

Interview: Lily Collins & Alden Ehrenreich of 'Rules Don't Apply'

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CHICAGO – If there is one star-crossed couple in this fall's movie line-up, it's Marla and Frank of "Rules Don't Apply," as portrayed by Lily Collins and Alden Ehrenreich. The two popular young actors are trying to connect by the standards of late 1950s Hollywood in the film, a looser atmosphere but still difficult for two religious outsiders.

The film is written and directed by Warren Beatty, who also portrays 20th Century mogul Howard Hughes. The strange and reclusive Hughes is sort of an abiding angel overseeing the couple, as they both work for him. The film has a mysterious quality to it, as the Hughes character affects the whole environment, including the ability for two employees to make a connection. It's part biography, and part flight of fancy for Warren Beatty – he has had a Howard Hughes project in the mix for the last forty years – as he pays tribute to an era when he first came to Hollywood.



Poster Image of Lily Collins and Alden Ehrenreich in 'Rules Don't Apply'

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

Lily Collins and Alden Ehrenreich are excellent as the potential lovers, both expressing the frustration of the times and their eventual escape from it. Collins is the daughter of singer Phil Collins, and has worked her way up in many big films including "The Blind Side" (2009), "Mirror Mirror" (2012) and "Love, Rosie" (2014). Ehrenreich made his splash in 2013, with a trio of high profile parts in "Beautiful Creatures," "Stoker" and "Blue Jasmine," and earlier this year stole the latest Coen Brother's film, "Hail Caesar!" He will portray the young Han Solo in an upcoming Star Wars universe prequel.

HollywoodChicago.com interviewed these two smart and emerging stars, as they negotiated a path directed by Warren Beatty.

HollywoodChicago.com: Lily, what impressed upon you about what women had to go through in 1958 versus today, and how do you think you best honored them?

Lily Collins: Marla, especially, believed that she has a certain set of rules that she had to abide by, in order to be successful in Hollywood. How she acted, how she approached things and even in her relationship with her mother – there were a lot more rules and regulations expected of ambitious women, even before they got into the door. It was interesting to portray a character that was so far removed from today's world, but was also at the forefront of feminism at that time. She symbolized a point in history where women wanted to do more, say more and be more.

HollywoodChicago.com: Alden, Howard Hughes defined the first half of the 20th Century, where technology meant something different than it does today. In assessing the best and brightest people who invent things, how do you think Hughes stands up to, for example, a Steve Jobs in creating a new destiny for society?

Alden Ehrenreich: His innovation was in the aviation field. His designs and spirit of experimentation was at the forefront. As far as his work as film producer, he certainly went after a bigger and more ambitious kind of filmmaking, even if he wasn't necessarily a cinema artist. He approached filmmaking like he approached all of his inventiveness – it gave him an opportunity to make a name for himself in the world. How much of what he did about that, and how much of it was about the invention?

HollywoodChicago.com: Lily, we experience a late 1950s Hollywood with your character and the attitude towards what she was trying to do as an actress and performer. We assume now that the attitude towards actresses is better, but what did you find similar about how women actors were treated then versus now?

Collins: I still think there is a huge emphasis on how women look, whether it's fitting a certain mold to play a certain type of character, or the idea that we might have insecurities based on the standards we see in the media. I think there is a greater push to erase that now, and embrace all types and sorts, and we're definitely more outspoken about everything than they were back then. Warren told us the same amount of sex of was going on, but no one ever talked about it. Maybe now it's too much – it's on social media. [laughs] We're allowed to be more expressive about how we're feeling as opposed to keeping it inside.

HollywoodChicago.com: Both characters go through a missing six years from the end of the 1950s story to 1964. What do you think the characters went through in that gap, and how do you think it reflects the later scenes?

Ehrenreich: Well, he works for Howard Hughes, and the monotony is the worst part. It probably was just more of the same. Warren always said that he wanted Frank to go from idolizing Hughes as a father figure to becoming Hughes's father, in a sense. Those kind of issues, with Hughes being an eternal "son," was what that transition is about.

Collins: We had a scene with Candice Bergen where I pick up my stuff later, and we assume I went off to school. The character sort of picked up what she was going to do before she won the beauty pageant and went to Hollywood – go to school and start a career. She knew she was smart, and wanted to take advantage of that, and go back to her roots.



Lily Collins and Alden Ehrenreich in a Scene From 'Rules Don't Apply'

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

Ehrenreich: That is sort of the eternal question for people who go to Hollywood...what will be the straw that breaks the camel's back, and forces you to think about doing something else? When do you throw in the towel?

HollywoodChicago.com: Lily, you are a multi-faceted individual, with many interests beyond acting. When you have a bad day as an actress, what particular interest do you turn to for escape, and why is that the first go-to for you?

Collins: I would say writing, because lately I've been finishing my book. But I also love baking, it's the most calming thing for me. It's therapeutic, it makes the house smell good, and I get to take the goods to my friends. I do it for other people.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the book about?

Collins: It's a collection of letters and essays about what it takes to be a young woman today. Mostly the taboo things that girls don't want to talk about, but once we do we realize we're not alone.

HollywoodChicago.com: Alden, you were also a 1950s actor in the brilliant 'Hail, Caesar.' What did you love about Hobie Doyle, and which quality did he possess that you wished you possessed?

Ehrenreich: Probably his ability to horseback ride and lasso. [laughs] The actors at that time had to learn all that stuff, it wasn't just hyperbole. What was appealing to me about being an actor at that time is that there was a home base, with job security. You were employed on a regular basis, and you had to sometimes do things you didn't want to do, but it was there. I also liked his positivity.

HollywoodChicago.com: Lily, when you were 18 you actually reported on the 2008 presidential election for Nickelodeon. How did that experience allow you to observe how presidential campaigns are run, and how you observe it today?

Collins: When I first covered it in 2008, I was asking questions for kids around the world, but mainly for myself. I didn't know the process, I didn't know how it worked. Now, of course, I'm more schooled on it, but I deal with so much politics in my fashion work and in Hollywood, that I haven't been as connected this time. However, I think it's a scary sign of the times that pop culture and social media is so involved, where it feels like a reality show. I have hope that the right decision will be made.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your career run as an actor has included some of the most classic and best contemporary directors virtually still working. At what point do you think that path opened for you, and what was the key decision that had you on it?



Alden Ehrenreich & Lily Collins in Chicago
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Ehrenreich: If I had a way to have done that on purpose, I'd probably keep it to myself. [laughs] For me, each one of those experiences stands on its own. The first one was with Steven Spielberg, who helped me to get an agent and vouch for me, and that gave me the confidence to continue. But I had four years of auditions, and nothing happened, until Francis Ford Coppola took a shot on me ['Tetro' in 2009]. I hadn't done a film, and suddenly I was the lead.

So many times you can't get a foot in the door unless you're already in the room. Even when Warren cast me, it had been two years between films at that point. You do need these people to go out on a limb for you, thinking you're right for a role rather than having box office numbers. You need those people to also have power and authority, and in a way that has been the story of my career.

HollywoodChicago.com: For both of you...obviously when you land a part in a Warren Beatty film, you're probably going to look at some of his previous works. Did you pick up any clues as to what to expect by doing that research?

Collins: I watched a few of them when I was growing up...my Dad loved 'Heaven Can Wait.' I had a mini marathon once I landed the role –

going from ‘Splendor in the Grass’ to ‘Bonnie and Clyde’ to ‘Shampoo’ to ‘Reds.’ I watched them back to back. I found that when you’re in the mood for ‘Reds,’ you’re not in the mood for ‘Shampoo.’ [laughs]

I wanted to watch the women interacting with him, which takes he chose, and how the actresses were reacting in scenes with him. If I’m going to be in that situation, I wanted to see how he reacted as well. Could I see him acting as he directed, and what would that be like? When you see him as those characters, once you get to know him, there is so much of him in them. In fact, I saw so much of him in them that it made me laugh.

Ehrenreich: For me, it was watching ‘Reds’ and ‘Splendor in the Grass.’ To me, ‘Splendor’ is like the companion piece to ‘Rules Don’t Apply.’ It’s set in the time when Warren came to Hollywood, and when he did that first film. He definitely sees ‘Rules’ as a comedic consequence to the American sexual puritanism that is dramatically presented in ‘Splendor.’

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally for both of you...since you’ve had so much variety so far in your careers, what did you find to be the most difficult thing you had to do in a film, and what techniques did you use to actually do it?

Collins: The idea of improvisation kind of freaked me out. I loved the idea, but I’d never taken any classes or practiced it. But I did a film recently in the Republic of Georgia [upcoming ‘Halo of Stars’] which was based on a long poem written by the director. We found that all these words were beautiful as a poem, but for humans it was more about the emotion or a look than just saying what was there. So he took it all out, and would roll for nine minutes, and as an actor I just existed. Often he’d just yell out things as we were rolling, about where we were going and what we were doing. It was so freeing...what used to make me tense up now was exciting for me as an actor. I went from being afraid to loving it.

Ehrenreich: I honestly feel that each film has its own particular challenges. With ‘Hail, Caesar!’ it was about all the skill sets I had to learn, but each movie requires a different way of working. You’re a piece in a new world, and there is always a difficult part within that world. For me, it’s not consistent from movie-to-movie, each film has a central challenge.

For an interview of writer/director Warren Beatty of “Rules Don’t Apply,” by Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, [CLICK HERE](#). [20]

“Rules Don’t Apply” opens everywhere on November 23rd. Featuring Warren Beatty, Lily Collins, Aiden Ehrenreich, Matthew Broderick, Candice Bergen, Martin Sheen, Ed Harris, Alec Baldwin, Oliver Platt and Annette Bening. Written and directed by Warren Beatty. Rated “PG-13”



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