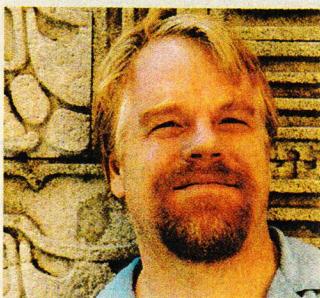


Hollywood Character

NEWSWEEK: Let's talk about your new film, "Love Liza." You play a widower.

PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN: At the beginning of the movie, he's literally four days a widower and he comes upon a suicide note from his wife. The story is about the first two months of someone grieving, and the very distinctive path he takes toward the next phase of his life.

You also star in "25th Hour," directed by Spike Lee. You play opposite Edward Norton, whose character's about to go to prison. He's going to jail for seven years. He calls up two of his old friends, one [played by Barry



Pepper] whom he's still very close with, and the other, played by me, he's not so close with anymore. It's his last hurrah before jail. But it's really a story about these three guys, who are all at points where there are choices to be made.

What new movies have you liked? I saw "Adaptation" and thought it was really great. I saw "Far From Heaven," which was fantastic. I saw "Bowling for Columbine," which was brilliant. I know there are going to be 5 to 10 great movies this year. I don't know what those people in the awards system are gonna do. I think everyone's gonna short-circuit.

Log on for B. J. Sigesmund's full interview

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THE EDITOR'S DESK

I READ THAT FIRST IN NEWSWEEK. WE like it when our readers can say that. And if you've been following the magazine this year, you may have had that reaction to two of the biggest news stories of last week. In late February, we ran a cover story on the brewing revolt among Massachusetts Catholics against Cardinal Bernard Law over revelations that Law protected a priest accused of molesting young parishioners. The Boston Globe broke the story, but our cover helped bring it to national attention. In the following months, predator priests became an American scandal. And last week, Law finally took full responsibility for betraying his flock's faith by offering his resignation to Pope John Paul II in Rome.

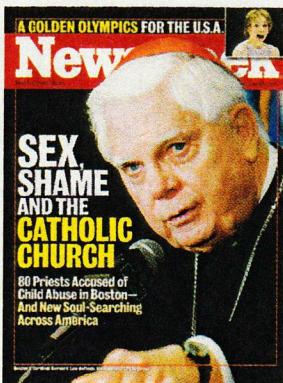
In October we published another cover story called "Operation: Smallpox," on the emerging plans to inoculate Americans against the dreaded disease as we readied for war against Iraq and its suspected arsenal of biological weapons. We received scores of letters about that issue, some thanking us, but others complaining that we were being alarmist. In Washington last week, President Bush announced that he had approved the emergency plan, and that he himself would get a smallpox shot along with the military personnel who will be the

first to be vaccinated. If you've been reading the magazine for a while, you may also remember a 1999 piece by Contributing Editor **Julia Reed** about the strange idiosyncrasies of the then Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. In our cover story this week, **Jon Meacham** teams up with Julia and **Eleanor Clift** to explain the history of regional racism, political opportunism and psychological denial that all led one of the most powerful men in Congress to make the remarks that have ignited a political firestorm, deeply embarrassing his party and president, and putting his leadership in grave jeopardy.

We're also proud of the reporting enterprise shown by NEWSWEEK's foreign-language editions. Recently Dokyung Lim, the editor-in-chief of our Korean edition,

Hankuk Pan, received the Kwanhun prize, South Korea's highest press honor, for her exposés of the suspect activities of relatives and associates surrounding President Kim Dae Jung. And **NEWSWEEK POLSKA**, our Polish-language edition, garnered two awards for investigative reporting—on a corrupt prosecutor, and on environmental groups that threaten lawsuits to shake down companies for big payoffs.

-MARK WHITAKER



HIGHLIGHTS

This week check out "Lighting Up the Holidays," our multimedia tour of Christmas celebrations across the United States. Log on for film clips from David Ansen's list of 2002's top 15 movies (page 62). Click through our interactive Special Report on the demographics of the U.S. Roman Catholic Church. Finally, cast your **Live Vote** on our home page: should Trent Lott resign his position as incoming Senate majority leader?

COLUMNISTS & LIVE TALKS

The Week Ahead on the Web



On Tuesdays, check out our new column *Diplomatic Diary*, written by Washington correspondent **Richard Wolffe**.

Read **Martha Brant's** column on the Bush White House, West Wing Story, published online every Wednesday.

Join **Jon Meacham** for a Live Talk on Sen. Trent Lott, plus politics and race, Wednesday, Dec. 18, at noon, ET.

Mark Starr follows professional and amateur sports in his online column, *Starr Gazing*, published Thursdays.

For an inside look at Congress, read **Eleanor Clift's** *Capitol Letter*, published online every Friday.

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Weekend

AUDIO | PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN



Listen to segments of B.J. Sigesmund's interview with **Philip Seymour Hoffman** about his two latest roles and more.

Press the **Play button** to begin

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Character Counts

Need an actor to play awkward? Eccentric? Deceitful? Depressed? No problem—just phone Philip Seymour Hoffman, the king of the memorable supporting part

By **B.J. Sigesmund**
NEWSWEEK WEB EXCLUSIVE

Dec. 12 — Can it be a coincidence that Philip Seymour Hoffman's next two movies are opening within a couple weeks of each other? Hardly—it's December.

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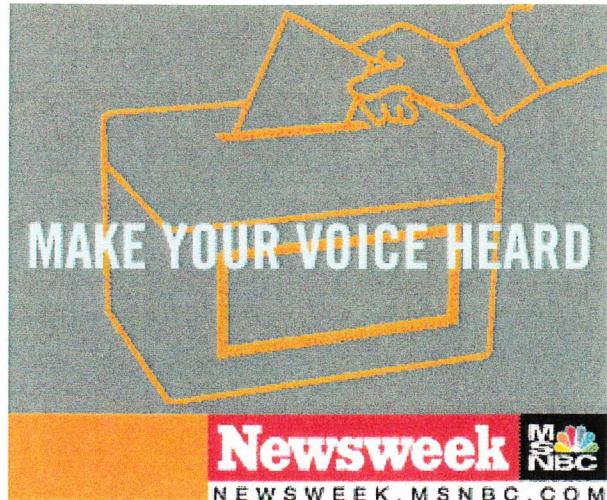
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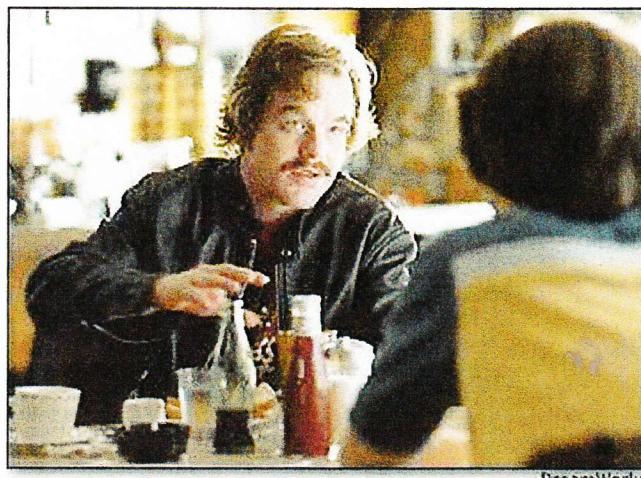
December 12 — Click the play button to watch the trailer for "Love Liza"

Says director Paul Thomas Anderson, 'I can't imagine Phil ever compromising'

AFTER STARVING adult audiences all year long, Hollywood studios this month will finally release a rush of intelligent movies in hopes of Oscar glory. Hoffman, who has long preferred smart, smaller movies to empty blockbusters, will see his next two films—"25th Hour" and "Love Liza"—open on Dec. 19 and Dec. 30, respectively. Says the actor, "You really don't want to release 'Love Liza' in July."

RELATED NEWS [Q&A: Philip Seymour Hoffman](#)

No, you probably don't. But Hoffman's got such a strong track record with audiences that you could see some fans turning down a day in the sun to spend an afternoon watching one of his movies—even one about a widower who, just a few days into his grieving, gets addicted to sniffing gasoline. "Love Liza" features Hoffman in yet another of the great character roles that have become his signature.



DreamWorks

Think over his oeuvre. He's played an awkward production assistant on a porno set in "Boogie Nights," a masturbating phone stalker in "Happiness," a drag queen in "Flawless," an arrogant rich kid in "The Talented Mr. Ripley," a gonzo rock critic in "Almost Famous" and, just this year, an unctuous newspaper columnist in "Red Dragon" and an unscrupulous phone-sex entrepreneur in "Punch-Drunk Love."



"25th Hour"

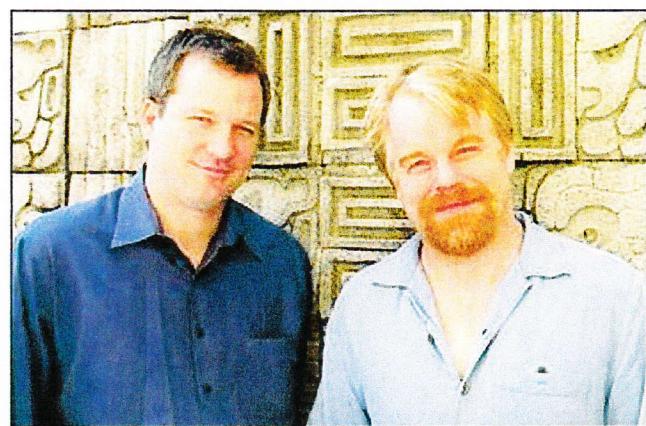
December 12, 2002 — Click the play button to watch the trailer for "25th Hour"

Touchstone

FREE VIDEO **START ▶**

"He's just gotten better and better over the years," says director Paul Thomas Anderson, who cast Hoffman as the lovesick film lucky who plants one on Mark Wahlberg's Dirk Diggler in "Boogie Nights." "Most actors get great and stay there, and I think Phil keeps rising." Did Hoffman always plan to become the king of the colorful supporting role? "No," he says, "but I was very conscious of creating characters, and I didn't want to repeat myself. I just wanted to play different roles and to work with good scripts and good directors."

His older brother, Gordy Hoffman, wrote the screenplay for 'Love Liza,' one of the first films to feature Philip in a leading role



Jeff Vespa / WireImage.com



Which was your favorite Hoffman performance?

• Lester Bangs in "Almost Famous"

The script for "Love Liza" came from his older brother, Gordy Hoffman, who first handed it to him in 1996. It took four years to get the financing together for the film, which begins when Hoffman's character, Wilson Joel, finds a suicide note from his dead wife in a sealed envelope. "It's the first two months of someone grieving, and the very distinctive path he takes toward

- Scotty in "Boogie Nights"
- Freddie Miles in "The Talented Mr. Ripley"
- Phil Parma in "Magnolia"
- Joseph Turner White in "State and Main"
- Allen in "Happiness"
- Rusty Zimmerman in "Flawless"
- Other

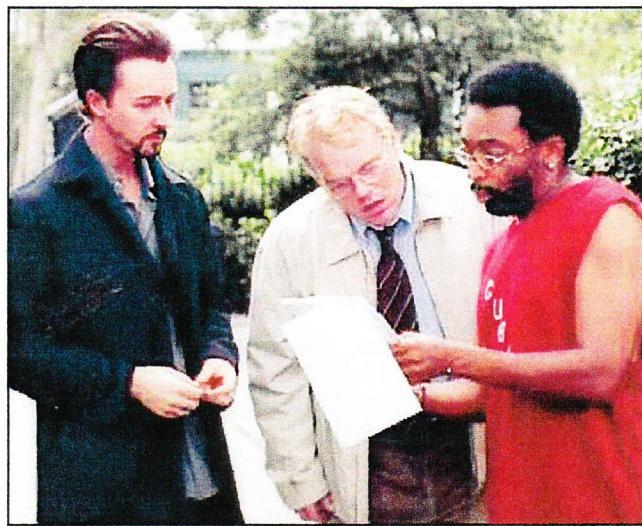
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'You're watching a wounded city around this story,' Hoffman says of '25th Hour,' which is set in a post-9-11 New York. 'And there are three very wounded men you're watching.'

the next phase of his life," says the actor, whose character carries the unopened letter with him for the entire film. "It's one of the most creative and insightful stories I've ever read about the topic."

In the 35-year-old's other upcoming movie, Hoffman again plays a man going through a life change. Spike Lee's "25th Hour" features Edward Norton as a guy who, the day before he goes to jail for seven years, makes an effort to connect one last time with those around him. Hoffman plays Jakob Elinsky, a close friend with whom Norton's character has lost touch—and who himself seems adrift. He's teaching English at his old high school, where he's tortured by both a crush on a 17-year-old student and his fears about taking on the responsibilities of adulthood. "He's stuck in the past and not a very courageous fellow," says Hoffman. "It's a great thing to look at because it goes on around us all the time."



David Lee

A film about transition, "25th Hour" is also noteworthy because it's set in a distinctly post-9-11 New York. While the characters only refer to the World Trade Center attacks a few times, it's clear that their lives have been affected. "Spike does a very powerful thing, which reinforces the story well," the actor says. In Hoffman's eyes, the movie's theme is, "If there's a time, it's now ... and how hard it is for humans—even when something like 9-11 happens—how hard it is to change whatever needs to be changed."

If Hoffman speaks more like a theater actor than a movie star, it's because he was trained on the stage and always doubted he'd make it in film. He grew up in Rochester, N.Y., where he played Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman" at age 16, and then studied drama at New York University. After graduation,

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Hoffman moved to Los Angeles, where his first big break came with a small but striking role as a sniveling prep school student in 1992's "Scent of a Woman." "I was 24 years old and I'd just been kicking around, auditioning for films for a couple of years, and doing theater and stuff," he recalls. "It was a very big part for someone like me to get."

No longer forced to wait tables, Hoffman worked pretty steadily in film for the next few years. And ever since "Boogie Nights" came out in 1997, he's been cast in incredibly diverse parts—though he's been featured in a leading role only a couple of times (there was "Flawless," now there's "Love Liza"). "The second banana [thing] is growing a bit tired for me," says director Anderson. "I would have to be guilty of writing supporting parts for Phil myself, but now that he has a bit of clout and an enormous amount of respect in the film business, he can take charge and create jobs for himself."

Hoffman's currently shooting an untitled romantic comedy with Ben Stiller in Los Angeles, and next summer he'll star as Jamie Tyrone in a Broadway revival of "Long Day's Journey Into Night." In the meantime, he's hoping to find some time to get to the movies over the holidays. The actor thinks it's going to be a great month. "I saw 'Adaptation' and thought it was really great. I saw 'Far From Heaven,' which was fantastic. I saw 'Bowling for Columbine,' which was brilliant," he says. "I know there's going to be like five to 10 movies this year that I'm probably going to say are really great. I don't know what those people in the awards system are gonna do." Whatever they do, they'll certainly be doing it with Hoffman in mind.



— **NEXT** New Hope for Oscar's Home

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3. Q&A: Cronenberg Discusses 'Spider'
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