Interview, Audio: Director Simon Curtis of ‘Goodbye Christopher Robin’

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CHICAGO – Winnie the Pooh is a cultural icon of four generations, due both to the character’s literary roots and Walt Disney’s interpretation. A new film, “Goodbye Christopher Robin,” is the origin story of the famous bear, as created by author A.A. Milne. The movie is directed by veteran helmsman Simon Curtis.

“Goodbye Christopher Robin” features Dohmnall Gleeson as A.A. Milne, who was a notable playwright in 1920s England, but found himself at a crossroads in his career. Moving to the country, he began to find inspiration in the imagination of his son Christopher Robin (Will Tilston as the younger CR) and created the books of Winnie the Pooh. The book was a runaway best seller – much to the pleasure of his flapper wife Daphne (Margot Robbie) and the consternation of the boy’s nanny (Kelly Macdonald) – but a torture to the actual Christopher Robin, who couldn’t understand the family’s sudden fame. Through this family dynamic, the story covers 25 years.



Director Simon Curtis with Child Actor Will Tilston for ‘Goodbye Christopher Robin’
Photo credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures

Simon Curtis directs his third major production after the success of the well-received “My Week with Marilyn” and “Woman in Gold,” which featured Helen Mirren. The filmmaker began his career in the Royal Court Theatre in London, and worked as a BBC TV director – turning out an adaptation of “David Copperfield” in 1999 – and as an assistant director in films. In 2010, he came upon the diary account of Colin Clark,

which became the template for “My Week with Marilyn,” based on a true story. He followed that debut with “Woman in Gold, which was also based in a real incident. Curtis is also married to American actress Elizabeth McGovern.

HollywoodChicago.com: All three of your major feature films are true stories. What fascinated you about the story of A.A. Milne, and why do you gravitate as a director towards these untold true stories?

Simon Curtis: Well, yes, I did gravitate towards it because it was an untold story, but there was a lot of important things on top of the situation as this great book was being created. I don’t have a deliberate policy on just telling true stories, the films I’ve done just happened to be three scripts that came together. I think a lot of films these days, and a lot of culture, is about nothing. And this film was about something, and that appeals to me.

HollywoodChicago.com: You and your Cinematographer Ben Smithard created a composition and beauty that was both nostalgic and magical. When approaching the look of the film, did you both have a template you wanted to follow?

Curtis: We wanted to portray the English idyll, and what lies beneath it. But one of the references we had was Terrence Malick’s ‘Tree of Life,’ the dreamy quality of that look and feel.



Dohmnall Gleeson and Margot Robbie in ‘Goodbye Christopher Robin’
Photo credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures

HollywoodChicago.com: Much of the film was in close-up of the faces that were the subject of the story. In the palette of shot selection that a director has, what is your opinion on the power of the close-up and how it communicates certain emotions?

Curtis: It’s only a good close up if you have a good actor, and I’ve been lucky in everything I’ve done to have great actors. I knew Dohmnall [Gleeson], Margot [Robbie] and Kelly [Macdonald] were great actors when they were cast, but I didn’t know how good young Will [Tilston] would be. There were points in the filming process where I could really see him thinking, and he just nails it.

HollywoodChicago.com: I particularly liked Margot Robbie…

Curtis: Yes, she is a really smart person, as well as a great actress. She had a particular vision of this character. The thing that I liked is that she wasn’t a hovering, 24/7-type modern mother, but when she was on in that sense, she was really exceptional. That face of joy that she does when she gives her son the Tiger is a sight to behold.

In the audio portion of the interview, Simon Curtis talks about the “stiff upper lip” of British culture, working with the performers in the film and of course a little about Harvey Weinstein…

“Goodbye Christopher Robin” opened everywhere on October 20th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Dohmnall Gleeson, Margot Robbie, Kelly Macdonald, Alex Lawther and Will Tilston. Written by Simon Vaughan and Frank Cottrell-Boyce. Directed by Sean Baker. Rated “PG”

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