Red-Carpet Interviews, Portraits: Martin Sheen, Emilio Estevez Find 'The Way'

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- Charlie Sheen [2]
- Chicago International Film Festival [3]
- David Alexanian [4]
- El Camino de Santiago [5]
- Emilio Estevez [6]
- HollywoodChicago.com Content [7]
- Interview [8]
- Joe Arce [9]
- Martin Sheen [10]
- Patrick McDonald [11]
- Red Carpet [12]
- The Way [13]

CHICAGO – Martin Sheen's sons certainly command the spotlight, whether it was Charlie's adventures of this year, or the emerging auteur talent of Emilio Estevez. Estevez wrote and directed the upcoming film "The Way," which stars his father.

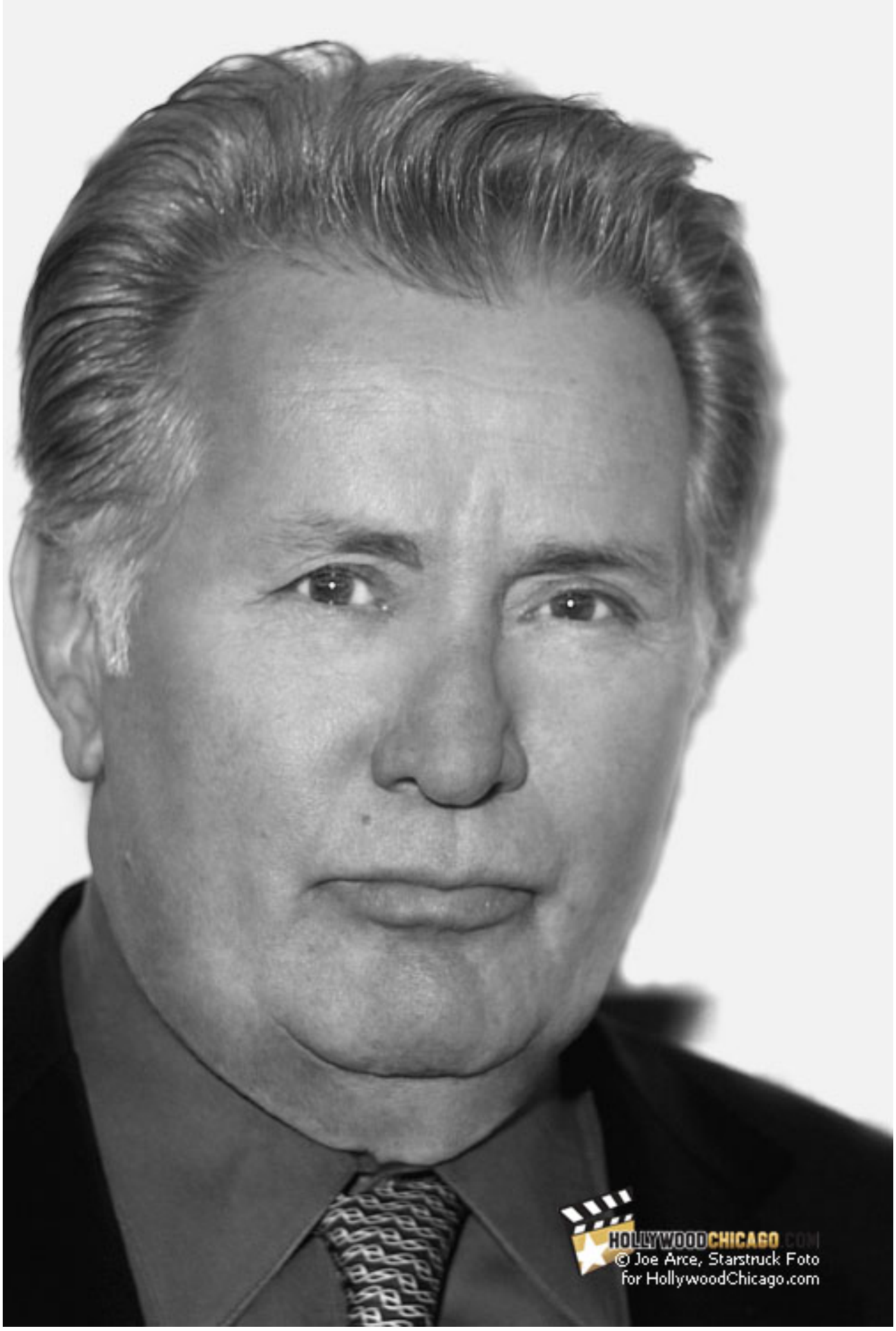
The elder Sheen and Estevez have been on a nationwide tour, promoting and opening the personal film along the journey. They were in Chicago on the weekend of August 19th, as part of the Chicago International Film Festival Summer Gala. Martin Sheen was honored by the festival for his career work, receiving the Silver Hugo Award from the Founder and Artistic Director, Michael Kutza.

"The Way" stars Martin Sheen as Tom, an American physician who goes to France to collect the remains of his adult son, who accidently died while walking "The Camino de Santiago" (also called the Way of St. James, a Christian pilgrimage from many points to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Northwestern Spain, the traditional burial place of St. James). He decides to take the journey himself, to find peace in the face of tragedy and meaning in his own life.

HollywoodChicago.com was on the red carpet, with photographer Joe Arce, to interview the legendary Martin Sheen, the writer/director of the way (and Sheen's son) Emilio Estevez and the producer of the film, David Alexanian.

Martin Sheen, Portrays Tom in "The Way"

Martin Sheen has often been called "the greatest actor without a major award," but it's doubtful that he cares about that. An activist and fiery performer, he has created memorable characters in such films as "The Subject Was Roses" (1967), "Badlands" (1973), "The Little Girl Who Lived Down the Lane" (1976), "Apocalypse Now" (1979), "Wall Street" (1987), "The American President" (1995) and "The Departed" (2006). On television, he has played both Kennedy brothers (John F. in 1983's "Kennedy" and Robert in 1974's "Missiles of October") and most famously the fictional President Josiah Bartlett in the evocative "The West Wing." The Way is another collaboration with his son Emilio, after doing "Bobby" in 2006.



Martin Sheen in Chicago, August 19th, 2011
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: How does your Catholic faith inform you when making a film like "The Way"?

Martin Sheen: Well, the whole film takes place on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, which has been in existence since the Middle Ages, it's one of the ultimate Catholic experiences. It goes from the Pyrenees in France to Galicia, Spain.

HollywoodChicago.com: Isn't that the origin of the Estevez side of your family?

Sheen: My father was a Galician, he was born and raised 80 kilometers from Santiago. So I was very familiar with the Santiago de Compostela. I first went to Spain in 1969 and met some of my relatives who were still living at the time. So I've had a long connection to the country, my family and the culture.

HollywoodChicago.com: Had you walked The Camino de Santiago before?

Sheen: I've always wanted to do The Camino, and I just never seemed to get enough time to do it. So between Season 3 and 4 of 'The West Wing' in 2003, I took an old friend named Matt Clark, who plays the Priest in the film, and his son Taylor, and the three of us went out on that road. Taylor met his future wife at a refugio [hotel] near Burgos, which is a main stop on The Camino. And he still lives there. So that was the first miracle.

HollywoodChicago.com: So how did that influence Emilio's interest in the road that eventually became 'The Way?'

Sheen: Emilio just became fascinated and began to study it, and writing scenarios for it, and finally came up with the story that became the

film in 2009. It’s a father and son story for sure, but it’s also a story of community, loss and healing, and a journey of walking alone, that is where we find the inner pilgrimage of transcendence, we all need to find that. But we cannot do it without community, as much as the character of Tom tries to get rid of the other pilgrims who try to hook up with him, he begins to realize that they are just like he is – filled of foibles, shortcomings and brokenness, they are just as human as he is. In accepting that, he accepts himself. It’s very powerful.

Emilio Estevez, Writer, Director and Performer in “The Way”

Despite being more in the background from his high profile brother Charlie, Emilio Estevez continues his journey as a writer and director with The Way. He hit the ground running in the 1980s, starring in the essential “Brat Pack” films, “The Breakfast Club” and “St. Elmo’s Fire.” He went on in the 1990s to write and direct (also co-starring with brother Charlie Sheen) “Men at Work” and portrayed Coach Gordon Bombay in the “Mighty Ducks” film series. After working for six years to complete his Kennedy bio film, “Bobby,” he continues to pursue personal projects, which led to The Way.

Emilio Estevez in Chicago, August 19th, 2011
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: You were quoted as saying that your new film The Way ‘celebrates our imperfections.’ Why do you think people in general shy away from those human flaws and how does The Way celebrate them?

Emilio Estevez: The Way celebrates our imperfections by saying I’m okay being exactly who I am. I don’t need the nose job, I don’t need a set of boobs, I don’t need to be thinner, smarter or any of that. You arrive at the end of the film and all the characters basically say, ‘I’m okay with who I am.’ If that is a problem, then the hell with it. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Your father once remarked after seeing one of your early plays that you were 'cursed' with the gift of acting. What is the biggest curse, in your viewpoint, regarding the soul of an actor?

Estevez: That you can't not do it. I see so many talented actors in Los Angeles and New York who are just trying to get a shot, and they can't get in the door. I audition a lot of actors who are brilliant, but may not be right for a particular part, and you have to say no, and it's the most heartbreaking thing ever. That's the one thing about directing I cannot stand. I can't stand being in a position to say yes or no. It feels like the 'thumbs up and down' of ancient Rome. Live or die. It's a horrible position to be in, especially since I've been on the other side.

HollywoodChicago.com: You have a connection to Chicago through the great John Hughes and 'The Breakfast Club.' At that point in your career, what was the best thing that Hughes taught you as part of that famous ensemble?

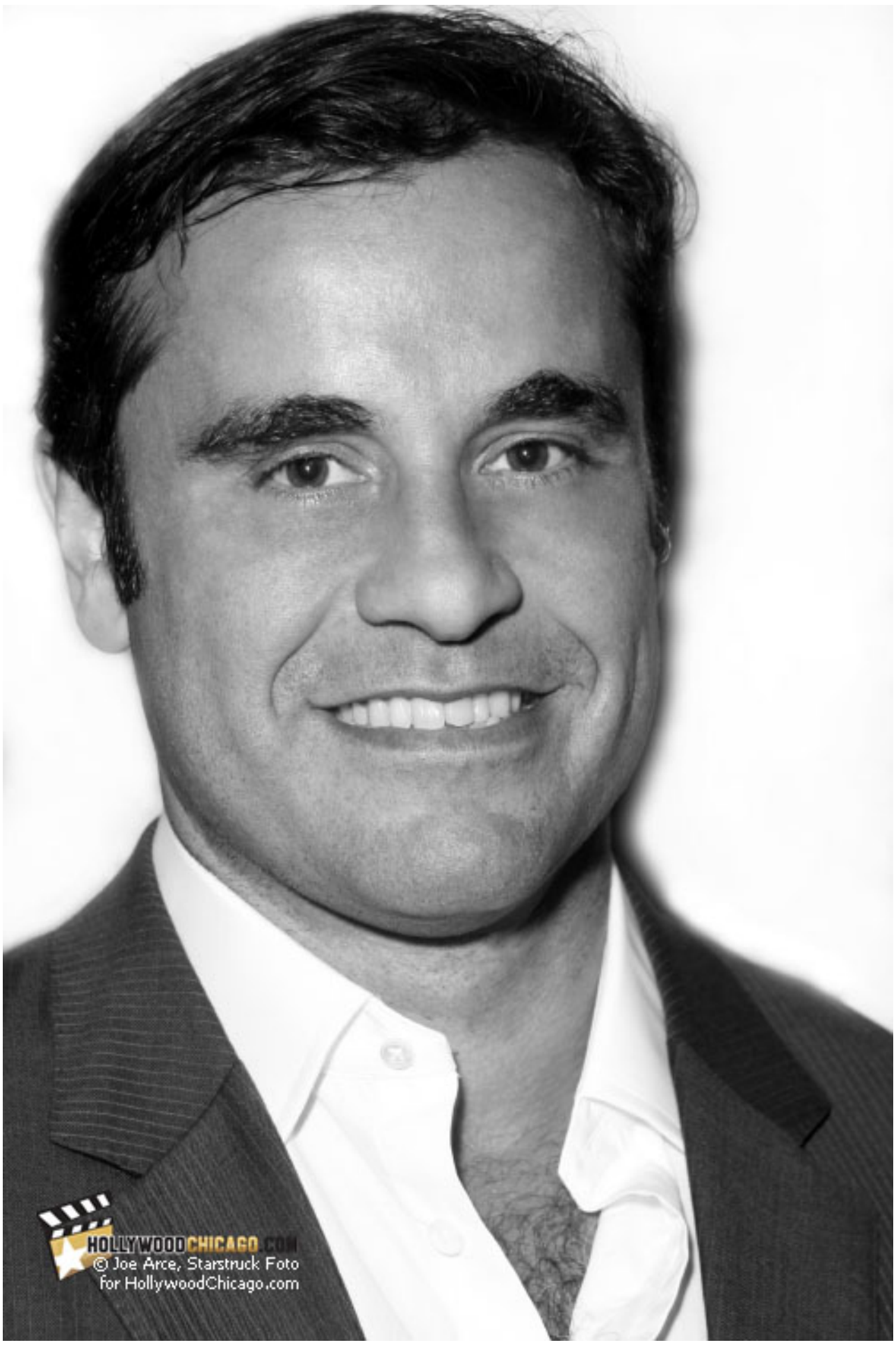
Estevez: Rehearsal, rehearsal, rehearsal. We came in early for the shoot, coming in January and finishing in May. Remember. this is a film with five characters in a library. The studios today would try to make you shoot it in twenty days, for no money. John Hughes had us come in early to actually enroll in New Trier High School. He told me, 'Emilio, you're 21 years old now, you've probably forgotten what it is like to be in high school, you're going back.' Judd [Nelson], Ally [Sheedy] and I all went back to high school for a week. And then we rehearsed, two and half weeks where we drilled down the film into ourselves. By the time we started shooting, we had been to acting boot camp.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you think characterizes the generation born in the early 1960s, nurtured in the 1970s and coming of age in the 1990s. What advantages and disadvantages do you feel we possess?

Estevez: We have lived through a lot of crap, with the exception of a World War, we've seen a lot. We've seen certain changes, especially in technology, but they haven't necessarily been the best for us culturally on a societal level. They have disconnected us, when their purpose was to connect us.

David Alexanian, Producer of "The Way"

David Alexanian was a perfect choice to be involved in "The Way," as his production background is rooted in travel. He was the producer for "Long Way Down" and "Long Way Round," which chronicled the motorcycle diaries of Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman.



David Alexanian in Chicago, August 19th, 2011
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: You’ve traveled far and wide, what is the overriding attitude towards the United States by the residents of other countries?

David Alexanian: People in general love the United States. I didn’t bump into Anti-Americanism. I feel like people want to cheer America on, and the way I travel is to live like the locals. I was close to the native people and I would have felt if there was any negativism. More importantly, it’s the way they treat you. The vibe is really open and welcoming.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since ‘The Way’ is a spiritual film, what has been the greatest moment of spirituality for you, in your journeys?

Alexanian: It’s simply part of what I do for a living, this is what I do. Having appreciation for others, and other cultures, has created a spiritual openness in me that is beyond my control. Those pleasant experiences I’ve had dictates how I behave going forward, what I tell others, and what I try to promote. If you anticipate a life changing moment, it doesn’t necessarily happen. It sneaks up on you quietly, and makes you appreciate things. In truth, It’s a matter of just having a conversation and finding some commonality. What we don’t do enough of in our world is to show the commonality between all cultures.

HollywoodChicago.com: Do you have a dream project to produce?

Alexanian: I’m working on a pro-peace film right now. It’s a film about an American boy who falls in love with a Canadian girl. It’s basically making sure we appreciate our Northern neighbors. It’s funny when we talked about Anti-Americanism or friction, the only place I’ve really felt it is in Canada. That’s a different thing, though, the Canadians have an issue with Americans that no one else really can. I want to tell a story about Canadians and Americans working through their issues.

"The Way" has a tentative release date of October 7th, 2011. Featuring Martin Sheen, Emilio Estevez, Deborah Kara Unger, James Nesbitt and Yorick Van Wageningen. Written and directed by Emilio Estevez, Rated "PG-13." The 47th Chicago International Film Festival begins October 6th and runs through October 20th. Click here for details. *[14]*

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