

ROAD TO NOWHERE

A picture by **Monte Hellman**

Starring **Shannyn Sossamon, Tygh Runyan, Dominique Swain, Cliff De Young, Waylon Payne, John Diehl, Fabio Testi**

(Press Kit from Venice Film Festival)

CAST (in order of appearance)

Mitchell Haven
Nathalie Post
Laurel Graham/Velma Duran
Bobby Billings
Cary Stewart/Rafe Tachen
Bruno Brotherton
Steve Gates
Jermey Laidlaw
Nestor Duran
Desk Clerk
Moxie
Peter Bart
El Cholo Bartender
Mallory
Doc Holliday Bartender
Man in Bar
Bonnie Pointer
Airplane Coordinator
Airplane Pilot
Greg
Larry
Erik
Joe Watts
Araceli
Sarah
Female Cadaver
Morgue Technician
Male Cadaver
Room Service Waitress
Cop Voices

Guard

Tygh Runyan
Dominique Swain
Shannyn Sossamon
John Diehl
Cliff de Young
Waylon Payne
Robert Kolar
Nic Paul
Fabio Testi
Fabio Tricamo
Herself
Himself
Pete Manos
Mallory Culbert
Beck Lattimore
Thomas Nelson
Herself
Jim Galan
Jim Rowell
Gregory Rentis
Larry Lerner
Lathan McKay
Michael Bigham
Araceli Lemos
Sarah Dorsey
Mandy Hughes
Cathy Parker
Brett Mann
Vanessa Golden
Dean Person
Jared Hellman
Jones Clark
Mitchell Allen Jenkin

PRODUCTION

Directed and Produced by
Written and Produced by
Produced by
Executive Producers
Director of Photography
Edited by
Production Designed by
Music by
Co-Producers
Associate Producers
Costumes Designed by
Production Sound by
Visual Effects Supervisor

First Assistant Director
Second Assistant Director
Supervising Sound Editors
Re-Recording Mixers
First Assistant Editors
Producers Representative
Worldwide Sales

Monte Hellman
Steven Gaydos
Melissa Hellman
Thomas Nelson, June Nelson
Joseph M Civit
Celine Ameslon
Laurie Post
Tom Russell
Peter R J Deyell, Jared Hellman
Lea-Beth Shapiro, Robin-John Gibb
Chelsea Staebell
Rich Gavin
Robert Skotak

Larry Lerner
Noreen Perez
Ayne O Joujon-Roche, Kelly Cabral
Scott Sanders, Perry Robertson
Gregory Rentis, Harold Hyde
Jonathan Dana
E1 Entertainment

"Well the ditches are on fire,
And there ain't no higher ground.
You set your sights on the City of Angels,
But you're stuck making bad deals in backwater towns.
Forgiveness is the killer of snakes, friend,
In the gardens of despair.
Keep your mind on the middle, brother
Out on that Road to Nowhere..." - Tom Russell

SYNOPSIS

A determined young American filmmaker in Hollywood sets out to make a film based upon a "true" crime story involving an older North Carolina politico and his much younger staffer, who may or may not be his lover. Was she the victim of his \$100 million dollar kickback scheme? Or was she the femme fatale who drove him down this path that led to the death of a decorated police officer and to their double suicide pact?

These are the questions haunting the young filmmaker and his immersion in the mystery only deepens when, after turning down every major young actress in Hollywood, he casts an unknown to play the young woman at the heart of the story. She also turns out to be an unknown whose own personal tale is as murky as the yarn he's trying to tell. And more than the heart of the story, she becomes much more to his own heart and to his quest to make "art" out of "truth."

Along the way, the road takes him far from the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, where the "crime" occurred, to Lago di Garda, Verona, Rome and London, foreign locales where new truths are discovered and where clues to other crimes and passions, darker and even more complex, are uncovered.

ROAD TO NOWHERE is not the movie the filmmaker set out to make.

ROAD TO NOWHERE is the movie about what happened to this young artist when he set forth on a road whose twists and turns he had tragically miscalculated.

BIOGRAPHIES

Monte Hellman

Director and producer

Monte's most recent film, the STANLEY'S GIRLFRIEND segment of the 2006 thriller TRAPPED ASHES, was honored to be an Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival, where Monte was further honored to be named President of the Un Certain Regard jury. Monte is widely credited as the man who discovered Quentin Tarantino, as Monte brought Quentin to Sundance to workshop RESERVOIR DOGS, which Monte executive produced.

The New York Times' chief film critic, A.O. Scott recently did a video package on Monte, calling his film TWO LANE BLACKTOP a "masterpiece," while fellow New York Times critic Dave Kehr called it "the ultimate road movie." The prestigious DVD label Criterion issued a four-hour two-DVD set of that film last year, which has sold almost 50,000 units.

Monte Hellman's Filmography

Director

1. Trapped Ashes (2006) ("Stanley's Girlfriend" segment)
2. Better Watch Out! (1989) (European title: Blind Terror)
3. Iguana (1988)
4. Avalanche Express (1979) (uncredited)
5. China 9 Liberty 37 (1978)
6. Cockfighter (1974)
7. Two-Lane Blacktop (1971)
8. Ride in the Whirlwind (1966)
9. The Shooting (1966)
10. Flight to Fury (1964)
11. Back Door to Hell (1964)
12. The Terror (1963) (exterior sequences)
13. Beast From Haunted Cave (1960)

Producer

1. Reservoir Dogs (1992) (executive producer)
2. China 9 Liberty 37 (1978) (producer)
3. The Shooting (1966) (producer)
4. Ride in the Whirlwind (1966) (producer)

SHANNYN SOSSAMON

Actor, "Laurel Graham"/"Velma Duran"

After being spotted deejaying in a Los Angeles nightclub, Shannyn Sossamon burst upon the screen scene opposite Heath Ledger in Brian Helgeland's hit period epic, *A KNIGHT'S TALE*. With her striking beauty, remarkably polished acting abilities and a range that includes the darkly dramatic and lightly comic, Sossamon has been much in demand ever since. She co-starred with Josh Hartnett in the jaunty hit comedy *40 DAYS AND 40 NIGHTS*, then turned in an unforgettable tragic performance in Roger Avary's adaption of the Bret Easton Ellis best-seller, "The Rules of Attraction." Alternating from light to dark with amazing dexterity, Sossamon sparkled in the Jude Law-Jack Black-Kate Winslet starrer *THE HOLIDAY*, then garnered acclaim on the international fest circuit in the edgy indie outing, *WRISTCUTTERS*. She's also appeared regularly on TV, most recently in a key role on the HBO comedy series, "How to Make It in America."

Life imitated art in an amazing fashion when "Road to Nowhere" screenwriter Steven Gaydos spotted Sossamon in a Hollywood eatery one day and, unaware of her acting resume, suggested she contact director Monte Hellman for the key role of Laurel/Velma. Just as in the film, where fictional director Mitchell Haven thinks he's "discovered" his acting star in Laurel Graham, Gaydos's "discovery" turned out to be a lot more experienced as well as beyond the filmmakers' wildest dreams. Shannyn Sossamon *is* Laurel Graham. And Velma Duran.

Maybe she's even the *real* Velman Duran.

TYGH RUNYAN

Actor, "Mitch Haven"

Canadian actor Tygh Runyan has become director Monte Hellman's "go-to" actor, at least when it comes to playing filmmakers. Prior to starring as the obsessed film director Mitchell Haven in *ROAD TO NOWHERE*, Runyan took on a daunting role for a young actor who also knows his film history. In Hellman's Cannes Festival-featured 30 minute film, *STANLEY'S GIRLFRIEND*, Hellman's acclaimed section from the omnibus thriller film, *TRAPPED ASHES*, Runyan plays no less a film luminary than the cinematic maestro Stanley Kubrick. Best known up to that point for his award-winning work in Canadian features such as *MOUNT PLEASANT*, *NORMAL*, *THIRST*, *MY INVENTIONS*, and *THE FRENCH GUY*, Runyan has also stayed busy during the past few years on hit series such as "Stargate Universe" and the Peabody Award-winning "Battlestar Galactica." The Vancouver native, like his fellow cast members Sossamon, De Young, Kolar and Payne, also has a steady sideline in the music business, playing guitar in the popular Canadian band "The Awkward Stage."

DOMINIQUE SWAIN

Actor, "Nathalie Post"

Few actresses have made so indelible impact so young as Dominique Swain, who starred as Nabokov's iconic "Lolita" opposite Oscar-winning actor Jeremy Irons in Adrien Lyne's bold 1997 film. Only 15 at the time, Swain was chosen over 2,500 girls who had auditioned for the role. Since that auspicious debut, Swain has worked virtually constantly, from a key role in John Woo's John Travolta-starrer, *FACE/OFF*, through appearances on hit TV shows such as "Ghost Whisperer" and "JAG" and in acclaimed films such as Nick Cassavetes's gripping true-life crime tale, *ALPHA DOG*, co-starring Bruce Willis, Emile Hirsch and Justin Timberlake. The Malibu native is also a highly visible spokeswoman for PETA.

WAYLON PAYNE

Actor, "Bruno Brotherton"

Singer-songwriter-actor Waylon Payne is the son of the late legendary country and western singing star Sammi Smith, whose number one hit recording of the Kris Kristofferson classic "Help Me Make It Through The Night" features prominently in ROAD TO NOWHERE. Grammy-nominated in 2009 for Lee Ann Womack's hit recording of his song, "Solitary Thinkin'," Payne's musical roots and skills contributed immeasurably to his acclaimed screen performances in two films. In the Oscar-winning biography of Johnny Cash, WALK THE LINE, Payne portrayed the famous rockabilly/country star Jerry Lee Lewis. This led to Payne's starring role as the brilliant but tragic Nashville musician Hank Garland in CRAZY. Payne continues dividing his time between acting and music, appearing on the hit TV series "CSI," and co-starring in the indie film KINGS HIGHWAY.

CLIFF DE YOUNG

Actor, "Cary Stewart"/"Rafe Tachen"

Cliff De Young has deep roots in the music industry, having been the lead singer of the groundbreaking band Clear Light in the 1960s. De Young's breakthrough acting role came in the TV movie, "Sunshine." Since then, De Young has been seen in countless hit TV shows, including "JAG," "CSI," "Nash Bridges" and "The X-Files." His standout movie appearances include Paul Schrader's "Blue Collar," Ed Zwick's Oscar-winning Civil War epic GLORY," THE CRAFT, THE SUBSTITUTE, and SUICIDE KINGS. De Young was originally cast as the lead in an unrealized Monte Hellman project written by ROAD TO NOWHERE author Steven Gaydos in the early 1980s. When Hellman and Gaydos went looking for the perfect actor to play the dual role of "famed" actor Cary Stewart and "fraudulent" politico Rafe Taschen, the duo immediately realized they had a chance to finally work with the much-admired De Young...nearly 30 years after their first attempt!

STEVEN GAYDOS

Writer

As executive editor of the entertainment business magazine "Variety," Steven Gaydos has learned a multitude of lessons about the inner workings of the film industry and he brings this insider's knowledge to his original screenplay for the movie business-set romantic crime thriller, ROAD TO NOWHERE. Prior to joining the publication, Gaydos was the writing partner of writer-showrunner Rene Balcer, a key creative and business figure behind the amazing worldwide success of the "Law and Order" television franchise. Gaydos and Balcer wrote screenplays for Paramount Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros and Columbia pictures.

After going solo, Gaydos contributed to screenplays for director Nouchka Van Brakel's hit comedy, ONE MONTH LATER and developed and co-wrote the film adaptation of Simone de Beauvoir's "All Men Are Mortal" for director Ate de Jong.

A long-time creative partner of director Monte Hellman, Gaydos first worked with the legendary filmmaker on one of Hellman's most iconic films, COCKFIGHTER. Later, Gaydos contributed to the screenplays for Hellman's IGUANA and the tongue-in-cheek horror thriller, BETTER WATCH OUT.

Gaydos tailored his screenplay of ROAD TO NOWHERE for director Hellman so precisely that in its first draft, the film director at the centre of the tale was named...Monte Hellman.

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ROAD TO NOWHERE SCREENWRITER STEVEN GAYDOS AND DIRECTOR MONTE HELLMAN...

STEVE GAYDOS: Monte, we've known each other for a while now. Do you remember how we met?

MONTE HELLMAN: You wrote me a letter with some samples of your poetry and prose. Being illiterate, I suggested you come by to talk. We're still talking. We've even collaborated on two films together: my 1988 film IGUANA, BETTER WATCH OUT in 1989, and now 20 years later on ROAD TO NOWHERE.

SG: Why did you wait so long to make another film? What have you been up to between BETTER WATCH OUT and ROAD TO NOWHERE?

MH: How much time do you have? For the long answer you can read Brad Stevens' book about my work, "Monte Hellman: His Life and Films." Short-short answer is: I've been waiting for ROAD TO NOWHERE.

Seriously, in addition to executive producing RESERVOIR DOGS, I've continued to work on getting several of my old projects made, including SECRET WARRIORS, TOY SOLDIERS, IN A DREAM OF PASSION and DARK PASSION. And there were a number of new projects that I was either hired to work on (FREAKY DEAKY) or developed on my own: THE SECOND DEATH OF RAMON MERCADER, WHITE LEOPARDS, THE LAST GO-ROUND, NOTHING MORE THAN MURDER, RED RAIN, SILVER CITY, FOOL'S GOLD, BUFFALO '66 (which I had set up before Vincent Gallo decided he wanted to direct it himself,) BOOM, SPANO, THE PAYOFF, DESPERADOES and GHOST OF A CHANCE. This last was moving along rapidly before ROAD TO NOWHERE passed it on the rail, and is now next on my plate.

And whenever I had any free time, I've been trying to put together a coffee-table book of my photos with accompanying essays.

SG: While we're still on the topic of your earlier films, are there particular themes that can be found in TWO-LANE BLACKTOP or COCKFIGHTER that still resonate strongly in ROAD TO NOWHERE?

MH: I think the recurrent theme is the hero who, for whatever reason, is incapable of communicating enough with his love object to satisfy her need for connection. But in every other way, ROAD TO NOWHERE breaks entirely new ground for me. I feel it's my first picture, and everything I've done before was merely a rehearsal.

SG: And yet, THE SHOOTING, RIDE IN THE WHIRLWIND, and TWO-LANE BLACKTOP are considered cult classics by many cinephiles. Those familiar with your work may not necessarily recognize ROAD TO NOWHERE as signature Monte Hellman. What made you decide to take such a dramatically different stylistic approach?

MH: You did by writing a script with a dramatically different style. I'm an interpretive artist, much the same as an orchestra conductor. I try to tell the story I'm presented with as faithfully as I can, subject to my own subjective interpretation.

SG: The script I wrote for ROAD TO NOWHERE was about a movie being made about a “true crime”, only “true” within the world of the film, of course. Ultimately though, it was really about us and the people we knew, wouldn’t you say?

MH: I don't think either of us knew where this story came from until after it was in the can, or on the chip or flash card, as the technology now must be addressed. But we now see it came from two wonderful friends who led tragic lives. So I think it's ironic that we've made a movie that is so much about movies, and yet is so grounded in our own lives and experiences.

SG: Actually at one point the movie within the movie was written by me and directed by you, explicitly.

MH: Yes, we were the characters. But I thought that would be "detrimental empathy" for the same reason I wouldn't let James Taylor sing in TWO-LANE BLACKTOP -- it would take the audience out of the movie.

SG: Again, with respect to biography and experience, the character of the film director (“Mitch Haven”) in ROAD TO NOWHERE really demonstrates the callowness of youth, as well as the arrogance that directors can have. Do you feel that you had those flaws?

MH: I was older than that then, and am younger than that now. Whatever flaws I had have probably been magnified ten-fold now. But I still believe Einstein's quip that doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome is the definition of insanity.

SG: Let’s move on to our lead actress Shannyn Sossamon. Do you remember how we “discovered” her?

MH: Yes, but it’s your story really; so you tell it...

SG: Finding Shannyn was the ultimate case of life imitating art. Just as Mitch discovers Laurel by accident, I was having lunch at a restaurant on La Brea in Hollywood and saw Shannyn. She was going through a line-reading with a young actor at a table in front of me and I figured she was an acting student. I didn't want to say anything to her because I was with a group of women and I thought it would look like the ultimate Hollywood cheeseball move. You know, "Hey, baby, I'm making a movie and can I have your phone number to call you for an audition?" But after about 45 minutes of seeing her sitting there in front of me and knowing in my bones she was a Monte Hellman heroine, I got the nerve to go over and give her your number and tell her I thought you should talk to her about the movie. I had absolutely no idea she was an actress and a well-known one at that. I had never seen a single piece of work she'd done, never even seen her picture. I just knew she had that Monte Hellman vibe. But what I didn't know was that she would take "Laurel/Velma" and deliver a performance that isn't just great, but iconic. Like "Laura" and "Gilda" and "Madeleine/Judy" she's got that film noir DNA. I guess the Movie Gods were cruising La Brea Avenue that day.

MH: Interesting you should use the expression "Movie Gods." My mentor Arthur Hopkins always talked (through his writings) about the casting gods. He'd say: “The casting gods smiled on me the day I discovered Humphrey Bogart or Katherine Hepburn or Spencer Tracy.”

SG: Let’s address the character of Laurel, the female side of the love story. Can you talk about how the film relates to Laurie Bird (the female star of TWO-LANE BLACK TOP) and your relationship with her as a man and as a director? She was one of those wonderful friends who led a tragic life....

MH: Laurie raised herself, without mother or father, in the gutters of Queens, New York. At 17 she was far older than me, so I was Eliza to her Higgins in areas of street smarts and contemporary pop culture, and she was my Eliza in the area of the humanities. I don't know when this part of Lauren's (sic!) character was injected, but Laurie became the archive of my memories. She memorized every line from every movie or play I ever directed. This was the truest act of love I've ever experienced.

SG: Can you talk about your own creative process of transferring what's on paper to realizing dramatic characters on screen? Both Shannyn the real-life actress and the character she plays are riveting to watch.

MH: I don't want to demean your wonderful script and the characters you created, but once there are actors cast in the roles, they go beyond the characters on the page. I always tell my actors: "Your job is not to become these characters; the characters must become you." I tried to create an environment in which the actors felt free enough that occasionally they could tap into their subconscious. Shannyn didn't just do it occasionally, she did it all the time. The character truly became her.

SG: The actress in the movie is both a victim but also dangerous, which is often true of victims. It's like drowning; they can drag others down. How do you feel about that?

MH: Not often. Always. It's the basis of film noir: the hero falls in love with the bird with a broken wing, and she manages to destroy him.

SG: The editing of ROAD TO NOWHERE is especially notable. It comes from the script to a certain extent, but I always wondered why you embraced that structure. Why did you choose to craft the film in such a radical way, especially after making westerns and horror films that use a more classical structure and conventional tropes?

MH: We both love the jigsaw puzzle movies of Alain Resnais, Antonioni, et al. I initially accepted your totally non-linear structure, but was gradually persuaded by my brilliant editor, Celine Ameslon, to temper it ever so slightly to help the audience on the path of discovery.

SG: One thing about the script. It was always very self-conscious and reflexive so that the movie deliberately seeks to bring attention to itself. Were you comfortable with that?

MH: I was trained never to do anything to take the audience out of the movie. Your script shook the whole foundation of my training and experience. But when we started to screen the movie for audiences I became fascinated by the power of the "willing suspension of disbelief." We do everything but throw rocks at the viewer in an attempt to convince him or her that it's only a movie. And within seconds they become totally involved again. I now believe we're involved in the most powerful medium ever invented, and we're morally obligated to take this responsibility seriously.

SG: But were there specific parts about the script that made the production that much more challenging?

MH: You've told me that you never try to inhibit your creativity by thinking about production costs while you're writing. It doesn't cost anything to write "London" or "Rome" on a page. Translating that into images then becomes the production's problem, not yours. Normally a low-budget movie, such as RESERVOIR DOGS, (which by the way cost less than our movie and has grossed more than \$85 million and still counting) tries to contain costs by shooting in one location. We all decided that the

scope of ROAD TO NOWHERE was one of the things that made it so exciting, so we determined to keep that big-movie aspect to it. We don't regret that decision.

SG: I love the music especially, the opening song. How did you make those choices?

Ever since I heard Tom Russell's song "Tonight we Ride," and especially "Touch of Evil," it was my dream to have him score a movie. He never responded to my phone calls. Finally, as a last resort, I sent him an email, and I got an answer within five minutes. The rest, as they say, is history.

SG: The movie looks much more beautiful than I could have ever imagined. And it's one of the great pleasures of watching the film. How did you get those shots? How much of it was your great eye and how much your embrace of new technology? I've got to say, you might have matured emotionally since the 70s, but you're completely fresh and bright-eyed when it comes to advances in the equipment.

MH: I've always been drawn to the visual aspects of the medium over all others, but these new cameras with sensors the size of IMAX have a unique pictorial quality. It's almost impossible not to capture beautiful images. But it helps when you have a master cinematographer like Josep, and a great production designer like Laurie Post. It also helps when you shoot your movie in some of the most beautiful places on earth: the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, the West End of London, Lago di Garda in Northern Italy, the ancient parts of Rome...and my living room.

SG: Your daughter Melissa was very involved as a producer on ROAD TO NOWHERE. How did that come about?

MH: Melissa fell in love with this script, and decided it was time we took our lives into our own hands, and not wait for someone else to give us permission to make movies. We made a budget, and when we only raised half of it, Melissa just decided to forge ahead anyway. When we predictably ran out of money half way through, she didn't tell anyone, and since we already had plane tickets, she decided to just forge ahead again. Because she as the captain didn't abandon the sinking ship, the ship never sank. It listed a little at times, but Lord love her, we're still afloat.