

Interview: Matthew Rhys Red Carpet for ‘The Scapegoat’ at Chicago International Film Festival

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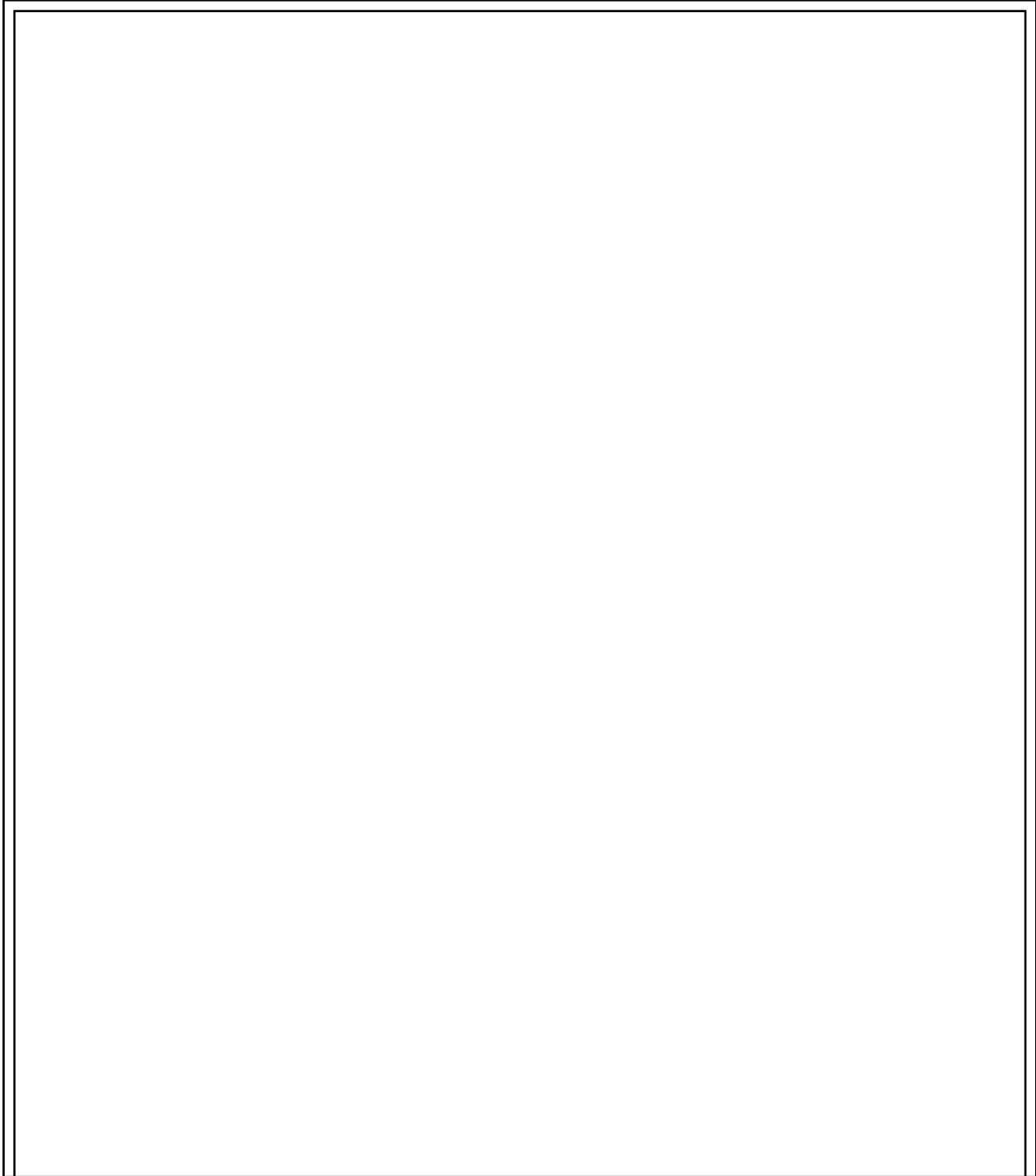
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CHICAGO – The new film “The Scapegoat” made a premiere splash at the 48th Chicago International Film Festival, with lead actor Matthew Rhys – of TV’s “Brothers & Sisters” – and director Charles Sturridge walking the Red Carpet on Thursday, October 18th. The festival wraps up this week on October 25th.

“The Scapegoat” is an adaptation of author Daphne Du Maurier’s novel of the same name. It involves two lookalike men (both played by Matthew Rhys) who switch lives with dire consequences. This film is breakout for the Welsh-born Rhys, who is also known for his stage work and his recent appearance in the BBC produced “The Mystery of Edwin Drood,” which aired on “Masterpiece Theater” in the former colonies. Director Charles Sturridge has mostly done television, with the notable exception of “Fairy Tale: A True Story” (1997).

Photographer Joe Arce was also on the Red Carpet to capture the photos, and HollywoodChicago.com was able to interview both the actor who plays two roles and director of “The Scapegoat.”

Matthew Rhys, Portrays John and Johnny in “The Scapegoat”





Lead Actor Matthew Rhys at the Chicago International Film Festival, Oct. 18th, 2012, for 'The Scapegoat'
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: This is one the great challenges of any actor, playing two roles as a twin to another. Was there any performance tricks you used to make sure the characters remained separate?

Matthew Rhys: I think the attraction of this project was the fact that they had one twin's taking over the other's life. Therefore you have to ask the audience to believe that. It actually was fantastic as an actor, because the two characters have to be close enough to plausibly step into the other's shoes. The way I tried to differentiate the two was very miniscule. It had somewhat to do with posture, and with one of the characters I played him as if he was smelling something slightly unpleasant. It gave him that tiny little air of pomposity.

HollywoodChicago.com: This film has a deep pedigree given its an adaptation of Daphne Du Maurier novel, and Alec Guinness had played your role previously. What did you cherry pick from the novel and/or the Guinness interpretation that you brought into the role?

Rhys: First off, I started to watch the Alec Guinness movie and then I thought I have to stop right away, for a number of reasons. [laughs] I know what I'm like, I'm just like a parrot, and I'd start mimicking for no apparent reason. The same thing happened with the novel in a way, because it was so incredibly different from the screenplay. Like in the past, I just did a Charles Dickens adaptation, and I read the novel ["The Mystery of Edwin Drood"], and I was bringing things into the screenplay adaptation that wasn't necessarily there. Often the director would say, 'what are you doing!?' I would say it was in the book, and he would say well it isn't in the screenplay, so leave it alone.

HollywoodChicago.com: Between your most recent roles in works by Charles Dickens, John Osborne and Daphne Du Maurier, which one had a piece of dialogue that best spoke to you regarding your lifetime of experience?

Rhys: I wish I had a week to think about that. I know it's Osborne, and the particular quote probably had something to do with the pain of relationships. [laughs] You could basically flick through the book of that play, and stick a pin in it, and there would some sort of painful quote about past relationships, and just pick one of them.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've done a number of accents over many roles. Which one is hardest to get right, and how did you eventually reel it in?

Rhys: I’ve found the American accent difficult to do. It’s difficult for the Brits to do it plausibly.

HollywoodChicago.com: Well then, give me a bit of an American accent, tell me, ‘you’re doing a great job, Pat.’

Rhys: [Imitates the interviewer] ‘You’re doing a great job, Pat.’ See, that just was an impersonation of somebody else, I don’t even know whose voice that was! [laughs] That is the danger, because what you do is watch other actors to get the accent, and then you end up badly impersonating Jack Nicholson.

HollywoodChicago.com: What can you tell us about Rachel Griffiths [‘Brothers & Sisters’ co-star] that the rest of the world doesn’t know?

Rhys: She’s Australian? Just kidding. [laughs] There are times when I’m acting with her, and I would look into her eyes and I would think, ‘she actually thinks we’re in this world right now.’ That’s how she immerses herself, and totally believes every situation she is in. She has that effortlessly, and I’m violently envious of that.



Charles Sturridge, Director of “The Scapegoat”



Director Charles Sturridge at the Chicago International Film Festival, Oct. 18th, 2012, for ‘The Scapegoat’

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: You are adapting the notable author Daphne Du Maurier, as Alfred Hitchcock did [“The Birds”]. Tell me about the process of that adaptation, and how did you want to best honor the source novel?

Charles Sturridge: It was a very tricky novel to adapt. It’s one thing to have a double impersonation on the page, but it’s different when you’re actually see it in front of you. There were a number of big elements in the book that I didn’t think would work in the film. So the adaptation takes some bold liberties with original source. For example, the original is set in France, the adaptation is set in England. I didn’t think you could make a film about an Englishman impersonating a Frenchman to a Frenchman in English. You would lose the grip on the audience’s sense of reality if I tried to do that. It was clear it had to be set in England, which made a whole set of elements that were in the novel change.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did that affect the ending?

Sturridge: It was crucial that the film have a very different ending. If you were to simplify the story, it was about a good man stepping into a bad man's life, in the book it was about the bad man just slipping back into his life again. I felt that the audience couldn't sit through two hours and just have the story just go back to how it started. I was reasonably supported in this, by a conversation I had with Daphne's granddaughter. She had watched the Alec Guinness 1959 film version with her grandmother, and she told her that she messed up, she should have killed one of them. So I took my courage from this admittedly second hand remark. Then it became a house of cards, once I figured out the beginning and the end, I just had to join those pieces in the middle. It was like adapting a puzzle.

HollywoodChicago.com: With Matthew playing the double role, you have to work with that challenge, and all the technical parts that go with it. Since that technology is a lot more seamless now, how do you deal with it and keep the actor engaged?

Sturridge: The technology is completely uninteresting, it's like knitting, and the key to all that is performance. The vital necessity of it is for the audience, for them to believe that there are two people present, but to have different and empathetic feelings for them at the same time. It's only when the audience feels that, that they stop thinking about the technical trick. Acting is absolutely the key. We have more tools in the playpen to get the result, but none of that counts if you don't have the emotional connection.

HollywoodChicago.com: Who was your heroic director influence as you were developing your style, and do you pay tribute to that person in any scenes, dialogue or actions in your films?

Sturridge: In one sense I'm influenced by so many directors that it's impossible to catalog them. But my first experience on a film set in 1968, which was crucial in how I thought a film set should be, was with a famous British director named Lindsey Anderson. I had a small part in his film "If..." when I was 16 years old, and I watched how he held together this world in his head and put it on film. What was peculiar about that film was that his cameraman was Miraslav Ondricek, who didn't speak any English. So the director and cameraman relationship was a pantomime, not a conversation. It was simply a fairy tale induction into that world.

The 48th Chicago International Film Festival is October 11th-25th, 2012. For more information and to purchase tickets, click on ChicagoFilmFestival.com [15]



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