

Feature: Top 25 Interviews of 2014, By Patrick McDonald

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 12, 2015 - 3:48pm

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CHICAGO – One of the specialties of HollywoodChicago.com is the film and personality interview. The majority of these chats came through me, Patrick McDonald, and I couldn't narrow it down to a top 10 or even a top 20. For 2014, there were 25 top interviews, and it is a diverse range of voices.

It is a privilege to get the opportunity to participate in the promotional tours, awards ceremonies, film festivals, book appearances, phoners and other lucky happenstances that feature the notable among us. To whittle down the list, I mostly thought about what was said in these interviews, whether inspirational or provocative – plus the status of the participants, whether they are up-and-coming or established.

The interview highlights are broken down by "Background and Behind-the-Scenes" and the "Memorable Quote" associated with each subject, and are often accompanied with exclusive photography by Joe Arce of HollywoodChicago.com. Four notables who just missed the list include (click the name) [Greg Kinnear](#), [27] [Crispin Glover](#), [28] [Andy Garcia](#), [29] [John Turturro](#), [30] and [Joel Murray](#), [31] The following list represents the films, events and nostalgia of 2014.



Rob Reiner, Actor and Director



Rob Reiner in Chicago, June 18, 2014

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: One of the great voices in modern American film directing came from a TV sitcom star from the 1970s – Rob Reiner. The son of famed TV producer and filmmaker Carl Reiner, Rob was best known for playing “Meathead” Mike Stivic on the controversial TV series “All in the Family.” He was in town promoting his latest film, “And So it Goes,” but I was just as fascinated with his years on that sitcom as I was with “The Princess Bride” – among his stellar filmography. He didn’t disappoint in any reflection.

Memorable Quote: *“When I was a kid growing up, my father was an idol to me, I loved what he did and I loved him so much. I wanted to be like him. My mother tells a story about when I was eight years old I came up to her, and told her I wanted to change my name. Immediately she thought, ‘Oh, the poor kid, it’s the pressure of living under the shadow of a famous father.’ She asked me what I wanted to change my name to, and I answered, ‘Carl’ [laughs]. I wanted so much to be like him. So really our major ‘separation’ came later in life, after I became single again in my early thirties, after being married for 10 years. I made the film ‘Stand By Me,’ which for the first time really reflected my point of view, which was separate and apart from anything he would have done. I had to find my own voice, and I finally did it.”*

[Click here](#) [32] for the full interview of Rob Reiner.



Chaz Ebert, Producer & Steve James, Director, of “Life Itself”



Chaz Ebert on the Red Carpet at the Chicago Premiere of 'Life Itself' on June 30th, 2014

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

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: “Life Itself,” the brilliant document of film critic Roger Ebert’s life, is not only the front-runner for Best Documentary at the Oscars, but is also a passion play for it’s creators – Chaz Ebert, producer and Roger’s wife, and Steve James (“Hoop Dreams”), the director. As an acquaintance of both individuals, the interview was more of a celebration of Roger’s life and what it meant to all of us. As long as I’m a film critic, I will always owe a debt of gratitude to RE, and as follows his brilliant biographers, Chaz and Steve.

Memorable Quote: *”[Chaz Ebert] Live your passion in life because that’s what Roger did, and that’s why he had so much fun. I called it ‘living out loud.’ If he loved a film, he was unabashed in his praise of it, and I loved that he did that. I also loved that he loved me, my children and grandchildren, so much so that we’d have that same fun and that same joy. I want people to understand if you have someone close, hold them closer. I loved that he wrote about the movies so beautifully, but I also loved that he wrote about life so beautifully – whether it was race, politics, religion or anything else. He also showed us how to look death in the eye and say, ‘I am not afraid, I’m coming for you,’ and embraced death as much as he embraced life.”*

[Click here](#) [33] for the full interview of Chaz Ebert and Steve James.



Liv Ullmann, Director and Actress



Liv Ullmann at the 50th Chicago International Film Festival

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

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: I've been fortunate enough to meet some true legends of cinema, and they don't get more legendary than Liv Ullmann – filmmaker, actress and muse to director Ingmar Bergman. Attending the 50th Chicago International Film Festival for her new film "Miss Julie," Ullmann sat down for a few nerve-racking (for me) questions, and gave some special insights to the life and times of her legacy. Speaking to her was a blessing.

Memorable Quote: *"If Ingmar Bergman had been a woman, that greatness would have destroyed him. No woman could have lived their work as much as he did, and demanded so much without consequences, and have someone else take care of the children. He lived a very self-forgiving life. Because he was a man he could do that, and everyone respected him and thought he was great, including me...I'm very proud, and still don't understand why he wanted to work with me so much, after we met each other. I asked once and he said, 'don't you understand, you're my Stradivarius.' I do believe he was a genius in his art, and as I read a script now to adapt for the stage, he was also a thinker and a philosopher – that is why he will last. The art of cinema will always come back around to him."*

[Click here](#) [34] for the full interview of Liv Ullmann.

**Jason Schwartzman, Actor**



Jason Schwartzman in Chicago, October 24, 2014

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Schwartzman was in Chicago promoting his underrated film “Listen Up Philip,” and he was an amazingly personable and warm interview subject. He was engaged and enthusiastic, and it wasn’t an act. He is, of course, a stock performer in Wes Anderson’s universe, who gave him his first big break in “Rushmore,” and did you know he was the son of actress Talia Shire (“Rocky”)? Our interview was a crazy quilt of his love for portraying authors like Philip and his adventurous career. He is a real treat of a human being.

Memorable Quote: *“I think a lot of it had to do with our ages at the time we met. I was 17 years old and Wes [Anderson] was 27. He definitely is a mentor, and there is always that person that comes along at the right time in your life, and steers you in the direction you need to go, and that was Wes. He was the kind of guy that turned me onto the French New Wave cinema and grittier American films. When I got the script for ‘Rushmore’ I remember reading it and thinking ‘this is exactly what I think is funny.’ I never realized it until then, and never knew that someone could articulate it so well. I remember thinking I wasn’t going to get the part in the film, but I couldn’t wait to see it. To this day, he makes me laugh. I don’t know how it ‘shaped’ me, but I’m with my friend, and we’re brothers in arms.”*

[Click here](#) [35] for the full interview of Jason Schwartzman.



Actor David Oyelowo, Director Ava DuVernay of “Selma”



David Oyelowo Consults with Ava DuVernay on the Set of 'Selma'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: This was a film that made my Top Ten List for 2014, and it's an inspiration both for the events it portrays – the voting rights march in Selma, Alabama, circa 1965 – and the man who led that march, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The actor David Oyelowo imbued his portrayal of Dr. King with a humanity that brings the icon to life, and the director Ava DuVernay – who is directing her first major film – gives a balance and reverence to the events as they unfolded. A must-see for soul cleansing, especially in the light of Ferguson and New York City. I spoke with the creators of this film via phone in mid-December, and their feeling and truth came through the distance.

Memorable Quote: *"[David Oyelowo] Racism is real, inequality is real and a 'minority mentality' that blocks us from where we want to go is real. But what is also real is the beauty of who we are as human beings, as black people, and what we have to contribute to society. Our human spirit is stronger than the forces that oppose us, and I have a true belief in that – and that's what I expect to live with everyday, to defy whatever injustices I may face."*

[Click here](#) [36] for the full interview of Ava DuVernay and David Oyelowo.



Bennett Miller, Director of "Foxcatcher" & "Capote"



Philip Seymour Hoffman (left) and Bennett Miller on the Set of 'Capote'

Photo credit: MGM/Sony Pictures Classics

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Why this director ends up in my “hot six” for 2014 interviews, became clear as we spoke. Miller is a intuitively honest man, and it was obvious he was not up for my analytic questions about his new film “Foxcatcher” or the legacy of his close friend, the late Philip Seymour Hoffman – the lead actor in Bennett’s “Capote.” It was refreshing to experience his complexity and his truth. Finally, somebody calls me on my bullsh*t.

Memorable Quote: *“I bet you could write a thesis paper on [your analysis]. The problem with your questions is that each one of them could a be term paper. [laughs] You could take these three films, teach a class, and each one of these questions could be an assignment – and don’t forget the reading lists alongside them. Listen, part of me is like that cat wanting to hit at that dangling feather in regard to your questions. We could line up five coffees and really get into it all. They are valid and fascinating, but I can’t answer them in soundbites.”*

[Click here](#) [37] for the full interview of director Bennett Miller.



Eddie Redmayne, Lead Actor of “The Theory of Everything”



Felicity Jones, Stephen Hawking and Eddie Redmayne During the Filming of 'The Theory of Everything'

Photo credit: Focus Features

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: This up-and-coming actor may garner a Best Actor nomination at the next Oscar ceremony for his righteous performance as physicist Stephen Hawking in “The Theory of Everything.” What is impressive about Redmayne, besides his high profile career, is his humility in the preparation to properly communicating the handicapped but brilliant Hawking. As a practitioner of the art of acting, he was passionate about his connection to his characters, and wowed me with his intellect and perspective.

Memorable Quote: *"When I met Dr. Hawking, he was down to using a sensor in his glasses, which his eye muscle controls, which stops on one letter at a time on his voice box computer – so it now takes him even longer to respond to a question. I spent three hours with him, and he maybe said ten sentences. So what I gleaned overall was a character image, he has one of the most charismatic faces. There is a joy of life, a vibrancy and a mischief to him that struck me, and that's what I took away from our meeting. We did talk about his voice, before the machine. He told me that it became very slurred, and those were the specifics that he wanted accounted for in the portrayal. But basically it was his energy that I took away."*

[Click here](#) [38] for the full interview of Eddie Redmayne.



Richard Linklater, Director of “Boyhood”



Ethan Hawke and director Richard Linklater (right) on the Set of 'Boyhood'

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Richard Linklater is a director whom I gratuitously admire, for his personal filmmaking journey through the labyrinth of his American Dream. His latest film, "Boyhood," on the short list for Best Picture at the next Oscars, is a meditative look at the life cycle, and filmed with the same actors over 12 years. My excitement in speaking with him, however, had to do with an earlier film of his, "Dazed and Confused," a perspective on my era in high school circa the 1970s that felt like home. Linklater is a fiftysomething filmmaker who is just hitting his stride, and will influence the culture for hopefully many years to come.

Memorable Quote: *"I had 'Boyhood' fairly planned out, it wasn't random at all. I'm a big structure and architecture guy. I knew what the last shot of the film would be at about year two. Patricia [Arquette, as the boy's mother] remembered me telling her the whole character, that she was going to get educated and get divorced along the way. It was all structured, but the fun of it was it gave me the opportunity to think – shoot, edit and then think. [laughs] In comparison to making a film in a short amount of time, it was different. I used the time element to our advantage, to just let the film speak to me as to what it wanted to be. Also, as the actors aged, I got to see where they were going."*

[Click here](#) [39] for the full interview of Richard Linklater.



Zach Braff, Director and Actor



The Interviewer and His Subject, Zach Braff, in Chicago on June 16, 2014

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

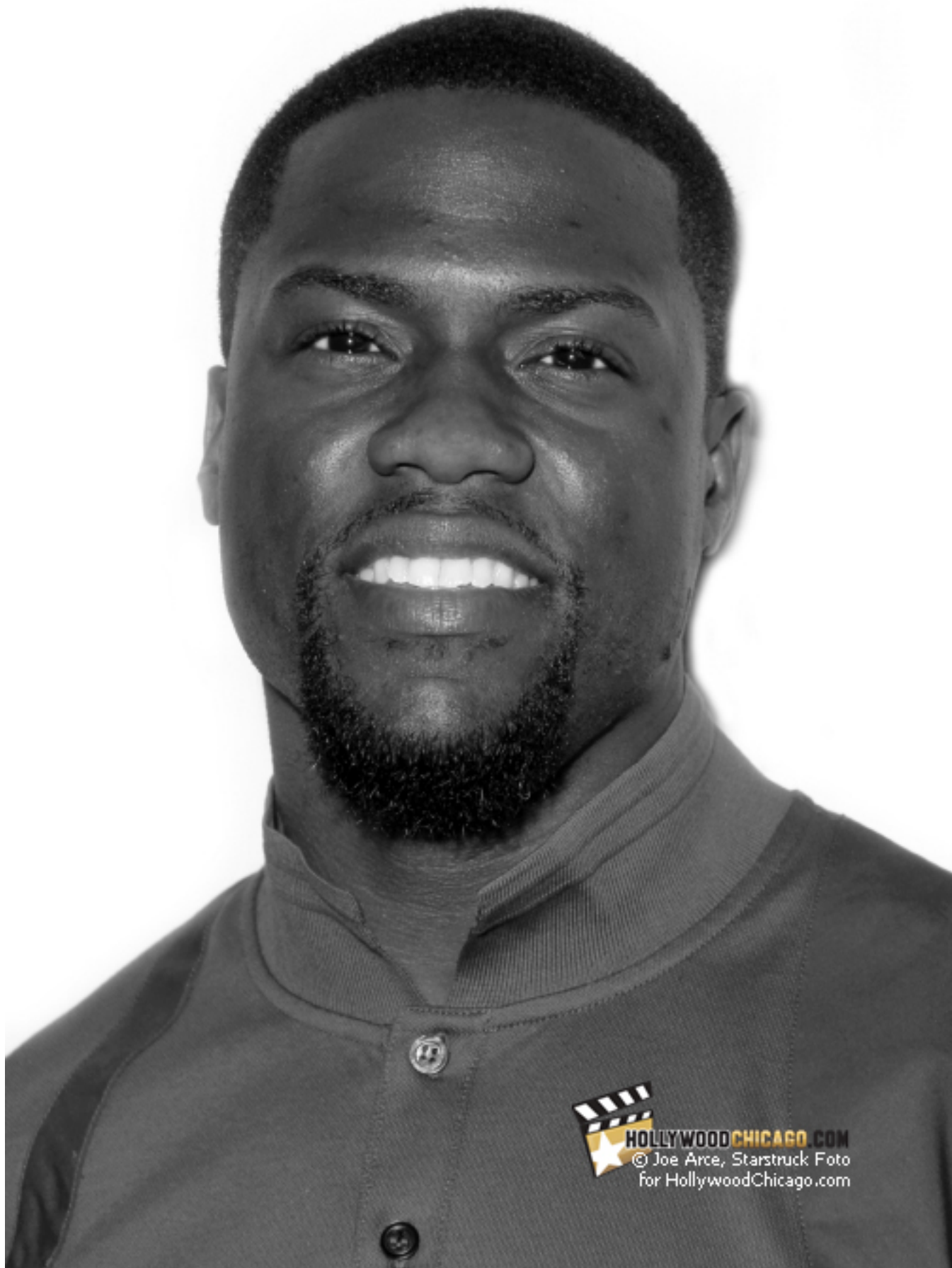
Background and Behind-the-Scenes: The personality and truth of Zach Braff shined, as he represented his independent film, “Wish I Was Here,” during a promotional tour in June. The film had a bit of controversy, as it was partially financed through the Kickstarter crowd funding website, and some outsiders protested that a known actor shouldn’t be using that resource. Braff was contrite about that circumstance (see the quote), and came off as I expected, as a breezy and witty observer of the show business scene. And as the picture indicates, one of my favorite celebrity pictures of all time.

Memorable Quote: *”[In response to being the first ‘celebrity’ to use Kickstarter] I’ve helped everybody by taking all the shit myself. So, you’re welcome [laughs]. The biggest lesson was that I know a lot about what I do, that I stupidly thought everyone knew. I know a lot about independent film financing and all of the many intricacies and roadblocks. I naively thought everyone understood that – 90 percent of the shit I took for the Kickstarter campaign was misinformation that I had to explain to everybody on Earth...I would have debated it, because it’s a new concept; is it right or wrong? Should celebrities use it? That’s a fine conversation to have discourse about, but the amount of misinformation about Kickstarter and this project that got thrown out there took an extraordinary amount of work to correct.”*

[Click here](#) [40] for the full interview of Zach Braff.



Kevin Hart, Actor and Comedian



Kevin Hart in Chicago for 'Think Like a Man Too,' June 13, 2014

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

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Kevin Hart was in Chicago promoting “Think Like a Man, Too,” the energetic sequel that featured Hart at his manic best. He was with his co-stars, Regina Hall and Terrence Jenkins (AKA Terrence J.), and the three conducted a lively interplay about the fun movie. Hart was the focus, as he is hot as a pistol, but also because he is humble and introspective. His sense of fame is that it’s a blessing, and he rides that wave with an eye towards keeping it real. He has natural wit, without being “on” all the time, like some comedians. He’s a true mensch.

Memorable Quote: *“Philadelphia [Hart’s hometown] breeds winners, in my opinion. The reason I say that is its a tough city. They are hard on their entertainers, whether it’s a sports team or stand-up. And when it gets to the point where they love you, they love you forever, no matter what you’ve taken them through. They will ride with you. To take the example of athletes, if they accept them and love them, the only time Philadelphians will turn their backs on them is when they feel like they’ve abandoned the city. That’s the only time. But if you stick with us – and we love you – and you retire a Philadelphian, we’ll celebrate you any time we see you.”*

[Click here](#) [41] for the full interview of Kevin Hart, Regina Hall and Terrence J.



Actress Jenny Slate, Director Gillian Robespierre of “Obvious Child”



Director Gillian Robespierre, Actress Jenny Slate in Chicago, May 28, 2014

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

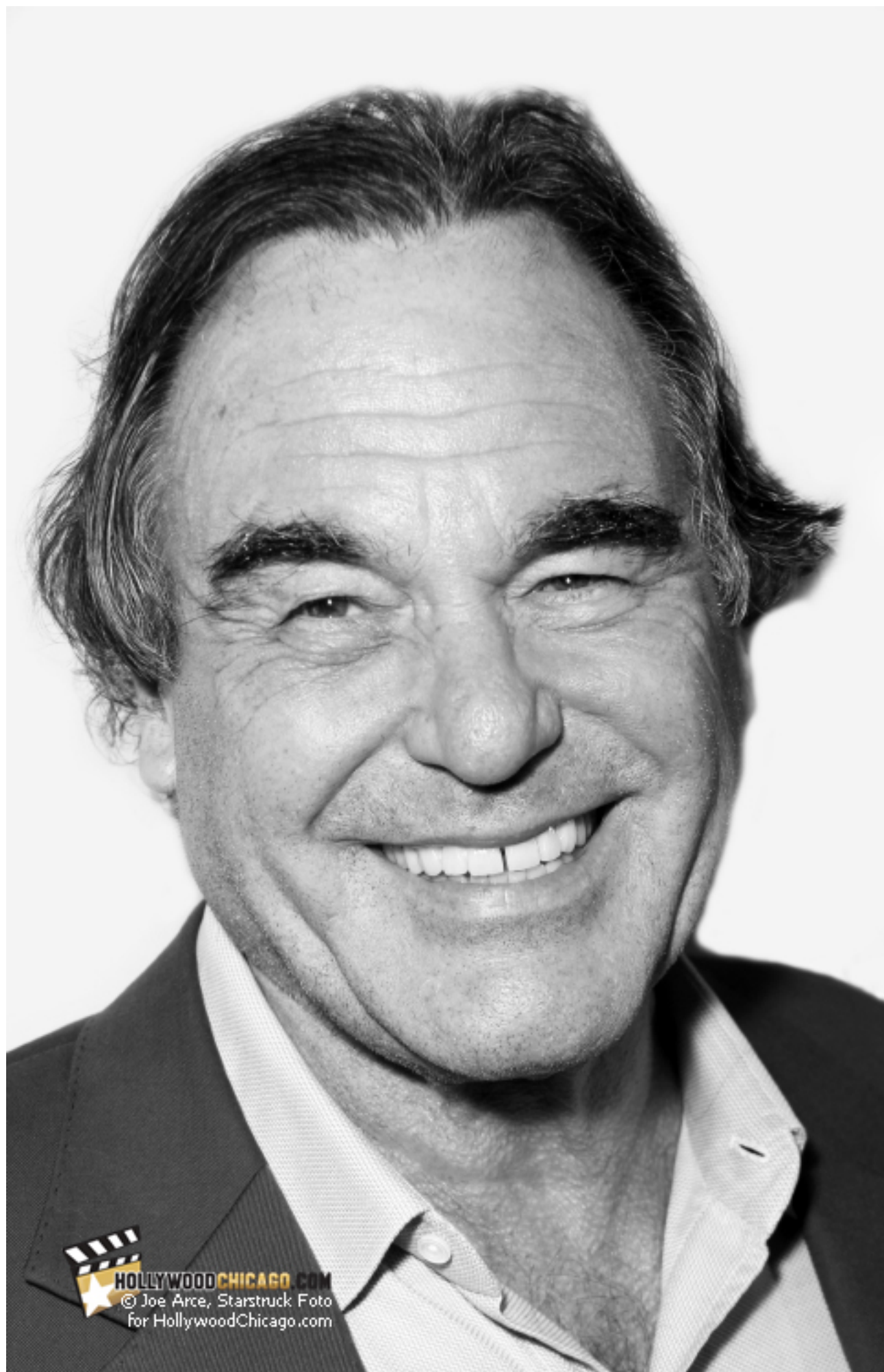
Background and Behind-the-Scenes: “Obvious Child” was an “issue” film masked by romantic comic overtones, and the exquisite performance by Jenny Slate, as a woman who makes a definitive decision – and follows up with it – all while negotiating a new relationship. Writer/director Gillian Robespierre and Slate insisted on the rom-com elements of the film over anything else, but their wise and wonderfully wacky interview allowed for some expressive discussion. Slate is a movie star in person, without pretension.

Memorable Quote: *"For me, chemistry is about the kindness of the performer, and if they like to laugh a lot. When I first met Jake Lacy [Slate's romantic interest in the film], it was very easy to joke around with him. If that happens that's pretty much it for me. Chemistry in performance is an odd thing, because it's completely different from meeting someone in life that you choose to partner with – you're not saying your own thing, it's something in a script and in character. There is a lot of focus, and because it's a film set and a lot of crew are around, you don't want to look gross when you're kissing. [laughs]"*

[Click here](#) [42] for the full interview of Jenny Slate and Gillian Robespierre.



Red Carpet Interviews, 50th Chicago International Film Festival



Oliver Stone at the 50th Chicago International Film Festival

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

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: The glitz and glamour of the Red Carpet is a freak-out for the interviewer, as three questions usually can't penetrate any relevance – but that is part of the challenge. The 50th Chicago International Film Festival in October of 2014 brought several of the big time stars to that carpet, and despite the truncated length of our conversations, offered some interesting insights. Oliver Stone, Kathleen Turner and Michael Moore took their turn while standing on a loom of red.

Memorable Quotes: *"[Oliver Stone, on press coverage of the 50th Anniversary of the JFK assassination] The treatment was incredibly shabby again, and I felt that the coverage was more fair when the film first came out in 1991. The reaction to the film has always been intense, and 'conspiracy' in association with the film has become the media mantra. The point is the original information that was released about the assassination in 1963 was off, every single fact that the media said was a fact was off. The case was never made, and it's going back to the original evidence that was never examined properly.*

[Kathleen Turner, on the late Lauren Bacall, whom she's been compared to] Lauren Bacall and I used to have a great game. Whenever we met each other at a restaurant or an event, she would always greet me with 'Ms. Turner,' and I would reply, 'Ms. Bacall.' That exchange would gravitate downward as our voices got lower and lower. (Deepens voice) 'How are you?' 'Nice to see you.' How low could we go? It was great fun.

[Michael Moore] 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."

[Click here](#) [43] for the full interview of Oliver Stone.

[Click here](#) [44] for the full interview of Kathleen Turner.

[Click here](#) [45] for the full interview of Michael Moore.



Dick Cavett, Talk Show Icon



Dick Cavett at the Chicago Museum of Broadcast Communications, June 21st, 2014

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

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: The genial and essential talk show host Dick Cavett reigned supreme during the latter 1960s, providing a hipper anecdote to his rival Johnny Carson. The two began as colleagues, as Cavett began his career as part of the transition staff for Carson's takeover of "The Tonight Show" in 1962. Getting mere minutes with the show business icon at a dinner honoring his legacy, he went into schtick mode, but managed to provide some insight to a few of his contemporaries, including Carson and Groucho Marx.

Memorable Quote: *"Interestingly enough, it was about the playwright George S. Kaufman. It was through Kaufman's funeral that I first met Groucho. Later he told me that when he was working with Kaufman in the 1920s on the stage plays 'Cocoanuts' and 'Animal Crackers' –*

and the playwright was famously particular about doing his written dialogue precisely – that it was he, Groucho, who was the only actor Kaufman ever allowed to ad-lib. Of all of his accomplishments, I think Groucho was very proud of that honor.”

[Click here](#) [46] for the full interview of Dick Cavett.



Mackenzie Phillips, Actress, “One Day at a Time”



Mackenzie Phillips at the “Hollywood Show Chicago”

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

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: I had laryngitis, and met teen-queen-of-the-1970s Mackenzie Phillips as she smoked outside of an autograph show. She was amazingly candid and reliable in interview, taking on some of the tougher questions regarding her years of addiction recovery. She is the daughter of John Phillips of “The Mamas and the Papas,” and was discovered by director George Lucas for “American Graffiti.” She rose to stardom on the TV sitcom “One Day at a Time” (ironic title), and battled substance addiction through the entire run. Clean and sober now, Mackenzie Phillips faces life...well, you know.

Memorable Quote: *” I think people thought, ‘Why does this girl keep crashing and burning Why can’t she stay sober, or keep it together?’ But there was no real through line to my life. I think I had been haunted for many years by secrets I’d been forced to keep via convention. I made an informed decision to be honest [about her relationship wit her father] for the first time ever. People would say to me, ‘Well, you should have told these truths while he was still alive.’ Well, if I had done it while he was alive, they would have said why didn’t you wait until he was dead. You cannot win for trying.”*

[Click here](#) [47] for the full interview of Mackenzie Phillips.

★ **Theo Epstein, President of Baseball Operations, Chicago Cubs & Sportswriter Peter Gammons**



Theo Epstein at the 'Hot Stove Cool Music' Event in Chicago, June 20th, 2014

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Sometimes the days bring interesting opportunities, and these interviews were a perfect example. President of Baseball Operations for the Chicago Cubs, a contradiction in terms if there ever was one, is occupied by wunderkind Theo Epstein, the architect of the Boston Red Sox's first World Championship since 1917. Hired three years ago by the Chicago Cubs, Epstein brought his "Hot Stove, Cool Music" charity to Chicago from Boston, which includes baseball scribe Peter Gammons, who plays guitar in the band at the event. Would I interview them? Hells to the yes.

Memorable Quotes: "[Peter Gammons on the Steroid Era in Baseball in the 1990s] We are all to blame. But also the media really didn't understand it, nor did Major League Baseball. The popularity of the game skyrocketed, Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa were selling tickets everywhere and people in baseball weren't asking too many questions – because balls flying out of the ballpark is what people wanted to see.

[Theo Epstein] We don't really talk about the curses, that probably would be a waste of our time. We focus on getting players that are self

motivated, who rely on each other, and help to create a buffer zone to the outside world. I worked in Boston, so I know all about curses. [laughs]"

[Click here](#) [48] for the full interview of Theo Epstein and Peter Gammons.



Damien Chazelle, Director of “Whiplash”



Director Damien Chazelle (center) On Set with J.K. Simmons for 'Whiplash'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: The first highlight of three hot director interviews in 2014, rookie Damien Chazelle stepped to the plate with “Whiplash,” the best movie of the year (on my list). This passion project, shot in less than three weeks, has a style, rhythm and sensation all its own, plus could propel featured players Miles Teller and J.K. Simmons (as a sadistic music teacher) into new realms of stardom. Unassuming and very introspective about his achievement, Chazelle could get a Best Director nod at the upcoming Oscars, making him one of the youngest nominees (at 29) in history. Basically it all comes down to his excellent and memorable film, with a backbeat you can use.

Memorable Quote: *"It's a film about the quintessential American art form, jazz, but it's also about the idea – that is very American – which is excellence at all costs. If you have to reduce America to a nutshell, it is that idea, both in the sense of what is good about it and what's wrong with it. It's a country that you can pull yourself up, go rags-to-riches, and make it if you just work hard enough. That's so motivational and has become a big part why this country has produced so much in a relatively short time."*

[Click here](#) [49] for the full interview of director Damien Chazelle.



Jonathan Glazer, Director of “Under the Skin”



Jonathan Glazer in Chicago, March 29, 2014

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: “Under the Skin” is a great movie, a metaphor for man-and-woman relationships that nails the impermanence of it all. Have a nice day. Glazer uses actress Scarlett Johansson in a very unusual way, and she turns in her best performance to date, with virtually no dialogue. With comparisons to the films of Stanley Kubrick, “Under the Skin” launches a new, higher level for director Glazer, and more brilliance is sure to come.

Memorable Quote: “Yes, the actors do wonder what is going on sometimes. [laughs] My relationship with actors is about trust. If they think you are there for right reasons, then they are there for the right reasons – it’s very easy then, we just look for the story together. Scarlett is a perfect definition of it in ‘Under the Skin,’ because she hadn’t done anything like this before. It’s incredible to find someone like her who has the confidence – since she is so much in the public eye – to just risk everything for it. To try and do something interesting, you have to risk everything for it.”

[Click here](#) [50] for the full interview of Jonathan Glazer.



Actor Dan Stevens, Director Adam Wingard & Writer Simon Barrett of “The Guest”



Terrific Trio: Dan Stevens, Simon Barrett & Adam Wingard of “The Guest”

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: The scene, the new Soho House Hotel, Greektown Chicago. The men, the lead actor and the filmmaker team of the seriously underrated film, “The Guest.” The story, a metaphor for the American military complex, which was also a sly tribute to “The Terminator.” Writer Simon Barrett and director Adam Wingard are horror film partners who are mining new territory with this highly symbolic thriller. Lead Actor Dan Stevens, by the way, is known for his previous work on “Downton Abbey.”

Memorable Quote: *“[Dan Stevens] As fantastical as this film is, we at least wanted to root it in at least one reality, in order to further explore the fantastical. One of the forms that has interested me – and this goes back to ancient texts like ‘The Iliad’ and ‘The Odyssey’ – was the very deep love that soldiers have for each other. If we are to believe David and the bond he has with Caleb, and since he goes to visit Caleb’s family because of this conditioning, he then can produce ways to assist them that are unorthodox. One of the themes that excited me when I read the script – and what Simon and Adam were keen to explore – was in David going somewhere to help, but actually wreaking utter devastation. That can be applied to some global and political situations, and while we’re not making a direct comment on that, it certainly was a backdrop.”*

[Click here](#) [51] for the full interview with Dan Stevens, Adam Wingard and Simon Barrett.



Mother Dolores Hart, Former Actress Turned Nun



Mother Dolores Hart at Her Consecration in 1970

Photo credit: Valerie Imbleau for Ignatius Press

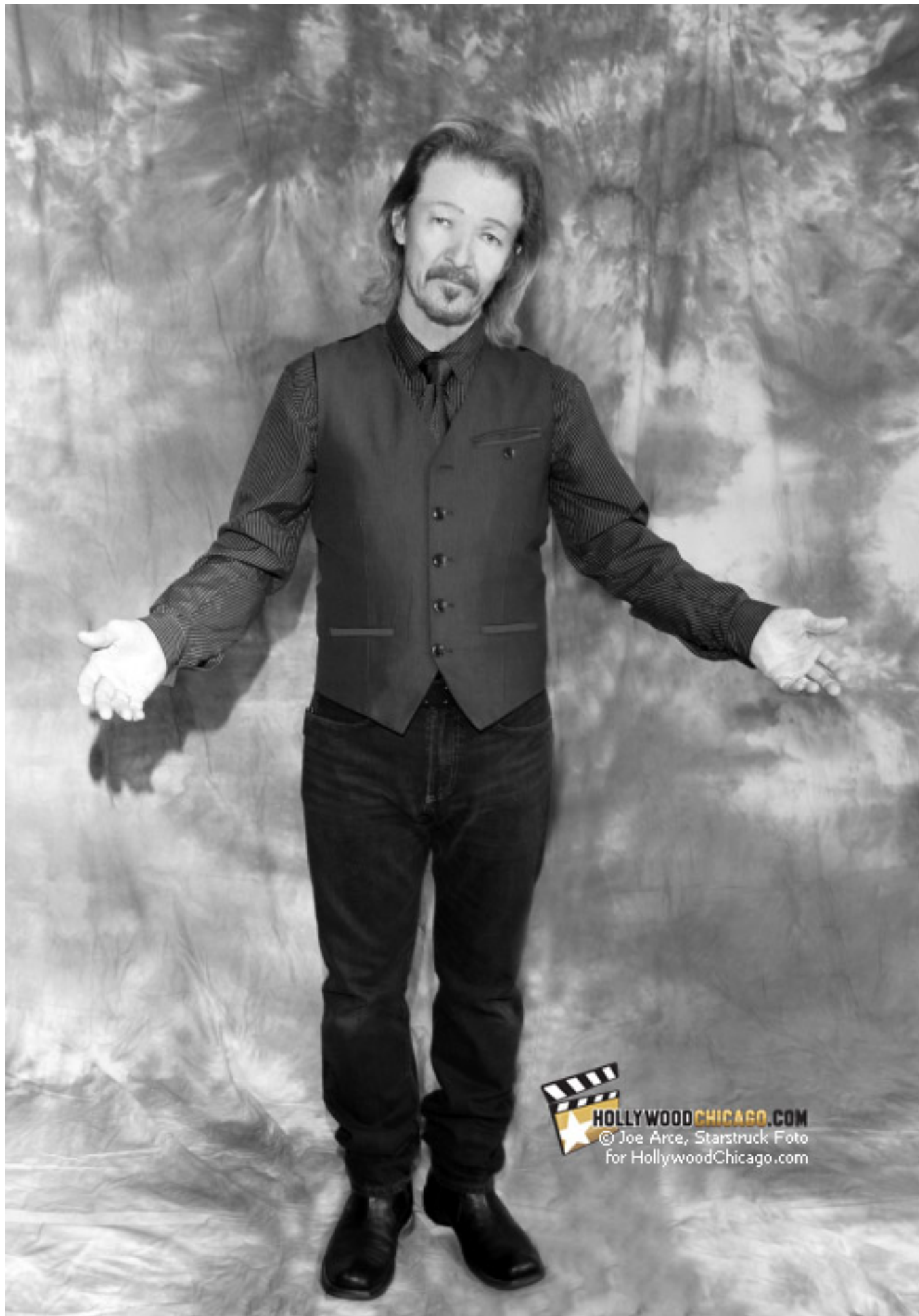
Background and Behind-the-Scenes: This was a book promotion interview (“The Ear of the Heart”), done via phone. As a Recovering Catholic, it was my duty to go in-depth with Mother Dolores Hart, who at the peak of her film career, in 1963, gave it all up to take up a religious life in a monastic nunnery. Hart, who co-starred in films with Elvis Presley and George Hamilton, among others, surprised me with her frank and non-judgmental assessment of her former life, so much so there might have been a twinge of regret between those lines. Regardless, one of the most memorable chats of 2014.

Memorable Quote: *“My mother was very open when it came to her body. She had a tattoo on her left hip, and this was the early 1950s. And she would walk around the house with just a string covering her boobs and fanny, practically naked doing her housework. She always said, ‘I am who I am.’ I loved her for that freedom in her sexuality. I don’t think I grew up afraid of it, I think I grew up wanting to go somewhere more important.”*

[Click here](#) [52] for the full interview of Mother Dolores Hart.



Ted Neeley of “Jesus Christ Superstar”



Ted Neeley, Superstar, at the “Hollywood Show Chicago” in 2013

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

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Ted Neeley has portrayed Jesus Christ over 5,000 times, and it only has seemed to slightly affect him. Seriously, Neeley was the movie Jesus in the 1973 film version of “Jesus Christ Superstar,” and then mounted a stage version in the 1990s that played off and on until 2008, – with over 5,000 productions – the majority of which co-starred the movie Judas, Carl Anderson, as the famous betrayer. This was part of the infamous laryngitis interviews, and I swear Ted wanted to heal me. He’s actually a very sincere man, and Jesus would be proud of him.

Memorable Quote: *”Apparently, because I’ve been hearing it for forty years – people say to me, ‘you brought me to my spiritual recognition.’ I always contend I’m a rock and roll drummer from Texas, what are you talking about? I recently saw the film again, for the first time on the big screen. I do see what they’re talking about in that experience. It was powerful and visionary, and beautifully plays up Andrew [Lloyd Webber] and Tim [Rice’s] interpretation of the relationship between Jesus and Judas. The essence of that is Judas thought he was doing the right thing – it wasn’t about betrayal, but what he thought was his purpose and humanity. I’m not quoting the Bible, I’m quoting the philosophy of ‘Superstar.’”*

[Click here](#) [53] for the full interview of Ted Neeley.



Paul Haggis, Director of Oscar Best Picture “Crash”



Paul Haggis directs Liam Neeson and Olivia Wilde in 'Third Person'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: The interview took place in a restaurant, and the morning crew was playing the background music so loud that Paul Haggis and I immediately started dancing upon meeting. After that inglorious introduction, the veteran TV and film director promoted his latest film “Third Person” and went over a magnificent and challenging career, which included writing and directing the 2005 Best Picture Oscar winner, “Crash.” Also, he wrote the screenplay for “Million Dollar Baby,” which won the 2004 Best Picture Oscar, making him the only screenwriter in history to pull off two in a row.

Memorable Quote: *“I woke up one morning from a dream about 12 years ago. It was about two in the morning, and I was drenched in sweat, because I had pictured my tombstone. And it said, ‘Paul Haggis - Creator - Walker, Texas Ranger.’ I knew right then I had to do something to erase that. [laughs] I went off then and wrote ‘Crash’ and ‘Million Dollar Baby.’”*

[Click here](#) [54] for the full interview of Paul Haggis.



Actor Michael Pitt, Director Mike Cahill of “I, Origin”



Michael Pitt and Mike Cahill in Chicago on July 14th, 2014
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Two young creatives, taking on the world and its evolution in the wondrous film, “I Origins.” This was my second interview with Mike Cahill, after his 2011 number one film (on my list), “Another Earth.” In partnership with the writer/actress Brit Marling, Cahill creates some prime science fiction involving humanity. Michael Pitt makes a mark everywhere in any media in works in, from “Boardwalk Empire” to “Last Days” – where he memorably portrayed a character styled after musician Kurt Cobain.

Memorable Quote: *”[Michael Pitt] Kurt Cobain was coming from a place in which he doing obscure music that wasn’t necessarily popular, and was an outcast his entire life. I felt that, because I’ve been an outcast since I was a kid. There were some amazing things that I’ve learned from that outcast perspective, it’s not always a bad thing. But in Kurt’s case, if you sprinkle in a lot of fame and the exploitation of money, he didn’t take the time to understand how it relates to his life. Throw in some drug use, and it can be a recipe for disaster.”*

[Click here](#) [55] for the full interview of Mike Cahill and Michael Pitt.



Cast of “Let’s Be Cops”



Let's Be: Damon Wayans Jr., Jake Johnson & Rob Riggle

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Given the opportunity to spend a morning interview session with Damon Wayans Jr., Jake Johnson and Rob Riggle, there is little need for coffee as a pick-me-up. This raucous laugh fest was to promote the oddball comedy “Let’s Be Cops,” which reunited Johnson and Wayans – from TV’s “New Girl” – as gentlemen impersonating police officers. Riggle played the real cop, and nearly stole the film. The three of them had the same weird chemistry in person as on screen.

Memorable Quote: “[Damon Wayans Jr] As a kid, I never thought about being in the Wayans family like that – I have a huge family. For all those doing comedy, there is just as many not doing it. There are just as many flight attendants and med students in the family as comedians. It was always a balance. Dad was good friends with Jim Carrey though, back in the ‘In Living Color’ days, and Jim would always be at the house. That would be fun, because he’d always be doing something crazy. I remember once he waited for us to come home, and then fell out of a tree onto our car, and his face slid off the windshield like a cartoon. And this was at nine o’clock at night [laughs]”

[Click here](#) [56] for the full interview of Damon Wayans Jr., Jake Johnson and Rob Riggle.



Cindy Caponera, Writer and Actress



Cindy Caponera, Writer, Actress & Southside Chicago Native

Photo credit: Cindy Caponera

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: Two fine interviews with this extremely funny actress and comedian, who is now on the production staff of the TBS sitcom “Ground Floor.” Cindy Caponera has had the perfect Chicago comic evolution, going locally from “The Second City” to the staff of “Saturday Night Live” to writing TV episodes for “Norm,” “Sherri,” “Shameless,” “Nurse Jackie” and “My Boys.” But primarily, Caponera is an advocate for her Chicago roots, composing and publishing a book of memoir essays entitled, “I Triggered Her Bully.” In one of the great compliments you can give anyone, she makes me laugh.

Memorable Quote: *“My mother’s dad, ‘Jumping’ Red Cassidy, was a singer in Chicago. He sang at all the political rallies, and recorded seven records. My grandmother and he were married on Christmas Day, and at their 50th Wedding Anniversary – which was before the holiday – he sang a song to my grandmother, then dropped dead. The song he sang to her was ‘Because of You.’ [laughs] I was in high school at the time, and he just had open heart surgery. He sang the last note, and then expired.”*

[Click here](#) [57] for the full interview of Cindy Caponera.



Ira Sachs, Director of “Love is Strange”



Director Ira Sachs, Then and Now

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Background and Behind-the-Scenes: What goes around comes around. The 25th interview of the Top 25 is director Ira Sachs, who was in Chicago promoting “Love is Strange,” his prescient film about a male gay couple – portrayed by Alfred Molina and John Lithgow – who takes advantage of legal marriage after 39 years together, only for Molina’s character to lose his job because his employer discovers the marriage on social media. This was directly parallel to a case that played out similarly in Chicago, that was in the news while Sachs was in town for the film. Be that as it may, Ira Sachs was the FIRST interview I ever did, in 2008, and close to 500 later I got to chat with him again. It was a precise circle in a year in which, obviously, I did more interviews than ever. If you made it this far, thanks for being here.

Memorable Quote: *“Many people have told me that this film is ‘of the moment.’ But to me what seems timely about the film is that I couldn’t have made it five years ago, because I wouldn’t have had the optimism that I have now. This is a very hopeful film, and I’m in a relationship that I’m hopeful about, and raising kids. In conclusion, I’m glad I’ve worked a lot of my shit out [laughs].”*

[Click here](#) [58] for the full interview of Ira Sachs.



[Click here](#) [59] for the 10 Best Films of 2014, by Patrick McDonald



[Click here](#) [60] for the 10 Best Films of 2014, by Nick Allen



[Click here](#) [61] for the 10 Worst Films of 2014, by Spike Walters

Happy New Year to the best readers on the planet! A shout out from me to Adam Fendelman, Founder and Publisher of HollywoodChicago.com, whose faith in me provided these interview opportunities. Adam also does fantastic Red Carpet VIDEO interviews, which we began in 2014 on HollywoodChicago. Click the name to view interviews with [Woody Allen](#), [62] the [Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles](#), [63] the stars of [Divergent](#), [64] and the premiere of the Roger Ebert Film [Life Itself](#). [65]



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