

D. Paul Thomas

Director, writer, actor, and producer D. Paul Thomas is the co-director of the film *Of Things Past*, starring Michael Moriarty, Louise Caire Clark and Tara Reid. Over 37 years in the making, the film recently debuted on top VOD streaming platforms. While president of Victory Films, he directed and produced over 30 commercials, documentaries, and feature films, including *Years of the Beast*, *They Cry in the Night*, and *The Calling*. In film and on the stage, he has worked with such artists as Olympia Dukakis, Jason Robards, and Christopher Plummer. He directed the award-winning *And*, starring Tony-Award winner Ron Silver. His play *Bonhoeffer 1945* was a “Best Pick” of the *London Times*. Recently, with his colleague and *Of Things Past* executive producer Dr. Sam Mayhugh, he co-wrote *The Odyssey of King David*, and is currently creative director of TGA Productions.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Our readers would love to get to know you a bit better. Can you tell us a bit of the ‘backstory’ of how you grew up?

I grew up in the Midwest with its traditional values. Those values have served me well over the years, as I left college, where I was preparing for the ministry, and dove into “the wicked ways of the theatre,” and the rest, as they say...

Can you share a story with us about what brought you to this specific career path?

After 12 years in NYC, acting in some wonderful plays with wonderful artists, I felt drawn to LA and the film business, with its many opportunities. At the time, I was Artistic Director of the Lamb’s Theatre in the heart of Broadway, but my good friend, Ron Silver (Tony award winner/President of Actors Equity), had moved to LA and found me and my family a great house to rent in sleepy South Pasadena. It was just the change of scenery we needed.

Can you share the funniest or most interesting story that occurred to you in the course of your film making career?

Oh, gee, there are so many; one that comes to mind: I was directing a docudrama in the Amazon jungle of Peru, with a planned, post-filming trip to Machu Picchu as our award for a job well done. We got caught in an horrific rain/dust storm when crossing the Andes, and by the time we arrived a couple of days later at the summit of Machu Picchu, I was completely blind, having come down with an acute case of conjunctivitis. I was taken down the mountain, off to Lima, and flown back home to LA for immediate medical care. Moral of the story? Always leave something behind to see.

Who are some of the most interesting people you have interacted with? What was that like? Do you have any stories?

So many fascinating people: Olympia Dukakis, Dixie Carter, Christopher Plummer, Jason Robards, Sam Waterston, Michael Moriarty, and my dearest of friends (who left us too soon), Ron Silver. When I was doing *Three Sisters* with Olympia, I had the smallest role in the play (my initiation to acting at the Williamstown Summer Theatre). I had to “Enter, laughing hysterically,” which, as a “method actor,” I found somewhat challenging. I asked Olympia for her advice, and she suggested “a hefty shot of whiskey might help.” And it did! Ah, those days are loooooong gone.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

He’s an actor/director from NYC who directed me in six plays. His name, Albert Sinkys. Many knew him then. Few now, I suspect. We work in a transitory business. But Albert knew as much about the craft/art of acting as anyone I ever knew. His artistic imprint on my life was invaluable ... crazy Lithuanian that he was!

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

“Never give up.” Here we are, talking about a film (*Of Things Past*) I directed that has taken 38 years to see the light of day. It’s a marathon, my friends, not a sprint.

I am very interested in diversity in the entertainment industry. Can you share three reasons with our readers about why you think it's important to have diversity represented in film and television? How can that potentially affect our culture?

The world is diverse. Reflect the world! Who doesn’t love a rainbow. Show us a rainbow of thought, color, and personalities, and types in your work. Don’t do it gratuitously, but when the material calls for it. People are beautiful; show as many as you can in all their rich diversity.

What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now?

Several: *Chief* among them, a new feature with executive producer, Dr Sam Mayhugh of TGA Productions, based on a book he wrote, now (the script) titled, *Mr. Unknown*. It’s a story of abuse, loss, betrayal, and subsequent forgiveness and healing. All themes I enjoy exploring, both as a playwright and filmmaker.

Which aspect of your work makes you most proud? Can you explain or give a story?

I think I’ve addressed that above, perhaps? I don’t know, I guess sticking around long enough to see some of my more important work produced pleases me most. I’m so delighted that after 38 years, *Of Things Past* and the wonderful actors in it are going to

be seen. Michael Moriarty is brilliant in it, Louise Caire Clark seamless in her reprisal of the role, and Tara Reid let's everyone know that she's got some mighty fine acting chops!

Ok super. Here is the main question of our interview. What are your "5 things I wish someone told me when I first started" and why. Please share a story or example for each.

Well, here are a few things I wish I knew when I left Indiana for the wicked ways of the theatre: "It's not about fame and fortune." The great, late acting teacher, Uta Hagen, would explain that it's all about "the work," and she was right!

Secondly, "You're going to have to work your butt off." Doing *Long Day's Journey Into Night* with Jason Robards (one of our greatest interpreters of Eugene O'Neill) taught me that.

Next: "Get ready for some lean days ahead." I was shocked when standing in the unemployment line one day I turned around and there was the great Julie Harris. "What are YOU doing here," I asked. "Darling," she responded, "I'm in-between jobs. This is where I'm supposed to be!" We subsequently became friends.

The other lesson that took me a long time: "Don't believe your own press." When the play that I wrote, *Bonhoeffer 1945*, appeared Off-Broadway, we received good reviews except for *The New York Times*, which, in essence, killed a long run. Six months later, I'm doing the exact same play at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and the *London Times* made it a "Best Pick" of the festival. Go figure! But don't let the negative reviews/criticism nor the positive reviews/adulation effect you too much—again, it's all about "the work."

Finally, "Keep Busy!" Don't wait for that phone to ring. Be proactive. My transition to filmmaking/writing plays/screenplays/directing, all came as a result of my twenty years of acting. Look at the opportunities around you. Diversify! Experiment! Keep busy!

When you create a film, which stakeholders have the greatest impact on the artistic and cinematic choices you make? Is it the viewers, the critics, the financiers, or your own personal artistic vision? Can you share a story with us or give an example about what you mean?

To me, it's the "artistic vision." When I wrote *Bonhoeffer 1945*, not too many "stakeholders" wanted to hear about a dead theologian who participated in an assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler. The other day, I'm reading a book and there was a direct quote in it from my play! Apparently, the author had seen it! Let time and history take care of the results of your work. So much is out of our control. Just tackle the subjects and themes you feel intimately drawn to, that excite you. The journey is half the fun.

You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

I'm not a great one for "movements." I'm reminded of a quote from Janet Flanner, the

great writer for *The New Yorker Magazine* ("Letter from Paris," by Genet, 1925-1975), whose story I've put into a one- person-show, with Austin Pendleton attached to direct. (It's just taken us seven years to get it off the ground!) Here's her quote: "Man is wicked and cruel, so violent in his notions of 'improving the world,' that he scatters blood like a fish leaping from a lake, merely in pleasure at its own strength." One must be careful in starting or joining a "movement." Having said that, I've still not found a better moral compass than, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It's not always easy, but it's always worth the effort.

We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might see this. :-)

I'd enjoy sitting down over a cup of tea or a glass of wine with Paul Schrader. He's a filmmaker/artist whose work has always fascinated me.

How can our readers further follow you online?

I'm pretty much offline these days, by choice. I like flying below the radar. Keep your eyes open, there will be something else "popping" soon; or you can always contact me at dpaulthomas@mac.com. I like emailing. (You can watch *Of Things Past* out now on Amazon, Vudu, Verizon, and Spectrum!)

This was very meaningful, thank you so much! We wish you continued success!