

Interview: Josh Peck Keeps Kicking it in 'Red Dawn'

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CHICAGO – When we last saw teen idol Josh Peck (“Drake & Josh”), he was selling special ice cream in the 2008 film, “The Wackness.” That film established him as an actor who could handle more adult themes. He expands further in the action movie “Red Dawn,” playing a student turned soldier.

Peck is best known for portraying Josh Nichols in the hugely popular Nickelodeon series “Drake & Josh,” a teenage version of “The Odd Couple” that co-starred Drake Bell. Raised in New York City by his single parent mother, he began his show business career as a young stand-up comedian. He took a role on Nickelodeon’s “The Amanda Show” in 2000, and “Drake & Josh” was spun off of that series. From 2004 to 2008, the well received sitcom was one of Nickelodeon’s most popular. The final appearance of the duo was in “Merry Christmas, Drake & Josh” (2008), which broke the record for highest viewership of any show on the Nickelodeon channel.



Wolverines!: Josh Peck (Matt), Josh Hutcherson (Robert) and Chris Hemsworth (Jed) in 'Red Dawn'
Photo credit: Film District

“Red Dawn” is a redo of the memorable 1984 film, notable for being the first movie to be rated “PG-13.” Like its predecessor, the remake is about a world war that begins on United States soil – the enemy is switched from a Russian coalition in the ’84 film to North Korean led raiders in the current film – and is fought by a teenage guerrilla force who directly engage the enemy. Besides Peck, the new “Red Dawn” features Chris Hemsworth, Josh Hutcherson, Connor Cruise and Jeffrey Dean Morgan.

HollywoodChicago.com interviewed Josh Peck in 2008 for “The Wackness,” and he sat down with HC again recently to discuss “Red Dawn.”

HollywoodChicago.com: In the unstable age of two real wars in the last ten years, what do you think is relevant about the fantasy of “Red Dawn”?

Josh Peck The new film walks a fine line between the circumstances being fantastical in nature, and also bringing the fight to the front door.

People can relate to that fear, that feeling if they were called upon to react to something that was completely unimaginable, something they are completely unprepared for. I think in that respect it has been on people's minds, and this film certainly has that element within it.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you think your film offers that the 1984 original does not?

Peck We do our best to pay homage to the original, and there are moments in which the diehard fans of the first one will be blasted by nostalgia. But 25 years later, whether it be technology or how action is captured today, the scope of this film is broader and bigger, and raises some new stakes. In the original film, the initial invasion has about 15 people, in our film it's 15,000.

HollywoodChicago.com: You handled quite a bit of weaponry in the film. What was that experience like, had you ever fired weapons before and which particular gun became your favorite?

Peck It was certainly random and real, starting with indoor shooting ranges with .22 pistols. When we started shooting AK-47s and having Marines teach us to use them, all of a sudden we went from elementary school to getting our Masters degrees in kicking ass. [laughs] We were shooting real weapons with blank rounds – which are deadly at close range – so we couldn't mess around. That element of having power in my hands was real, so I had to be careful. The AK was dope, but I also had a 1911 .45 pistol that I carried in my pants.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your film depicts a decidedly middle class group of kids who eventually become the Wolverines, which is the typical volunteer in today's military. Do you think that upper middle class or wealthy kids would ever participate in a war that is shown in the film, or was it important to highlight the that military class of Americans?

Peck I don't think it was a distinct choice, it was just a nod to the original, which had middle and working class families involved in it, it was just trying to be similar in that respect.

HollywoodChicago.com: After participating in a film like this, how did your attitude regarding geopolitics change, have you become more hawkish?

Peck Now that I've had this experience, I'm more hawkish about the shady people hanging around the '7-11.' [laughs] If I need to take care of business, I have training now. Seriously, on the geo-political level, I don't know. After I got all this training and live this life, I did find myself on high alert. It takes a couple of months to settle down from that.



Back in the Day: Drake Bell and a young Josh Peck in 'Drake & Josh'
Photo credit: Nickelodeon

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you have an opinion going in, or have a reactions to the possible politics when you read the script?

Peck There was definitely an element within the film that could polarize some people. And inevitably most films can get criticism using these standards, if that's how you want to approach the film. But if you approach the movie the way it was intended to be watched, as an action and escapist film, then we're not making any kind of statement except edge-of-the-seat entertainment.

HollywoodChicago.com: You broke out in a big way from your previous image in the film "The Wackness." What was the reaction to that film role from the show business community, and did it help you get to the next level in your career?

Peck Without a doubt, especially since the film was first seen within the industry, in the big cities and by cinephiles. It wasn't a huge audience, but it's had a life beyond the initial release in DVD, rentals and cable viewings. I owe [director] Jonathan Levine because he believed in me,

and for that I am forever in his debt. Whenever you can do something that puts you in a different light as an actor, between having Jon and Sir Ben Kingsley [co-star], I was pretty much guaranteed to not suck, as long as I didn’t screw it up. I’m glad it was received well, and it did afford me an opportunity to do ‘Red Dawn.’

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you owe the character of Josh Nichols from ‘Drake & Josh’ in the evolution of your career? Do you envision a reunion show 20 years from now and what would it be about?



Josh Peck in Chicago, November 2nd, 2012
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Peck I’m so proud of that show and the people involved, and Nickelodeon gave me my first opportunity. In many ways, I would love to figure out a way to keep entertaining kids, whether it would be on Nickelodeon or another film. Reunion shows, though, are dangerous. I’ll be open to it. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: You have directed an episode of ‘Drake & Josh.’ Do you have an interest in that skill in your back pocket to go along with your acting career?

Peck I’d loved to. I want to be completely prepared for it. For example, we worked on ‘Red Dawn’ for two years, but [director] Dan Bradley worked on it for two years in pre-and-post production. It’s takes a lot of commitment and ability to really see something like that through. But given the opportunity, I would so much like to keep directing.

HollywoodChicago.com: What’s next for you? Do you think you’ll go for these big films or something smaller and independent?

Peck I’m in, I’m all in. I’ve worked on smaller budgeted indie films, and it’s all about who is involved, whether it’s a filmmaker I like or an actor I want to work with, it all comes down to the script. If the dialogue tastes good, and I can imagine saying the words, that’s what I immediately run to. If you have any of those ingredients and you have my attention. I’m always excited to see what comes next.

HollywoodChicago.com: Of the films that you have upcoming, what do you really want your audience to see?

Peck I have this film ‘Battle of the Year’ coming out, which is a 3D dance movie from Screen Gems. It couldn’t be more different from ‘Drake & Josh’ or ‘Red Dawn.’ It’s based on a documentary called ‘Planet B-Boy’ and it’s about real B-Boy dance crews who go to this event called the ‘Battle of the Year’ in France. They thought I’d be right for it, and I wanted to be a part of it, but because there are so many great dancers, literally the best in the world at this style, that I was comfortable being the comedic relief. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the most surreal moment for you of ‘Drake & Josh’ mania?

Peck I had one Beatles-type moment at a concert, which was geared toward a younger age group that was our audience. I remembered at first it was nothing, but then it built to a mob mentality where one person noticed me, and it escalated into my shirt being torn off. I thought, ‘if only ten year old Josh could see this, there would have been a lot less anxiety in my life.’ [laughs]

“Red Dawn” opens everywhere on November 21st. Featuring Josh Peck, Christ Hemsworth, Josh Hutcherson, Adrienne Palicki, Isabel Lucas, Connor Cruise and Jeffrey Dean Morgan. Screenplay by Carl Ellsworth and Jeremy Passmore. Directed by Dan Bradley. Rated “PG-13” (naturally)

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