

Interview: Director Rodrigo Garcia on His New Film 'Mother and Child'

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CHICAGO – “Mother and Child” is an intense exploration of the various stages of motherhood, through the performances of Annette Bening, Naomi Watts and Samuel L. Jackson. Leading the eclectic cast through their paces is director Rodrigo Garcia.

Garcia, the son of famed author Gabriel García Márquez, has carved his own artistic niche in a career directing both prestige television and film. Besides shepharding the HBO's favorites “The Sopranos,” “Six Feet Under” and “Carnivále” at various points, Garcia also produced and help develop the HBO adaptation of “In Treatment.”

His films are characterized by their human relationship elements, including “Things You Can Tell Just by Looking at Her” [2000] and “Nine Lives,” which Garcia also wrote. Mother and Child is his fourth film directed from his own screenplay.



Scene from 'Mother and Child' featuring Samuel L. Jackson as Paul and Naomi Watts as Elizabeth
Photo Credit: Ralph Nelson for © 2009 Sony Picture Classics

HollywoodChicago sat down to interview Mr. Garcia, about his distinct new film, his television career and word on his literary upbringing.

HollywoodChicago.com: What fascinates you about the relationship to mothers and their children, or their potential to have children, that motivated you to write this script?

Rodrigo Garcia: The original idea was about separation, people who have been separated from someone, and who longs for that person. Originally it wasn't going to be mothers and children, but then I thought okay I'm going to separate a mother and child at the birth of that child. I made Karen [Annette Bening's character] very young in the beginning of the film, so she hadn't made an informed decision, it was forced on her.

HC: You deal with themes of religion quite strongly in this film. To you, what does the adoption nun symbolize to you as a facilitator through the Catholic Church and her role as a woman who has empathy for those seeking their truth?

RG: I'm not a religious person myself. I thought it was interesting that although she represented an established church she also made choices that were her own and she was her own person. All I can offer are the questions posed by some of the characters, which are the stories of people separating and reuniting, and a lot of the participants think there is some fate at play. Whether there is design or fluke, who knows?

HC: Kerry Washington's character of Lucy says she 'tells the truth because it's easier to remember.' That one line summarizes a lot of what we take on as human beings when we choose not to be truthful with ourselves. What was the origin of that particular line. Did it come through the character as you wrote her or did you think of it beforehand and applied it to her?

RG: I didn't think of it until the moment she said it. The other woman said, 'do you always speak the truth?' and she just replied, 'the truth is easier to remember,' and I just thought that it was a Lucy thing to say. That is how Lucy is, she is direct. The truth is always accessible.

HC: I found myself gravitating towards the Jimmy Smits character and the Kerry Washington character because of the honest and refreshing admissions that they were athiests. In you opinion, does it take more courage in the life and society that we live in to not believe in God, than to believe in him?

RG: Whether you believe or not is often not a choice. You feel it or you don't feel it, you struggle with it or you don't. I sometimes feel for non believers, especially those in countries where the climate is so religious, that you might feel you're missing a gene. It's really not a choice, you either feel it or you don't.

HC: You have done virtually every job on a film set, both on the technical, production and creative sides. Which element and experience of your journey gives you the most aid and comfort when creating a new film or television series?

RG: The hardest for me is writing the script. It takes forever, it's difficult and frustrating. Of course when it is done and you feel like it's working, that's a great high. Other than that, watching the actors work is rewarding, usually that's on a set where you're running out of time and money. [laughs]

Having done the technical jobs of camera operator and cinematographer, it helps me to shoot, I know how long things take and how much they cost.

HC: You explore psychotherapy in your HBO show 'In Treatment.' What burdens, in your opinion, do psychotherapists take on when they decide to position themselves as arbiters or facilitators over other people's problems, and how did you explore that most succinctly on the show?

RG: Luckily for me the show was based on an Israeli program that was beautifully made, "Be' Tipul," we adapted and improved as much as we could. There was some room for improvement, but mostly it was excellent, it captured me completely. What I actually like about the show and what we tried to keep doing is that the shrink felt the worst of anyone. He was as screwed up, if not more so, then his patients.



Rodrigo Garcia in Chicago, April 30, 2010

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HC: How did your attitude towards death become altered after you worked on the series 'Six Feet Under'?

RG: It didn't, it's still a daunting prospect. [laughs] I liked that on Six Feet Under death was dealt with equal parts drama and humor. It was sobering – we were often in morgues and recreating bodies.

HC: How is your father, Gabriel García Márquez?

RG: He's good, he's in Mexico right now after spending such time in Columbia, but he's doing well.

HC: We as a culture and society owe a great debt of gratitude to your father for his remarkable and essential perspective. As his son, what was your initial reaction when you first discovered his works and how do you apply it to your own writing sensibility?

RG: I've always liked his books, obviously. I started reading his stuff in my late teens. With respect to the influence, I feel the real influence comes from growing up in that literary world and living in the literary environment, more than the books themselves. I don't see much of an

overlap, thematically, between his books and my movies, and that is probably better. You’re always revealing something about yourself when you write, not particulars about facts usually or necessarily, but you get to know a person by absorbing their work.

“Mother and Child” continues a limited release, including Chicago, on May 21st. Check local listings for show times. Featuring Annette Bening, Samuel L. Jackson, Naomi Watts, Kerry Washington and Jimmy Smits, written and directed by Rodrigo Garcia. Rated “R”



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