



# todd solondz

interview **Tony DuShane**  
an exclusive special edition interview

You want to be a talk show host like David Letterman. You teach English to Russian immigrants. You have a fantasy of being raped. You drug your son's friend and have sex with him. You're a character in a Todd Solondz film.

Todd Solondz has created unique feature films with vibrant characters that don't fit so well into normal society. His current film, "Palindromes," follows Aviva, a 13-year-old girl bent on getting pregnant and having a baby at any cost. Aviva is played by seven different actors including Jennifer Jason Leigh. It's a fairy tale ala Gulliver's Travels with abortion, pedophilia, a Christian rock band, and a beautiful girl with no arms who can sing her guts out.

I met Todd Solondz in his hotel room the day before he was appearing at the San Francisco International Film Festival last May as part of an indie filmmaking seminar and screening of "Palindromes" co-presented by 826 Valencia, a writing lab for young students headed by writer Dave Eggers.

*What lessons have you learned regarding filmmaking or things you've done differently as you've progressed with each film?*

It's a good question. It's a problematic one to answer though. There are no real lessons that I've learned that I feel I can communicate or convey to others. It's hard to articulate what exactly you've absorbed from any of this. You do grow with each film that you make and you have a better understanding, a grasp, a sense of storytelling and of what moviemaking is about. But it's the kind of experience that in some sense is almost subconsciously understood, so therefore, if it's to be understood at all, it's not something that I have any lessons that I can pass onto others. I'm still figuring it all out myself. The process of filmmaking is both one of discovery and self-discovery. It's a mystery what makes one put pen to paper. It's not exactly fun. And, so what I find happens, I write a first draft, I have a sense of what it is. Of course I really don't know what it is. When I start shooting, I have the actors in the locations and it takes on a different life and I say, "Ah, so this is what it is." But then you get into the cutting room and yet again it shifts in meaning, you find from shaving away, from distilling, from finding the

right form, you get at what you think is the meaning of this movie.

*What are the joys and frustrations you've found working with child actors?*

Well, generally speaking, children are easier to direct than adults. They respond more readily to direction. But, there are all kinds of kids, some that are truly gifted, and need little in the way of modification, and others that need a lot more attention and even line readings. I've dealt with children in all of my movies that have contained delicate material, and I've always involved the families, the parents, so it becomes a much more lengthy process. The casting process with children, you have to be very open and straight-forward with them, so they can feel and have a sense of what you're about. Because what's of paramount importance is that their child will take pride and have a sense of dignity in their participation in this project. The parents are always there on set, and so far, they're also proud of the work that they have done. I've been very fortunate that way. I can say I don't have children, but if I did have a child and my child were clamoring to act, I certainly would permit my child to act in one of my movies where I