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Director  
Steven  
Soderbergh  
Feels a  
'Presence'

By Kalyn Corrigan



ENTERTAINMENT

# SURREALIST VISIONARY DAVID LYNCH DIES AT AGE 78

BY ERIN MAXWELL



David Lynch in Ukraine to open an office of The David Lynch foundation, his charitable foundation advocating for Transcendental Meditation, Nov. 17, 2017

IMAGE COURTESY MYKHAYLO PALINCHAK/SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

Director, writer and artist David Lynch, who transformed the film landscape with his surrealist vision and ethereal aesthetic, has passed away at the age of 78. The filmmaker is best known for his films *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Eraserhead* (1977), and *The Elephant Man* (1980), for which he was nominated for an Oscar for Best Director. He will also be remembered for his work with Mark Frost

on the landmark television series *Twin Peaks*.

On January 16, his family announced the passing of the legendary filmmaker in a Facebook post:

"It is with deep regret that we, his family, announce the passing of the man and the artist, David Lynch. We would appreciate some privacy at this time. There's a big hole in the world now that he's no longer with us. But, as he would say, 'Keep your eye on the donut and not on the hole.'

It's a beautiful day with golden sunshine and blue skies all the way"

The last line is a reference to the daily weather reports Lynch would post on his YouTube channel, where he would offer a quirky take on the Los Angeles weather for his fellow Angelenos.

No cause has been officially given for Lynch's cause of death, though the filmmaker revealed in 2024 that he had been diagnosed with emphysema due to his

smoking habit.

David Lynch was born on January 20, 1946, in Missoula, Montana, to agriculturalist Donald and English teacher Edwina ("Sunny"). Alongside his younger brother John and sister Martha, Lynch experienced a nomadic childhood, frequently relocating due to his father's work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Though he and his family often moved, Lynch called these times "a super happy household" in



A still from *Eraserhead*

IMAGE COURTESY LIBRA FILMS



David Lynch and Isabella Rossellini during the 43rd Cannes Film Festival, May 21, 1990

IMAGE COURTESY ERIC ROBERT/SYGMA/SYGMA VIA GETTY IMAGES



A scene from *Twin Peaks*

IMAGE COURTESY LYNCH/FROST PRODUCTIONS/ABC

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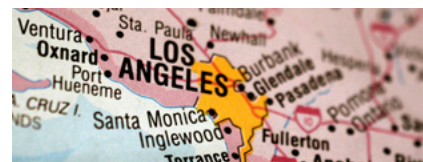
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his 2018 memoir, *Room to Dream*.

His passion for the arts emerged early in life, paving the way for his future as a filmmaker. He first attended the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in Washington, D.C., before transferring in 1964 to the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Frustrated by what he considered an “uninspired” curriculum, Lynch began experimenting with short films, ultimately leading him to enroll at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where his cinematic journey began.

While earning a keep at a day job printing engravings, Lynch began creating short films, a hobby that ultimately motivated him to move to Los Angeles and study filmmaking at the AFI Conservatory. It was there that he developed his first feature-length film, *Eraserhead*, starring Jack Nance. Although initially rejected by many film festivals, including Cannes, *Eraserhead* eventually gained a cult following, particularly among midnight movie enthusiasts. Its surreal and otherworldly exploration of fatherhood anxiety and the fear of responsibility resonated with audiences, solidifying its status as a unique and enduring classic.

The success of *Eraserhead* got Lynch noticed in Hollywood and a seat in the director’s chair for *The Elephant Man*, based on the tragic true story of Joseph (John) Merrick. Starring Anthony Hopkins, John Hurt and Anne Bancroft and executive produced by an uncredited Mel Brooks, *The Elephant Man* was nominated for eight Academy Awards, including Best Director for Lynch and Best Picture.

After *The Elephant Man*, Lynch directed *Dune* (1984), followed by the neo-noir psychological thriller *Blue Velvet* (1986). Widely regarded as an artistic masterpiece, *Blue Velvet* contrasted idyllic small-town America with the dark violence lurking beneath its surface. Starring Isabella Rossellini, Kyle MacLachlan, Dennis Hopper

and Laura Dern, *Blue Velvet* became a defining representation of Lynch’s distinctive themes and cinematic vision.

Lynch’s work included the psychological romance *Wild at Heart* (1990), the iconic TV series *Twin Peaks* and its revival (1990-1991, 2017), the prequel film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), the mind-bending *Lost Highway* (1997), the unexpectedly poignant *The Straight Story* (1999), the highly-acclaimed *Mulholland Drive* (2001) — for which he earned Academy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Original Screenplay — and the unsettling *Inland Empire* (2006).

Film and TV weren’t his only pursuits. As a painter, Lynch’s works were exhibited at the Venice Biennale, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and The Kunsthalle Mannheim in Germany. He was a practitioner and advocate for Transcendental Meditation, and in 2005, started the David Lynch Foundation to teach the mindfulness practice to adults and children.

Known for his sound design and editing in addition to taking on directing and writing duties for most of his projects, David Lynch was a true multi-hyphenate who transformed the filmmaking sphere. He created a lasting legacy that continues to inspire generations of independent filmmakers. The term “Lynchian” has emerged to describe his distinctive style, often applied to visual storytellers who use abstract and surreal elements to convey their narratives. His contributions have left an indelible mark on cinema, shaping its evolution for years to come.

At the 63rd Venice International Film Festival, Lynch said this about film — “Cinema is such a beautiful language and all of you all ... you have the gift of words. Cinema is a thing that deals with beyond words. And it’s so beautiful,” said the auteur. “It’s so fantastic. It talks to you, but not with words alone. So just go in open, and have an experience in a different world.”

# WHAT'S UP POPPING UP

The Frightfully Delightful Horror Boodega Opens In Burbank

BY MICHELE STUEVEN



Terri Rivera, left, and Erick Yaro at the Horror Boodega

COURTESY MICHELE STUEVEN

Tucked between the Mystic Museum and Lucifer's Pizza on the Horror Row section of Magnolia Blvd. in Burbank is the new frightfully delightful [Horror Boodega](#).

The interactive shotgun space features drinks like Bug Barf, Brain Wash and Weird Tea and oddity snacks like Wicked Minis, Bigfoot Popcorn, Box of Bones Cheetos and giant gummy snakes. The cereal box section includes Franken Berry, Halloween Crunch, Zombie Vanilla Cereal as well as Carmella Creeper and her frightful marshmallow friends.

Every aspect of the store, from its curated selection of horror-themed snacks, drinks, and merchandise to its whimsical decor, pays homage to the nostalgic eras of the '80s and '90s. There are giant replicas of famous childhood symbols, like a

seven-foot-tall My Pet Monster, a Goosebumps One Day at Horrorland replica sign, a 10-foot interactive retro TV replica, and an Alien Xenomorph display bringing a playful energy to the cozy space.

Erick Yaro, who also owns the wonderfully escapist [Mystic Museum](#), opened the bodega in November with partner Terri Rivera after a year full of personal hurdles.

"Both of our parents passed away, my cat passed away and I had some health issues," Yaro tells *LA Weekly*. "Owning a museum is fun and I love it, but I was looking to do something a little more whimsical. Me and Terri talked about a nostalgic look and something that would bring more joy into our lives during hard times. Terri had spent a lot of time in New York and loved going to the neighborhood bodegas, so we merged the two ideas."



Where Nightmares Come To Life

COURTESY MICHELE STUEVEN

The Horror Boodega was also designed as a space for the community to come together. The venue is available for rentals, birthday parties, and performances that include Yaro's emo cover band, Too Bad So Sad. Horror movie nights are also planned for the future. "The weirder the better," says Rivera. "We're excited to share our space with other creatives and horror fans."

"I like to think it's a place for your inner child with adult money," says Rivera, who leans more towards the campy and goofy side of horror. "Everything that you wanted as a kid and you either couldn't afford or your parents thought was a waste of money is here. Most of the people who come in here can't believe we could find these things and it sparks nostalgia in everyone. Even though this store is a quarter the size of the museum, I have

more vendors here. I scour through food resellers who carry this spooky stuff year-round. There are some seasonal items, but most of these are made year-round and some are international brands like Swedish Bugs, Japanese Ramen and items from Korea."

"We made it a community," says Yaro of the shop across the street from Pinocchio Italian Restaurant and the Monte Carlo Italian Deli that have been there for more than 50 years. "You start with one store, then another opens and it just becomes this hub for Halloween and horror throughout the year. Parking is easy, no meters. You can easily spend the day just walking up and down the street going to all the different horror-themed and oddity stores and fun restaurants. We wanted to fill the void of snacks and drinks in that same genre." ■

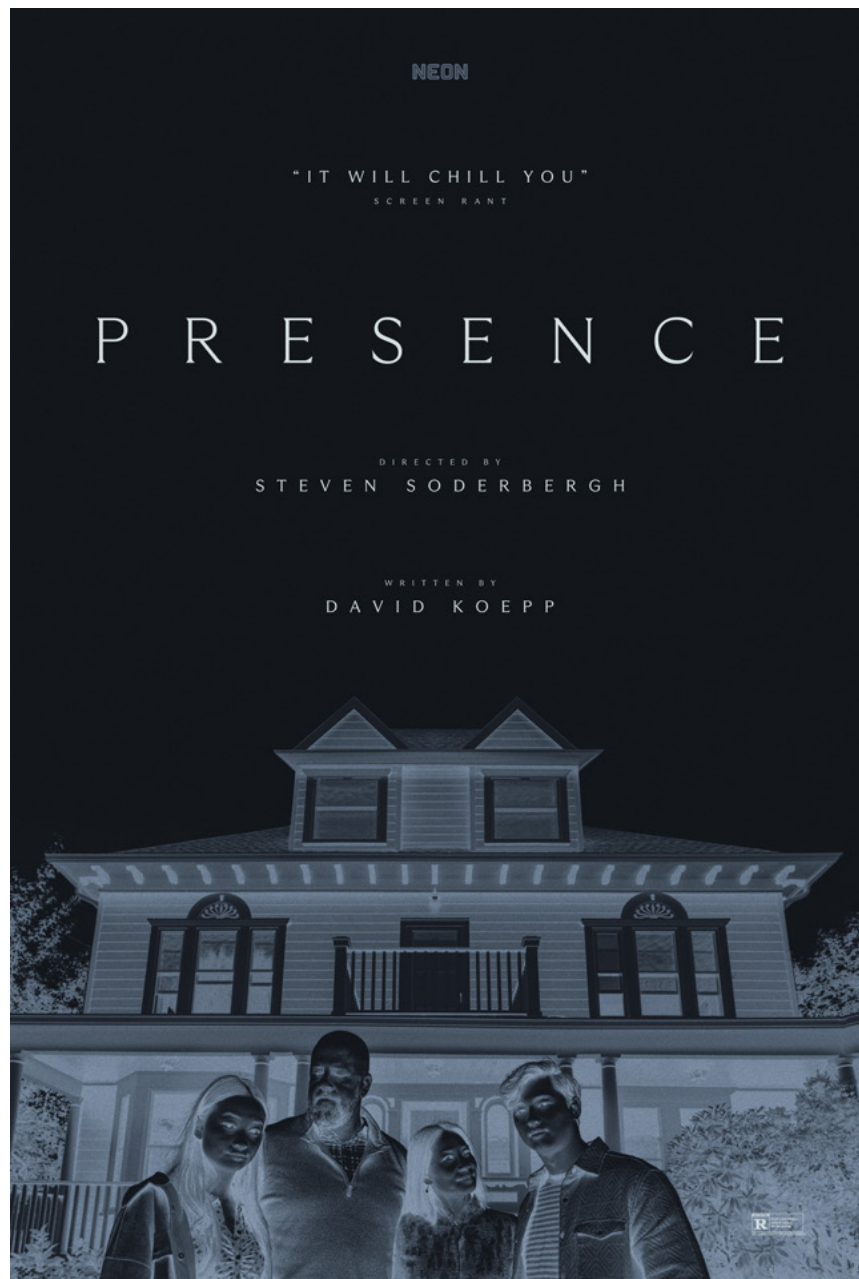
# DIRECTOR STEVEN SODERBERGH FEELS A 'PRESENCE'

BY KALYN CORRIGAN

“I need to be scared of something,” Steven Soderbergh tells me as we sit down to discuss his new film, *Presence*. “Every movie that I have worked on, there’s gotta be a pocket of fear about some aspect of it. There’s gotta be something that really gives you the night sweats, or else you’re kind of directing from the back of the limousine. It could be a conceptual thing. It could be the schedule. It could be any number of things — but if there isn’t something about it that scares me, it means I’ve probably either done it before, or it just feels like it’s not very challenging.” In terms of his latest project, a ghost story shot from the point of view of a housebound spirit, the filmmaker heeded the call to action upon realizing that his go-to method of operating the camera himself would actually demand the embodiment of the entity. In a rare event, the director almost becomes part of the cast, as he is, in a way, the very presence itself.

In the film, a family moves into a new suburban home but soon becomes convinced that they are not alone. Captured in a first-person POV style, the specter gains an unusual attachment to Chloe (Callina Liang), a teenage girl who’s still reeling from the recent loss of a friend, much to the chagrin of her mother Rebekah (Lucy Liu) and her brother Tyler (Eddy Maday). Chloe seeks solace in her father Chris’s (Chris Sullivan) company, but as time goes on, it seems as though the wraith haunting their halls feels compelled to do something, and that unlocking that specific purpose could be the key to releasing the apparition from the shackles that bind its being to this mortal coil.

“It’s actually a drama that has a ghost in it,” Soderbergh specifies. “It was generated by something that happened in our house in Los Feliz. We had a house sitter while we were gone, taking care of the cats, and she saw somebody in the house while she was there. We were aware that a woman had passed in the house before we bought it, but when we did a little more diligence on the story, it got more intriguing in the sense that there was some controversy around the circumstances of this woman’s death.” While the filmmaker admits that he himself has yet to feel anything otherworldly in his home, he talks about how this very personal experience inspired him to gain a fresh perspective. “This did get me thinking what it would



COURTESY NEON

be like if I were that woman, and I was still hanging around, and some new people showed up to live in what I considered to be my house.”

Making a camera emote when the viewer is denied a subject’s face to reckon with presents its own set of unique challenges,

but an Academy Award-winning director like Soderbergh is nothing if not motivated by the impossible. “If you’re making a movie or project in which you are rigorously in a single POV, there’s a danger of creating a sense of frustration on the part of the audience because they’re

not seeing a reverse,” he explains. “Seeing a reverse is a very primal desire on the part of the audience. They really want to look into the eyes of the character that is experiencing the story to see the emotion of that character. It was my hope and my belief that the instant that you understood that this was not a person that exists in the world like we exist, that you would switch off that desire and that impulse to want to see a reverse angle, because you would know there’s nothing to cut to.”

In order to make the audience understand that they are seeing this story play out through the eyes of the presence, Soderbergh had to unlearn everything he knew as a director. Denying the artist within, he did his best to follow his cast around with his lens like he was just another subject standing in the room, as opposed to framing up shots like a filmmaker. “It was the thing that ruined the most takes,” Soderbergh laughs. “This is what I made the most mistakes trying to achieve, which is not anticipating when somebody was gonna move. There had to be just the right amount of lag time in my reaction to make it seem as though I didn’t know what was going to happen. My natural instincts as a camera operator are going in the other direction, which is to anticipate and have the perfect composition all the time. That took me a while to let go of.”

Even more demanding than the need to interpret scenes in a new light was the actual operation of the camera, for which Soderbergh had to maneuver himself up and down some seriously steep stairs as quickly and quietly as possible while a camera blocked his field of vision.

“I was just very anxious that I was going to have an accident on the stairs,” says the filmmaker, who goes on to describe the “ballet shoes” he wore with rubber grips on the bottom; a look that became part of the uniform for Soderbergh on this project in the name of safety, agility, and of course, a silent soundtrack. “That was a new thing,” he remembers, “Some of the lengthier takes got challenging because the camera itself — the Sony A7, not a big camera, and the Ronin stabilizer, one of their smallest stabilizers — the whole thing weighed ten, twelve pounds, which is not a lot, unless you’re trying to hold it out from your body for like seven minutes. Then, it starts to get a little tricky, and your arms start to shake.”

Faced with an unusual problem, Soderbergh developed a highly stylized visual approach that is so overtly subjective, it actually makes the viewer forget that there's a director behind the camera. Instead, it focuses their attention on watching the events of the story unfold on-screen, just like the entity observing the scene.

"In order for the shaking not to become too extreme, and too obvious to the viewer, I had to come up with ways to keep the camera moving just a little bit all the time, so that my body didn't go just completely rigid," he remembers. "And so, I had to justify in my mind that the presence would be wanting to alter its position based on what it was trying to understand, from what it was looking at. That was one of the reasons we tried to shoot in chronological order as much as possible because I wanted you to see it learning as the story went on. I felt that the only way to do that was to shoot in sequence so that I would be learning at the same time."

Adds Soderbergh, "Directors get performance anxiety, too. I mean, some of these takes, especially the penultimate scene in the film, which goes on for al-

most ten minutes, when I would get to minute eight, minute nine, I would start to shake, and I was worried that I was going to ruin a perfectly good take, and these performances that were really intimate and sensitive. By that criteria, I got a blood pressure spike or two."

Based on the heavy subject material, many fans assume that Soderbergh's hardest film to shoot was *Traffic*, but the filmmaker reveals that from a logistical standpoint, the more challenging project to capture actually turned out to be *Ocean's Eleven*. Regarding where he would place *Presence* on that same scale of difficulty, he says, "I wouldn't rate it high on a conceptual level in terms of figuring out how to do it. The box that you're in is pretty specific, and pretty small in terms of the tool kit. You're only allowed to do one thing, really, so the conceptual part was in blocking and rehearsing the scenes, and deciding where I wanted to be over the course of the shoot — and that stuff's fun to figure out."

As a filmmaker whose portfolio boasts a grand affinity for ensemble staging, in many ways *Presence* represents the magnum opus of everything Soderbergh has been building toward in his career so far.

"I think a movie should work without any sound," the director muses. "That is not to denigrate sound, but I do believe you should be able to watch a movie silent and understand it. That, to me, is the essence of what staging is, and editing." By blocking his characters like actors in a stage play, the director hopes to convey plot points that are as easy to follow as illustrations in a picture book. "In this case, something that I thought about a lot was, if you couldn't hear what they were saying, and I wanted you to understand what was happening in the scene, in the relationship between these two characters, how would I express that visually?"

The director believes in this method of filmmaking so much that he actually used what little spare time he had to re-cut Steven Spielberg's classic action-adventure film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Soderbergh's cut can be found on his website in black and white with the sound stripped away and Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's score for *The Social Network* added in, all to demonstrate how proper staging can tell a story even without an aural crutch.

"Often as an exercise, when I'm working on a project, at a certain point in the editing, where I feel like we're getting close to

this thing becoming what it wants to be, I will watch it without the sound to see if it's still playing the way that I think it should play. That's been a very good exercise for me. And invariably, I end up going back and making certain editorial adjustments that I feel will make it work silent."

Leaning so heavily on visuals, especially when it comes to a single-location thriller about a family living through a haunting, means placing a great deal of trust in the cast. "Well, you better hope that you have actors that aren't trying to win the scene, but understand that we all have to submit to what the story wants us to do," he states boldly. "I've been lucky. I don't feel like I've ever had to deal with an actor who was so focused on themselves and what they wanted to do in the scene, that it was distorting the creative ecosystem of the process and the piece itself. If you ask [George] Clooney about the *Oceans* movies, he would go, 'Well, that was the easiest job in the world. All I did was hand scenes over to other people.' And he was right, but he's smart."

Luckily, Soderbergh found a motley crew of juggernauts to aid him in his quest to demonstrate a new kind of campfire tale. "Lucy [Liu] is one of those people



Lucy Liu (Rebekah) in *Presence* directed by Steven Soderbergh



Callina Liang (Chloe), Chris Sullivan (Chris), Eddy Maday (Tyler), Lucy Liu (Rebekah), and Julia Fox (Cece) in *Presence* directed by Steven Soderbergh

COURTESY PETER ANDREWS / THE SPECTRAL SPIRIT COMPANY

that's been on my mental list for a long time," notes the filmmaker. "She was such a treat. She's so skilled and understands all of it, and has a great sense of humor, and brings a really positive energy to the set. For a director, she's a real dream." One scene in particular, when the family finds themselves posting up on the back porch after a frightening paranormal event pushes them out of their home, truly highlights the power of the ensemble that casting agent Carmen Cuba pulled together.

"One of my favorite scenes is after the presence has ripped the son's room apart and they're arguing on the back porch," recalls Soderbergh. "The rhythm of that is a testament to David [Koepp]'s writing, but also, to their performances. There's a lot of dialogue, and it has to come at a certain pace, and people are overlapping, and they have to use their intuitive sense of how that should feel. Unlike a lot of other scenes, I was locked, just staring at them. They didn't have a lot of places they could go either, because they were in this frame, just looking into the house. So, in that case, I'm just really relying on their ability to hear how this should sound. And they were just all over it. They really

understood it immediately. I thought, oh, we're going to be here a while. This could take a few. And it didn't. They just got it, and that's fun. That's exciting."

An early pioneer of independent cinema, Soderbergh's Palme d'Or winning directorial debut *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* cemented the multifaceted visionary early on as a movie making machine who dons many hats. To this day, the filmmaker still edits all of his own work, and in fact holds the role in such high regard that he proudly states how cutting his pictures together still remains his favorite part of the process. That's why when he sees a film being poorly spliced, he tends to take it a little personally.

"I want to feel intention in everything," he says, "I want there to be a reason for every shot and every cut. When I see cutting that I feel isn't purposeful and is insecure, I get frustrated, because the power of the editing is so enormous. I never tire of it. I'm not going to say it was the thing about filmmaking that I understood first, but it was the first thing that I felt the tractor beam pulling me in. The editing is the reward for all of the effort that went into shooting. If I were to stop, it would be the

thing I would miss the most."

In *Presence*, every scene is a single take. Although the lengths of each sequence vary, the overall effect gives the audience a sense of unpredictable voyeurism that for certain individuals, can be surprisingly quite intense. Some viewers have found the experience to be so physical, that they actually had to leave the theater.

"I fully admit that part of what I hope is compelling about this film is that you feel like you're seeing something that you're not supposed to be seeing," the director discloses. "The [audience] can't look away. I mean, that sounds stupid in a sense, like, oh, yeah, they're always looking at the screen. But when you edit, when you cut to something else, that's a version of the audience looking away. What we saw at this first screening at Sundance last year, in that next-to-last scene, was people becoming very disturbed by the fact that they couldn't look away, that the conceit of the film left them nowhere to go, and nowhere to look, except at what was happening in the center of the screen. Given what was happening, there were people that walked out — which I totally understand."

Known for pushing the envelope in

cinema, it's no surprise that his latest endeavor is ruffling a few feathers. Director Soderbergh is endlessly curious. That's his superpower. That's why he's always trying to invent new ways to film a scene. It's not that he's necessarily always trying to make a statement, he just possesses this childlike wonder at all of the possibilities in this medium of storytelling, and he's excited to see which choice leads where. It's what makes him one of our best living filmmakers, and it's the type of ingenuity that elevates *Presence* as a one-of-a-kind ghost story in a sea of wannabe standouts. Plain and simple, making movies is hard. Directing brilliant blockbusters that stand the test of time is harder. Still, Soderbergh sees it as the best job in the world. "It's like standing in the exhaust of a jet engine, but at the same time, when it reveals itself to you and you know what to do, your brain kind of lights up like a Christmas tree." He continues, "So, I don't know. I was just lucky that I found a thing that I was obsessed with early, and had supportive people around me."

*Presence* will be released in theaters January 24. [📺](#)

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