

Interview, Audio: Comedian Demetri Martin on His Film ‘Dean’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 1, 2017 - 10:36am

- [CBS Films](#) [2]
- [Dean](#) [3]
- [Demetri Martin](#) [4]
- [Father](#) [5]
- [Gillian Jacobs](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Important Things With Demetri Martin](#) [8]
- [Interview](#) [9]
- [Kevin Kline](#) [10]
- [Los Angeles](#) [11]
- [Mary Steenburgen](#) [12]
- [Mourning](#) [13]
- [New York City](#) [14]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [15]
- [Point Your Face at This](#) [16]
- [Son](#) [17]
- [Stand Up Comedy](#) [18]
- [The Graduate](#) [19]
- [This is a Book](#) [20]

CHICAGO – The dry, hangdog demeanor of comedian Demetri Martin is familiar to fans who have watched his Comedy Central show, “Important Things,” experienced his notable stand up routines and read his best-selling books. It seemed a natural to leap into film, so Martin has written, directed and portrays the title character in the new release, “Dean.”

Dean (Demetri Martin) is in a life funk, due to the death of his mother the year before, and the break-up of his engagement shortly thereafter. He plunges into his work as a cartoonist and illustrator, but he can’t shake the recent losses. His father Robert (Kevin Kline) is trying to reach out, but can’t seem to get through to him, until he tells Dean that he is selling the family home. This puts the title character into a tailspin, and even an escape to Los Angeles – and meeting a free spirit there named Nicky (Gillian Jacobs) – can’t seem to pull him out of his downturn. The time has come for some redemption. The film also features Oscar winner Mary Steenburgen.



‘Dean,’ Written, Directed and Featuring Demetri Martin

Photo credit: CBS Films

Demetri Evan Martin was born in New York City, and grew up in New Jersey as the son of a Greek Priest. While attending Yale University, his father passed away, creating the impetus that would eventually become “Dean.” Martin himself went on to create a successful stand-up comedy persona, winning awards at the prestigious Edinburgh Festival in 2001, writing for Conan O’Brien, and writing/appearing on “The Daily Show.” He got his own Comedy Central Show in 2009, “Important Things with Demetri Martin,” and did some film roles in “Taking

Woodstock" (2009) and "Take Me Home Tonight" (2011), while continuing his stand-up career. Martin's debut as an author was "This is a Book" in 2011, and he has written three more since then, including his current "If It's Not Funny It's Art." The film "Dean" is his debut as a director.

Demetri Martin sat down with HollywoodChicago.com to talk about his new film, and the following interview is split into two parts – written down on the subject of the film, and then moving to audio regarding other aspects of his career.

HollywoodChicago.com: This is based on the passing of your father, which occurred about 20 years ago. How fresh did the mourning period feel again once you were formulating the story for 'Dean'?

Demetri Martin: It had been awhile since my father's passing, and mourning doesn't follow a linear pattern. Ten years later you can have a day that is just as bad as when he died. Especially on birthdays, anniversaries and most significantly the birth of my son. It's always real to me, but at the same time I wanted 'Dean' to be a fictional story, because I didn't specifically want it to be about me. Dean is a fictional character, granted not that far away from me, but I wanted to learn how to create characters and tell a story.

HollywoodChicago.com: How long were you thinking about your own reaction to that mourning before you came up with the idea for 'Dean'?

Martin: Well, most of what I felt had dissipated, and my life is now completely different than the time it happened, because then I wasn't doing comedy, I was a Junior in college. What I associate about my identity happened after my Dad passed away. All that comedic life, my drawings and my books, is now who I am.

But I always wanted to do a movie, because I love the movies. They give you a chance to have an intimacy with your audience that is different from stand up. With movies, you can bring the audience in with a close up, and emote in a different way. So when it came time to process that, it was about revisiting the feelings that I had about my father's passing. I think about him a lot, and he's become part of who I am. I knew there was something in that to tell Dean's story.

HollywoodChicago.com: The film has two vibes from 1960s films – 'The Graduate' and stylistically, 'The Thomas Crown Affair.' What emotions are Dean struggling the most with, in common with the Dustin Hoffman character, and how did you come upon the multiple points-of-view like was most famously found in 'The Thomas Crown Affair'?

Martin: It is a coming of age story like 'The Graduate,' but in this generation it occurs later in life. For example, there is a genre in comedy about the continuing adolescence of adult men, the man boy. I wanted to explore that in 'Dean,' and I wanted to explore that coming of age, even though it was a bit more subtle than 'The Graduate.'

Regarding the multiple perspectives, that was two fold. I am telling the story of a father and son who are not connecting, when they most need to, and having them physically apart but sharing the screen. I wanted to use the 'real estate' of film to communicate that, as well as using the drawings to illustrate the journey as well.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your father was a Greek Orthodox priest, yet no element of religion permeates the mourning aspects of Dean and his father. What role does religion play in your life and what roles do you think it plays in a mourning period?

Martin: I grew up going to church every Sunday, and was an altar boy until I went to college. My Dad was a spiritual person, and he would use the Bible in his sermon, but he expressed more of the spirit than the doctrine. The Greek ceremony is archaic – it's a ceremony, there is incense and my Dad was wearing a cape.

It was a bit hard for me as a kid, because my Dad was the priest. That's where he worked and that was my association with it, a workplace. So it became extra painful for me to go back the church after I lost him. I carry his legacy of spirit rather than religion, and I believe in empathy. When religion provides that for people, it's the best thing in the world.



Stranger in a Strange Land: Demetri Martin Navigates California in ‘Dean’

Photo credit: CBS Films

HollywoodChicago.com: Since this was your first directorial effort, and you are a drawing artist, did you use storyboards to plan your scene work or was it more on-set adjustments based on what needed to be shot?

Martin: I did plan it on storyboards, I even used floor plans to show camera placement. But sadly, the budget was the difficulty. We’d arrive at a day of shooting, and suddenly the location that we had planned wasn’t available. So the storyboarding became pointless, and I had to do it on the fly a lot of times. So my fantasy of pre-planning composed shots was not possible in a 20-day film schedule.

HollywoodChicago.com: You worked with two Oscar winning actors in the film, and Gillian Jacobs right off her amazing performance in ‘Don’t Think Twice.’ Did you find that they were able to self guide their characters, or did you have to step in once or twice to tweak their performances?

Martin: When Kevin Kline agreed to do it, a small independent film for not much money, he was doing me a great favor. He doesn’t need any more acclaim, and I kept wondering what he was getting out of it. [laughs] It felt like real generosity, so I pretty much followed his lead. I had ideas about things, and would adjust, but mostly I stayed out of the way. Same with Mary [Steenburgen]. They had a great chemistry, and I really liked what I had to work with when I sat down to edit the film.

Gillian is just great, especially at blocking. There is a scene in an art gallery, which we did as one long conversation and shot. She had to walk backwards at some point, and still look natural in the midst of the dialogue. That sounds simple, but her TV experience really helped in doing that naturally and making it work.

HollywoodChicago.com: The use of mobile phones is almost a necessity in films set in the present, yet you seemed to be making a commentary on their intrusiveness in the film. Since you spent your teen and young adult years presumably without a phone, what do observe about them today that affects you personally?

Martin: This is not an original answer, but it still amazes me how much it pulls us out of the moment. I find myself escaping the silence of the present, and I’m hoping I’m getting better with being in the moment. I travel alone so much, and the first thought is to grab the damn phone. In airports, just look around. Nobody looks at anybody, or even out the window.

It’s obvious we can’t live without it anymore, and as a comic on the road the phone is an essential tool. It’s probably doing more good than bad for me, but it does make me sad that those of us who grew up without mobile phones, we know what we’re missing.

In the audio portion of the interview, Demetri Martin talks about his career and his approach to having a certain notoriety as a comic personality.

“Dean” has a nationwide release on June 2nd. See local listings for theaters and showtimes. Featuring Demetri Martin, Kevin Kline, Gillian Jacobs and Mary Steenburgen. Written and directed by Demetri Martin. Rated “PG-13”

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [22]



[21]

Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [21]

© 2017 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 28 2024 - 5:49am*):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/27584/interview-audio-comedian-demetri-martin-on-his-film-dean>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/cbs-films>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/dean>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/demetri-martin>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/father>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/gillian-jacobs>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/important-things-with-demetri-martin>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/kevin-kline>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/los-angeles>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mary-steenburgen>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mourning>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/new-york-city>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/point-your-face-at-this>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/son>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/stand-up-comedy-0>
- [19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-graduate>
- [20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/this-is-a-book>
- [21] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [22] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>