

Interview: Chris Cooper, Director Ira Sachs Marry Blissfully in ‘Married Life’

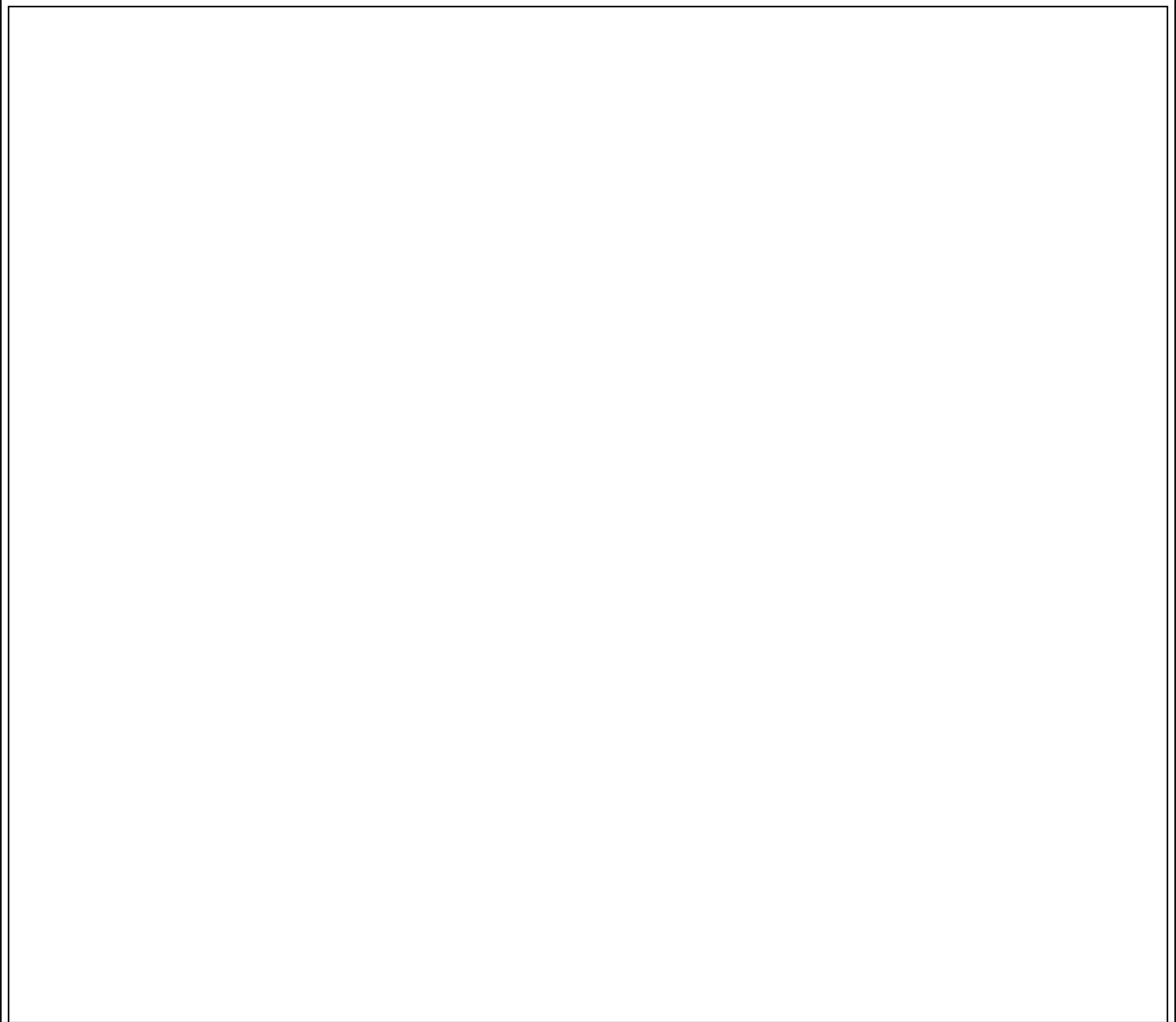
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- [Alfred Hitchcock](#) [2]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [3]
- [Interview](#) [4]
- [Ira Sachs](#) [5]
- [Married Life](#) [6]
- [Movie Review](#) [7]
- [Patricia Clarkson](#) [8]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [9]
- [Pierce Brosnan](#) [10]
- [Rachel McAdams](#) [11]

CHICAGO – Sitting down with Oscar-winning actor Chris Cooper and Ira Sachs – the director of Cooper’s latest film, “Married Life,” which opened on March 14, 2008 in Chicago – is to marvel at the passion and commitment these two high-level professionals bring to this entertaining, poignant and hilarious new film.



“Married Life” is set in 1949 America and features the character of Harry (Cooper): a man hitched for many comfortable years to his wife, Pat, who is played by Patricia Clarkson. At the same time, he is having a secret affair with Kay – a surprisingly appropriate Rachel McAdams – and longs to be with her permanently.





Actor Chris Cooper for "Married Life" in Chicago on Feb. 27, 2008.
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Events start to percolate when Harry confesses his affair to his best friend, Richard (a perfect Pierce Brosnan), who not only takes notice of Kay but starts to call on her himself. The inner conflict that Harry possesses evolves to generate an idea designed in his mind to solve everything while in the meantime Richard, Kay and even Pat are generating their own victimized circumstances.

"For me, this film speaks to the fact that all relationships are in rupture and repair," said "Married Life" director Sachs in a Chicago interview with HollywoodChicago.com critic Patrick McDonald. "As human beings, [we] are always separate people even [when] in a relationship. Maybe if we accept that more there is a possibility for becoming closer to the people with [whom] you have an intimate life."



Director Ira Sachs for "Married Life" in Chicago on Feb. 27, 2008.

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Cooper talked about making the character of Harry likable even though he's having an affair and hiding it from his devoted wife. He added: "If there is a conscious choice, it's that I'm not giving the viewer a break. I don't anticipate or show my hand. I want to challenge them. As a character, Harry has made some very bad choices, but I'm not going to play up the evil aspect of that. I wanted to make him human."

Sachs concurs: "The thing Chris brings as an actor is that he makes text and subtext equal. He brings so much to even silence in the texture of his performance. That's what you're noticing. Harry is complex and Chris is a good actor. That is the nature of what makes him interesting."

The performances are fined-tuned in "Married Life" as precise and nuanced as its 1940s setting. Long shedding his James Bond persona, Brosnan becomes the conscience within and around the disintegrating marriage of Harry and Pat. Still, he's not above carrying on a with larcenous selfishness. He is best described as delicious.



Rachel McAdams in "Married Life".

Photo credit: IMDb

"I was very taken with Pierce in his role in the recent film 'Matador' and especially his humor," Sachs said. "'Married Life' was a really rich role for him. He brings an emotionality and vulnerability to the performance. He really is the one [who] defines the whole tone of the film."

Cooper also spoke of fellow actors Clarkson, Brosnan and McAdams: "What was outstanding to me was having these three talents who were equally committed to the project. I see a lot of casual acting in films today. There is not a scene in this film that is casual."

There is a lightness and whimsy to the proceedings from the animated opening credits to the bright and explicit glamour of its 1949 world. While the narrative doesn't exactly wink at the camera, it certainly doesn't wallow in what could have been very dark material. There are nods to the quirkiness of Alfred Hitchcock in his manner of handling dark situations in a light manner.



Chris Cooper in “Married Life”.
Photo credit: IMDb

“I did go back to Hitchcock films like ‘Shadow of a Doubt,’ which were both fun and sinister,” Sachs said. “I wanted the film especially to be funny and have the audience accept it. For example, if there is a twist or turn, there isn’t a scream but a laugh.”

“As characters and as actors, we wanted to handle this material with a certain lightness but play it for real,” Cooper said.

Indeed, there is a certain reality in this film. Even though the setting and characters have extreme points that are mostly played for laughs, there’s nothing about the central theme of exploring relationships that rings false.

Great care was taken to craft a respectful and almost old-fashioned studio picture about the married life and fun results. “Married Life” is a throwback to leaving your cares behind and munching popcorn in front of a passionately acted “movie-type movie”.



Pierce Brosnan and Rachel McAdams in “Married Life”.
Photo credit: IMDb

“‘Married Life’ is trying to give people a filmic version of certain things that happen in their own lives. It allows them to accept certain kinds of disappointments, pains and distance they might experience [without] beating themselves up for it,” Sachs injected.

He continued: “But I think this film shouldn’t be taken literally. We do have an animated opening credit sequence. We’re trying to say what’s going to follow you should enjoy, you should engage, you should invest in and yet it does play out on a level that is ‘movie like’. It is a movie.”

Cooper summed up his “Married Life” experience: “When I commit to a film like this, I’m working on it every day. It’s just a joy and that’s the pleasure I get. I’m not going to waste my time on something that’s not a challenge.”

Challenging, intuitive and comical are spot-on characteristics for describing the devotion of Cooper and Sachs in this pursuit and the subsequent audience experience in enjoying their film.

“Married Life” opened in Chicago on March 14, 2008 at AMC Pipers Alley, Landmark’s Renaissance in Highland Park and CineArts in Evanston. The film opened limited elsewhere on March 7, 2008.

[View our full “Married Life” image gallery.](#) [12]



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[13]

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