



## Singer, Bryan (b. 1965)

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Bryan Singer in 2006.  
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Bryan Singer is a leading contemporary American director and producer of motion pictures and television programs.

Working within such popular genres as film noir and science fiction, he challenges viewer expectations by overturning standard narrative formulae and by developing exceptionally complex characters. In his films, he consistently emphasizes the fluidity and ambiguity of all identity categories, including those pertaining to gender and sexuality.

A gay Jewish man, he is acutely aware of the difficulties encountered by minorities. Therefore, many of his projects have been concerned with individuals and groups who have been stigmatized because of perceived differences from those who assume the authority to define what is normal. His *X-Men* (2000) and *X-2* (2003) have achieved mainstream commercial success while simultaneously enjoying cult status among queer audiences.

### **Origins: Childhood and Adolescence**

Bryan Singer was born on September 17, 1965 in New York City. At the age of two months, he was adopted by Norbert Singer, a corporate credit manager for Maidenform Company (a manufacturer of women's apparel), and Gloria Sinden, later a prominent environmental activist. He grew up in suburban New Jersey, primarily in the affluent communities of Princeton Junction and Lawrenceville.

Although troubled by the divorce of his parents when he was twelve years old, he remained close to both of them. In most of his movies, he has given small but noteworthy roles to his father and mother, as well to his stepmother, Mildred Singer.

While acknowledging the strong emotional foundation that Norbert Singer and Grace Sinden provided, he often has indicated that his status as an adopted child profoundly impacted his view of the world. In particular, he has related his fascination with concepts of identity to the mystery surrounding his origins. In an interview with Ruthe Stein, Singer indicated that he knows virtually nothing about his biological parents, except for the fact that his father lives in England. Thus, as he explained to Michael Joseph Gross, "There's this other heritage that could be anything."

From an early age, Singer was very aware of the factors that made him different from other children. In addition to being adopted, he was an only child, growing up in a neighborhood in which most families had numerous offspring. Furthermore, he and his family were the only Jews in a predominantly Catholic area.

On numerous occasions, Singer has emphasized that he was an awkward boy who was picked on by other children and who constantly challenged the authority of teachers and other adults. He has described himself as having been "kind of a dork" and "a really annoying kid."

Yet, although sometimes feeling isolated, Singer established during his childhood and adolescence close and enduring relationships. Among his early friends were writer Christopher McQuarrie, who has provided the screenplays for several of Singer's films, including *Usual Suspects* (1995) and *Valkyrie* (2008), and actor Ethan Hawke, who starred in the short film *Lion's Den* (1988).

### **Youthful Filmmaking Endeavors**

By the age of twelve, Singer already had demonstrated a passionate interest in and an exceptional talent for photography. In conversation with Joyce Persico, Norbert Singer recalled of his son, "He was always fooling around with photography. He had a camera, zoom lens and a dark room." When he was thirteen, he began making 8 mm. and 16 mm. movies in his backyard and garage, often assisted by Christopher McQuarrie, who persuaded his father's friends to appear in the productions.

Singer and McQuarrie experimented with a wide variety of themes and genres--including war films, staged with props acquired at an Army/Navy store; sci-fi stories, inspired by *Star Trek*; and even precocious examples of film noir, foreshadowing *Usual Suspects*.

Singer regards his current film work as a logical extension of his youthful endeavors. In an interview with Dayla Alberge, he stated, "My goal is to move the entire crew and cameras with the same agility that I did with my 8mm camera as a boy."

By 1984, when he graduated from West Windsor-Plainsboro High School, Singer had made over twenty movies, ranging in length from two to forty-five minutes. Despite this practical experience and his determination to become a movie director, he was rejected by all the university film programs to which he applied because of his poor grades. With a cumulative grade point average of only 1.9, Singer was ranked at the very bottom of his class.

### **Singer at the University of Southern California**

For two years after graduating from high school, Singer took classes at the New York School of Visual Arts while he repeatedly applied to the Film Production program at the University of Southern California (USC). Realizing that he probably would never be accepted by the Production Division, he finally applied to and was accepted by the Critical Studies program of the USC School of Cinematic Arts. Majoring in film history, he completed his B.A. there in 1989.

While at USC, he not only continued to make his own films, but he also assisted Film Production majors on their projects. In the process, he developed friendships with other openly gay men, including composer and film editor John Ottman, who remains one of his closest personal and professional associates. Singer met Ottman in 1987, while working as Production Assistant on *Summer Rain*, the thesis film by Howard Slavitt, who won the student Academy Award for this endeavor.

In 1988, Singer and Ottman initiated their professional collaboration by making *Lion's Den*, a short film (25 minutes) about five high school friends who realize that they no longer have much in common when they get together after their first semester of college. As a favor to his childhood friend, Ethan Hawke agreed to star in the film, even though he already was acting in major studio films. Co-directing the film with Singer, Ottman edited it on equipment that he had assembled in his apartment.

Shown in December at a charity event sponsored by the Directors Guild, the *Lion's Den* attracted favorable critical response. Among those in attendance at this screening was John Johnson, an American representative of Tokoma, a prominent Japanese manufacturing corporation. Immediately struck by the artistic potential revealed by *Lion's Den*, Johnson helped Singer secure funding from Cinema Beam, a

program established by Tokoma to enable emerging international directors to create full-length movies.

### ***Public Access***

With a budget of \$250,000 provided by Cinema Beam, Singer produced and directed *Public Access*, released in 1993. In developing the script, Singer collaborated with his childhood friend McQuarrie and with Michael Feit Dougan, a recent graduate of the USC School of Cinema.

Ottman assumed the responsibilities of both editor and composer when the individuals originally hired for these positions unexpectedly left the project. Ottman has worked as both editor and composer on many of Singer's subsequent films, including *Usual Suspects*, *X-2*, and *Superman Returns*.

*Public Access* is imbued with many of the themes that distinguish Singer's later work, including the pervasiveness of evil and the complexity of identity. The plot concerns Wally Pritcher, a young man who takes up residence in a seemingly tranquil suburban community. Initially, Pritcher seems to be a well intentioned, but ineffectual man--rather like Clark Kent, as portrayed in Singer's later *Superman Returns*. However, Pritcher soon emerges as a more complex and menacing character.

On the call-in show that he establishes on the local public access channel, Pritcher encourages viewers to make accusations against one another. As discord between residents develops, increasingly severe acts of violence engulf the community, which is on the verge of disintegration by the end of the film. Characteristically, Singer leaves Pritcher's motivations unclear, and one might even wonder if Pritcher had any responsibility for the chaos that engulfs the town.

*Public Access* was received enthusiastically at the 1993 Sundance Film Festival, where it was awarded the Grand Jury Prize for a Dramatic Feature. In the same year, Singer's film also won the Critics Award at the Deauville [France] Film Festival. However, mainstream American critics dismissed Singer's chilling depiction of life in a seemingly typical American small town as overly dark and cynical. *Public Access* was never distributed commercially in the United States, although it had a theatrical release in Europe.

### ***The Usual Suspects***

Elated by the enthusiastic reception of *Public Access* at Sundance, Singer and McQuarrie began planning their next project while still at the festival. Inspired by the title of a magazine article he had recently seen, McQuarrie told a reporter who inquired about their future plans that their next movie would be "called *The Usual Suspects*, so I guess it's about a bunch of criminals who meet in a police lineup."

Not surprisingly, the creation of the film proved to be a much more difficult process than this account of its almost casual beginnings might seem to imply. Singer spent nearly two years trying to arrange financing for the movie, and he required McQuarrie to rewrite the script nine times.

Released in 1995, *Usual Suspects* is Singer's breakthrough film. It established him as a major player in the film industry. Enthusiastically received by critics, *Usual Suspects* also was enormously successful commercially. Shot in only thirty-five days with a budget of approximately six million dollars, *Usual Suspects* quickly earned more than twenty-five million dollars in its initial American release alone.

The film won two Academy Awards: Original Screenplay (McQuarrie) and Best Supporting Actor (Kevin Spacey). Furthermore, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts nominated *Usual Suspects* as Best Film and gave it awards for Editing (Ottman) and Original Screenplay (McQuarrie).

Many factors contributed to the film's enormous popularity, including constantly surprising plot twists;

dazzling cinematography, incorporating unexpected camera angles, rapid cutting, and intensive close-ups; and the lush, orchestral score, deliberately contrasting with the brutality of much of the action.

Most of *The Usual Suspects* is narrated in a voiceover by Verbal Klimt (Kevin Spacey), the only survivor of the devastating harbor explosion that opens the film. Interrogating him is FBI agent Dave Kujan (Chazz Palminteri), who is eager to establish Verbal's guilt within the two hours that he can be kept in custody. Motivated to "kill time," Verbal presents a compelling account that absorbs Kujan's attention while distracting him from his goal of securing Verbal's imprisonment.

Shortly after Verbal is freed, both Kujan and the audience simultaneously realize that crucial aspects of his colorful story were false. The detective and viewers alike are left to wonder which, if any, of the events narrated by Klimt actually occurred. By making viewers question the reality of the incidents that they just witnessed, Singer adds a metaphysical dimension to the movie.

Although ostensibly paying homage to film noir of the Hollywood Golden Age, *Usual Suspects* actually is an innovative revision of that genre. Superficially, *Usual Suspects* may seem to be a typical heist caper, but virtually nothing in the film is what it appears to be. Typically, in a heist narrative, the culminating robbery is organized by a single major criminal, regarded as the mastermind. In Singer's film, the crooks seem to come together by chance--placed in the same holding cell as the result of a police roundup of the "usual suspects" for a crime that is never specified.

However, at the end of the movie, it seems probable that the men were brought together at the request of the powerful Keyser Söze, an internationally notorious Hungarian criminal, who chose to execute his own family rather than allow them to be murdered by his rivals. Thus, rather than rogues transcending the banality of the everyday world, the gang members are revealed to be cogs in a ruthless criminal organization, which parallels in its amorality and efficiency the large corporations that employed many of Singer's target audience. By showing the rough and aggressive gang members to be ultimately powerless, Singer interrogates the construction and meaning of masculinity in modern society.

Also challenging the validity of stable binary gender categories is the concluding revelation that the weak and supposedly crippled and dependent Verbal Klimt is the strong and ruthless Keyser Söze.

Throughout much of the film, Spacey as Verbal mimics patterns of behavior, conventionally associated with female characters in action films. Throughout his interrogation by Kujan, Verbal appears vulnerable and effeminate. Denying Kujan's suggestion that fellow gang member Dean Keaton is Keyser Söze, Verbal insists almost pathetically, "He was my friend." Frustrated in his attempts to use the lighter given to him by Kujan, Verbal leans demurely toward the detective as he asks him to for a light.

Moreover, Verbal vividly fulfills the classic role of the femme fatale in film noir when he encourages Keaton to participate in the heist and to abandon his relationship with his fiancée, Edie Finneran (Suzy Amis). Sitting next to him on steps in Keaton's apartment, Verbal elicits his sympathy by emphasizing his own weakness and his need for Keaton's protection.

As Larsen has noted, "Spacey's performance is ambiguous enough to suggest that Verbal is infatuated with Keaton." Through his successful seduction of Keaton, Verbal eradicates the only heterosexual relationship in the film. With the exclusion of Edie, *The Usual Suspects* becomes an exclusively homosocial space.

During the entire course of the film, Edie and Keaton have only one intimate moment together--as they stand outside the police station, following the release of the suspects. Even in this scene, however, Edie and Keaton are not really alone, as they are observed by the other suspects, scattered around the public space in front of the station. Although the other men ostensibly are trying to compel Keaton to participate

in their recently hatched plot, it is easy to suppose that they have something else on their minds. Rapidly alternating close-up shots of the men's intently staring faces create the impression that all of them, including Keaton, are cruising one another.

Throughout the film, Singer explores the intersections of homophobia, homoeroticism, and violence. In an interview with Jonathan Romney, Singer clarified this intention: "There was a very homoerotic sense of humour on the set. I think that's essential--ever since those guys got together to kill Julius Caesar. Bunch of guys in a bath house talking about killing!"

Repeatedly, the gang members assert their dominance through references to male-male sexual acts. For example, in his voiceover narration, Verbal praises his associates by asserting, "These guys would never bend over for anybody." Later, Verbal proclaims the gang's success in getting revenge against corrupt policemen by ridiculing the cops as passive victims of homosexual rape: "Everybody got it right in the ass, from the chief on down. It was beautiful!"

Homoerotic repartee helps to establish and solidify the camaraderie among the gang members. A typical exchange occurs in the holding cell, where the men become acquainted with one another and determine to get revenge on the police. When Fenster (Benicio del Toro) complains about a policeman fingering his anus, Hockney (Kevin Pollack) says, "I didn't know it was Friday." In response, Fenster asks, "Do you want some?" Broadly grinning as he shakes his head up and down, Hockney indicates that he might indeed "want some."

The interaction between homosexual desire and violence also is made explicit in a dispute between Hockney and McManus (Stephen Baldwin), which resembles a lovers' quarrel. Strongly opposing McManus's plan to take a trip with Fenster, Hockney complains, "you and Fenster are off honeymooning in California while the rest of us are sitting here holding our dicks." Near the conclusion of this scene, Hockney asks McManus if he wants to dance, as the two men lean toward one another in a way that is at once seductive and threatening.

Of course, the implied homoerotic desire is never realized in sexual acts. Instead, lust is suppressed and sublimated into violence. It is indicative of Singer's genius that he was able to explore provocative ideas about homosexuality in a hugely entertaining film that was successfully targeted to a predominantly straight young male audience.

### ***Apt Pupil***

In his next film, *Apt Pupil* (1998), Singer again explores the pervasiveness of evil, the complexity of identity, and other issues that he dealt with in *The Usual Suspects*. Yet, despite their thematic consistency, the two films differ in many fundamental respects. Whereas *The Usual Suspects* is a dazzling action thriller, *Apt Pupil* is a somber, slow-paced, and sometimes depressing study of psychological terror. Therefore, it is quite possible that *Apt Pupil* would not have been commercially successful under any circumstances.

However, at the time of its initial release, the actual content of *Apt Pupil* was overshadowed by the negative publicity generated by baseless accusations of sexual harassment made by the parents of six young extras against Singer and others involved in the production. The resultant smear campaign made mainstream theater owners reluctant to show the movie, even though Singer and his associates had been cleared of charges by the time that the film was distributed. Thus, *Apt Pupil* had a very limited theatrical release in the United States, even though it received favorable reviews.

Based on a novella by Stephen King, *Apt Pupil* concerns a seemingly typical high school student, Todd Bowden (Brad Renfro), who becomes intensely fascinated by the Holocaust. Having studied countless accounts of the extermination of Jews, Todd identifies an elderly man whom he happens to see on a local bus as the former head of an infamous Nazi concentration camp. Shortly thereafter, Todd visits Kurt Dussander (Ian McKellen) and threatens to expose him unless he will describe in detail all the atrocities that

he committed.

At first, Todd seems to have the upper hand in their interaction, as he compels the reluctant Dussander to recount his crimes. However, a shift in the balance of power occurs in a compelling scene in which Todd commands Dussander to march in a Nazi uniform that he purchased. As Dussander's movements become more frenetic, Todd realizes that he has unleashed a monster that he can no longer control.

As the movie progresses, Todd reveals his ability to act with the same ruthless cruelty that Dussander did in the concentration camp. Thus, he completes the murder of a homeless man that Dussander initiated, and he efficiently disposes of the corpse and the man's effects.

Increasingly focused on listening to Dussander's accounts, he ignores many other aspects of his life. His grades plummet, and he no longer excels at sports. When his friends realize that he has lost interest in girls, they challenge him to have sex with the easily available Becky Trask (Heather McComb). However, Todd is unable to get an erection, and Becky loudly mocks him as a homosexual.

In an interview with Eddie Cockrell at the 1998 Toronto Film Festival, Singer insisted that he had not wanted to suggest any erotic dimensions in the relationship between Todd and Dussander: "I never intended any between the two characters, but there is a smattering of that with the guidance counselor [David Schwimmer] and the homeless guy [Elias Koteas], which can be kind of interesting." Furthermore, in response to Cockrell's question about whether he had encouraged McKellan to "play the character with potentially gay overtones," Singer asserted, "No, not at all, I don't think so, no. In fact he played it very straight."

Yet, as Caroline McKahan, Jason Picart, and others have noted, the exceptional emotional intensity of the interactions between the two lead characters in Dussander's claustrophobic home evokes sexual tension, whether intended by Singer or not. Dussander makes the erotic dimension of their relationship explicit when he tells Todd, "Don't you see? We are fucking each other."

The fervor of their involvement is emphasized by shifting close-ups of their eyes and by John Ottman's soaring, romantic score. Also contributing to the erotic dimensions of the film are soft, golden lighting; flattering camera angles; and other devices that emphasize Brad Renfro's youthful beauty.

As *The Usual Suspects* does, *Apt Pupil* reveals the ambiguous interactions of homoeroticism, homophobia, and violence. In the shower of the high school gym, Todd imagines that the youths surrounding him are transformed into elderly men in a concentration camp. Although the men are haggard and deformed by suffering, they and Todd exchange intense, desiring glances. Furthermore, in a provocative montage, Singer superimposes photographs of Holocaust victims over the barely clad Todd, as he twists and turns in his sleep.

As Singer acknowledged in the interview with Cockrell, homosexuality also is suggested in the incidents involving the homeless man and the guidance counselor. Wearing a woman's scarf and displaying effeminate gestures, the homeless man is characterized as stereotypically gay. On the night that Dussander invites him into his house, the two are shown on a bus, intently gazing at one another in a way that evokes cruising. Moreover, Dussander tenderly caresses the man's neck before he stabs him.

It is easy to imagine that Edward French, the kindly high school counselor played by Schwimmer, is gay. In any case, French immediately succumbs to Todd's threat to accuse him of sexual molestation if he reveals Todd's involvement with Dussander (whose Nazi past has become publicly known by this point in the movie). This incident provides an eerie precedent for the smear campaign against Singer and his associates.

The accusations made against Singer and others involved in the production concerned the filming of the crucial shower scene on April 2, 1997. Originally, Singer and his assistants tried to film the youths showering with g-strings. However, the extras were asked to remove the g-strings because they remained highly visible in the rear views of their bodies.

Among the approximately thirty extras involved in the shower scene, six youths later claimed that they had been psychologically intimidated and that they had been filmed naked against their will. They further insisted that they had been sexually ogled and otherwise humiliated during the filming process. Within two weeks, the parents of the six youths filed a total of five criminal suits against Singer, Phoenix Pictures, and other individuals and corporations involved in the production of *Apt Pupil*.

The homophobic basis of the suits was revealed by attorneys Marty Rub and Peter Gordon, who emphasized that Singer and some other members of the production crew were "known homosexuals" in documents that they filed as part of a joint suit on behalf of two of the youths. In court papers, Rub and Gordon also falsely claimed that some of defendants were "known pedophiles or pederasts." Ten television stations in the Los Angeles area immediately publicized the charges brought against Singer and others involved in *Apt Pupil*, and the story was also aired nationally by Johnnie Cochran's Court TV show.

The claims made by the youths and their parents were challenged by the other extras involved in the scene. For instance, the other youths maintained that all the extras had been informed in advance that they might be filmed in the nude and that, on the day of the filming, everyone was given the option of appearing clothed in a locker room scene, rather than in the shower scene.

Extensive investigations into the allegations were conducted over the course of eight months by the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office and by the Sheriff's Department. In December 1997, both these agencies reported that the claims of inappropriate behavior were totally without foundation.

Despite the controversy, Singer left the shower scene in the movie because he realized that it was crucial to the development of the story. However, before the film was distributed, he re-filmed this sequence, using adult extras.

In an interview with Charlotte O'Sullivan, Singer discussed the impact of this event: "It is interesting, but not when you've lived it. Not when someone points a finger at you and your life, and the media, if only for a moment, listen and the gossip arises. . . . Back then, I was relatively young in my career, so it was much more traumatic."

### *X-Men* and *X-2*

In contrast to *Apt Pupil*, Singer's next two films--*X-Men* (2000) and *X-2* (2003)--were blockbuster hits. Based on the popular Marvel Comics characters, both films featured lavish and often astonishing special effects, achieved in part through the use of advanced computer imaging. However, as he emphasizes in his commentaries on the DVD editions, Singer did not want to depend primarily on technology because he worried that it might literally take over the films. Whenever possible, he utilized live action in order to ground the scenes in reality.

Perhaps even more importantly, Singer encouraged the actors to endow their characters with great emotional depth. As a result, *X-Men* and *X-2* have a psychological intensity unusual in blockbuster films. In her compelling study of the philosophical implications of the films, Bonnie Million emphasizes that as a result of Singer's revision of the comic series, the characters become more complex individuals who respond to fundamental moral challenges in distinctive ways.

Like the comic series, *X-Men* and *X-2* concern mutants who possess extraordinary powers. Only a few of the mutants--most notably, Logan, called Wolverine (Hugh Jackman)--had been created through human experimentation. Most developed through a natural process of evolution and, thus, could be regarded as higher forms of life. However, many people regard the mutants with fear and loathing because their special powers seem beyond human control.

In both films, prominent American politicians and government officials attempt to confine and even eradicate the mutants. Hopeful that human beings will one day learn to live in harmony with mutants, Professor Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart) tries to promote understanding between the two types of beings, and he runs a school, intended to help young mutants to use their powers in ways that will be acceptable to humans. However, Xavier's efforts are opposed by Magneto/Eric Lensherr (Ian McKellen), who leads a group of rogue mutants, determined to eradicate the human race. A survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, Lensherr is understandably skeptical about the possibility of human reform.

Obviously, the stories of individuals persecuted because of their unique qualities have relevance for individuals and groups who have been stigmatized because of perceived differences from what is defined as normal. However, while having wide appeal, Singer's films have had an especially strong resonance among queer viewers.

Like closeted gay people, the mutants can live undetected among "normal" people, if they choose to do so. Although some mutants--for example, Ororo Munro/Storm (Halle Berry), one of Xavier's followers--strongly oppose the practice, many believe that they must conceal their true natures if they are to survive.

In his commentaries on the DVD editions, Singer indicates that he was aware of the gay implications of the storylines. For instance, he emphasizes that Ian McKellen's long experience as a gay activist helped him to make Magneto a compelling and complex character. Through McKellen's deft portrayal, Magneto's desire to destroy humans becomes understandable.

Moreover, Singer explains that he intended the scene of Bobby Drake/Iceman (Shawn Ashmore) revealing his mutant identity to his parents (in *X-2*) as a variation of the classic coming out story. Undoubtedly, many gay viewers can relate to Bobby's discomfort when his mother pleads with him to just try living as a normal person.

Although homosexuality is not specifically referenced in the films, it is noteworthy that Singer places much more emphasis on the sexual problems encountered by the mutants than his comic sources did.

Thus, for example, in one of the earliest scenes of *X-Men*, the adolescent Marie D'Ancanto (Anna Paquin) inadvertently kills her boyfriend by draining life from him as they passionately kiss on her bed. Through this traumatic experience, she realizes that she is a mutant. Appalled by what has happened, her parents throw her out of their home.

Also, Rogue's efforts to find a way to connect physically, as well as emotionally, with Iceman constitute a moving and entertaining subplot in both of the films.

Constantly transforming from one gender to another, Mystique (Rebecca Romijn) embodies the multiple possibilities of transgender identities. As played by the stunning Romijn, Mystique has become a cult figure among lesbians.

### ***Superman Returns***

To the dismay of the many fans of his two X-men films, Singer in 2004 turned down the opportunity to

direct the third film in the series in order to undertake *Superman Returns* (2006).

From the time that he announced *Superman Returns*, gay bloggers fueled speculation that he would create a flamboyantly queer version of the "man of steel." However, Singer sought to deflate rumors about the possible gay aspects of his interpretation of Superman. In an interview with Lesley O'Toole and on other occasions, he asserted "*Superman Returns* is probably the most heterosexual movie I've ever made."

Singer also defied widespread expectations that the film would be intended primarily for male viewers (whether gay or straight) by conceiving *Superman Returns* primarily for women. Thus, in an interview with Michael Joseph Gross, he described *Superman Returns* as "my first chick flick." Although there are some very impressive action sequences, these are considerably fewer in number than in either of Singer's X-Men films.

Like many of the classic "women's films" of the Hollywood Golden Age, *Superman Returns* is focused on the lead character's longing for a love that can never be fulfilled. At the beginning of Singer's film, Superman comes back to earth after having been away for several years investigating rumors that his home planet had not actually been destroyed. He is dismayed to learn that Lois Lane (Kate Bosworth) has tried to distance herself from his memory--even writing a Pulitzer Prize-winning story that the world no longer needed him. Furthermore, Lois is happily married and has a son.

Although he rightly suspects that Lois's son is his child, Superman realizes that he should not do anything to disrupt her marriage because he recognizes that her husband, Richard White (James Marsden), is fundamentally a very good man. In keeping with this storyline, Brandon Routh endows Superman with a considerably softer personality than earlier actors did.

While mainstream critics praised the traditional values that seemed to be expressed in *Superman Returns*, some gay bloggers lamented that Singer had not taken the opportunity to create an overtly queer version of the classic story. However, *Superman Returns* really does offer much to queer viewers.

First and most obviously, one can appreciate the splendid physical endowments of Brandon Routh, emphasized by his very tight blue costume and very skimpy shorts. Combining physical strength with emotional sensitivity, Routh's Superman in many respects seems to correspond with gay male ideals in the early twenty-first century.

Moreover, some of the actors--most notably Kevin Spacey as the master criminal Lex Luthor and Parker Posey as his moll, Kitty Kowalski--infuse their performances with a wonderfully camp sensibility.

### **Singer as Television Producer**

To insure creative control, Singer has produced all of the films that he has directed, and he also has been active as a producer of movies and television programs by others. Among his recent successful television productions are the SciFi Channel miniseries *The Triangle* (2005) and the hit Fox series *House M.D.* (on air since November 2004).

Starring Hugh Laurie as the misanthropic Gregory House, *House M.D.* challenges many of the usual conventions of medical dramas. Singer personally directed two episodes--the crucial pilot (originally aired November 16, 2004) and *Occam's Razor* (third episode of season one, originally aired November 30, 2004). In *Occam's Razor*, Singer dealt with provocative themes that also appear in his movies, including the potential dangers of sexuality and the severe harm that can be done by acts inspired by love.

Singer is also Executive Producer of *Dirty, Sexy Money* (premiered on September 26, 2007 on ABC), a quirky

and deliberately provocative soap opera about the enormously wealthy, dysfunctional Darling family. The cast includes such major film stars as Donald Sutherland, Jill Clayburgh, and Peter Krause. The stunning transsexual actress Candis Cayne plays Carmelita, the alluring transsexual mistress of Patrick Darling (William Baldwin), New York State Attorney General.

### **Current and Forthcoming Films**

Scheduled for release in the summer of 2008, *Valkyrie* reconstructs the attempt by a group of high-ranking Nazi officers to assassinate Adolf Hitler in 1944. Singer has indicated that in his development of the narrative, he will emphasize the circumstance that none of the participants could really be sure of the loyalties or the intentions of their colleagues.

To endow the movie with a sense of historical authenticity, Singer has filmed virtually all of *Valkyrie* on location in Berlin. The casting of Tom Cruise in the leading role of the national hero, Colonel Claus von Staffenberg, has sparked public protests in Germany because of Cruise's adherence to Scientology, popularly regarded in Germany as a totalitarian cult. Nevertheless, the German Federal Film Fund has supported Singer's project with generous grants.

Singer already has accomplished extensive planning for *The Mayor of Castro Street*, based on Randy Shilts' biography of the same name. Scheduled for a 2009 release, *The Mayor of Castro Street* effectively will be competing with Gus Van Sant's *Milk*, currently in pre-production. However, Singer's film may well have the advantage--not only because of its foundation in Shilts' authoritative and comprehensive biography, but also because of Singer's longstanding and deeply felt commitment to the exploration of identity issues.

Singer is unusual for his openness about his homosexuality in an industry that is sometimes very nervous about sexuality. He has been openly gay since his years at USC. He has sometimes paid a price for his honesty, as in the false charges and smear campaign he faced during the filming of *Apt Pupil*. However, his homosexuality is a crucial aspect of his art, particularly his awareness of the complexity and ambiguity of identity.

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