

The Unbelievable Truth

USA 1989

Directed by
Hal Hartley**Written by**
Hal Hartley**Director of Photography**
Michael Spiller**Music**
Jim Coleman**Cast**
Audrey
Adrienne Shelly*Josh*
Robert Burke*Vic Hugo*
Chris Cooke*Pearl*
Julia McNeal*Emmet*
Gary Sauer

90 min

*Our next screening...***No**

Tue 4 February 2014

Dir: Pablo Larrain

Chilean drama set around
the 1988 public vote as to
whether Augusto Pinochet
should stay in power.

In this season's 'Classic' slot, tonight we are proud to present the debut feature film from the highly influential but little known US auteur Hal Hartley. For more info on his work, visit www.possiblefilms.com

The Unbelievable Truth is another example of that strange mixture of melodrama and irony that David Lynch has popularized with *Twin Peaks*. The approach involves inventing a real world of ordinary people, and then filling it with bizarre and mysterious events. A movie like *The Unbelievable Truth* is second cousin to those melodramas Douglas Sirk made at Universal in the 1950s in which people who looked and spoke and dressed as pillars of the middle class got involved in unspeakably complicated love triangles and crimes of weakness. *The Unbelievable Truth* is a movie for film buffs. Those who wander in off the street are likely to be confused, since it seems to be so unsprung and without purpose. What Hartley is doing, however, is writing a film essay on conventions and cliches and middle-American movie characters. He establishes them as completely ordinary, and then he lets them wander off into the byways of their destinies. What makes the film fun is the deadpan, tongue-in-cheek humor that undermines the seemingly sincere dramatic scenes.

Roger Ebert (original review - 3 Aug 1990)

Coming from nowhere at Sundance 1990, Hartley's debut, *The Unbelievable Truth*, was quite unlike anything else on screens at the time. In the context of the rest of Hartley's career, it sometimes feels like a test-run or a sketch, principally for follow-up *Trust*, outlining early expressions of themes he'd later fill out more comprehensively. And it's very much a product of the late 1980s, from Audry's post-Cold War nuclear paranoia to her father's Reaganite politics. But while it might not be as well-developed as later projects, it remains a delight, with the first demonstration of the intricately rhythmic, almost theatrical dialogue, full of wit and invention, that would come to characterise Hartley's style. But while Hartley's dialogue is what he is most known for, the film demonstrates that he had a keen visual eye from the first, with regular DoP Michael Spiller pulling in nice work on a meagre budget. It also marks the discovery of two figures who would feature heavily in Hartley's later work: Shelly (the victim of a tragic killing in 2006, as she was completing her directorial debut *Waitress*) and Burke (who went on to a role in *The Sopranos*, as well as *Robocop 3*), and both are superb. Keep an eye out too for cameo-sized roles from Edie Falco and even *Meek's Cutoff* director Kelly Reichardt.

from a Hal Hartley retrospective published
in 2012 in IndieWire

