

For ‘Once,’ Carney Casts Musicians – Not Actors – in Masterful Musical

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on May 27, 2007 - 7:06pm

- [Adam Fendelman](#) [2]
- [Fox Searchlight](#) [3]
- [Glen Hansard](#) [4]
- [John Carney](#) [5]
- [Marketa Irglova](#) [6]
- [Movie Review](#) [7]
- [Once](#) [8]



CHICAGO – To purely document the life of a street-singing [busker](#) [9], “[Once](#) [10]” director [John Carney](#) [11] didn’t engage actors. He married musicians.

“Though I was initially thinking of using a good actor who could half sing ([Cillian Murphy](#) [12]), I quickly realized I should do it the other way around and get a good singer who could half act,” Carney said in a Chicago interview with Adam Fendelman.

He added: “I created a world in which the acting wasn’t as important as the chemistry, charisma and believability of the person.”

What may have seemed to Carney as an obvious decision bucks a trend found in most films today. A modern-day, naturalistic musical, “Once” is based on the premeditated choice of downplaying the dialogue and emphatically underscoring the music.

“You can cut out the dialogue in a lot of Hitchcock films and it’d just be pictures and music,” Carney said. Even so, when asked why music hits home with him so loudly, he couldn’t put his finger on it: “I can’t really answer that. I don’t know.”



[13] Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová meet for the first time in “Once”.

Photo courtesy of Fox Searchlight

Carney and [Glen Hansard](#) [14] aren’t shy about why independent movies often pack a punchier impact than big-budget, mainstream films.

“It can tell its own story,” Hansard said, who along with playing the lead “actor” in “Once” is the vocalist and guitarist for popular Irish rock band [The Frames](#) [15]. “The power of an independent film is that it owns itself and its fate. It is art made by one man that resonates to a much smaller audience in a much bigger way.”

He added: “If you’re Bono on stage in front of 80,000 people making an intelligent critique on the nation over 20 minutes, it’s going to lose most people. If you just scream ‘stop the war!,’ the message is clear. Big-budget films make very simple statements. They can’t make anything complicated because they can’t alienate [the masses].”

As for the big statement in a small film that was shot in three weeks for \$150,000 and funded entirely by the [Irish Film Board](#) [16], Carney remains modest.

“There is no statement in this picture,” Carney said. “It’s not forcing itself down your throat. It’s just inviting you to listen to some tunes and hang out in Dublin with us.” Hansard added: “It’s made in the classic French style of two people hanging out in a week and you get to hang out with them.”

With nearly all music in the film made for the film by Hansard and co-star [Markéta Irglová](#) [17], “Once” is a true-to-life story of two kindred spirits. It feels somewhat like the connection in “[Lost in Translation](#) [18]” but without the rules of traditional cinema. Carney added: “Americans have had enough of that shit.”



[19] Glen Hansard busking on the streets in Dublin.

Photo courtesy of Fox Searchlight

“How many people do you meet where it’s the best thing that’s ever happened to you and it’s happily ever after? So many relationships are an attempt to get somewhere and then you end up going the opposite way,” Hansard said.

Clearly having pride in their own patriotism and carrying a stigma about American filmmaking, Hansard says the whole structure for a good film is only beginning to crumble now.

“A feel-good, Hollywood film [is simple]. It gives you a scenario, something goes wrong, you spend the rest of the film trying to redeem yourself and it’s all packaged up beautifully in last 20 minutes,” Hansard said.



[20] Glen Hansard (left), John Carney (middle) and Markéta Irglová in “Once”.

Photo courtesy of Fox Searchlight

He used “[Spider-Man 3](#) [21]” as a classic example: “I haven’t even seen ‘Spider-Man 3’ yet and I can tell you what happens. Spider-Man picks up where he left off, some mean guy does damage to the city and Spider-Man gets bit by something and turns bad.”

While not exactly right, he’s close enough and that’s his point. Though the trailer for “Once” might pique your curiosity, you don’t know the freight train of raw emotion that’s about to blindside you.

For the young Irglová – whose role in “Once” was her first for anything anywhere – spewing such sentiment to the camera was exhausting. She describes the experience as difficult to switch from takes back to dealing with the realities of her own life in the meantime.



[22] Glen Hansard borrows his father's motorcycle for a small trip with Irglová.

Photo courtesy of Fox Searchlight

“As long as you’re true to the song and who you are, you get consumed by it and anything around you disappears,” said the relatively timid Irglová who only spoke when prompted. “Whenever music was involved in a scene, I didn’t even know the camera was around. It was only with the dialogue when I noticed the camera.”

Carney added: “I never auditioned [Irglová]. For two or three months coming up to the film, I asked her to get a camcorder and get used to being on camera but for God’s sake not to take acting classes. On the first day of filming, I thought it was going to be a disaster. They were nervous, the camera was right up their noses and they were self-conscious. It was ropey.”

For many of the street scenes, Carney used long-range lenses to help his leads forget he was there. For Hansard, playing the role of a busker – or a street musician – came naturally. After busking for five years when he was younger, though, he’s sensitive about the misconceptions often associated with the gig.



[23] Glen Hansard performing with The Frames in 2007 at Coachella.

Photo courtesy of The Frames

“It’s a choice. It’s a job,” Hansard said. “I knew a lot of different buskers when I was young. Some were alcoholics. Some lived at home, got bored and committed to playing the evenings on the streets. Some were like me and just wanted to learn about a different kind of living.”

He added: “There is an attitude that buskers are beggars and should have permits. Busking is one step up from begging. That’s an accepted idea. It’s incredibly enjoyable to take out your guitar and stand in public. I defy anyone in their job to stand in public and do their work. It takes a steel temperament.”

Carney, who is cynical about American busking, sees “a lot of hanging around and very little work” in the U.S.



[24] Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová take in the coastline on their motorcycle trip.

Photo courtesy of Fox Searchlight

“Those who have permits probably do it for money. I never did it for money. I did it for the joy,” Hansard said. “It filled my days full of interesting stories and wonder. The idea that you take out your guitar, stand for six hours and put that money against your rent is bullshit. While some people have to do that, for me it was never about that.”

For a film that didn’t spend much money and wasn’t shot to make piles of it, Hansard and Irglová say cash wasn’t their motivating factor.

“We did this for John,” Hansard said. “His films are good, his attitude is good and I think this film is really [sic] good. The less money involved, the more excited I get.” Carney added: “We were happy when we saw the film projected for the first time. After seeing it with a couple friends, we could have put it to bed then.”

© 2007 Adam Fendelman, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on Apr 24 2024 - 5:58pm): <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/2007/05/for-once-carney-casts-musicians-not.html>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hollywoodchicagocom>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/adam-fendelman>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/fox-searchlight>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/glen-hansard>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/john-carney>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/marketa-irglova>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/once>
- [9] <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/busker>
- [10] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0907657/>
- [11] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0138809/>
- [12] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0614165/>
- [13] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/uploaded_images/1-740802.jpg
- [14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glen_Hansard
- [15] <http://www.theframes.ie>
- [16] <http://www.irishfilmboard.ie>
- [17] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2461627/>
- [18] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0335266/>
- [19] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/uploaded_images/2-737534.jpg
- [20] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/uploaded_images/3-777560.jpg
- [21] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0413300/>
- [22] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/uploaded_images/4-722674.jpg
- [23] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/uploaded_images/5-751291.jpg
- [24] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/uploaded_images/6-778855.jpg