

WHO THE HELL'S IN IT

CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLLYWOOD'S
LEGENDARY ACTORS

PETER BOGDANOVICH



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Movie of the Week (1999)

Who the Devil Made It (1997)

A Moment with Miss Gish (1995)

This Is Orson Welles (1992; expanded 1998), with Orson Welles

A Year and a Day Engagement Calendar (annually, 1991–98; a.k.a. *The White Goddess Engagement Diary*, based on works by Robert Graves; editor)

The Killing of the Unicorn: Dorothy Stratten 1960–1980 (1984)

Pieces of Time (1973; expanded 1985)

Allan Dwan: The Last Pioneer (1970)

Fritz Lang in America (1969)

John Ford (1967; expanded 1978)

The Cinema of Alfred Hitchcock (1963)

The Cinema of Howard Hawks (1962)

The Cinema of Orson Welles (1961)

WHO THE HELL'S IN IT

CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLLYWOOD'S
LEGENDARY ACTORS

Stella Adler • Humphrey Bogart • Marlon Brando
James Cagney • John Cassavetes • Charlie Chaplin
Montgomery Clift • Marlene Dietrich
Henry Fonda • Ben Gazzara • Lillian Gish
Cary Grant • Audrey Hepburn • Boris Karloff
Jack Lemmon • Jerry Lewis • Dean Martin
Sal Mineo • Marilyn Monroe • Anthony Perkins
River Phoenix • Sidney Poitier • Frank Sinatra
James Stewart • John Wayne

Peter Bogdanovich



BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

To the memory

of

Audrey Hepburn,

John Cassavetes,

Sal Mineo,

River Phoenix,

Madeline Kahn,

John Ritter,

and

Dorothy Stratten

Each gone from us

so much too soon

In pictures, personalities are it, you know. It isn't acting per se as it's known in the theater. You'd bring some kid in who just blazed off the screen—a girl or a fellow would hit you instantly. That's what we looked for—some photographic quality, some mysterious hidden thing certain people have.... The great movie stars learned the technique and a few mannerisms and a few moves and became sort of public idols. They couldn't do anything wrong, if you liked them—no matter what they did; it wasn't what they played.

—ALLAN DWAN

Actors are like children. They must be coddled, and sometimes, spanked.

—ALFRED HITCHCOCK

You and your directors! For me, it's all about the acting—movies are, you know. Pictures are ultimately about the performances.

—ORSON WELLES

That's the great thing about the movies.... After you learn—and if you're good and Gawd helps ya and you're lucky enough to have a personality that comes across—then what you're doing is—you're giving people little ... tiny pieces of time ... that they never forget.

—JAMES STEWART

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

THE MAGICAL ART

Some thirty years ago, in Rome, Orson Welles and I were having a late-night drink in his suite at the Eden Hotel. We had spent a couple of hours taping our conversation for a book about his career. The tape machine, much to Orson's relief, was off now and stowed by the door. Of course, it was always at those times that Welles made the best comments. He had been going on about one of his favorite heresies—that directors, and indeed the whole job of directing, were highly overrated. For Orson, motion pictures were essentially about the performances.

When I remarked that a certain film was well directed but not well acted, Welles responded that he couldn't separate those qualities and if it wasn't well acted, then what good was it? Obviously, he said, he agreed that the highest level of great direction—with picturemakers he most admired, like Jean Renoir or John Ford, Ernst Lubitsch or Howard Hawks—certainly ranked among the fine arts. But that the average director, even some of the most successful, with long, distinguished careers, did not make the difference that really good performances do.

A little while later Orson cracked a disparaging remark about a popular contemporary stage and film star, ending with, "Well, you know—*actor!*" In show-biz circles, particularly among crews and production people, the use of the word "actor ..." (said with just the slightest touch of contempt) reads as volumes of recorded experience. It is as much an expletive with or without a preceding "goddamn," and contains all the negative aspects behind the currently fashionable "diva," but none of the glitter or charm. "Actor," which can be hurled like a brick through a window or said under one's breath, carries a rather mundane connotation of a boringly self-involved, humorless and demanding person, often childish and vain—in other words, tediously high-maintenance. None of this is ever taken to imply that the actor is not a good one.



So I asked Orson, Well, if he thought acting was *it* in theater or film, how could he so disparage “actors,” and how did *he* himself behave when he was acting? After all, he had done a great deal more of it than directing. Welles replied, nodding boisterously once, “*Actor!*” We both laughed. Did he mean that when he was acting, he behaved with all the unpleasant connotations behind the pejorative use of “Actor!”? Orson nodded, beaming, almost proudly. “Yup—*actor!*” He laughed, loud and long.

This book repeatedly harks back to that essential paradox about actors, male or female. To achieve what they often do so magically and with such humanity, must there always be a childish or a childlike foundation? In order perhaps to preserve some profound sense of innocent vulnerability? Acting does begin with play-acting. There was, in fact, an innocence on some level with all the star-players I met, and almost all actors, young or old. In their varying ways, at various points in their careers, as well, each of the actors in this book has on some level felt an unspoiled, selfless love for the work and the medium itself, whether on stage or screen (see, in particular, the Lillian Gish chapter).

During the old studio-system days (roughly from about 1915 until the early 1960s) star-players with beauty and peculiarities were the commodities most eagerly sought, most actively exploited, by the entire industry. With the relinquishing of contract talent, the business changed forever. No longer were the combined talents of the best directors, writers, producers and technical craftsmen in the world focused on making the contract players the best they could be. Everybody went on their own, actors preferred to be versatile rather than typed, and the studios—once factories that created entertainment and occasionally art, at the same time helping and mining the talent performing it—ended up having to go picture by picture and pay through the nose for the few stars that supposedly could “open” a movie in the now popular weekly top-ten box-office game, which never existed in the golden age. In the seventies, when the old studio way was already history, Howard Hawks once remarked to me that all through the twenties, thirties, forties, and into the fifties, there were more stars than ever in the history of the world. “And most of them,” he said, “had very little to say about what they should play.” It is a show-biz axiom that many actors and actresses are not necessarily the best judges of what they are best at. But most of the original movie stars had personalities and, as Allan Dwan* put it, they “just blazed off the screen.”

As the gods and goddesses were for the Greeks, these stars formed a kind of twentieth-century mythology, created by the movies. They were no longer actors playing parts—because all their roles merged into one definitive character, one special folk hero, similar to but not necessarily identical with the original mortal. And this creation became, as director Fritz Lang* used to phrase it, a “valid dramaturgical element.” Robert Aldrich,* who directed James Stewart in one sixties picture, admitted that he and his screenwriter decided to use for their script “what Stewart seems to be.” The great film stars had an authenticity that transcended acting. They became real—not actors or even people playing themselves. They simply were: Cary Grant. John Wayne. Greta Garbo. Clark Gable. Marlene Dietrich.

With normal fame and success intensified by virtual deification in the United States, of course, it became easy to forget integrity, lose all innocence; to sell out, succeed yet fail within. It is the typically American struggle in the *Golden Boy* syndrome (prizefighter vs. pianist): What shall it be, brute force or true passion? Money or poetry? The question itself now almost seems dated. But then *Faust* is an even older story. And as Faust learned, it is dangerous to ignore the immortal soul. This book, therefore, is dedicated to the spirits of all the brilliant players in it, long may they live.

Unlike my earlier work about directors, *Who the Devil Made It*, the chapters here are not arranged chronologically in order of the subjects’ births, but rather in a more personal way: with the exception of the first two, and the last, these

chapters are arranged roughly in the order that each person came into my life. Since my firsthand experiences with Lillian Gish and Marilyn Monroe were exceptionally brief—the latter not more than a glimpse—I have begun and ended with these two extraordinary women whom I wish I had gotten to know. Standing as vivid antipodes, both in career and character, the two represent the most traditional and archetypal—and most severely limiting—roles of women: virgin and whore. Because a truer understanding of female nature would radically improve relationships between the sexes all over the planet—and thus the planet—the continuing mythic power of Gish and Monroe seems appropriate to bookend these profiles of star power in a “man’s world” ruled by personality.

My take on Bogart—which, as an *Esquire* article in 1964 (Bogie had died in 1957), heralded the beginnings of the Bogart cult—is the only other chapter that deals with someone I didn’t actually know, even a little, or spend time with. The Bogart piece is also the most explicit look at the differences and similarities between the actual star-personality and the iconic image of them. The length of contact and levels of intimacy with the others, of course, vary greatly. From the briefest—with Montgomery Clift or Marlon Brando, to pretty brief with James Cagney, Henry Fonda or Charlie Chaplin—all the way to relationships that went on for nearly three decades, as with Cary Grant or James Stewart. Or, as is now for more than four decades, with Jerry Lewis. Portions of this material have appeared previously in other forms (noted either in the text or in the acknowledgments).

Résumé

Since the summer I turned sixteen, I’ve been working and living with professional actors. Actually, though hired as a glorified apprentice, I became one of their number within that first innocent summer, landing a lead role by the seventh week. But three years earlier, I had made my stage debut, doing the title part in our sixth grade (Collegiate School, on West 78th Street) production of the E. Y. Harburg–Burton Lane musical, *Finian’s Rainbow*. My first line was “Eureka! Sharon, come quickly!” My dear mother became my first director when she heard me do a few lines and said, “You better work on that Irish accent.”

Still, my earliest performances had been at some of my Parents’ intimate dinner parties in their New York apartments—either at 15 West 67th Street (from my infancy to nearly thirteen) or at 90th Street and Riverside Drive (until I was twenty-two)—where after the meal they would ask me to recite—poems like Poe’s “Annabel Lee” or “The Raven,” or Whitman’s “O Captain! My Captain!” or Robert W. Service’s “The Shooting of Dan McGrew”—or to read a short short story like Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.”

In the same period, before I had turned thirteen, I produced and directed—and acted on—three or four radio productions made at home. This was just when dramatic and comic radio programs were fading from the scene; I had grown up on them, thought they were terrific. For Christmas my parents had given me a much-wished-for reel-to-reel Revere tape recorder, and with it I would tape a radio play (usually *Suspense*), then transcribe it word-for-word in longhand and type it out on my tiny portable typewriter. I would use my own selection of music with a little advice from my father or my uncle Fred Gandolfi and his extraordinary classical record collection (sections of Mussorgsky’s *Night on Bald Mountain*, and Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*). I played every part (including the women), and created all the sound effects by hand or vocally. When my sister Anna was born, I made a production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* for my mother and played it over the phone while she was in the hospital. I did all my own announcers, too, and had my own call letters: BTBC, Bogdanovich Tape Broadcasting Company.

Later that same year, having become a teenager, I went to see my first Broadway play (Henry Fonda in *Point of No Return* by Paul Osborn) and, thereafter, from 1952 to 1964, when I left New York for Los Angeles, I saw nearly every important show on or off Broadway. When I was sixteen or seventeen, my parents used some connections they had to arrange for me to go backstage and meet Charles Laughton, who I believe was playing in Shaw’s *Don Juan in Hell* (which he also directed). He was quite heavy and awfully nice in a slightly gruff yet self-deprecating way. When I told him I wanted to be an actor he said, “Well, you should have no trouble—you’re a good-looking boy. I’ve looked

like the hind end of an elephant since I was twenty-one.”



Edward Everett Horton in characteristic expression, flanked by Katharine Hepburn and Jean Dixon in George Cukor’s film of the Philip Barry play Holiday (1938), starring Cary Grant. Seventeen years later I was Horton’s dresser.

As a high school freshman (still at Collegiate), I was the youngest ever to have the lead in the annual school production, playing the heavy in an Agatha Christie–like suspense piece, *The Ninth Guest*, by Owen Davis. I began cracking my knuckles as a character-thing and then couldn’t stop for about twenty years. All through my thirteen years at Collegiate, I was nicknamed “Bugs,” because of a popular impression I did of Bugs Bunny. At other times, my nicknames fluctuated to Dean or Jerry, or Marlon, but Bugs prevailed. At fifteen, I started Saturday-morning teenage acting classes at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, impressed the teacher, actress Eleanor Gould (especially with my *Cyrano*), and she invited me to become part of the children’s theater and an apprentice with the main company for the summer of 1955 at the Cherry County Playhouse in Traverse City, Michigan.

The theater had a good resident company with actors from all over the country, especially New York, and each week a different star would come in, rehearse with us for a couple of days, then perform for a week, and move on. It was Star Summer Stock, lots of fun, and virtually gone today. I was more than a month shy of my sixteenth birthday when I left Manhattan (by train) and came back twelve weeks later, having played the lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, directed and written a kids’ variety show, and done a (silent) butler in Maugham’s *The Constant Wife* starring Sylvia Sidney. My birthday fell in that week and she gave me a real silent butler, with a handwritten card that read “Oh, you *are* the silent one!” A reference, I guess, to my being talkative. I wish now that I had talked less and asked more questions.

The sad truth is that within three years I would have known who each of those ten stars were, and what they had done *before* arriving in Traverse City, Michigan. Sylvia Sidney, for God’s sake, had worked with Alfred Hitchcock,* Fritz Lang, King Vidor, Josef von Sternberg,* and Spencer Tracy, Henry Fonda and Cary Grant, among others. Did I know? No. When I finally met Sylvia Sidney again, about forty-five years later at a Hitchcock centennial celebration, I reminded her of her present and our brief association. Graciously, she pretended to remember. She was thin and fragile, had a hard time stepping up to the podium. Finally, her first words into the mike were: “Getting old is a bitch!” She died a few months later, those questions I would have asked never to be answered.

Nor, when I met Edward Everett Horton (I was his offstage dresser), had I even heard of all those great directors he'd worked with, whom I was so soon to revere (and in several cases, meet and befriend): Vidor, Sternberg, George Cukor,* Ernst Lubitsch* (five times!); and with Astaire and Rogers, Grant and Katharine Hepburn. Watching him from the wings every night, I learned how much you could get out of the smallest gesture if it was placed right. While holding someone at bay with a pistol, Horton at one point moved the wrist of his gun-hand very slightly and got a huge laugh. It was clearly his own moment, because he topped it by getting two more laughs with equally small hand gestures, plus a final "topper," which was the biggest laugh of the bunch. He may have been holding a gun but it was the audience he had in the palm of his hand. Horton died fifteen years later; I still recall—having helped him out of his dress coat and into a smoking jacket every night—the sharp yet musky smell of his cologne.

Others over that summer included Richard Arlen (unasked questions about Howard Hawks,* Sternberg, William Wellman, Gary Cooper); ZaSu Pitts (worked with Erich von Stroheim three times, Leo McCarey,* Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford); Ilona Massey (the Marx Bros.). Veronica Lake got married for the second time during her days in Michigan—she was in Preston Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels*, shortly to become a favorite of mine. Ignorance may be bliss but you pay for it with recriminations.

My favorite role was in the seventh week, playing Signe Hasso's teenage son in Edward Mabley's comedy *Glad Tidings*. It was the juvenile lead and a terrific part to land while still an apprentice. And Signe—who, it would turn out, had also worked with Lubitsch, Cukor, Grant, C. B. DeMille, and Ronald Colman—gave me a still-treasured compliment when she said I got more laughs out of the role than anyone who had played it before, even on Broadway. She couldn't have been warmer or more kind. One afternoon, we went for a long lovely ride in her convertible. Actually, I saw her a number of times over the years, first in New York when she was doing an off-Broadway show, then in Hollywood, but somehow always at gatherings when we couldn't really speak. I rode uptown in a cab with her once soon after her beloved only son, also named Peter, had died in his twenties, over which she suffered terribly.

Signe, who was Swedish, was wonderful to have as my first mother in the theater, and not long before her death in 2002, I did phone her in Los Angeles a couple of times (I was back in N.Y.C. by then) and asked a few questions. "Cary was the most wonderful gentleman," she told me, and "DeMille was very underrated—he was very good, really." She adored Cukor, "a dear friend," and Lubitsch, "of course, was the best," acting out each part for every actor and "better than any of them. I used to tell him he was much better than me in my role as the French maid [in *Heaven Can Wait*, 1943]." Signe and I had planned to tape some of her reminiscences, but before we could she died suddenly in her eighty-fourth year.



Signe Hasso is the French maid who initiates teenager Dickie Moore (who grows up to be Don Ameche) into the mysteries of sex for Ernst Lubitsch's penultimate classic, Heaven Can Wait (1943), a lovely human comedy, his first in color. Spring Byington and Charles Coburn are Dickie/Don's disapproving mother and approving uncle. At the time, Moore was almost the same age as I was when twelve years later Signe played my mother onstage.

Another apprentice whom I met that summer advised me to study with Stella Adler, by then already legendary as an actress/star-teacher, and in the fall of 1955, having lied about my age (I said I was eighteen), I entered into the beginner class she taught. For the next four falls, winters and springs I took Stella's classes in the afternoons after school. I was also briefly in the large cast of the Kurt Weill–Paul Green musical-drama *Johnny Johnson*, which Stella directed off-Broadway. Those four years with her were the solid foundation for all the directing and acting I would ever do.

During June–September, 1956–58, I continued working in summer theaters: in Stratford, Connecticut, as an apprentice extra, bit player and understudy at John Houseman's American Shakespeare Festival (*King John, Measure for Measure, Taming of the Shrew*); and in Central Park at Joseph Papp's original New York Shakespeare Festival (*Othello, Twelfth Night*), trying out *Othello* for a week in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. My favorite summer of acting in stock was at Falmouth, Massachusetts, where (turning 19) I had a really good time playing fine parts in Shaw's *Major Barbara* (the stuffy son) and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (the Nazi-like main heavy), plus six comedy-part bits all in one farce (once, I followed myself on), using a different famous voice for each. After about the third entrance the audience figured out it was all the same actor and laughed every time I turned up.

Finally out of high school, I tried to get work in theater or in television. There were very few films made in New York at the time, and live dramatic TV was on its way out fast. I did bits on two of the last good ones: "Blast in Centralia No. 5" with Jason Robards, Jr., and Maureen Stapleton (directed by George Roy Hill for *Seven Arts Playhouse*), and "Fifty Grand," out of Hemingway, with Ralph Meeker (directed by Sidney Lumet* for *Kraft Television Theatre*). Auditioned twice and was turned down twice for the Actors Studio, did leads in a couple of showcases off-Broadway (Tennessee Williams' one-act *Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen*), and in Westport, Connecticut (a new play by Michael Hastings, *Yes, and After*). I hated auditioning, and found the process humiliating and not a fair way to judge talent. Often, I would eventually discover, the best actors were not necessarily good auditioners, and good auditioners were not necessarily always as good once they had the role, the audition sometimes being the best

you were going to get. When I started directing, my casting sessions were usually long because I tried to give the actors as much time as possible. The necessity of auditioning, however, is what propelled me away from acting as my primary career.

In the late fall of 1958, I suggested to a group of five students I was hanging out with at Stella's that I direct them in a scene from Clifford Odets' Hollywood drama, *The Big Knife*. We rehearsed for a week or so and then they performed it with great success during one of Stella's scene-classes. From this point on, my focus changed from acting to directing and by the end of the following year, in November 1959, I co-produced and directed an off-Broadway production of *The Big Knife*, which was a *succès d'estime*. I was twenty.

We had a good cast and everybody in it kept on working afterward, but the only one who became famous was Carroll O'Connor. I had cast him—it was only his second appearance in New York City, and his first leading role—as the movie-studio boss whose sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy were supposedly based largely on M-G-M's Louis B. Mayer. Carroll was superb in the part, received great notices, got his first agent from it, soon went to Hollywood, and never looked back. Ironically, in the Robert Aldrich film of *The Big Knife* (1957), Rod Steiger had played the studio boss and, years later, Carroll took another Steiger movie-role when he did the popular TV series based on *In the Heat of the Night*.

There occurred with O'Connor, shortly before we opened, one of those defining moments for a director. I was giving performance-notes to the cast after a run-through. One of them was a direction I had already given Carroll—repeatedly—and found repeatedly not being sufficiently heeded, so I said, without looking up from the clipboard, “And Carroll is still speaking quite often with the cigar in his mouth.” I had pointed out earlier that his doing so made it difficult to understand the language, and that it was Clifford Odets, after all, whose brilliant idiosyncratic dialogue (as in the classic all-Odets-dialogued New York picture, *Sweet Smell of Success*) was perhaps the playwright's most often noted and praised attribute. Carroll now said in deliberate, irritated tones, “There's a lot more wrong with this production than my talking with the cigar in my mouth.” I didn't look up. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before, of course, but clearly I knew I had to respond quickly and decisively to the challenge or I could lose control of the entire cast. After what seemed like an eternity in the atmosphere of that room, I said, keeping my head and voice down: “Yes, there *are* a lot of things wrong with this production.” I looked up at him: “And *one* of them is that you talk with the cigar in your mouth. So don't do it anymore.” He said nothing and I went on with the notes; we never spoke of it again, and he generally kept the cigar out of his mouth during his lines. What most amused me personally when seeing his decade-long, myth-making Archie Bunker of *All in the Family* was how often he spoke with a cigar in his mouth.

We saw each other only twice more before his death in 2001; at a political gathering (described below) and at the 1972 Golden Globes gala, where he won his first award for *All in the Family*, and had the final word on our moment of friction. I was seated directly below the winners' podium, having been nominated for directing and co-scripting *The Last Picture Show*. During Carroll's acceptance speech, he told about his having gotten his first important role from a young New York director who was “an arrogant son-of-a-bitch, and he's seated right below me here tonight.” We hugged after the event, and spoke briefly. Not long after Carroll died, Iran into his one and only beloved wife Nancy, who told me that she and Carroll were so broke before *The Big Knife* that when I called him back to audition for a second time, Carroll was angry because they had to scrounge around and redeem pop-bottle deposits to make the subway fare.

When our *Big Knife* leading man (in his late thirties) announced his decision to do a Hollywood television film, I was so exhausted from the year-plus I had spent raising the money and then casting, directing, opening, advertising, promoting, I was simply too tired to look for, and direct all over again, a replacement in that crucial role for only the last two weeks of our run. I decided to play it myself. Orson Welles had done old men while in his teens, why couldn't I do fortyish at twentyish? This self-casting was generally deplored by the ensemble, but I ignored their objections, grayed my hair and played the doomed Charlie Castle for sixteen well-attended performances off-

Broadway on Manhattan's East 30th Street, happily doing the role originated on Broadway by John Garfield, filmed with Jack Palance, directed on the Paris stage by Jean Renoir starring Daniel Gélin, and imagined by Odets himself when he wrote it (he told me) as Cary Grant. I loved every second of acting it, and the applause was as good as ever. I especially remember Carroll O'Connor's energy, precision, truth, and star-assurance; acting with him was easy because he gave you everything fully.

In the summer of 1961, I was the artistic director for a ten-week season of stock at the Phoenicia Playhouse in Phoenicia, in upstate New York, not far from Woodstock and Kingston (where I was born and lived for about three months). I also supervised the casting, chose several of the plays, directed four of them and acted in a couple. My own productions were the Moss Hart–George S. Kaufman Hollywood satire, *Once in a Lifetime*, Odets' rarely revived domestic drama *Rocket to the Moon*, Tennessee Williams' poetic allegory *Camino Real*, and Agatha Christie's classic whodunit, *Ten Little Indians*. Most of the actors and a couple of the directors who were just starting out with us that summer subsequently have had long careers: George Morfogon (who already was one of my closest friends), Anthony Zerbe, James Tolkin, Joanna Miles; directors Glenn Jordan, Michael Lindsay-Hogg, (actor-teacher) William Hickey; our costume designer was Polly Platt (who would become a prominent production designer and producer, my wife for eight years, and the mother of my two daughters). In 1964 (having started writing for *Esquire* magazine two years before), I directed and produced an ill-fated off-Broadway production of *Once in a Lifetime*; financial circumstances killed us, and within six months of its closing, I had moved to Los Angeles, where I lived and worked for most of the next thirty-two years.

Despite my career as a journalist, and my subsequent success as a film director, my roots obviously had been as an actor, although I acted infrequently after moving to California, yet most memorably: playing a lead role of the young director in my own first film as a director, *Targets* (1968), featuring a few scenes of me with Boris Karloff; acting a lead as another young film director, with Orson Welles directing and John Huston as an aging veteran filmmaker, in Welles' legendary last picture, *The Other Side of the Wind* (1970–1976), finally perhaps to be shown in 2005; playing a bit as myself with Gena Rowlands in the last scene of John Cassavetes' beautiful backstage drama, *Opening Night* (1977); acting the government-heavy opposite Ben Gazzara in Singapore for my own film version of Paul Theroux's novel, *Saint Jack* (1979); and, most famously, as the somewhat square but decent psychiatrist to psychiatrist Lorraine Bracco in David Chase's epoch-making HBO series, *The Sopranos* (1999–2005).

During my years directing pictures, I've been blessed with some magnificent casts and quite a few superb actors. Among these are many whom I was fortunate enough to introduce to the public in either their movie debut or their first notable role on the big screen: Sandy Baron, Timothy Bottoms, Eileen Brennan, Jeff Bridges, Sandra Bullock, Ellen Burstyn, Anthony Clark, Laura Dern, Burton Gilliam, John Hillerman, Madeline Kahn, Cloris Leachman, Tatum O'Neal, Randy Quaid, John Ritter, Cybill Shepherd, Eric Stoltz, and others. Apart from those who have a chapter of their own, I was also lucky to work with a number of illustrious, gifted, and in some cases, mythic stars (which is yet another book or two).

In the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, I have been acting more and more, usually in cameo roles, and often playing a movie director. It's called typecasting. To my eternal regret, I was unable to do a classic when Sydney Pollock kindly offered it to me—the director (Dabney Coleman did it) in *Tootsie*.

The Stars Party

The truth is that the acting life (especially in the movies) has a number of occupational hazards, high among them the emotional fallout from the repeated extraordinary closeness—of family-like proportions (known as production)—being summarily ended, most people rarely seen again. And so a sense of loss (or its ghost) pervades most phases of the actual work. The beautiful English author Rumer Godden once worked on a screen adaptation of a book of hers with Jean Renoir—to me (and to many others), the finest film director of the western world. Their

collaboration, *The River*, shot entirely in India, is noted by all as one of his greatest triumphs. In a memoir (*A House with Four Rooms*), Godden ended her long and loving section on the making of that picture with this:

When a film is over it is over. There seems to be an unwritten code that, when crew and actors part, you let them go. Maybe you will see them again in perhaps another film—as I have several times; then you pick up the threads where you left off but, meanwhile, you do not seek to keep contact. This sounds heartless but it is sense. How can professionals remember everyone they meet on a film?

It is hard though for people outside the stage and film world to understand. They are often hurt by it. “We thought Renoir liked us,” said the wife of the manager of the jute press in which we had filmed, and said it in bitterness. She felt they had been “used”—as they had. “We thought he liked us.” They had sent Christmas cards, which were not reciprocated.

“We did. He does.” Which was true or would have been true if Jean had been reminded of them, but when the cards came he was probably in Italy or Mexico. “*The River?*” he would have said. “That’s over long ago.”

For actors, this sort of seesaw life leads to a somewhat bigger than natural need to unwind after a day’s or week’s or three months’ intensive work.

Also, a lot of the moviemaking process is so boring for actors—the lighting usually takes a long time and repetitions of scenes from many angles, often necessitated by directorial uncertainty—that they often feel obliged to bust out for a night on the town. Or some awards presentation or special tribute (see below). Usually there’s not much to do in Los Angeles at night: it’s an early-rising company town. In the mid-1960s when I first got to Hollywood, an evening at a club called Whisky A Go Go was *the* place to be in California, or practically in the entire civilized world. By now, of course, much of the earth’s nightlife is essentially the same experience as the one I had in 1965.

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The Whisky had opened January 15, 1964, and at that moment was the hottest club in America. Jack Paar’s *Tonight* show (Paar was before Johnny Carson and after Steve Allen) covered it and ABC-TV did a documentary on it, Johnny Rivers’ records (he was singing there) were selling, and Whisky’s four owners were doing fine. They had the furtive look of men who knew they were riding a wave, their eyes darting about, nervous to make it now because they might never get this kind of chance again.

But then, right then, everybody came. You’d see Loretta Young, and Jack Palance and his wife, Shelley Winters, Laurence Harvey, Sal Mineo. Fred Astaire came around one week. So did Bob Hope and Dean Martin. And the Beatles. They caused a riot on top of the usual one. Pierre Salinger (JFK’s press secretary) was in one night. That blonde dancing wildly in the middle of the floor, a big black bow in her hair, that was Mamie Van Doren. Johnny Rivers was going with her at the time. And at the next booth were four of NASA’s astronauts. That one in the middle was David Scott, who was rumored to be going to the moon (and did).

And the beatniks from Venice came (under some new moniker), and the arty crowd from UCLA and the hippies from New York and the squares from all over and the has-beens who wanted to be in on the action, and the in-crowd because they wanted to stay that way. There was a fellow with hair down to the middle of his back. And another with his hair cut like Shakespeare’s. Quite a few mixed couples. Girls in the tightest possible Capri pants and high heels. Girls barefoot and covered with makeup. And boys covered with makeup. Men with beards and sunglasses. On the balcony, leaning against a pole, stood a surly young male prop in a goatee, staring down at the dance floor. He didn’t move all night. No one could move much, the dancing mainly being various sexual gyrations, and the noise so deafening that conversations were not possible. In three cages suspended from the ceiling, three scantily-dressed

young women moved about suggestively but with little excitement.

~~Meanwhile, the other clubs ran only half-filled or empty while the walls of the Whisky A Go Go shook and swelled from five times their comfortable capacity. Was it nicer? Better? Cheaper? No, dude, it was in.~~

The Stars Celebrate

On January 7, 1973, Paramount, the studio Adolph Zukor used to own, turned his hundredth birthday celebration into a glittering gala at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, a benefit (\$125 a plate) for the Variety Clubs of America, a major publicity blast for itself, and a tribute to the oldest founding father of the industry. Twelve hundred and fifty of Hollywood's finest turned up—a far better showing, in celebrities anyway, than the Oscars had been drawing in recent years. As Bob Hope unkindly put it, “If a bomb fell on this place, Troy Donahue would be back in business!” (In the twenty-first century, hardly anyone would get that joke.) Among the hundred or so on the three-tiered dais: Anne Baxter, Jack Benny, Michael Caine, Frank Capra, Bette Davis, Allan Dwan, Gene Hackman, Charlton Heston, Alfred Hitchcock, Rock Hudson, Danny Kaye, Gene Kelly, Dorothy Lamour, Mervyn LeRoy, Jerry Lewis, Fred MacMurray, Groucho Marx, Walter Matthau, Gregory Peck, George Raft, Buddy Rogers, Diana Ross, Gale Sondergaard, Barbara Stanwyck, George Stevens, Stella Stevens, James Stewart, Liv Ullmann, Jack Warner, William Wyler, not to mention the heads and key executives of all the major studios, and me. “A living wax museum,” Hope called it.

When he was sixteen, so the story went, Zukor left Hungary and came to New York with \$40 sewn into the lining of his coat. He eventually became a successful furrier, began investing in penny arcades and nickelodeons, finally exhibiting two-reelers, then the first feature film, *Queen Elizabeth*, Sarah Bernhardt's only movie, her “one chance for immortality,” as she called it. A pretty bad picture then, it's unwatchable now except to meticulous archivists, but its success helped to promote Zukor's movie company, Famous Players (launched in 1912), into the big time. The firm's original formula, “Famous Players in Famous Plays,” was actually not a good idea since it stuck to the idea of pictures as filmed theater—instead of moving in the direction Griffith and others were pointing: to a new art. Later Zukor merged with Jesse Lasky to form Famous Players-Lasky, which evolved, as movie companies did in those days, into the less clumsily named Paramount. (“If it's a Paramount Picture, it's the Best Show in Town” was the slogan for years.)

The mood of the evening was, What the hell, Zukor was one hundred years old and no one in pictures had ever made *that* before, so let's give him credit for everything! For Mary Pickford and Doug Fairbanks, for Gloria Swanson, Gary Cooper, Clara Bow, Hope and Crosby and Lamour, Dietrich too, and Veronica Lake, Alan Ladd, and Maurice Chevalier, and don't forget William S. Hart. If they didn't actually *say* he'd invented the movies, the implication was there, but after all it was for a good charity and no one really got hurt.

It was a show-biz night. Bob Hope came on with a string of nasty and brutally funny cracks—insults is the right word—but he was in his element. I hadn't heard him that good for years. No political jokes, no plugs for Vietnam, just a machine-gun barrage of one-liners and jokes that took the mickey out of everyone there, even himself. If he was a little cruel, at least he wasn't sanctimonious. He got a standing ovation, by the way—the only one of the evening except for Mr. Zukor when they finally wheeled him in at the end of the affair. But Hope's was spontaneous, while Zukor's was more or less mandatory. It was also difficult to *see* Mr. Zukor in that wheelchair behind the dais, so everyone remained standing for quite some time—long after they brought out the fourteen-foot birthday cake which looked plastic.

Before the start, the dais guests and assorted other VIPs and press assembled first in the Empire Room of the Hilton, surrounded by huge movie stills and a replica of the famous Paramount gates; drinks and canapés passed about by waiters, lots of business talk and gossip, not much real conversation, it was too crowded. Then the word went out for the dais people to gather in the next room for their entrance. I was talking with Jimmy and Gloria

Stewart when Howard Koch, the producer of the gala (he also had done the last two Oscar shows), came over and said, pointing, “Hey, would you guys go in there and find your names and sit on them.” He moved quickly away to the next group. Gloria turned to Jimmy. “What’d he say?”

Jimmy looked whimsical. “He said we should ... he said would we find our names and *sit* on them.”

“Oh,” said Gloria. “Well, see you later, darling.”

“Yeah,” Jimmy said. “Well, I’m going to go find my name and *sit* on it.”

The names were on little cardboard signs on rows of folding chairs. Much amusement and a little chaos in finding them: Stella Stevens browsing absent-mindedly through the B’s; Hitchcock, launching into, for the benefit of Capra, Gene Hackman and Gene Kelly, his story of how he’d first worked for Mr. Zukor in England in 1920, though of course Mr. Zukor didn’t know it at the time, Hitch being a lowly title-writer then. Before anyone could really sit down, we were being pulled to stage left for our entrances. Each of the hundred dais guests was announced separately, but also very quickly. Hardly enough time for a bow even, much less the applause to which some of them were accustomed and, indeed, entitled. But on they came at double time, except when the announcer got things screwed up (he introduced George Stevens, Sr., as George Stevens, Jr., and started to announce Mae West before someone could tell him she hadn’t shown up) or there was a delay in finding someone who obviously hadn’t found his name and sat on it.

After Hope and Jack Benny, came the “entertainment tribute,” which was staged by Tommy Tune and Michael Stuart. It was an energetic display. Loud and fast and boisterous, lots of balloons, jets of smoke, strings of confetti. But I kept having the feeling—as various dancers came on impersonating Paramount stars Swanson and Bow and Dietrich and Betty Grable (I thought she was a Fox star), Veronica Lake and Mae West—that it was all really meant as a giant put-on. That Tommy Tune—who also starred on his stilt-like legs—had been stuck with this assignment and couldn’t help but send it up in a kind of devilishly intense, almost sadistic fashion. I can’t believe he really waxed sentimental about all those old stars he was “recapturing” for us, and indeed the whole performance—in fact, the whole evening—was strikingly bereft of sentiment or, strangely, even an honest stab at sentimentality. There was something coldly calculating about that stage show, and when, at the end of it, Tommy asked the audience to join him in counting out Mr. Zukor’s one hundred years as the ensemble did a hundred high kicks, no one did. I guess the idea was for the thing to climax in cheering chaos with 1,250 voices blasting “one hundred,” but the crowd didn’t count; they just sat there watching.

Maybe they too couldn’t help feeling the cold edge of derision behind it all. Otherwise, how to explain the culminating entrance of the real Dorothy Lamour, flanked by two small chimps whom she introduced as Bob and Bing? Add to this bit of weirdness the fact that the animals both misbehaved, shrieking chimp shrieks loudly to the delight of the crowd and the embarrassment of Miss Lamour, who handled it with the humor of a professional caught in a nightmare. I think she had really wanted to celebrate “Papa” Zukor’s birthday—she’s the only one who called him that all night—and felt sincerely warm toward him. Her remarks seemed completely genuine, but by that time it was too late. David Butler, the veteran director who had guided her and Hope and Crosby through one of the *Road* pictures, was sitting next to me. “Why didn’t they give her a mike?” he said sadly. “She never had the greatest voice, you know, she needs a mike.”

Oscars

Years ago, when Cary Grant and Dyan Cannon were getting divorced, a perhaps apocryphal story appeared in the scandal sheets: As an extreme example of Grant’s supposed irrationality, Cannon cited to the judge Cary’s yearly habit of sitting in front of his television during the Academy Award ceremonies and sardonically abusing all the participants. This item, true or not, must have amused nearly everyone in Hollywood, since nearly everyone in Hollywood does pretty much the same thing. In fact, for those who avoid going to the actual telecast itself, having a

TV dinner with friends while lacerating the presenters, winners and losers on the tube has become an almost eagerly awaited ritual.

The funny thing is that from all accounts, when the Academy Awards began in 1929, they were conducted in a similar spirit of irreverence, something that has practically disappeared from the event itself. “They used to have it down at the old Coconut Grove,” Jimmy Stewart told me in the late seventies. “You’d have dinner and alawta drinks—the whole thing was ... it was just ... it was a *party*. Nobody took it all that seriously. I mean, it was swell if ya won because your friends were givin’ it to you, but it didn’t mean this big deal at the bawx office or anything. It was ... it was just alawta friends gettin’ together and tellin’ some jokes and gettin’ loaded and givin’ out some little prizes—the things they handed out were a lot smaller those days. My gawsh, it was ... there was no pressure or anything like that.”

Cary Grant corroborated this to me: “It was a *private* affair, you see—no *television*, of course, no *radio* even—just a group of friends giving each other a par-ty. Because, you know, there is something a little embarrassing about all these wealthy people publicly congratulating each other. When it began, we *kidded* ourselves: ‘All right, Freddie March,’ we’d say, ‘we know you’re making a *million* dollars—now come on up and get your little *medal* for it!’”

The alleged origin of the award’s now official nickname in itself indicates a certain inebriated lightness. Supposedly, the rear end of the statuette (for some reason it’s a naked gent with a sword) reminded Bette Davis of the one on a boyfriend named Oscar, and she didn’t mind loudly mentioning the resemblance. It was hard, therefore, to be entirely serious about a prize named after somebody’s ass.

A lot of frivolous things have been turned into money, however, so the award that first went to the German star Emil Jannings (received for his performances in two silent films, *The Way of All Flesh* and *The Last Command*) has evolved into something not only treasured but deeply coveted. Actually, by the end of World War II, Jannings himself valued it more than when he received it. Having returned to Germany with the coming of sound in 1929, Jannings decided to stay there as part of Hitler’s cultural scene. Evidently, when the Americans marched into Berlin, they encountered a rotund and pathetic figure meekly moving toward them down a bombed-out boulevard, clutching a brass statuette, holding it up to be recognized. “Please,” he said, pointing to it desperately, “don’t shoot—I vin Oscar.”

Maybe there’s only one place that does it right. Every year in Barcelona they give awards for poetry. The third prize is a silver rose, the second prize is a gold rose, and the first prize—the one for the best poem of all—is a real rose.

Stars and Politics

Long before Ronald Reagan became president, it was a commonplace that there was politics in show business and show business in politics. In 2001, Arthur Miller published a book-length essay, expanded from his Jefferson Lecture in Washington, D.C., *On Politics and the Art of Acting*, in which he dissects, examines and analyzes brilliantly this phenomenon as exemplified in the fractured 2000 election. I was present myself at three or four representative historical moments in the mix of politics and showbiz:

Nixon at San Clemente

In mid-1972, about a year before Watergate began to simmer, Mrs. Norman Taurog was on the phone (her husband had won an Oscar in 1931 for directing *Skippy*); being on the Committee to Re-elect the President, she was calling to find out how I was voting this year and whether I’d endorse Nixon. I told her I wasn’t endorsing anyone.

“Don’t you *like* our President?” she said.

“I don’t know him.”

“Would you like to meet him?”

“Sure.”

That's how I happened to be invited to the August 27th reception for some four hundred Hollywood folk at the "Western White House" in San Clemente. I had got special permission to bring Cybill Shepherd, though she wasn't my wife. The check-in point was attended by Secret Service men, uniformed guards with walkie-talkies, and young Presidential aides (each wearing red, white and blue star-spangled ties) presided over by Los Angeles TV personality Johnny Grant, who looked a little overwhelmed by his job today. He leaned in, smilingly pretended to recognize us both but couldn't quite come up with names. Still, he seemed content to let us go, but the grim-faced official beside him, clipboard in hand, was less enthusiastic. He wanted the names, please. We were cleared and escorted to a receiving line. Debbie Reynolds was right ahead of us, Glen Campbell ahead of her, and Charlton Heston came up behind us, followed by Jim Brown. One of the aides told us the men should kindly precede the women.

"I thought you were a Democrat," I said to Heston.

"I was ... well, I've always been an *Independent*," he answered, and then mumbled something about preferring Nixon this year.

At the end of the line, in the beam of a floodlight, the President and Mrs. Nixon were greeting their guests. Photographers were snapping away, aides stood around, Secret Service men scanned the line. Heston pointed out that they never look at the President but only at what is going on around him.

I turned to watch the President as a perspiring man lightly held my arm—I suppose to prevent me from jumping my cue. Mr. Nixon turned to me and the perspiring gentleman gave me a light push forward, at the same time supplying my name. I shook hands with the President and introduced Cybill to him and Mrs. Nixon.

"I've seen your name," the President said to me, waving one arm to indicate a movie screen, "on many *productions*." He made the word sound important.

I mumbled something or other. There was a pause. Some years before, a mutual friend of the Nixons and of my parents had given them a present of one of my late father's still lifes. Mrs. Nixon, however, had not liked it. "My mother met you some years back," I said. "She'd come to your apartment to pick up a painting of my father's."

I'm not at all sure that either the President or Mrs. Nixon remembered the incident, but Mr. Nixon shifted his look momentarily and nodded pleasantly.

"My father was a painter," I said.

"Of course I know your father is a painter," said Mr. Nixon, a little too genially.

There was another pause. The perspiring gentleman was not looking any better. We backed off. Mrs. Nixon kept right on smiling at us as the President turned to Heston.

More star-spangled ties indicated the way to the party where four hundred Hollywood people were talking, drinking, eating. There was Vince Edwards, Red Skelton, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Lawrence Welk, Jack Benny, Desi Arnaz, and Chuck Connors. Frank Sinatra flashed by, followed by several others, on the way to something urgent, from the look of the exit.

John Wayne waved and came over, puffing a small cigar. I told him my presence didn't mean I was a Republican. "That's OK," said Duke. Just then the music stopped and there was some applause; President Nixon had stepped onto the bandstand in front of a microphone. He looked smaller and thinner than he had before. "I am not going to impose on you another speech," he said, "after what many of you had to endure last week [at the convention] in terms of so many speeches." He then made a speech that lasted fourteen minutes. The emphasis was on movies:

"I would like to express appreciation as an individual, and also speaking as the President of the United States, for what you, the people of Hollywood, have done for America and have done for the world. I can speak with some feeling on this point. Let me begin by saying that my wife and I like movies. We like them on television. We fortunately now have our own projection set in the White House. [Laughter.] That is one of the reasons I ran again. [Another laugh.] I just can't stand those commercials on the *Late Show*. [Laughter.] But we have seen many movies. We haven't yet shown an X-rated movie in the White House. We had an 'R' one night, and I said, 'That is as far as you can go.' [Laughter.] But I like my movies made in Hollywood, made in America, and I don't mean that I can't

appreciate a good foreign movie, or a foreign movie star or [slight pause, looking for a word] ... or starlet.... In all the countries that my wife and I have visited, about eighty, I can assure you that Hollywood, in most of them, has been there before. We go along streets in the cities of Africa and Asia and Latin America, and everywhere, and on that marquee you will see the Hollywood names that we are so familiar with. It makes us feel at home as we see those names....”

He was closing with an anecdote concerning a Harlem congressman named Charles Rangel; the President had called Rangel on the phone. “The congressman was somewhat overwhelmed by the call, and we talked a bit, and then he said, ‘You know, Mr. President, when I was growing up in Harlem, if I had told my old man that someday I would be talking to the President of the United States, he would have told me I was crazy.’ And I said, ‘Well, Mr. Congressman, if when I was growing up, in Yorba Linda, I had told my old man that someday I would be talking to a congressman on the phone, he would have thought I was crazy.’ [Laughter.] I will simply close my remarks tonight by saying ... if I had told my old man when I was growing up in Yorba Linda that someday I would be talking to Jack Benny, he would have said I was crazy!”

He stepped down to laughter and applause, the band struck up again. We wandered around, taking in the sights: Clint Eastwood, Rhonda Fleming, Glenn Ford, Art Linkletter, Hugh O’Brian, Jack Warner, Richard Zanuck, Joanne Carson. Billy Graham was there, too, standing on a rise—overlooking the golf course, and surrounded by a bower of branches, with a kind of glow around him as he talked to several people. Then I noticed he was standing in a floodlight, too. Dr. Kissinger was as charming as ever, Jill St. John by his side. Jack Benny was trading jokes with George Burns, George Jessel, and Vice President Agnew, and when the opportunity came I said hello to Benny, who said that after the President’s “plug,” he’d calculated he had to be a Republican for “at least another eight years.” Then Scatman Crothers sang with gusto a song about Nixon that he’d written for the occasion.

It was getting late. We worked our way through the crowd and came over to the President, still standing near the band, shaking hands with everyone as they were leaving. We stepped up.

“Well, thank you, Mr. President,” I said as we shook hands. “I haven’t been won over, but it’s been a nice party.”

He rode right over that—didn’t hear it—but also didn’t let go of my hand. “I had no idea you were so young,” he said.

“It’s my name—makes you think of an old fellow with a beard.”

“Yes—*Bogdanovich*,” he said as though to confirm agedness in the sound of it. He still held my hand, without awkwardness—not as though he couldn’t find the right moment to let go, but just because he wanted to hold it, I guess. Certainly I wasn’t going to pull it away. “But, you know,” he said, “when you think of some of the great directors of the past—John Ford, for example—he started very young, didn’t he?”

“He was twenty-two,” I said. “I did a documentary about him.”

He didn’t seem to hear that, either—went right on with his thought—though he finally took his hand away to make a gesture. “You know, I ran a couple of his films the other day—*Apache* ... ahm, *Fort Apache* and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*—was he twenty-two when he made those?”

“No—oh, no—that was later in his career. I guess he was around fifty when he did those.” I was trying to get over the odd sensation of discussing one of my favorite directors with the President of the United States.

“Well,” Mr. Nixon said pleasantly, “then you have a long time ahead of you, too.”

I grinned. “You know, Mr. President,” I said, “you were mentioned in a review of one of my pictures.”

“Really?” he said, leaning his right ear closer, looking down. “What was that?”

“Well, this critic [it had been Pauline Kael in *The New Yorker*] said that the movie I’d made was one that ‘even President Nixon would like.’”

He threw his head back and laughed. I believe he slapped his thigh. “Well!” he exclaimed, “you don’t know if that’s a compliment or not!”

“Yeah,” I said, and laughed, too. “But, you know, Dr. Kissinger told me he thought you hadn’t seen it.”

“Well, I will,” he said. “I will.” He shook hands with Cybill and we started away. “You ought to put *her* in a picture!” he called after us.

“I did. That’s the one you haven’t seen.”

“Oh?” He came after us and leaned in toward me confidentially. “What was the *name* of that production?”

“*The Last Picture Show.*”

He looked up at me and there were several seconds of silence. He knitted his brow intently. “Ahm—the one in Texas?” he said tentatively.

“That’s right.”

“In—ahm—in black and white?”

“Yes.”

“But I saw that! Why, that’s a *remarkable* picture! We ran that at Camp David!” And to my amazement, he launched into a very flattering paragraph about the movie and the actors in it—Ben Johnson in particular—generally confirming Kael’s prediction. Then he turned to Cybill, putting a hand on her arm. “And what part did *you* play?”

She said, “Jacy.”

I said, “She was the one who stripped on the diving board.”

The President paused. He looked at me, but kept his hand on Cybill’s arm. “Well, *everyone* gave a remarkable performance in that film,” he said, and then, still not looking at Cybill, but patting her arm as he spoke and with the barest flicker of a smile: “And, of course, I remember *you* very well now, my dear.”

We said good-bye again, shook hands and left.

Carter at the Beverly Wilshire

Four years later, Warren Beatty was on the phone. “You wanna meet Carter?” he asked in a velvety whisper. “I’m having a few people over to meet him on Sunday—you and Cybill wanna come? Ask some tough questions.”

As we walked into the Beverly Wilshire suite that Warren had hired for the cocktail party, guests were arriving in droves. The Secret Service was well represented, as were the caterers, but the crowd was still manageable enough for Warren to meet us at the door and at least take us into the main room.

In no time the place was packed. Art Buchwald, Carroll O’Connor, James Caan and Tony Randall, Peter Falk, Diana Ross, Dinah Shore, Buck Henry and Paul Simon, Sidney Poitier, Hugh Hefner, all the non-Republican studio heads—precious few of those. Most of the Hollywood brass were over at Lew Wasserman’s house where there had been a dinner party that same evening for Carter. Everyone at Warren’s looked thrilled to be there. Movie people, used to leading fantasy lives, seem to always experience a special rush when exposed to the glamorous side of political power.

By the time Jimmy Carter got there, the crush in the room was so thick you could tell he had arrived only from the agitation of the crowd, and pretty soon, everyone was trying to have a private moment with the candidate. I turned to find him beside Cybill Shepherd and me. Confronted by his smiling visage, I couldn’t think of anything relevant to say so I simply pointed out that we were both wearing the same suit. Gray herringbone. Carter looked at mine and said, “Indeed we are.” His was adorned with one of those peanut campaign buttons he wore in the lapel. Cybill said, somewhat suggestively, “Ooo, I like your peanut.” Carter grinned broadly at this and said he was glad to hear it. Cybill blushed. Carter blushed. Warren cut right in with Carroll O’Connor and our time in the sun was over.

Warren finally asked for quiet and eventually the din subsided so that he could be heard. With just the right edge of ironic mockery, he scored a few lightly irreverent jokes off Carter—who appeared to enjoy them as much as everyone else—and managed with some charm to combine an attitude of suave superiority and shit-kicking humility into precisely the right mix to fit the mood of the group. Just in case anyone was casting, Warren was doing a splendid audition for a swinging Secretary of State. At the appropriate moment, he stepped down and turned

it over to Carter.

~~The future President's most appreciated remark had to do with his own bravery—considering his host's amorous reputation—in showing up at all for a Warren Beatty cocktail party. This not only got a big laugh but achieved the desired goal of putting him morally one-up on everybody in the room. When he went on to say that he had heard of everyone gathered about long before they had heard of him, I would guess he secured most of the available votes.~~

With some grace, he then moved casually into a more serious vein, explained some of his most popular positions and opened the scene to questions. Diana Ross asked very earnestly if Mr. Carter would tell why he thought he was qualified to be President, an obvious cue to recite one's résumé, which Carter patiently proceeded to do. Before long Jimmy Caan interrupted with a longish go-team speech in which he expressed his general enthusiasm for Carter, giving virtually no reasons, but plenty of boyish good-fellowship: "You've got *my* vote."

With some trepidation, I asked if Mr. Carter intended to do anything about secrecy in government, especially as it related to the maneuvers of the CIA and the FBI. He replied briskly that the heads of these agencies would be appointed from among people he knew and could trust and that they would be directly answerable to him. I don't know what response I had expected but I wasn't entirely happy. Possibly I'd hoped for something more rousing.

Then Carroll O'Connor was into his speech, expressing loud disapproval of Carter's then recent defense of the Russian author Solzhenitsyn. This caused consternation and embarrassment, since it was not a fashionable opinion around the room, and a lot of the looks that flashed around reflected the thought that maybe Carroll had been playing Archie Bunker too long. Carter, realizing that the question was unpopular, gave a short, succinct reply that left Carroll visibly dissatisfied and everyone else relieved.

At this point, Tony Randall launched into one of his favorite subjects—the need for greater government subsidy of the arts—in particular the formation of a national theater. Carter danced lightly around this for a time, speaking of all the fine cultural events he had observed in Georgia, allowing as how a good concert was a wonderful thing for folks to see. Tony was not to be easily appeased and he pressed for Carter's assurance that a national theater would become a reality during his term of office. Carter sidestepped with good humor, didn't answer yes or no or barely even maybe.

One could sense in the room a split vote for Tony as he continued with what was becoming a mini-filibuster on the subject of arts subsidy. Admittedly Carter was in a difficult position. He couldn't very well say what he might have been thinking: that he didn't give one damn about the arts when there were all these hungry people in the country, all this unemployment and all those headaches to deal with overseas. But a bunch of votes were at stake, so Jimmy Carter kept on smiling. Part of Randall's charm was in playing the scene so that the guest of honor *could* go on smiling and not seem silly. But the whole occasion ended without a satisfying exit for anyone.

There was a history of passivity and easy panic operating on Carter's side that evening. And show people have always been impressed with royalty—which the presidency has devolved into—the regal position being another the movies abdicated in their avid plunge toward everyday respectability. (Orson Welles used to say that one of the great steps downward for the acting profession came when theater star Henry Irving became the first actor to be knighted.) Artists, like presidents, are in the service of the people, though at their most valuable they lead the way. With a touch of the honest politician, an artist perhaps can be more successful in achieving his goals, just as a politician could use a touch of the artist.

Pop Mythology

In 1982, I was at the Kennedy Center in Washington on the night they honored five distinguished figures in the arts, among them Cary Grant. Our seats were directly in front of the stage, but none of the honorees ever left their places in the central area of the first balcony, so that all of us in the orchestra had to be satisfied with only a long-shot view of the principals. This had a strangely effective advantage: distanced so far and high above us, they retained some of their larger-than-life qualities—especially Grant, with whose face and voice and movements so many of us had

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