

Interviews: Richard Anderson, John Savage at 2010 Chicago Comic Con

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 27, 2010 - 12:41pm

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CHICAGO – Two notable character actors held court at the Wizard World Chicago Comic Con in Aug. 2010. Richard Anderson (best known for his role as Oscar Goldman on TV’s “The Six Million Dollar Man”) and John Savage (unforgettable in “The Deer Hunter” and “Hair”) were there to meet admirers, sign autographs and take pictures.

HollywoodChicago.com was also there and scored interviews with both actors. Photographer Joe Arce also captured their very distinct images.



Richard Anderson of “The Six Million Dollar Man” and “The Bionic Woman”

Richard Anderson took a leap into TV lore in the 1970s by portraying the iconic associate, Oscar Goldman, to both Steve Austin and Jamie Sommers, who were also known as the Six Million Dollar Man and the Bionic Woman. But the character actor had been around for quite some time before that, establishing himself as supporting player with the MGM studios starting in the early 1940s.

From there, he made several appearances in classic films, including director Stanley Kubrick’s “Paths of Glory” (1957), “Forbidden Planet” (1956), “Seven Days in May” (1964) and “Seconds” (1966), before moving primarily into television.



Richard Anderson at the Wizard World Chicago Comic Con, August, 2010
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com.

HollywoodChicago.com: One of your notable early roles was in 'Paths of Glory,' directed by Stanley Kubrick very early in his career. What was notable about the young Kubrick that you observed?

Richard Anderson: Stanley was a visual director, that is what he was interested in. When he called me, it was after he'd watched my films with MGM for the previous six years...I had made 24 of them. When we met, we talked film for six hours, which I loved to do. I got a call from his associate later telling me that Stanley wanted me for his next picture, which was to be shot in Germany. I read the script for Paths of Glory and said, 'when do we start?' I thought it was an extraordinary idea.

While we were filming, I had gone to Paris for a couple of days, and later we were shooting a scene where my line was 'I'm surrounded by a bunch of scoundrels.' I had a strong feeling about how I was going to express this line, and after the first take Stanley approached me with a different way to do it, and I agreed with him, even though I felt my approach was better. He came over later and said, 'okay, I'll do it your way only if you can answer this question...how come I'm the director and I didn't get to go to Paris? What did you do there?' So I told him everything I'd thought he'd want to hear, and when I saw the premiere he put the line in my way.

HollywoodChicago.com: As a working character actor in the 1950s and '60s, what was different about navigating film roles versus doing television parts later in your career?

Anderson: At the time I started at MGM movies were the thing, but television became the audience and that's why I moved there. That's where the audiences were. I have eight regular series, hundreds of guest shots and about 15 movies during that era. There wasn't a stigma about doing television, because that's where the audience went.

HollywoodChicago.com: You worked with director John Frankenheimer on two legendary films in the 1960s, 'Seven Days in May' and 'Seconds.' What was it about his style that keeps the films fresh, even when you watch them today?

Anderson: John was a well educated man, and he took chances. He was handsome enough to be an actor, and got around very well around town. Seconds was risky, the producer wasn't sure about it, but now it's quite the iconic film. The famous line at the end was mine, I got the last line. A fellow film actor friend of mine always said, 'always be in the last frame.' [laughs] Cary Grant told me that.

HollywoodChicago.com: What other advice did you get from the masters?

Anderson: Gary Cooper was always one of my idols. I asked him once about acting, and he said, [doing a perfect Gary Cooper impression]... 'I don't know too much about that, Dick, but don't ever let them catch you at it.'

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you feel the difficulty that Rock Hudson had with 'Seconds,' considering his double life that came out later?

Anderson: It was a big step for Frankenheimer to cast Rock Hudson in the role, but I think basically it was because he was so handsome. He had such a great movie face, that's why it was so shocking for people I think when all the private stuff came out.

I remember when we had the first rehearsals, John was very enthusiastic because it was the first time he was hearing it from actors. John was innocent in a lot of ways, but he was an actor's director. I think Rock knew very well what he was doing, John said after the first rehearsal, 'everyone now learn your lines.' And Rock just said, 'stop it, John.' [laughs] When Seconds came out, it did boost Rock's career as an actor, the business took him more seriously beyond the comedies he did.

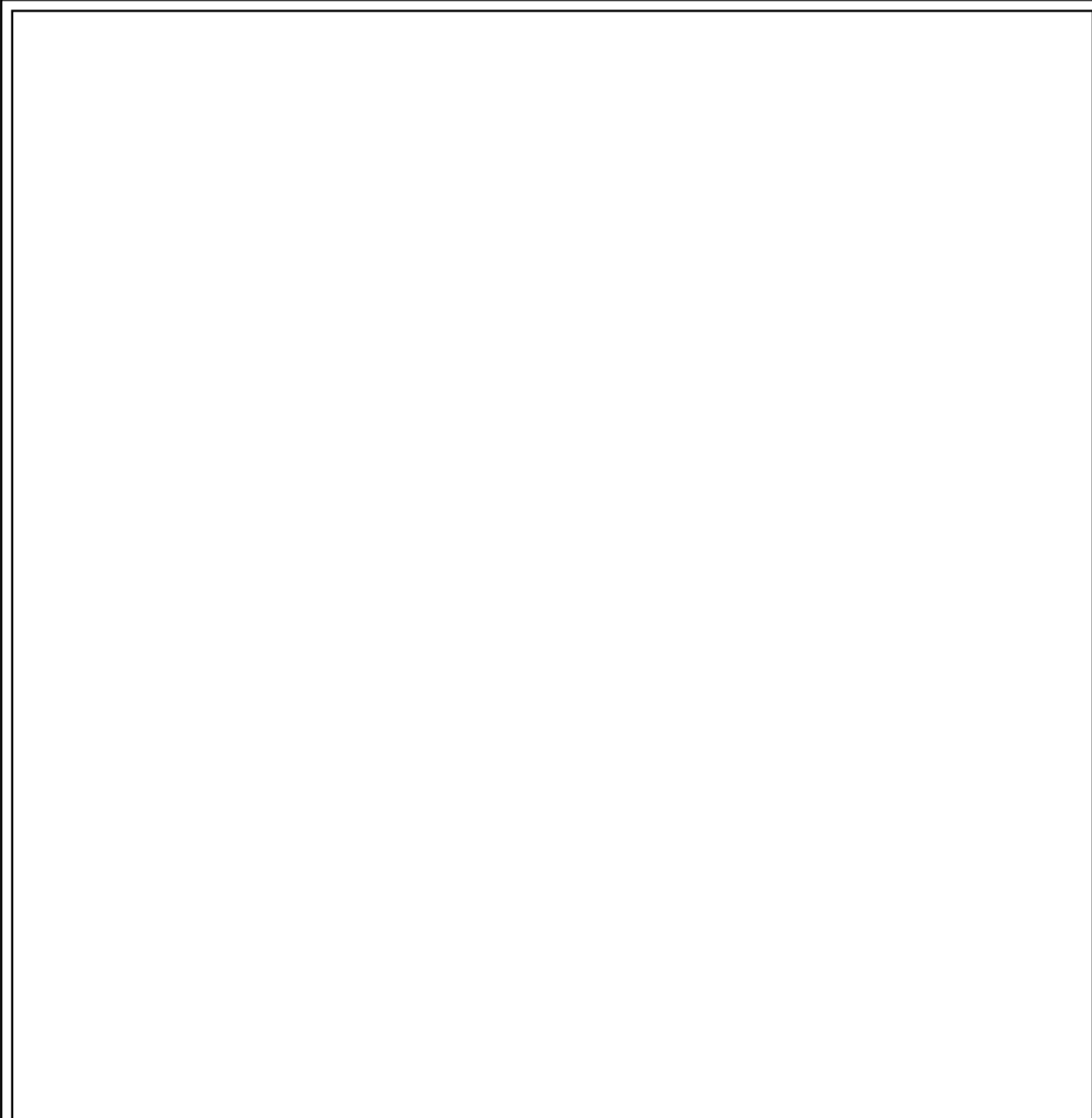
HollywoodChicago.com: You have a great connection to legendary Hollywood history, what was the circumstance of meeting your wife, Katharine Thalberg?

Anderson: She of course was the daughter of Norma Shearer and Irving Thalberg, people I had always admired. Katharine was extremely bright, and all she ever wanted to do was have a book store in Aspen, which she eventually had. I had met her once before we really connected, at a party that had quite a moment. It was at Ray Stark's house in the Holmby Hills section of town, and they had an orchestra there, and I asked her to dance. The moonlight hit her right into her beautiful eyes, and I said, 'Kate there is something I have to tell you... I love you.' She shot back with, 'Richard, you shouldn't say that to a woman, she might believe you.' [laughs] From there we had three of the most charming daughters in the world.



John Savage of "The Deer Hunter" and "Hair"

John Savage made a huge splash onto the film atmosphere in the late 1970s with his role as Steven in director Michael Cimino's 'The Deer Hunter' (1979) and in Milos Forman's 'Hair' (1979) as Claude Hooper Bukowski. He continued in characters roles over the years, more prominently in Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing" (1989) and Terence Malick's "The Thin Red Line" (1998).





John Savage at the Wizard World Chicago Comic Con, August, 2010
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've worked with the creme de la creme of contemporary directors, which one had the most influence on you as a performer, and what is the oddest characteristic of directors in general that you've observed?

John Savage: Many of the great directors of my early career were very patient with me and my attitudes, and supported my energy and effort. They wanted me to go out there and make mistakes in trying, to guide me with their wisdom. I've been very fortunate that way.

As far as what makes them odd, I think that any authority has difficulty with relationships. In every relationship there are complexities, and oftentimes we assume we know the other person in a relationship, in what they want and what they think. We don't know what anyone thinks. Even when they tell us what they think, we have too many of our own thoughts to really know or listen to what they are saying. The director-actor relationship is odd, but it needs to be respected, because directors carry the weight of the film. I just hope that they have as much fun as the actors have, even as the director of the movie.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've put on a military uniform in several movies. What do you think defines a military 'role' the most, and how do you approach it as an actor?

Savage: I'm just an actor, I don't look at the uniform so much as the experience of the character. I've been pretty close to the military my whole life and most of them are real people.

With issues, pass me the tissues. It's when we take action, when we do what we've got to do, we can't leave it to anybody else sometimes. I believe there is a great future in all contributions in this country. We have a great freedom of spirit here. It can be tough, but it can be fun.
[laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: You had some years in Chicago in the 1970s, what was your favorite hang-out?

Savage: I loved the city, and I loved the theaters here. I met David Mamet and ended up working with him in New York City, the production of 'American Buffalo' that moved from here to New York, that I co-starred in with Bobby Duvall. There was a great amount of art here, diversity, this was America for me.

HollywoodChicago.com: What about the struggle for civil rights moved you to activism, both in your anti-apartheid work and your collaboration with Spike Lee and his statement films?

Savage: We have a long way to go, and that's okay. Let's get on the road, let's do what we have to do. It's okay to challenge people, that's how you get to know them. I've had my words with Spike, because I respect him. Because he does his work, and I want to work with what he wants to get to. As an actor, sometimes I didn't understand what a director was for, but thank god we've got them.

The Wizard World Chicago Comic Con is back in Chicago, August 11th-14th, 2011.

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