

Interviews: Filmmaker Michael Moore Meets Chaz Ebert at 50th Chicago International Film Festival

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CHICAGO – What better way to get over the post-election hangover than hearing from the progressive lion, Michael Moore. Moore was on the Red Carpet at the 50th Chicago International Film Festival, and ran into an old friend, Chaz Ebert.

Michael Moore has had an adventurous career in the media, shaking up the power structure and questioning social morality. The man from Flint, Michigan, dropped out of college to start a magazine in 1976. In the mid-1980s, he was hired by Mother Jones Magazine as editor, but was fired from that position only after four months. This led to the next phase of his career, and his film “Roger & Me” (1989), about Moore’s pursuit of GM executive Roger Smith – who presided over the decimation of Flint when he closed the GM plants there – became a cult sensation. Since then, Moore has tilted at the windmills of guns (“Bowling for Columbine”), the Bush administration (“Fahrenheit 9/11”), healthcare (“Sicko”) and Wall Street excess (“Capitalism, A Love Story”).



Michael Moore at the 50th Chicago International Film Festival, October 23rd, 2014

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

Moore answered questions for HollywoodChicago.com on the Red Carpet before introducing the 25th anniversary print of “Roger & Me” at the film festival. While there, he ran into producer Chaz Ebert, who was screening the excellent documentary about her late husband Roger, “Life Itself.” So many filmmakers own their reputations to a great write-up or TV mention from the legendary film critic, and Moore took the opportunity to express his gratitude to Ms. Ebert.

HollywoodChicago.com: What does the conservative movement fear about you, since they’re constantly using you as a scapegoat for all that is wrong in the progressive movement?

Michael Moore: They fear one thing from me, and that’s the fact that I’m one of the few people on the left whose work doesn’t necessarily speak to the ‘Church of the Left,’ but to a vast and wide Middle American audience. My work is good, okay, but the point that it reached so many people with my point-of-view, and people like it, and they leave the theater thinking about it.

Here we are, 25 years after ‘Roger & Me,’ in a very different world. If I had told you on this carpet in 1989 that we would have a black president from Chicago and gay marriage in Iowa, I would have sounded like a crazy man. Those are things I believed when I started my filmmaking, and they all happened. Back then I looked like I was on some left wing limb, but now I’m much more mainstream. The majority of Americans are evolving and progressing to what I’ve saying, not in the direction of FOX News.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you think the conservative movement has been doing as a result of this shift?

Moore: The gerrymandering of districts, and the suppression of the vote, is conservatives admitting that the majority of Americans no longer agree with them. What you hear is a sound of a dying dinosaur. And it's too bad, because at one time there were good Republicans, and there are conservative principles that work.

HollywoodChicago.com: It's been 12 years since 'Bowling for Columbine,' yet the gun issue remains most divisive than ever. What do you think motivates an individual to be more concerned about those rights than how a sane background check would do for the safety of humanity?

Moore: Let me answer that with a question – why is it only Americans that obsess over gun rights? I could give you a flip answer, that it's men with 'shortcomings,' [laughs] but there are men all over the world in those conditions. There are years in the whole country of Japan when there are NO gun murders. The question that has to be answered in our souls, is what is it about Americans that need those rights?

HollywoodChicago.com: What project are you working on right now? What will be it's subject.

Moore: You'll have to listen carefully. The film deals quite deeply with [Moore mimes silence]. I don't know what kind of trouble I'll be in once people see this movie. You'll have to decide whether you print that or not. [laughs]



Chaz Ebert Joins Michael Moore on the Red Carpet...

HollywoodChicago.com: As a documentary maker, what was your opinion about the Roger Ebert biography, 'Life Itself'?

Moore: 'Life Itself' is one of the best documentaries of the year, I encourage everyone to go and see it. It's a powerful film, and we as filmmakers know what Roger Ebert did for us. He was a force for good in this world, and is sorely missed, and it's wonderful to turn around and see you here.



Chaz Ebert at the 50th Chicago International Film Festival, October 23rd, 2014

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

Chaz Ebert: I remember the first time Roger saw your film, 'Roger & Me' at the Telluride Film Festival. He was so impressed with it.

Moore: He was the only critic that came to my first screening ever of 'Roger & Me,' he was the only one I could convince to come. He had tickets to another bigger opening, with a big gala, and at first he told me he'd see it the next day. So I kept pressing, telling him to come to that opening night. He looked at me and replied, 'I said I'll come tomorrow.' [laughs] I thought that I'd upset him. But 20 minutes later, when I was about to start the screening, he came into the theater. He gave up his big gala opening to come to my opening. I profusely thanked him, but all he said was, 'don't say a word.'

Later he said there was a crazy look in my eyes that told him he had to be there. He was the only film critic in that room to see the first screening, and the first time the public ever heard about me, was when he wrote about it the next day in the Chicago Sun-Times. That's how my life in this world began.

Ebert: That's my Roger.

HollywoodChicago.com: Chaz, I just wanted to ask you, since you're going around the country and world with 'Life Itself,' what kind of thematic reaction are you observing as a collective spirit?

Ebert: It almost makes me want to cry as to how 'Life Itself' has been received. Because I think it highlights the filmmaking quality of director

Steve James, but it also understands a respect for Roger and what he did in the filmmaking industry, yes as a reviewer, but also as a human being. He was a great guy who cared about people, and he saw film not just as entertainment, but as an art form that could touch our hearts and make us feel like better people.

Cinema/Chicago, the organization which facilitates the Chicago International Film Festival, sponsors year round events. For membership and other information, [click here](#). [16]



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