

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON



ON SCREEN

Week Four

Welcome to *Paul Thomas Anderson on Screen*

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Welcome to Week Four of *Paul Thomas Anderson on screen*, in which Anderson's talent for reinvigorating, even changing the shape of, a performer's career reached its first peak.

Following the success of the epic *Magnolia*, Anderson was determined to make a 90-minute film – and to test himself within the framework of a romantic comedy.

Adam Sandler was his chosen lead. The former *Saturday Night Live* star, best known for a series of goofy comedies, often of his own devising, was his chosen star.

Because of, not despite, previous Sandler's work. Paul Thomas Anderson was a fan. He made connect via Tom Cruise, during the production of *Magnolia*, and asked the comic's blessing to write a role with him in mind.

Seeing *Magnolia*, Sandler was briefly terrified that he had the chops to pull off what he imagined Anderson would ask of him. Likewise, Anderson's producers took some convincing that the art-house director's choice was remotely sensible.

Artistically, they needn't have worried. Sandler had always been a capable actor and would grow to become an extremely potent one in the right role. The film was as well-received as any of Anderson's previous work and became a firm favourite of many of his peers.

The box office, however, was not yet ready for Sandler the serious actor, it seems, and it barely managed to match its production budget. But it did free Sandler to pursue other roles, outside of his core oeuvre. (I enjoy referring to Adam Sandler as having an oeuvre, on the grounds that it causes snobs to go bananas.)

Without *Punch-Drunk Love*, no *Uncut Gems*.

Which would be reason enough for its existence.

FILM WEEK FOUR

Punch-Drunk Love (2002)

Saturday Night Live (1993)

Uncut Gems (2019)