

Feature: Jane Lynch, Paul Sorvino at 2013 Chicago Film Critics Awards Press Conference

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CHICAGO – As the stars, presenters and award recipients gathered at the Chicago Film Critics Awards on February 9th, they took some time out to mix with the media at a pre-show press conference. Jane Lynch, Paul Sorvino, Joe Piscopo, Nadine Velazquez, Regina Taylor and the other award winners offered their perspectives.

HollywoodChicago.com's Brian Tallerico, Patrick McDonald and Matt Fagerholm covered the presser, and contributed several questions asked to the awards show participants. Photographer Joe Arce captured his stellar portraits at the event. Below is a summary of the afternoon's best.



🔀 Jane Lynch, Recipient of "Comedia Extrarodinaire"

Accepting this year's award for Comedia Extraordinaire was the incomparable Jane Lynch, the Chicago-bred actress who achieved mega-stardom with her portrayal of Sue Sylvester, the bullying high school coach on "Glee." It was a role impeccably designed for Lynch's uproarious wit and deadpan timing, which she cultivated in a multitude of roles in theatre (the Annoyance Theater's "The Real Live Brady Bunch") and in film ("The 40-Year-Old Virgin"). Yet it was her role as the fearsome dog trainer Christy Cummings in Christopher Guest's 2000 comedy classic, "Best in Show," that provided Lynch with her first big break.



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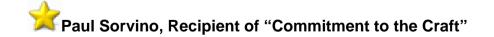




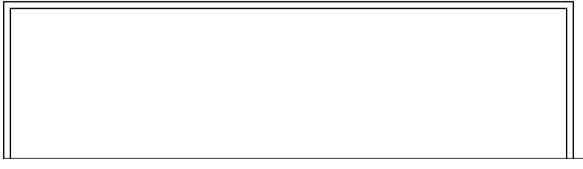
"When I saw 'Waiting for Guffman' in 1998, I fell out of my chair and went, 'Oh my god, I want to do this!' And just through a series of happy accidents, which happens to be the name of my book," Lynch said while posing in front of the nearest lens with typically sublime comedic flair, "I did a [Frosted Flakes] commercial for Christopher Guest, and he asked me to do 'Best in Show' several months later. I got hooked into a form and style and energy that suited me so well. It blew open the doors for me, not just for my career, but for my confidence."

During the press conference, Lynch also praised her longtime collaborator, and "Real Live Brady Bunch" creator, Jill Soloway, who became the first woman to win a Best Director prize at Sundance for her feature debut, "Afternoon Delight," starring Kathryn Hahn and Juno Temple. Curiously enough, the picture was one of two official selections at Sundance 2013 featuring Lynch as a therapist.

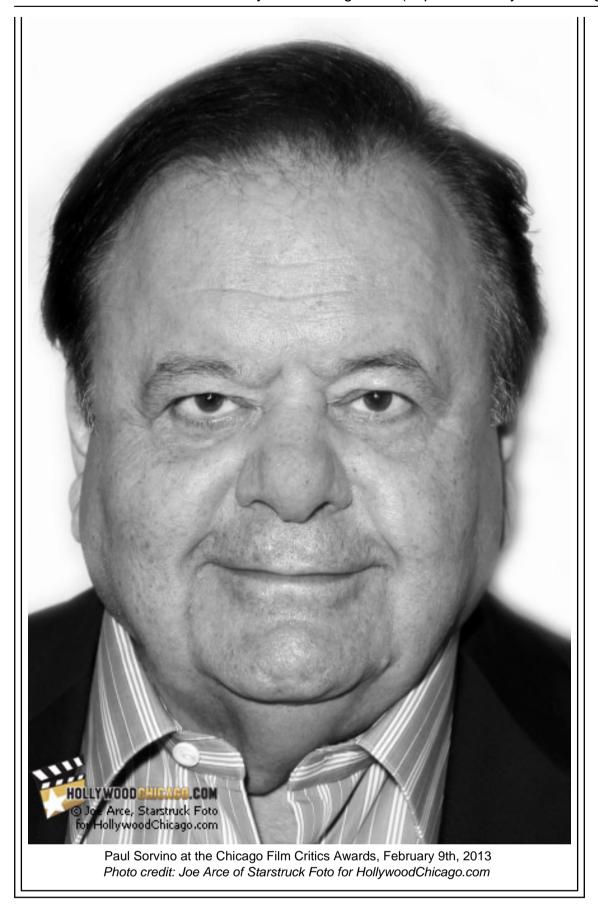
"I play therapists all the time," Lynch half-joked. "I'm such a messed-up person, I don't understand how that works."



Actor Paul Sorvino is the definition of "artist." Besides his very familiar character roles in films such as "Reds," "Cruising," "That Championship Season," "Dick Tracy," "The Rocketeer," "Bulworth," "The Cooler" and as the unforgettable Paulie Cicero in "Goodfellas," Sorvino is a trained opera singer, activist, sculptor, writer, director, pasta sauce entrepreneur and father of Oscar winner Mira Sorvino. He accepted the "Commitment to the Craft" Award from the Chicago Film Critics, and gave an impassioned acceptance speech on his appreciation for the art of acting. Sorvino has four films scheduled for 2013 release, including "How Sweet It Is," co-starring Joe Piscopo, who introduced Sorvino at the awards show.







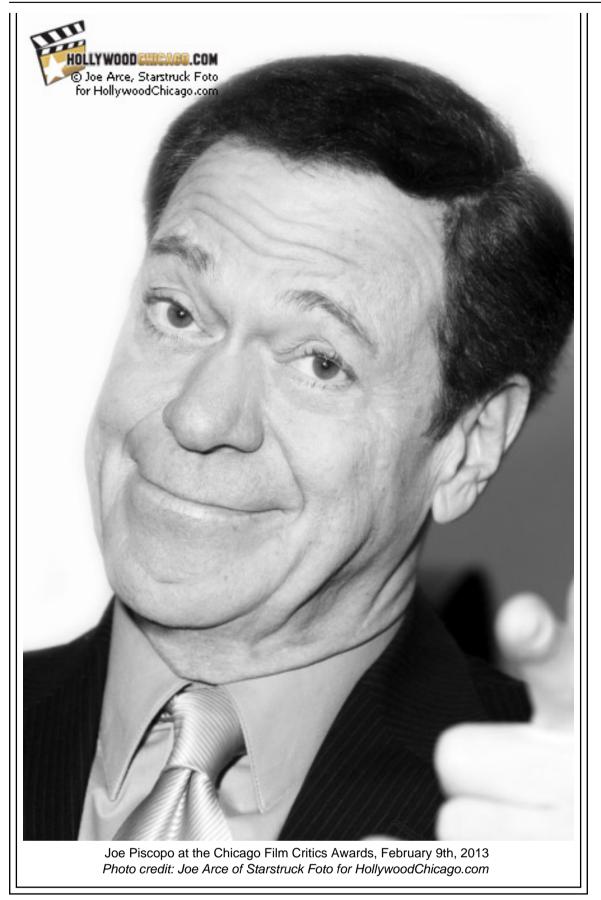
He talked about his relationship with the craft of acting at the press conference, "I study the way people behave, the way they look, how they sound and how they behave. If you really want to be a good actor you have to find out what makes people tick. When I did Paulie Cicero, for example, I found out what he wants, what he does on a daily basis and what is important to him. That tells us something about his behavior. You don't try to do anything but make it look like what you think it should look like, when you feel you know you have the character...and then you're ready to go to work. Playing Paulie Cicero took me about a month."

Concluding, he said, "Part of the actor's tools is his child-like belief in things. Any fine artist retains his simplicity from childhood, he has to believe completely when he creating character, like a child using his finger as a gun. The actor's work is different from any other artist because you have to believe in imaginary circumstances. As [famous acting instructor] Sanford Meisner once said when I studied under him, 'you must find the pinch that will give you the ouch.'"



Joe Piscopo hasn't lost a step as he did a few routines for the audience at the awards show. His energy and timing was as sharp as when he worked on "Saturday Night Live" as part of the troupe that came immediately after the first cast of the show. It was only he and Eddie Murphy who survived that sixth season in 1980, when new producer Jean Doumanian nearly derailed the show with her changes. He was on SNL until 1984, and created many memorable characters, including his spot-on impression of Frank Sinatra. He attended the awards as the presenter of the "Commitment to the Craft" award, introducing his co-star Paul Sorvino from the soon-to-be-released "How Sweet It Is."





Piscopo commented on the infamous 1980 season: "It was a near death experience. Jean Doumanian was a great film producer for Woody Allen, but I could not figure out why they cleaned house like that and gave her the show. I didn't want to do it, and I was making more money just doing commercials. I thought of myself more as a utility guy, but my agent Chris Albrecht, who later produced so many great shows for HBO, told me I had to go on SNL. For ten shows we died, and it was the worst. I do this bit in my routine, I talk about walking down the streets of New York City during that season, and people would say, 'hey aren't you on Saturday Night Live?' I'd say yeah, and then they would shout back, 'you stink, get off the show.'"

🔀 Nadine Velazquez, Special Presenter, Featured in "Flight"

Adding glamour to the night's roster of guest presenters was Nadine Velazquez, a native Chicagoan who ended up finding a successful career in acting years after earning a Bachelor of Arts in Marketing from Columbia College (she admitted that the degree did little for her screen career). She had the distinction of being featured in one of last year's most memorable nude scenes, getting dressed in front of Denzel Washington during the first scene of Robert Zemeckis' "Flight," yet most audiences would most likely recognize Velazquez from her recurring roles on such small screen hits as "My Name is Earl" and "The League." She told the press that her experience on "The League" has had a particularly strong impact on her evolution as a performer.





"It's been really nice to watch the comedians that come on the show and be able to improvise with them," Velazquez said. "I think that's helped me in my performances without me even realizing it. I just worked with Michael Cera on 'Arrested Development,' and though a lot of that show is scripted, you still really need chops in improv."

Kegina Taylor, Recipient of the "Oscar Micheaux Award"

Regina Taylor considers Chicago her "performing hometown," as Distinguished Artistic Associate of Chicago's Goodman Theatre. Born in

Texas, she did her first made-for-TV movies while studying at Southern Methodist University. "Crisis at Central High" (1981) got her rave notices from New York Times, among others, and launched her career. Since then she has appeared in such diverse films as "Clockers," "Courage Under Fire," "The Negotiator," and most well known for TV's "I'll Fly Away," as Lilly Harper. She recently finished four seasons as a series regular on "The Unit." The "Oscar Micheaux Award" is named after one of the first prominent African American filmmakers, who began his career in Chicago in 1918, and honors African-American performers who have contributed to their communities as artists and activists.





"After giving the award to James Earl Jones last year, I was totally surprised and amazed to be the recipient of the 'Oscar Micheaux Award' this year," Taylor said. "My mother and grandmother always told me to live a creative life, and to give back. I've been able to do what I love so much, and have an effect on the community, and it has been a wonderful experience."

🤀 George Tillman Jr. & Robert Teitel, "Commitment to Chicago" Award

Two filmmakers who have been vital to the local film economy are George Tillman Jr. and Robert Teitel. They met at Columbia College in Chicago and went on to form a partnership that produced the films "Soul Food" (also directed by Tillman), the two "Barbershop" films and "Nothing Like the Holidays," all shot on location in the Windy City. In addition, Tillman has directed Oscar winners Robert De Niro and Cuba Gooding Jr. in "Men of Honor," and recently helmed the well-received biography film, "Notorious," about The Notorious B.I.G.

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"We've been fortunate because we've made six films in Chicago," Robert Teitel said. "For me, Chicago is great, with crews that work harder than anywhere, with locations that are out of this world, a acting community that is undeniably strong and tax incentives that are very supportive."

"When we first met, the independent scene was in New York," George Tillman added, "we felt there was an untouched world here in Chicago, and we just thought the best thing to do was to tell our stories here. We shot our first film on State Street and the south side, and I remembered those locations when we later did 'Barbershop.' It's all connected to our own personal experience, and we stand out as Chicago filmmakers."

💢 Kori Cioca, Representing "The Invisible War"

The most moving moment in the ceremony occurred when Kori Cioca, a key subject in Kirby Dick's "The Invisible War," accepted the CFCA's Best Documentary award on behalf of the filmmakers. She drove from Ohio in order to attend the event, and tearfully shared her experiences with the press and audience. "War" sheds light on the staggering number of soldiers raped in the U.S. military, and Cioca was one of many women who suffered abuse at the hands of her commanding officer in the Coast Guard. Along with 27 other soldiers, Cioca filed a lawsuit against Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates that was dismissed in December 2011. Her injuries included a dislocated jaw and she was discharged from the military without any medical insurance, inspiring philanthropists Barbara and Eric Dobkin to cover the full cost of Cioca's surgery. When asked about her initial thoughts regarding the project, Cioca said she felt skeptical.





"I was afraid that it was going to be anti-military and if it was, I was going to ask the [filmmakers] to leave my house, because I'm very pro-military," Coica said. "When they got there, they explained to me their love of the military. They told me that they were outraged and wanted to make the system better for active duty members, so I agreed to do the movie. ... I live in a small town and after the lawsuit got out, everyone knew what had happened. People would turn around and walk away from me. It was an awful feeling. During my interview with Kirby Dick and [producer] Amy Ziering, I looked up and they were crying along with me. I had never felt such love and support than in that moment, and I was confident in their mission to make change."

🔀 "Emerging Filmmakers Award" Winners

Joining the stars at the press conference were two fresh faces practically bursting with potential. Director Mike Wytrykus and producer Ray Avid Lebon were honored the previous night when their animated short film, "Play Date," won the CFCA's first-ever Emerging Filmmaker Award. Film & Video Department Chair Bruce Sheridan joined the filmmakers to celebrate their achievement, as they were presented with a \$5,000 check while an excerpt from their film played on the big screen.





Lebon said that compromise was not only a major theme of her film, but also a key to the collaborative nature of the project. Flipping seamlessly between reality and a vibrant, pop culture-fueled dreamland, Wytrykus' film explores the imaginations of a little boy and girl as they learn to play together. Ordinary playground staples such as swings and monkey bars are transformed into pirate ships and foreboding jungles. Though the film pays no direct homages to iconic blockbusters such as "Star Wars," Wytrykus admits that they served as an influence.

"You have to start out imitating the filmmakers that inspire you in order to find your own voice," Wytrykus said.

Contributing to this article is Matt Fagerholm and Brian Tallerico. The Chicago Film Critics Association (CFCA) celebrates the heritage of cinema through their membership on TV, radio, newspapers and the web. <u>Click here</u> [16] to go to the CFCA website for details on upcoming events.



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