



# THE WANDERERS

**A film by Philip Kaufman**

1979 / USA / 117 min. / In English

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## **Synopsis:**

Based on the acclaimed first novel by Richard Price, Philip Kaufman's *The Wanderers* follows the exploits of the titular Italian-American gang in the Bronx in 1963, just before the country underwent profound change. Part comedy and part drama, the film is an evocative and thrilling look back at a more innocent time. The cult classic features a jukebox full of golden oldies and a young cast of up and comers including Ken Wahl (*Wiseguy*), Karen Allen (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*), and Linda Manz (*Days of Heaven*)! Cinematography by Michael Chapman (*Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*). Co-starring John Friedrich, Toni Kalem, Alan Rosenberg, Jim Youngs, Tony Ganios, Dolph Sweet, Michael Wright, Val Avery, Olympia Dukakis and Erland van Lidth de Jeude.

## **Background on THE WANDERERS:**

Based on Richard Price's acclaimed first novel of the same name, *The Wanderers* was adapted for the screen by husband and wife team, Philip and Rose Kaufman, after their son Peter brought the book to their attention. The larger than life characters of the Bronx inspired Price while he was growing up there in the '50s and '60s, and he depicted this milieu in an accordingly heightened and vivid manner. Kaufman's film retains this spirit, often resembling a live-action comic book. Made on a modest budget in a pre-digital age, *The Wanderers* stands out for its striking visual design and period texture, achieved by director of photography Michael Chapman, costume designer Robert De Mora, and production designer John Jay Moore.

The director of thirteen films in a career spanning more than fifty years, Kaufman is justly acclaimed for the varied nature of his oeuvre—spanning the western, horror, historical drama, and action—linked by a strong visual style and refined, literate writing. As writer /director, his credits include *The Right Stuff*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *The White Dawn*, *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid*, and *Henry and June*. Other directorial credits include *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Quills*. He was Oscar-nominated, alongside co-writer Jean-Claude Carrière, for *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and he co-wrote the original story for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* with George Lucas.

*The Wanderers* was the second of Price's novels to be adapted for film or television, following *Bloodbrothers*. His subsequent novels *Clockers*, *Lush Life*, and *Freedomland* were all turned into films, and Scott Rudin is producing a film version of his latest book, *The Whites*. As screenwriter, he has gained plaudits for his scripts including *The Color of Money* (for which he received an Oscar nomination), *Clockers*, episodes of *The Wire*, and the current HBO series *The Night Of*, of which he is also co-creator and executive producer. Price appears in the film as one of the crooked "Bowling Bankrollers."

The film marked the beginning of producer Scott Rudin's career and, in his role as casting director, he uncovered a number of dynamic talents and future stars including Ken Wahl, Karen Allen, Olympia Dukakis, and Linda Manz.

In the years since its original theatrical release in 1979, the film has become a major cult item around the world; it was featured in Danny Peary's *Cult Movies 3*, was once the most requested film on the A&E Network in the New York market, and has inspired a particularly fervent following amongst the organizers and regular attendees of the Telluride Film Festival, many of whom gather every year there in replica Wanderers jackets.

### **Director's Statement:**

My son Peter was 14 when he read Richard Price's book and told Rose and me to turn it into a film. The book stunned us: this Price guy was the Bronx Mark Twain! He was writing about coming of age not on the Mississippi; but in alleys, basements, football fields and back seats of cars. It was a world jammed with perils and thrills, told from the perspective of kids experiencing things for the first time--unknown, confusing things they were struggling to make sense of. It was a dream of a time that was no more, a remembrance of a teenage urban yore, an idyll filled with angst, haunted by music seared into the brain. And it was written with a fast-beating heart and oozing glandular secretions; it was painful, scary, tragic, and funny as hell.

Rose wrote the first screenplay, but studios in their early-70's-infinite-wisdom proclaimed that there was no market for teen-age movies. So we struggled on for many years, always rewriting, always looking to find ways to visually capture the feeling of Richard Price's saga, his almost comic-book-Old Testament perspective of boys who were hard on the outside, sweet on the inside, bravely confronting outsized terrors, believing they could be *Wanderers Forever*.

Somehow we finally got it made. But there had recently been violence in movie theaters, and now exhibitors were more afraid to show the film. One big-time-low-brow critic announced: "*(The Wanderers)* was like a rape or a mugging, leaving the viewer stripped of dignity... (and when Joey and Perry head to California) I can only pray that they stay there. New York has enough pollution already." No one wanted to hear about how Huckleberry Finn had been declared "trash and suitable only for the slums." And so it was shunned, relegated to oblivion, and released in 17 drive-ins and 2 theaters. Fucked.

*I hop right into that car of mine  
And I drive around the world.  
'Cause I'm a Wanderer...yeah a Wanderer  
I roam aroun'. aroun', aroun'.....*

Wandering around the world *The Wanderers* found friends everywhere. The film caught on big-time in England, Germany, Europe, Japan, Asia; someone sent me a photo of a kid in a Cambodian refugee camp wearing a Wanderers cap. In 1982, a *Wanderers* fan club formed in Telluride Colorado; and they meet every year at the Telluride Film Festival wearing Wanderers jackets, singing the songs, reciting every line from the film, telling tales of their own lives, and toasting: *Wanderers Forever!* I saw the film at Telluride with a thousand filmgoers and filmmakers high in the mountains under the stars, and, next to me, sitting on a blanket humming along, was the great director Zhang Yimou from China--*Don't fuck with the Wongs!*

Recently that towering all-American global cultural ambassador Kareem Abdul Jabbar wrote: "As H.G. Wells said, 'History is a race between education and

catastrophe...Unfortunately (many films) don't explore history as much as merely recreate it. So, what would I consider Best Picture-worthy historical dramas?" Among the dozen he names are *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Wild Bunch*, *A Man for All Seasons*...and *The Wanderers*!!

And now finally, after almost four decades of wandering, a really heroic gang showed up. They are called the Kino Lorbers. And they decided enough's enough: *Leave the kids alone! Wanderers Forever!* They created this beautiful Blu-ray. And they're releasing the film in more theaters than it was ever in!!

Rose was proud of *The Wanderers* till the end. All this would've made her even prouder!

*I tear open my shirt I got Rosie on my chest  
'Cause I'm the Wanderer, yeah the Wanderer!  
I roam aroun' aroun' aroun' ...*

Philip Kaufman, 2016.

## Reviews:

“This adaptation of Richard Price's episodic novel plays like the urban flip-side of *American Graffiti*: a macho mini-community grows up and apart in the cultural gulf between Dion and Dylan...rock history gets its most intelligent illustration since *Mean Streets*.” - *Time Out London*

“A heartily anecdotal not-quite-coming-of-age saga... simultaneously tense and funny...an urban kind of all-American fantasy.” - Michael Sragow, *The New Yorker*

“This visually extravagant gang ode...has Fellini-esque touches.” - *The San Francisco Chronicle*

“A well-made and impressive film. Philip Kaufman...has accurately captured the urban angst of growing up in the 1960s.” - *Variety*

“It's like *Grease* with brass knuckles. *The Wanderers* is a violent, sweet-tempered, funny and compassionate ode to the knights of the inner city who had to fight to grow up.” - Jack Kroll, *Newsweek*

“*The Wanderers* is always worth watching. It contains more surprises than a walking tour of Times Square at 3 in the morning: you never know whether the intense activity will explode into violence, scatological humor or even sentimentality.” - Frank Rich, *Time*

“Richard Price's book on which the movie is based and Philip Kaufman's imaginative, loving direction make today's minds and hearts identify with the vintage 1963 Bronx high school seniors whose story it is. Funny and touching...violent and tender...thoroughly ingratiating and unpretentious film...marvelous music...though outwardly it might appear to be a gang movie, inwardly it is something much more important...it moved me so much.” - Norma McLain, *After Dark Magazine*

“It's funny and sad and has some fine performances. It also boasts one of the best assemblages of rock music ever put together for a film...the flip side of *American Graffiti*.” - Rona Barrett, *WABC-TV*

“*The Wanderers* has a humor, a pungency and a pictorial vividness matched by few movies these days.” - Richard Freedman, *The Star Ledger*

“*The Wanderers* has stimulated, moved and excited me more than any film I have seen in months...Phil Kaufman's *The Wanderers* is like *West Side Story* flavored with comic grotesquerie and melancholy poetry of Fellini...*The Wanderers* reawakens our sense of wonder at the most exotic country of all--our own buried past.” - Stephen Farber, *New West*

“Unflaggingly high energy level...magical...” - Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

“Full of sexy scenes and pungent performances...As an acting debut, (Ken) Wahl's performance is phenomenal.” - Michael Sragow, *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*

**Crew:**

Director  
Writers

Director of Photography  
Producers

Editing

Production Design  
Costume Design  
Casting

Philip Kaufman  
Rose Kaufman  
Philip Kaufman  
Richard Price (novel)  
Michael Chapman  
Martin Ransohoff  
Richard R. St. Johns  
John W. Hyde  
Stuart H. Pappé  
Ronald Roose  
John Jay Moore  
Robert De Mora  
Scott Rudin

**Cast:**

Richie Gennaro  
Joey Capra  
Nina  
Despie Galasso  
Turkey  
Buddy  
Perry LaGuardia  
Peewee  
Terror  
Mr. Sharp  
Chubby Galasso  
Clinton  
Joey's Mom  
Bowling Bankroller

Ken Wahl  
John Friedrich  
Karen Allen  
Toni Kalem  
Alan Rosenberg  
Jim Youngs  
Tony Ganios  
Linda Manz  
Erland Van Lidth De Jeude  
Val Avery  
Dolph Sweet  
Michael Wright  
Olympia Dukakis  
Richard Price



**Further reading:**

<http://philipkaufman.com/>

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<http://www.thebetamaxrevolt.com/2015/10/watergate-cinematik-exclusive-interview.html>

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<http://thehollywoodinterview.blogspot.com/2008/03/philip-kaufman-hollywood-interview.html>

<http://www.avclub.com/article/philip-kaufman-13691>

<https://neilmcglone.wordpress.com/2013/11/05/full-interview-with-philip-kaufman/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/01/movies/northern-california-lures-movie-maverick-san-francisco-ten-years-ago-northern.html?pagewanted=all>

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