothes offered by the wardrobe department. The costumers didn't know what to make of her dress sense and Allen had to tell them to just let her be. Just, you know, let her be to create a fashion movement. Her outfits are incredible and so iconic that they could easily make an identifiable Halloween costume. Department stores would start to advertise clothes for people to have that ANNIE HALL look.

Not that Allen's look didn't become iconic. Allen's tweed jacket and later this green army jacket have been forever tied to him.

Tony Roberts is solid as Rob, Alvy's best friend. Robert's is Allen's good friend in real life and his casting here mixes fiction and reality even further. They call each other Max in the film because they call each other Max in real life. They found that yelling out each other's name in public when they were talking drew attention. So they made up Max. Roberts apparently lost his copy of the script at one point, and Allen joked that MEL BROOKS probably stole it.

ALVY: Max, are we driving through plutonium?

ROB: It keeps out the alpha rays, Max. You don't get old.

The rest of the cast are a series of memorable cameos. JEFF GOLDBLUM, SHELLEY DUVALL, PAUL SIMON, CHRISTOPHER WALKEN and many more pass through the film, but it's the Alvy and Annie show. Especially after it went through the final journey of the film - the painful editing and reshooting process.

What happened was the first cut, over three hours long according to some reports, wasn't working. It was too complicated and there was nothing cutting through. So Allen and editor RALPH ROSENBLUM started to cut the film down.

And they threw out a lot. Many scenes that were filmed, usually at major expense, were canned. Photos from some of the scenes were actually used in lobby cards promoting the film.

I've mentioned some of the scenes that didn't make the final cut that we know about. But mainly Allen cut anything that wasn't something to do with the part of the film that worked best - Alvy and Annie. The two ex wives had most of their scenes cut. A fourth woman, played by SIGOURNEY WEAVER, is reduced to cameo from far away. The scene visiting the devil was later rewritten for DECONSTRUCTING HARRY. A lot of stuff with Annie's family got cut. A lot more Los Angeles got cut, including Alvy being in prison. And Allen shot some new scenes to make sense of the film.

These deleted scenes are talked about sometimes as the holy grail. The footage apparently exists, but Allen has no interest in releasing any of this stuff. I would love to see it - but I think sometimes people think it might be more fabulous ANNIE HALL. But it doesn't always sound that way. It doesn't sound like the emotional gut punch that is the film as it stands. It sounds like lots of sketches that detract from the best Alvy and Annie bits.

PARTY MAN: Right now it's only a notion. But I think I can get money to make it into a concept, and then turn it into an idea.

It's kind of amazing how much Allen cut and that he was allowed to do so. Allen's contract says he could do whatever he liked - he had final creative control. And Allen wasn't precious if a scene that took a lot of time and effort was cut, if it didn't serve the story. Even a scene that was funny would simply be cut if it didn't serve a higher purpose. And Allen would work like this for the next decade or so. He would shoot more than he needed and cut things down in the edit. He would build in time for reshoots so Allen could make additional changes. And that reshoot time was baked into the contracts of the actors, crew and locations. And he would cut brutally. His films would be short - usually under 90 minutes and sometimes under 80 minutes.

The most important new scene was the ending. They simply didn't have one

and one day, on the way to the editing bay, Allen came up with the idea of the flashback of scenes from throughout the film, and the joke about the eggs. According to Brickman, who had been unhappy with the film to this point, it saved the film. It was poignant, romantic and cinematic. Without backing out into a happy ending. It's still an incredible ending, a huge gut punch. And once again we return to theme of memory.

ALVY: After that it got pretty late. And we both had to go, but it was great seeing Annie again, right? I realized what a terrific person she was and how much fun it was just knowing her and I thought of that old joke, you know, this guy goes to a psychiatrist and says, "Doc, uh, my brother's crazy. He thinks he's a chicken." And, uh, the doctor says, "Well, why don't you turn him in?" And the guy says, "I would, but I need the eggs." Well, I guess that's pretty much how how I feel about relationships. You know, they're totally irrational and crazy and absurd and but, uh, I guess we keep goin' through it because, uh, most of us need the eggs.

Also coming together in editing was the title sequence. Allen had played around with animated titles but loved the simplicity of INGMAR BERGMAN's title cards with a clean white font on black. Allen copied it, with a font that he liked - Windsor Light Condensed. He would add to it and have music and cast names in alphabetical order in later films. But the very recognisable Woody Allen credits sequence starts here. With a couple of exceptions, he would use it for the next 40 something films he would make.

The only thing left to work out was the name. For a long time the film had the title of ANHEDONIA. The word meant an inability to feel pleasure and comes from the same root as hedonism. No one could even pronounce it so Allen came up with other titles from the boring - like ANXIETY - to the very silly - like A ROLLERCOASTER NAMED DESIRE. But he settled on Annie Hall at the last minute.

ALVY: I can't enjoy anything unless everybody is. You know, if one guy is starving someplace, that's you know, it puts a crimp in my evening.

Release and reception

ANNIE HALL was released on 20th April 1977, through UNITED ARTISTS. It was his fifth film for the studio.

And, it was a sensation on release. Allen was already super famous by this point, but it took him to the next level - joining the pantheon of great directors. I don't know if you would say that Allen was anywhere near what you would call New Hollywood before this film. But that movement in American cinema was rewriting the rules, being led by directors like FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA, MARTIN SCORSESE, ROBERT ALTMAN, MIKE NICHOLS and more. And Allen would find himself caught up in the scene. In short, with ANNIE HALL, Allen made the jump from MEL BROOKS to MARTIN SCORSESE. And it justified the creative control that United Artists gave him.

It's hard to even start with the critical acclaim afforded to this film. It won just about every award. It beat STAR WARS to Best Picture at the Academy Awards. There were also best screenplay, best actress and best director wins. It was also the last time a comedy won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

Famously, Allen didn't attend the award ceremony. This was the first awards he was ever nominated for - and from day one he rejected the whole scene. He played in his jazz band that night instead and found out the next day that he won when he read the paper. He did relent on letting the award wins getting a place on the film's poster after his managers pretty much begged him.

ALVY: Oh really, they give awards for that kind of music? I thought just earplugs.

ANNIE: Just forget it, Alvy, okay? Let's just forget the conversation.

ALVY: Awards! They do nothing but give out awards! I can't believe it. Greatest fascist dictator, Adolf Hitler!

I, of course, love this film. And it's just not going to be fun for me to just gush about it for another ten minutes.

The one thing I do want to say, and always wanted to say, is it's almost unique as a great break-up film. There's great break up albums - albums like RUMOURS and BLOOD ON THE TRACKS, etc. This is a great break up film. Really, the only other one that I can think of is ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND.

And it's so honest. Allen pours his heart out. This film has more in common with the 70s confessional singer songwriter music than, say, THE GODFATHER. Like CAROLE KING's TAPESTRY or JONI MITCHELL's BLUE, it captured a beautiful, confessional, romantic feeling that doesn't date.

And really, people love this film - not because of the script's cleverness, the groundbreaking filmmaking, the costumes or any mix of single elements. They love it because they love Alvy and Annie.

Whatever multi coloured madness Allen envisaged, it transcended it. What Allen says here about them is fundamental to the human experience. That it

was done by a director at the height of his powers is a bonus.

ALVY: Hey, listen, listen.

ANNIE: What?

ALVY: Gimme a kiss.

ANNIE: Really?

ALVY: Yeah, why not, because we're just gonna go home later, right?

ANNIE: Yeah.

ALVY: And-and uh, there's gonna be all that tension. You know, we never kissed before and I'll never know when to make the right move or anything. So we'll kiss now we'll get it over with and then we'll go eat. Okay?

ANNIE: Oh, all right.

ALVY: And we'll digest our food better.

ANNIE: Okay.

ALVY: Okay?

ANNIE: Yeah.

ALVY: So now we can digest our food.

Fun facts

Some fun facts about ANNIE HALL. There are so many and if you want dozens more, you should check out our book, which we will talk about at the end. But for now, here's a couple.

Allen didn't really know the rules of filmmaking and was going with what felt right. And that included with the famous split screen scene where Alvy and Annie are in different psychology sessions and speaking in turn. Both scenes in the split screen in actually one - Allen and team basically built two sets and a real split screen.

ANNIE: That day in Brooklyn was the last day I remember really having a great time.

ALVY: Well, we never have any laughs anymore, is the problem.

ANNIE: Well, I've been moody and dissatisfied.

ALVY'S PSYCHIATRIST: How often do you sleep together?

ANNIE'S PSYCHIATRIST: Do you have sex often?

ALVY: Hardly ever. Maybe three times a week.

ANNIE: Constantly! I'd say three times a week.

There's that wonderful scene at the cinema line where Allen pulls out

MARSHALL MCLUHAN to prove his point. Life would be great if we could do that, but actually even Allen was unable to use his first choice - Italian director FREDERICO FELLINI. And McLuhan apparently took almost 20 takes to nail his part.

ALVY: Tell him.

MCLUHAN: I heard what you were saying. You know nothing of my work. You mean my whole fallacy is wrong. How you ever got to teach a course in anything is totally amazing.

ALVY: Boy, if life were only like this!

And of course, the winner of the TRUMAN CAPOTE lookalike contest is the actual TRUMAN CAPOTE. In 1976, a year before ANNIE HALL, he appeared in film for the first time with MURDER BY DEATH which was written by Allen's friend and former colleague NEIL SIMON. After ANNIE HALL, Capote never appeared in a film again.

ALVY: Him. Yeah, he's the Mafia. Linen Supply Business or Cement and Contracting I think. Oh geez. I just got my mustache wet. And there's the winner of the Truman Capote look-alike contest.

Wrap up

Thanks for listening to this episode of The Woody Allen Pages Podcast.

Next week - we look at Allen's love letter to New York. The real one.

PARTY MAN: Yeah. I forgot my mantra.