

## **BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke**

**18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London**

**Boyd Hilton:** Hello ladies and gentlemen, welcome. Thanks very much for coming, I'm Boyd Hilton, I'm very excited to be hosting this very special BAFTA A Life in Pictures event. I'd like to thank our sponsors, Deutsche Bank Asset & Wealth Management for being very generous, thank you.

[Applause]

And this is a very special event; our guest of honour is one of the most accomplished actors of his generation. He's starred in some of the most extraordinary and remarkable and unique films of the last three decades. Before we bring him out, and I'm going to ask him all about his career ranging wide and free, and later on you'll have a chance to ask your questions as well, let's remind ourselves of some of his amazing work.

[Montage reel plays]

[Applause]

**BH:** Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Ethan Hawke.

[Applause & cheers]

**BH:** Welcome to BAFTA, welcome to London.

**Ethan Hawke:** Thank you.

**BH:** How are you doing?

**EH:** Well that was pretty funny.

[Laughter]

**BH:** Yeah?

**EH:** Yeah, it's pretty funny because that's something I did do, write myself a letter at 20 to 40. You know I really did write that and that really, that really was a drag [laughs]. Yeah, so it's just funny.

**BH:** We're gonna take you even further back, right to the beginning.

**EH:** Okay, all right.

**BH:** *Explorers*, your first film, you were 13, is that right? And I read that Joe Dante

the director said you weren't even going to the auditions, you weren't even there to audition, you just kind of went along with a friend. And you were so good, he said, he tried you out and he said "can this guy act!" and he built the whole thing around you. Is that right?

**EH:** It's a, you know, like it's a version of the truth; there's hints of the truth in that story. What is true is that I did my first play, I did George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* when I was 12 years old at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey. On a fluke, because I didn't have a winter sport and my mother needed me to be busy, and this guy who ran the local theatre department came in - believe it or not it was the Paul Robeson acting class, which I kind of take pleasure in because, Paul Robeson, I didn't know who Paul Robeson was right, but I'm very proud to be a Paul Robeson student now, because he was the first super multitasker, you know he did so many things and he did them all so well and with such artistry that as I've grown up I've realised that I'm proud to be a Paul Robeson protégé - but anyway, that's not the story. The story is that this guy ran this little improv with the students, and afterwards he came up to me and asked if I would play Dunois' page in Bernard Shaw's play, and so I did that. And I had this incredible experience because my parents were so unhappy at work - you know when you see your parents growing up, and they hated going to work - and I saw all these actors rehearsing, and in *Saint Joan* it's such an interesting play, they were sitting around talking about whether or not they believed in God, and they were talking about why we were born, and what is sanity versus insanity, and what is culture, and the difference between Shaw and how it relates to Shakespeare, and I remember just sitting there going, "This is a job?! You can do this for a living?" And I thought that that was cool, and there was a kid - I know this is way more answer than you wanted...

**BH:** No, no.

[Laughter]

**EH:** But I came in here, I watched that clip, you watch a clip like that and you

## **BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke**

**18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London**

see yourself at 13, it's very bizarre. And so this kid who was in my school who I really liked named Brandon, who coincidentally is still a professional actor and also a co-author of the film *Milk*, he's a really interesting guy, but at that time we were both 13 and he used to go into New York on professional auditions. And so I accompanied him. My mother wouldn't allow for me to have an agent or get head shots or do any of that stuff, but she didn't really care what I did in that she didn't get home from work until seven, so if I could be home by seven it was a non-issue, and it's an hour train ride from Princeton to New York and then back, so if I could do the audition I'd just go with Brandon. So it's not like I wasn't auditioning, I did audition and I took polaroids, Brandon took polaroids, and we would do the audition, right? No harm, no foul. Well I got the part, which was a problem for my parents because they didn't know how, you know they weren't like some kind of stage parents, and we lived in New Jersey and the movie was shooting... And to Joe's credit, he loved the story that I was, didn't have an agent, and so...

**BH:** It's a good story, yeah.

**EH:** It's a good story. The funnier part of the story is I had one of these [points to his mic] and I had a ton of tests, as you can imagine, I was this unknown kid, I had braces on and they gave me this mic for my first screen test, I'd had several screen tests but so I was so nervous that I went in and shook everybody's hand - this is a true story - and I shook everybody's hand and I, "Oh yeah, thank you," until the wire was wrapped around my feet, and I went 'thwhackam', you know. And there were a few other kids watching me audition, and they thought, "oh he's out." But they didn't know I was in, and you never know what's going to work with a director.

[Laughter]

**BH:** And of course your co-star in that movie was River Phoenix. I'm fascinated by his whole life and career obviously and it's tragic ending, but was he as, kind of, unique a kid then as he grew up to be? And did you kind of follow his

career with fascination as to what a remarkable actor he turned out to be?

**EH:** Was he a unique kid is like saying, you know, is Margaret Thatcher uptight, you know.

[Laughter]

**EH:** It's like, this kid, I never felt more ordinary in my life. You know, oddly enough I saw the movie *Amadeus* while we were filming *Explorers*, and you know I just, I fell apart in tears watching that movie as a 14 year-old because I - River was a severely upsetting person because he was, I felt, so much like Salieri is what I'm trying to say, I completely related to that thing. River was chaotic to be around, his parents were, they raised him in an extremely unconventional way, they'd been street beggars. I mean I thought my life was unconventional, my mom was 17, I was you know from Texas and now I'm in New York area, and I'd always felt kind of like a Charles Dickens character myself, but I wasn't anywhere close to Dickens the way that River was. And I remember the first time we were staying at like a little motel six type thing while we were filming, the whole crew was, and I looked out the window and there was this 13 year-old boy practicing his walk, he would walk one way and he would walk the other way, and I thought, oh I bet that's the kid who's playing Wolfgang, you know. And he was, and I walked out to him and asked him what he was doing, and he said he was trying to figure out how Wolfgang walked, and from that moment forward he was always ahead of me. "What do you mean how does he walk?" "Well he doesn't have to walk like me, he could walk like someone else." And I'd never had the thought. And River was very strange. He was a beautiful, beautiful person. I'll give you an example: he didn't go to school, right, so he would say things, we're 13, and he would say things like - I've got myself in this story and I'm just going to go with it, I'm regretting it already.

[Laughter]

**BH:** No, carry on. This is what we're here for.

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

**EH:** But he would say things like, "So how big's your pecker?" I'd be like, "What do you mean?" He goes, "I'm just worried mine's too small." And I would say things like, "We don't talk like that," you know, and he would say, "What do you mean you don't talk..." I was like, "No, you don't say things like that to another person." And he's like, "Why not? I'm worried about it." And I'm like, "Well of course you're worried about it, you're 13, but so am I and I don't wanna talk about it."

[Laughter]

And there's a level of honesty to everything he did, and I say that not for any indication about the, *you know*. He was a perfectly normal man, okay.

[Laughter]

I'm not talking about that. I'm saying that there was a level of honesty to everything he did that was very striking, to the point when he did *My Own Private Idaho*. I really feel that when people are looking around today about you know lesbian and gay rights and things like that, people forget what a groundbreaker River was. That River was a full-blown teen idol, Justin Bieber teen idol, I was apoplectic with jealousy about how much everybody loved him. If you wonder why, go watch *Stand By Me*, alright. James Dean has got nothing on that kid. And he went off with a completely experimental filmmaker, a person who was using cinema as art, as self-expression, not as an industry, and River played a gay character at a time period when that was completely frowned on, it was actively incendiary at that moment. And it was a huge burden to bear you know, because he was a young man and it pushed him into the forefront of a lot of situations that he wasn't really sure how - he was just totally at peace with the unwavering equality of mankind, but he didn't mean to be a spokesperson for this, that or the other thing. But I always found him to be a beautiful leader in that way. And when I sit here and see his picture up there and you ask me about him, it's upsetting because you know when you're 23 and somebody dies there is a part of a young

person's mind that thinks that's cool. There is a little part that, you think it's tough or something, or you think he'll live forever, you know you still believe in this idea. It's a beautiful thing, in some cheesy magazine that's out right now Martin Landau writes about James Dean, and he writes about walking through Prague or something, it was some film festival honouring Martin Landau, and he was walking, and - you know he had been friends with him, James Dean, when he was a young person - and he saw this picture of James Dean from *Rebel*, you know life-size cutout in the window of a shop, and he writes very beautifully about seeing his own reflection in the window and remembering when Jimmy Dean got that part, and seeing his own face all wrinkled and old and Jimmy Dean still young, but going, "He's not immortal. He missed it all. He's not here." You know the wake he left behind and the work and the ideas, yeah they're present and that's beautiful, but when I think about River not getting to have tributes like this and getting to do 20 years more of work you know.

**BH:** We're going to talk about another actor, and we don't want to get you down, but another actor, an incredible actor you worked with, and an incredible cast you worked with in *Dead Poets Society*, which I think was the film where we really sat up and took notice of you, as well as that incredible cast. We're going to have a look at a clip first, which is a key scene with Robin Williams and you. Let's have a look.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

**BH:** I remember the first time I saw *Dead Poets Society* thinking one of the most incredible things about that, apart from the fact that it's, you know it's a film about poetry and radical teaching, and it's quite a subversive, for a big Hollywood production it's a subversive film, but how naturalistic all you guys were, you and the rest of that young cast. Did you have, did you have a method of how you were going to act in that film, did it all just, did you prepare, did it all just kind of come naturally and

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

flow from the director, do you remember?

**EH:** Yeah I remember. The reason why I say it like that is because it was a time period when people really, I got into the film industry at a moment when people still really cared about that thing, that kind of, of how to achieve that kind of work. And Peter Weir was adamant that the film not be nostalgic, that it not be an older man's viewpoint of what a young boy is like. You know he wanted us to have agency in it, and so we had two weeks of sitting around in this rehearsal room really thinking and talking about, "what is the difference between your character and your character?", you know and really thinking it through. And to the point that he gave Robert Sean Leonard and I, the young man you saw up there, he gave us an assignment. I've never had another director do this where he said, "Okay, I need a scene in the movie where you two become friends, where I see you two becoming friends, and I want you to get together and write me three three-page scenes that take place inside your dorm room, and we'll shoot one of them." And he showed us on the call sheet, you know October 29th from 12 to 5 we're shooting scene number 38B which is the scene TBW, to be written, right. And so Robert Sean Leonard and I went back and we're like, "We have to write this scene, what are you talking about?" And we really worked hard on it, and you know we stayed up all night for three or four days and we wrote three versions of the scenes, one of which he did shoot. And it's not in the movie, and I don't think it ever was going to be in the movie, but we became friends you know, and we had a true, we became a team where we weren't competing against each other, we both wanted each other to succeed. And funnily enough, five years later - this kind of thing doesn't even happen any more - but NBC was gonna air *Dead Poets Society* right, and he needed to add four minutes to the movie for the commercial breaks, you know it's the kind of thing that they don't do any more. And he called us both up and he says, "It made the cut." You know, "You were one of the last to go," and he said, "I always wanted that scene to be in the movie, and now it's

back in the movie." And so we watched it on NBC and we saw our scene.

But I don't think anything in my life prepared me more for my relationship with Richard Linklater than that. Because see Peter's unlike - there's a lot of great directors, I see their pictures up on the wall over here, a lot of great directors have passed through this hall, and a lot of them, they have vision you know, and they tell you exactly where to look and exactly what to see and exactly, they impress their vision on you every second. And Richard has never been that type of person, he really asks his actors to have vision, and he kind of curates, a little bit like perhaps Mike Leigh might do, he curates a grander vision by actually asking other people to have vision, and it's really exciting. And Peter did that with every single one of - I could tell you more stories about *Dead Poets Society* because it was amazing you know. Robert Sean Leonard once in a scene was saying, "This is so fake, I don't believe this, I don't believe any of this," and Peter said, "Alright, why don't you believe it?" "I don't believe myself." "What don't you believe?" "I don't, all I'm thinking about is you." And Peter said, "Alright, here," and he took out this, you know the version of a Walkman back then, and he cranked the soundtrack to *The Mission*, and he released the crew for about 40 minutes and he turned off all the lights and left Robert in a room by himself. I've never had anything like this on films, I thought this is what filmmaking was like, you know this creativity was happening. And then Peter walked everybody in slowly one at a time and turned one light on and one light on at a time, and then he just touched Robert on the shoulders, and Robin was over there, and asked him the first line of the scene. It was this long scene where, you know he was, Robert was trying to tell his father why, trying to tell Robin why his father wouldn't let him be in the play, and he spontaneously breaks down crying you know. And people always, I don't know, it was a very beautiful process to be a part of.

**BH:** And did you, so did you realise when you were making that film how special it was, and when it came out and became a huge hit.

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

**EH:** No I had no idea, I had no idea at all. And Norman Lloyd who played the professor in the movie, who happened to be one of Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre troupe, he came up, we were joking around all of us guys on the set one day. And I don't know, to me he seemed 107, he probably was you know 52 or something, I don't know, but he said to us, he said, "You know you guys are sitting here joking around, having a nice time before lunch, and you have no idea that you're having an experience that's going to change your life." And you know we thought, "huh, what a weird old guy."

[Laughter]

And it's absolutely true.

**BH:** And Robin Williams, did he seem as special then?

**EH:** Well of course it's hard to watch that clip now you know. Yeah, is Robin Williams special is a little bit like the River thing you know? Robin Williams, and you know I don't know that I've ever met another, you know is a genius, he was a comic genius. His, his brain didn't function the way - if he were in the audience tonight this whole evening would be different, do you know what I mean? There was a power to his charisma, his intelligence. I mean you know, that shot you showed, it's almost entirely one shot. You know, it was the first time I ever felt the buzz and thrill of acting was that shot, and a lot of that was improvisation. I would say to Peter, "I don't like a lot of these lines," and he would say, "You don't have to say any of them, but I have to think that you did," you know. And so I kept trying to do this thing where I was trying to walk back to my chair and Robin would say, "Not yet, not yet," you know and it was, it filled the whole thing, it was great. But I'd never been given that kind of permission. And Robin, the power of his imagination and creativity is so intense that to attempt to stand next to him was something you don't forget.

**BH:** And from that film on did you then think, right this is it for me, this is what I

want to do, become a film actor now, even then at that point?

**EH:** I still - you know the failure of *Explorers* had been so intense and so sad, I had thought that when that movie was a failure that I really wasn't supposed to be an actor. And I had dropped out of college to audition for *Dead Poets Society*, because I knew I was okay at it, but I was really worried that I wasn't good enough at it. And I wanted, I really wanted - I had this fantasy of being Jack London and joining the merchant marines, I wanted to be a writer - and so I used the money from *Dead Poets Society* to go to NYU as a creative writing major, because that's what I had wanted to do. Because I was sure the movie would be a bomb, *Explorers* was a bomb. I mean I had had a great time on *Explorers*, I'd had amazing experiences, but you know it had kind of taught me that, not to believe the hype. So as *Dead Poets Society* was a hit, I was kind of the last one to know, I was so afraid of being hurt again I think. And then offers started coming in, and there I was at NYU smoking a lot of pot and not doing my homework, and I remember my brother saying to me, "Look, if you're not going to show up for class you may as well do the Disney movie," you know. And so you know that's kind of how it happened.

[Laughter]

**BH:** You did get into many interesting films at that time. One that I wanted to mention before we get onto the next clip is *Reality Bites*. I watched that again recently, I think because people kind of regard it as being, oh it's that slacker film, you know people hanging out and being very trendy and hip, but it's a really good movie and really good characters, a cult film, and really well directed by Ben Stiller. What was he like back then to work with as a director, and did you, is that a film you look back on fondly as an experience?

**EH:** Yeah because, you see everything in hind sight makes so much sense, like *Dead Poets Society* was going to be a hit and you're going to be an actor, you never know any of that in the moment. In the moment I was 18 years old and did

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

this weird movie that may or may not come out you know. And a lot of the, at the moment of *Reality Bites* it was kind of looked at as this poster for the slacker generation or whatever they called it at the time, but you know Helen Childress wrote a pretty brilliant script, and Ben Stiller was this brand new comic voice, and the person who gave him that chance was Winona Ryder. Winona was in the height of her powers; she's this huge star. She's just worked with Scorsese, Oscar-nominated, like back to back Oscar nominations, everybody in the world loved Winona Ryder right, she was the national darling. I remember on set Jack Nicholson would come by you know, Al Pacino's on line two, Scorsese's on line four. Everyone, you know, the hawks were circling you know. And here she was, she could have worked with anybody, and here's this guy who had done this little TV show that had been cancelled, and she thought he was brilliant. And because I remember just saying to her, "Who is he?" And she wanted me for the part, and everybody else wanted other people for the part, but she had seen a movie I did called *A Midnight Clear* which she was a big fan of, and so she wanted me for this part which was amazing for me at the time. Because it was a studio movie and I was kind of at that time just one of the kids from *Dead Poets Society* and undifferentiated from anybody else. And it was, it was a real character part, and it was the first time I was asked to - you know I was working with my own generation, Ben was extremely young, we were all in positions of leadership in a way on that set, which felt strange to me because I'd been used to handing that authority over. And I really, my character was kind of, of dubious personal qualities, he wasn't necessarily a good guy, or necessarily a bad guy, but I really related to him, and I liked him, and it was - I enjoyed it yes.

**BH:** Do people do that thing they do, ridiculously at that time, particularly with that role of confusing you with that character?

**EH:** More than any other time in my life that was true then. Everybody after that movie thought I was a pretentious asshole, and I am, but not like that.

[Laughter]

**EH:** You know, so that was definitely interesting. But really I was proud to be a part of my generation. You know this is a moment where Nirvana's breaking, Doug Coupland's coming out with a book, *Generation X*, and you had this sense of my generation being different than the baby boomers, different and maybe having something of our own to say.

**BH:** Absolutely, yeah no, it was an incredibly creative period wasn't it?

**EH:** It was.

**BH:** Fun, exciting. Let's talk about, the next film we've got a clip of. I think it's an incredibly accomplished film, it's a science fiction film with a brain, Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca*. And in the scene we're about to see, I mean it's a complex story, but basically it's a film all about trying to perfect people, perfect humanity and create kind of people scientifically, and you are rebelling against this and you meet Jude Law for the first time in this scene we're about to see. Let's have a look.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

I think *Gattaca*'s one of the smartest films of that period. When you got that script did you realise how special it was?

**EH:** Mmhm. I mean Andrew Niccol had just written *The Truman Show*, and for anybody who's seen *Truman Show* it's kind of a work of staggering genius. And it's funny, it's hard not to watch that and, you know that was Jude's first movie, and I remember when we were doing auditions for that part some of the best actors of my generation came in you know. I remember a friend of mine, Philip Seymour Hoffman came in to audition, and he was my friend, I knew him, and he slayed it, and I just thought Phil was the best you know. And then, oh I think Mike Shannon came in and a bunch of different people who were - Liev Schreiber came in, Liev slayed it and he was so good. And then Jude came in,

## **BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke**

**18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London**

and he was so beautiful, he was like, I had to call Phil and say, "Hey, it's over pal," you know what I mean.

[Laughter]

"This kid is gorgeous. It's like Peter O'Toole walked in you know." And I knew that script, I felt so blessed to get it. I remember years, a few years ago I was in line for the bathroom at Shakespeare in the Park and there was some secret security service guys next to me, I realised I was standing next to Bill Clinton, and he leans over and he goes, "*Gattaca*'s a great film." And I thought, "Yeah it is."

[Laughter]

And Andrew, he's got a totally unique mind. And you know it's just a passion of mine science fiction, it allows you to talk about philosophy and politics in a way where people aren't sure what side they're on, you know because you take it in a setting where you're not sure what left and right is. Well I know the left position on this, or I know what my position, but you set it in the future, you set it in some strange planet, you set it on a spaceship and all of a sudden you can actually talk about the ideas and ethics involved in a situation. And Andrew's writing in his voice and he's operating with metaphor and theme, and I personally think it's one of the great first films of all time you know.

**BH:** Absolutely, it's brilliant. And how daring it was as well, things like you've got Gore Vidal's in it, isn't he?

**EH:** Gore Vidal is in it.

**BH:** Incredible casting. What was he like to work with?

**EH:** He said, "Oh you're staying at the Chateau Marmont. It's like the navel of Hollywood, sweaty and wonderful. You know I hung out with James Dean and Natalie Wood by the pool." And you're like, "Jesus Christ."

**BH:** He was a great namedropper.

**EH:** It was awesome.

**BH:** Yeah, I bet. And at that point did you think - I mean you were writing, you were writing novels. I'm still fascinated by, you were getting into doing all these different things, but you were still committed to being an actor as well - did you even then, you were like I can become a novelist and that's what I want to do, or were you happy doing both of those things?

**EH:** You know, I didn't think like that. I had a real awareness, River had already died first of all, and I had a real natural and healthy, because some people think it's a posture or something, a real disinterest in celebrity. I mean I wanted to be successful at what I did, and it was really fun to work with talented people. I mean to be on a film set with Andrew Niccol and hear that writing and know that no one's ever heard it before, and see Jude Law, and Jude was amazing, that was some of the most fun I ever had. So I'm not downplaying that I wanted these experiences, but I was really worried about basing my self-worth on other people thinking you're a big shot you know, and I was pretty aware of how superficial that could be. And I didn't know what to do about it, so the one thing I thought I could do was take some responsibility for my own education and try to do other things. I tried to start writing and I tried to start a theatre company, and I was trying to not wait for the world to hand out any favours you know, and so that's where the writing and stuff was going. And also I'd wanted to write before I'd wanted to do this, I'd had a couple of short stories published in the NYU Journal for Christ sake, I was somebody.

[Laughter]

And so you know I was trying to stay - success for young people has a tendency to like stop their growth. You know there's a great thing, like in jail or something if they want to punish you they put you in isolation because it makes you crazy right, and the one thing that celebrity does is it puts you in isolation. You know you start feeling you're other than other people, or that you're made to feel, or they themselves even do it. "Can I have my picture with you?" You know why don't you ask your

## **BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke**

**18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London**

Uncle Jimmy for a photo you know. "I don't care about him. You." And it creates this feeling of like, well who am I?

**BH:** And everyone has a very specific idea of you, of who you are. The public as it were.

**EH:** Yeah it's very hard, and you know I remembered very clearly how much River was suffering over that. I was hanging out with him the night before he had been nominated for an Oscar for Sidney's film, what was it called, oh come on, what was it called?

**Audience:** *Running on Empty*.

**BH:** *Running on Empty*, fantastic film yeah.

**EH:** Brilliant, *Running on Empty*, a fantastic performance. And River was sitting there telling me like, "This is all so phony man, you're not going to believe how phony it all is." And I was thinking, you're such a fool. It's not phony, it's awesome. You got to work with Sidney Lumet. But he was struggling with, he was like, "Yeah that part was awesome, but you don't know, you don't know how weird everybody makes you feel." And I - as *Dead Poets Society* happened, and know shortly after River died *Reality Bites* happened - and so that was my first blush with feeling the heat of celebrity. So I was wary of it, so I did start writing. It was a way to kind of try to break the glass wall, say I'm actually person you know.

**BH:** I think it's interesting; we've gone slightly out of order because that film was made...

**EH:** I'm sorry.

**BH:** No no no, my fault.

**EH:** I'm sure it's my fault.

**BH:** That's the thing, you've made such interesting projects because, the *Before* trilogy, if we can call it that, which I think is one of the best film trilogies ever now.

**EH:** Thank you.

**BH:** You know each film is incredible. But of course the first film was before *Gattaca*, and you met Richard Linklater and Julie Delpy and you worked on that film.

**EH:** Yeah, they were right in the same period of my life.

**BH:** Around the same period, okay. We're going to look at them as a trilogy, and I guess for me it's interesting what you're saying about celebrity and about kind of trying to look at reality, because these are films all about aren't they, to me they're all about trying to get some kind of reality about a relationship within the context, within film. Does it seem that way to you?

**EH:** Well I met a kindred spirit in Rick you know. I mean he had an ethos about, I remember on *Before Sunrise*, I mean I'm 23, 24 years old and he, I said well you know, "Who's shooting this movie?" He said, "Why?" I said, "I don't know, I mean just who's the DP? You know you want it to look good?" He said, "Why would I want it to look good?" I said, "Well, everybody wants their movies to look good." He said, "I know. Isn't that irritating?" And I said, "Well what do you mean?" He said, "Everything looks like a Heineken ad. What are you selling? I think life looks awesome, it should just look like regular life." And I thought, yeah. And I remember Julie came in once and she said, "This movie it's just us talking, people are going to be bored of me," and Rick said, "I've been with you for three weeks rehearsing, I'm not bored of you. Somebody can't be - if they get bored of you in two hours I'm not making this movie for them. You know this movie is for someone else." And so yes it was this ethos of not hyperbolising life that is something that, that breaks the glass wall too you know. A lot of movies end up, are a little bit like crack cocaine or something, that they're incredibly fun while you're doing it, and afterwards leave you like a shell of a person. Not like I'm some expert on crack cocaine use okay. But my point is that...

**BH:** We know what you mean, yeah.

**EH:** You know what I mean, it's this feeling of, oh I've never had a kiss like



## **BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke**

**18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London**

that, oh I never had this. As opposed to, what the ethos of the *Before* trilogy is about: well your relationship might be okay, you know because it's certainly not as screwed up as this one, or you know.

**BH:** We'll talk about it in depth afterwards.

**EH:** Okay, afterwards, shut up.

**BH:** We'll look at, we're going to look at clips of all three together in one go, because it is, it feels like now an achievement in one go.

**EH:** Yeah, I would love that.

**BH:** So we'll have a look.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

**BH:** So at what point did - a great first film, a kind of unique first film, great you know two people talking for most of the film - then turn into this thing where we're going to revisit those characters nine years later and then again nine years after that? Was that the plan from the beginning or did Richard come up with that at some point afterwards?

**EH:** There's several answers to the question. One is that Richard asked Julie and I to make a cameo appearance in a film called *Waking Life*, and we, it's an animated film about dreams, it's a very beautiful movie, and he had this idea that maybe Jesse and Celine would appear but he didn't know what we'd say. And so the three of us got in a room and we wrote this one scene together, and we had so much fun writing together again that we all left Austin that weekend with the feeling of like, couldn't we work on something together? And there floated out this idea of, well what if we were to revisit these characters, what would it be? And we had a little dialogue about it, and then the idea of *Boyhood* came into the air, and this idea of making a movie about family and using time, revisiting it, and that kind of naturally progressed into a dialogue, God it would be fun to do that with Jesse and Celine as well. And we

were like yeah, and I was doing a book tour for *Ash Wednesday*, and I came through Austin, and Rick came to visit, he came, he introduced me at this book tour in a Barnes & Noble or something in Austin, Texas, and I was doing the book signing and Rick's like, "Oh my God, I know how the movie is." I'm like, "What?" He goes, "You wrote a book that was basically like *Before Sunrise* and she shows up!" And I was like, well I don't know, I was going to spend the night at his house that night, so after the reading I got in the car with him and we were in the car and we called Julie, and we were like, "We got it, we got it!" And Rick was like, "Well I just don't know what happens after that." And I was like, "No no no, that's it, that's the whole movie. We do the whole movie in real time." And I had wanted the movie to be in one take, I even flew to Paris and timed how long it took to walk from Shakespeare and Company, I remember calling Rick because I timed it you know. I walked from Shakespeare and Company, like what we thought the walk would be to this certain idea where we thought Julie's apartment could be. And that was the original idea was the whole movie would just be one walk over these certain bridges and stuff like that. And Rick was like, "No that's too much like a stunt, it can't be one take." He's very practical too. "There's no way some passer by won't throw a water balloon at us or something." So, but that's the idea of it was born. And so we wrote *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight* after we'd started *Boyhood*, you know which is kind of funny to think about it now.

**BH:** Yeah yeah, that's incredible. And I'm fascinated by the collaborative process, because I think a lot of people see those films, and they're so naturalistic, the dialogue is so naturalistic, the scenes feel so flowing naturally from you, but it's all meticulously written isn't it? It's not improvised, people assume it's improvised but it's not is it?

**EH:** It's the beauty of Linklater's process, which is that you know, I'll give you an example. There's a scene in *Before Sunrise* where I'm supposed to talk her into getting off the train, and in the script as it was originally conceived I'm like,

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

"Hey, you wanna come spend the night?" And Julie kept saying, "I would never get off the train with some guy like this you know." And Rick would say, "Well what would it take?" And I would say, "Oh I know what it would do," and I'd try some Don Juan like move, and Julie would be like, "No way." And then I would say, "Alright, let me try again, let me try again," and I'd try this and Julie was like, "Ergh, you make me sick you American populous," you know. And then Rick would be like, "Okay, what would it be?" And she would say, "Well it would have to be something that showed me that he was smart. Like I would have to believe that he wasn't an idiot." And so weirdly enough she would kind of come up with some version of what it could be, and then I would say, "Well I had this idea as a pickup line once of what if I tried to tell a girl that, 'think of me as a time machine'. You know and that I'm gonna, 'go out with me tonight and it will prove to you that your future husband, who you're bored with and think is disgusting, well you'll think well he's not as bad as me. And so I'm going to make you happy to be with your future husband'." And Julie was like, "I like that, that I can work with." And then we would sit and so we would, it would come out of an improv of sorts, and then the three of us would write it down together, "Oh this would be funny, oh this would be funny." And then slowly, we'd never go to set without a meticulously written script, but we didn't have a script three weeks before we shot. It's a little bit like firing yourself from a cannon.

**BH:** Yeah, absolutely. And do you know, having made three of those films and of course *Boyhood* which we'll talk about in depth soon, do you know when a moment gets fake, and you know kind of seize that moment and get rid of it and do it again, or just, because all those scenes seem so real?

**EH:** It's the wonderful thing about what Rick used to say, he'd say like, "If people see you acting at all, then they'll notice that there's no plot," right. He's like, "It has to, the whole movie hinges on the idea that we think you're making this shit up," you know. "The second you give me a meaningful stare, or the second you

say a joke with a well-oiled punch line the whole thing falls apart." Because the next thing I thought is, oh he's acting, isn't this funny. What's happening? Why aren't the Russians coming at dawn? You know why isn't there a bomb that's supposed to go off? Where's the ticking clock. You know all three of these screenwriting; all three of these scripts would have been kicked out of every decent screenwriting class in America for sure you know. Because there's just, there's no even attempt at plot, but it hinges, it can work if there's no attempt at drama. Because as soon as you have drama you want plot. But if you're actually just holding a mirror up then something else becomes fascinating.

**BH:** But the writing for those was, you're Oscar-nominated for the writing for that, so that's a pretty decent recognition of how good...

**EH:** The acting is.

**BH:** Absolutely. Well talk about being Oscar-nominated for acting; let's talk about *Training Day*, which is a fascinating film. Because that's, on one level that's a genre movie, it's a thriller, it's got action, it's about cops, but I think there's a lot more to it than that. Let's have a look at this clip, which is the crucial clip where Denzel Washington makes something very clear to you I think for the first time.

**EH:** Okay, uh oh.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

**BH:** I love the fact that you got Oscar-nominated for *Training Day* because actually Denzel's got the big flash role hasn't he, and your role is kind of interesting, you're reacting to him, you're, I mean you grow an interesting arc, but that's great that, it's important, that's interesting, different acting is that you're reacting to the big dominant character. Was that how it felt making it?

**EH:** Yeah, I felt, when I read the script I thought if I do my job well Denzel will win the Oscar. That was my goal you know. And then when the nominations came

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

out Denzel called me up, I hope he wouldn't mind me saying this, and he said, "You know why I'm so happy that you're nominated?" And I said, "Why Denzel, why?" "Because if you got nominated, that means people saw the movie, and if people saw the movie, I'm gonna win." And so yeah it was an awesome experience, you know that whole... You know and it brings out another love of mine which is genre movies, you know I mean there's a big, oftentimes for example when you do art films like the *Before* trilogy or *Boyhood* or something and people, you know you win film festivals, you get prizes or some such thing and people think they're good, but what is extremely hard to do too is to make a genre film with thoughts and ideas behind it. And the power of it if you can do it is that you can kind of infiltrate the psyche and the consciousness of the average drive-in moviegoer, you know the person who doesn't see art films, and you can give them something worth watching. And that is something, on my first movie, on that movie Joe Dante directed with River, Joe used to take River and I, we would sit and he would show us crazy Roger Corman movies and show us old, oh he showed us, I remember he made us watch the new *Thing* and the old *Thing*, you know John Carpenter's, and talking about what movies can be and just eradicating the line between high art and low art. I mean the joy of working on Shakespeare for example, is when it's done right it's actually not high art. You know there's nothing like, I mean one of the most amazing experiences of my life is doing *The Scottish Play* for a thousand inner-city students who'd never even heard the play, and when the guy comes in and says, "The queen, my lord, is dead," the whole audience goes [\*gasps\*]. You know and then I say, "She should have died hereafter," and the audience goes, "Oh." As opposed to, a normal audience sees that and they think, oh he didn't do it as well as Ian McKellen, Ian McKellen took a 15, Ian McKellen took a 20-second pause, you know.

[Laughter]

And it's all in this comparison and contrast as opposed to being inside the

story. And this stuff is meant to be entertaining you know, and the poetry and the language and the metaphor operates on top of that, and a good genre film like *Training Day* you know can do that. I mean Denzel is giving this super, uber swashbuckling performance, but at the heart of it there's something interesting happening in the movie.

**BH:** It's a great script, David Ayer's script.

**EH:** Great script, great script. And again another script, I mean people act like it's rocket science making a good movie or something, and you know the play is the thing. I knew the second I read *Gattaca* that I wanted that part you know, and I knew the second that I read *Training Day* that I wanted that part. And you know like a lot of my career I owe to other actors, you know I mean Winona got me that part in *Reality Bites*, the studio never wanted me for that movie, they wanted 90000 people before they wanted me, but Winona had a lot of power. Denzel got me that part. Philip Seymour Hoffman got me the part in *Before The Devil Knows You're Dead*. You know I've always owed a lot to other actors in that regard.

**BH:** We've got so much to talk about with the film *Boyhood* that I want to dedicate quite a lot of time to it, but I do, I wanted to ask you about *Before The Devil Knows You're Dead* which is one of my favourite of your films. What an incredible cast, because Philip Seymour Hoffman, Albert Finney, a great British actor.

**EH:** Marisa Tomei.

**BH:** Marisa Tomei, and of course Sidney Lumet's last film. I mean how do you feel about that now, that you were in this incredibly powerful film by the master Sidney Lumet.

**EH:** You know if you haven't seen it, I swear you really should. It came in a moment where it was a little lost. You know the American independent film scene didn't really have its foot on the ground, Miramax was gone, it was a weird moment. I feel like if a movie had come out five years before...

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

**BH:** I agree, yeah.

**EH:** It's a powerful film, Phil is brilliant in it. And to give a little homage to Phil tonight, you know this is a moment, Philip Seymour Hoffman had just won the Oscar for *Capote*, and in the prevailing ethos of the time period we live in, whenever anything happens, to even wonderful actors, they win the Oscar and then the next thing they do, they do a Marvel movie. You know, they cash in. You know what Phil did? He went to one of his heroes, a New York City icon who everybody said was washed up and put out to pasture, he said, "What was that script you had that you showed me a few years ago? You wanna make that, because I think I can get it made right now," you know. And Phil and Sidney came to see me in a little 200-seat house, we were doing *Hurlyburly*, and they came and they said, "We want to talk to you," you know. "You wanna make a movie?" I was like, "Yeah, I wanna make a movie." And when I think back on it now, you know that was Phil's ethos, the old school '70s actor, the actor who was going to put real life on screen. He wasn't there to look pretty, he wasn't there to be a big shot and have, and win awards, he was there to tell the truth while he could. And he put his money where his mouth was, never stopped making small, independent movies. You know I'd see him even late, or the last days of his life hopping the train to go down to *Hunger Games*, and you know, he was directing a play in a little 99-seat house, beautiful play that the Labyrinth Theatre was producing you know for no money or nothing. And man, it burned him alive that this actor was two seconds late for his cue, "This punk kid, late for his cue," it's gonna eat him alive you know. And it was so fun to be around people who cared about acting like that. Sidney Lumet is one of the few people that actually knows how to talk to you about acting. For anybody who's interested like in this as a profession, Elia Kazan's book *A Life* is kind of mandatory reading, because people wonder like, oh gosh, isn't it funny that Kazan directed Brando, Beatty, James Dean, you know Sandy Dennis, all these, De Niro, all these amazing performers he's discovering and giving their best work. Well, read his book. I mean this guy

cared about acting a lot. You know he didn't think it was cute or an avenue towards getting popular - he thought it was life and death. And you know Sidney was that way, and you saw, I saw Sidney Lumet is 83 years old and he's about this tall, and it's about 97 degrees and he's got his T-shirt wrapped around his head like he's in *Lawrence of Arabia*, and going, "Get the shot, get the shot," you know.

**BH:** Well if anyone, I mean it's a brilliant, I think it's one of the most underrated films; it's a brilliant film.

**EH:** Well thanks, I love that movie. And it's, if a 25 year-old had made that movie.

**BH:** If Quentin Tarantino had made that film.

**EH:** Oh, they would have just dropped dead you know.

**BH:** But let's talk about what I think is a modern classic, *Boyhood*. You mentioned it before; you mentioned that, I mean this must be a weird thing because none of us knew this thing was going on, you've known for 12 years, nearly 13 years now. Before we talk about it in depth, let's have a look at this clip which is you hanging out with your son.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

I have to say on a personal level, as a son of a divorced father, the scenes of you hanging out with your son and daughter are so brilliantly real, I mean among many incredible achievements in this film, just that element of it alone is incredible. When Richard Linklater first said, right, we're going to make this movie over 12 years, do a bit every year, did you think, oh yeah, that's gonna work, or did you think, no?

**EH:** I couldn't believe that some weird Czech guy hadn't done it in 1962. I was like, I remember he told me the idea and I was thinking, well has anybody ever done that? And we were like, we tried to think of it, we were like, well they've

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

done it in documentary a lot really, you know visiting things over time, but nobody's done it in a narrative feature. And we were both on a, well Rick's always on a huge Tolstoy kick, but I was freshly on one, and there's that book *Youth, Boyhood and Childhood* etc. or something, it's different titles, different translations. But anyway, we were like, "What if you could do that as a movie?" Like because there's this lie to even the best movies about childhood. You take *400 Blows* or something, it's this beautiful moment at the end when he's like this enlightenment moment at the beach, as if any of us really had one moment that defined our childhood. It's an artifice, it's a beautiful one, but our childhoods are made up of this collage, this web. And we were talking about that, and I thought it would be brilliant, and I thought there was a real danger in the whole thing could be ruined if you cast the wrong kid, and but I knew that I have this vision of my dad when I was, my first memories of my father, which are when this movie starts. I mean the idea he was presenting to me, you know when you first have memories, five, six, first grade, you start to be able to piece together, everything before then is more like a dream, impressions. But you kind of can remember your first grade teacher, little things you can remember, and I remember the vision of my dad, how big he seemed, how wild he seemed, how... And who he was at my high school graduation, you know what a father he was at my high school graduation, and I wondered how that happened, and what if I could dramatise that? And you know Rick and I are both from Texas, we both were children of divorce, our fathers both were in the insurance business, they're both you know crazy baseball fans, and we had a very similar portrait that we wanted, I mean there was a reason he came to me you know. And I said, "Oh this is going to be amazing, yeah I'm gonna do it." And he said, "Oh no no no, I don't think you, I'm not really offering it to you." This is classic Linklater you know, like he's so, you can never get a hold of him; you know he's like water or something you know. I say, "What do you mean, what do you mean?" He goes, "Oh I mean obviously I want you to do it, but come on you're going to be doing some big shot thing,

you're going to be doing something. You're not, when I need you you're not, you know I mean it's going to be you know, it's going to be hard to do, I'm going to need complete commitment for 12 years. I mean I would never ask that of you." "No, I want to do it." It comes out of your mouth, "I promise."

[Laughter]

"Alright, shake my hand," he says, you know and I'm like, "I'm in." And it, I never looked back, I mean I only grew to look forward to it more and more as, because at first of course it seemed like an experiment, it seemed like a mad experiment. My first scene with this young man I'm putting him in a car seat, you know I'm getting yelled at by somebody because I don't have a car seat for him. And in the last scene he's got a beard, we're talking about girls, he drives his own pickup away from me. So it's unlike anything I've ever done or ever will do.

**BH:** So did you collaborate with Richard over the, you know in terms of the script, in terms of the story, year on year did the two of you talk about how it was going to develop?

**EH:** Absolutely, I mean it was one of the most magical processes I've ever been asked to be a part of. It's a big movie and he needed everybody to come through, meaning you know from little things, for people who have seen it there's, he knew he wanted this birthday scene and it's a thing... We would talk about what are the important moments of your childhood, weird moments, and he said, "You know what I really remember, is the time my parents, my dad got remarried and I had my birthday at her family's house, and these people were acting like we're family, and they were all really nice, but they, but it was so strange, but it was everybody's trying to make it nice, it was just unique." And I said, "Oh man, I had that, oh yeah." And funnily enough we both had a very similar version of it, because the parents were all extremely Texan. So that was really fun to do, and Rick would be like, "Well what does Mason see here? What are the presents?" we're going to have a presents scene. And we're good friends,

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

and he's like, "What about...," earlier that year I'd given my oldest for her 13th album The Beatles' *Black Album*, and Rick was like, "We should do that, we could do a whole riff. Because you remember when you're stuck in the car with your dad and the drive goes on forever and he talks to you constantly about things you don't care about and he's like..." and so that's how the whole process developed. But part of my job, you know we were like part of a band in the way, or a team you know in the way that some person's asked to cover first base, you guys don't play baseball but, and I don't play cricket so I can't have an analogy, but you know what I'm saying. Every person has a role, and my job was to play base, right.

**BH:** But was it hard to go back to go back you know once a year, for that chunk of, for this film, to go back into your character, to kind of remember all the stuff that you'd gone through? It seems like a kind of unique challenge to me.

**EH:** It was unique but it wasn't hard because the uniqueness of it... First of all I knew very clearly who this man was. What was hard was mapping out, okay when does he sell the GTO? When does he have a new baby? When does he grow a moustache and comb his hair? You know when does, all these, I wanted them by the time they happened to feel inevitable, so that you never go, "Oh, wow, he's changed." it's just kind of, the way it did with my dad. I don't remember the day that he got his act together, it just happens slowly. And you know what, at first as a kid you might even resent your parents getting remarried, and then time goes on and you realise, oh, they've taught me how to have a fulfilling masculine-feminine relationship. And I, all I wanted was his time every second, you don't realise that there's actually more to teach somebody than that you know. And so that was the portrait we wanted to do, and that was my job, and you know Patricia had a different job, and you know I don't want it to be lost on this movie, one of the great accomplishments... It's hard, my career and Rick's are forever entwined a little bit and you know, but one of the things

that I feel is really important to note in talking about this is how few opportunities women have in film to really be women, three-dimensional women, and the one thing about Julie and Patricia, both, is that they're not one thing you know. Patricia's a lover and a mother, she's a teacher and a student, she's a good mother, she's a bad mother, she's gorgeous and she's unappealing, you know? And men, we get that all the time, all the time. History of male performances, all these three-dimensional figures, and women are often asked to either be character parts, do you know, where they can do that kind of thing, or to be you know some idealised version or a witch. And most of the time frankly they're asked to be naked and dead you know. And so Rick is a very beautiful filmmaker in that regard, and if you think it's not on purpose, it is. I mean, when I did *Before Sunrise* one of the big things that he impressed upon Julie is that he needed a woman to be in this movie, "I need your voice, I need you to have vision. This is not going to, this movie is not going to have a masculine gaze." And you know he could cite Chekhov without being pretentious, you know the thing that's, the beautiful thing about Chekhov, *Cherry's Sisters - Cherry's Sisters! - The Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard*, you know whatever it is, if you found it on the street with no title page and you read it you wouldn't know if a man or a woman wrote it. That's not true for *Oleanna*, that's not true for *True West*, that's not true for, Shakespeare probably, I mean if it wasn't so recognisable, I mean he writes such great female roles. And Rick was really disappointed in *Dazed and Confused* in its, in how much he let the male view take over that, and he was adamant in both *Boyhood* and the *Before* trilogy that the film have a wiser viewpoint than that.

**BH:** Well I think the unique thing, isn't the unique thing about both those projects is that all the characters in those films don't seem like characters, they don't seem like one, they seem like three-dimensional, multi-layered human beings don't they? That must be down to the unique nature of filming over a long, like novels, characters in novels I guess they're like.

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

**EH:** That's the goal, that's the goal in my life.

**BH:** My final question, we're going to throw it open to the audience for questions, and my final question about *Boyhood* is, how did it feel when you first sat down and saw the finished cut and saw, not only your life but the lives of your colleagues, your fellow actors...

**EH:** I didn't think about it like that at all. What I thought about was, I honestly, I watched it downstairs, Rick had sent it to me to show me the latest cut, and I saw it, and I came upstairs and I told my wife, "I feel like my friend Rick wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I have a friend who did something magnificent." And I didn't really care what anybody thought about it or, I hope it doesn't come across as, I didn't see it as any victory of mine or anything, it was a grand experiment, you know it was a herculean effort of patience, and there's a lot of love in that movie. I mean if you know Lorelei and you see that Samantha character -

**BH:** Richard's daughter.

**EH:** His daughter. Lorelei's my friend you know. I knew Lorelei, I held her as, when we were shooting *Before Sunrise* I held her as a little baby, and you know I know her mother really well, and I got to act with her and have her call me dad, and that's somebody I care about a lot. And it was very interesting to watch this kid Ellar Coltrane turn into an artist. So there's a lot my life in the movie, and so to see it dramatised and to see Rick carry the ship into port, I'd never seen that movie before. *Training Day*'s a great film, *Dead Poets Society* is a lot like *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, both great films. *Training Day* owes a great debt to *French Connection*. I mean you know, *Boyhood*, I had never seen that movie before.

**BH:** No one has, it is unique, yeah absolutely. Right, let's throw it open to the audience. I think we have mics, so if you can wait for a mic and then, so we can all hear you. There's a guy right in the front row in the middle, mic's on its way.

**Question:** I wanted to ask you about your novels, which I loved. You know firstly if there's another one on the way, and when you wrote the first novel, *Hottest State*, the critics seemed to have it in for you because it's like an actor playing pretend you know. Did you feel kind of more validated working on the follow-up, and then what was it like directing the screen adaptation of *Hottest State* later on?

**EH:** So everybody heard the question?

**Q:** It was like three questions, I'm sorry.

**EH:** Yeah but, well, I'll take the first one on. It's like yeah, I was a pretty, I was about, you know *The Hottest State* came out at probably the worst possible moment if I wanted to be an author, because it was shortly after *Reality Bites* and *Before Sunrise* came out, where I was you know the flavour of the month kind of. You know young actors have these moments and that was my moment, and I decided to come out with a novel? It seemed very weird. I remember one of the major reviewers said, "Ethan Hawke performs a fantastic trick," and you think, oh this is going to be a good review. "He manages to perform fellatio on himself," you know, so you're like, oh wow. Maybe this isn't going as well as I thought. But you know, I ultimately came at it with a viewpoint of, if you can't handle that then fuck it, get out, you know. That it's my, it's not an artist's job to decide whether it's of value, it's your job to decide whether you think anybody writing a book has value, right. If that has a value then why wouldn't it be of value for me to try, you know? Or does it have any value at all, is the attempt of value? And did I put thought into it? I knew I wasn't performing fellatio on myself, or I hoped I wasn't. I wanted to connect with people, I wanted to write something good, I loved to read, and I didn't want to be some flavour of the month actor and I sabotaged it, you know. Kind of deliberately in hind sight, and I'm glad I did. And there's something wonderful about getting bad reviews. The beautiful thing about the theatre is a living art form. You know this is a very nostalgic art form, capturing moments. The beauty of *Boyhood* in itself its nostalgic you know.

## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

Cinema is nostalgic, and the theatre is present tense, it only lives in the moment you know. And what's beautiful about getting terrible reviews in a play is then you have to go out and do it, and really the rubber meets the road. Because if you're doing it for accolades or you're doing it for everyone to love you then there's no reason to go on stage, because they hate you, you know. And if you're doing it to be a part of a collective dialogue, or if, you know what I mean, there's strength in that. And there was something kind of wonderful about, I mean I won't say that I wasn't terrified or I wasn't hurt by... I mean in general, I was an only child of a single mom you know; I thought everything I did was dynamite, you know. And I kind of lacked, even when I started, I started a theatre company because I didn't get a couple of parts in some plays. "I can do this, let's put on a play ourselves." I missed as a young man the necessary gene of like fear that I have now. Which leads me to like, you ask is there a third or another one? There is, but I've learned so much about the world, and I've learned so much about, when I was that age I really had a kind of knee-jerk, "Hey I wrote 30 pages, you wanna read it?" I mean that's really how I felt, a little naively you know. And now, now I've read *Moby Dick* you know, and I've read *Anna Karenina*, and it's not that important that you read my book you know, it's really not.

[Laughter]

And I know that. And funnily enough, what scared me more than any critics about the publishing was my parents, you know because if you tell the truth about your inner life at all, then you're gonna disappoint your parents you know. And I was really worried about hurting them, but I really wanted to tell the truth and I wanted to be a serious artist, and I felt like any serious artist has failure, fuck it, I can handle this. But I had no idea about how nervous I would be about my children, which has really been very hard about... I've finished the third novel and I love it, I think it's the best thing I've ever done, and you know I love it, but I can't publish it because my 16 year-old will have a cardiac arrest. And it's not really worth it to me, I want

her to grow up a little bit and I've been incredibly patient with it. And oddly enough it's gotten better, I've done more drafts. You know when I look back on it I think why the hell didn't I do another draft of those books you know, they would have been so much better.

**BH:** So you'll publish it one day?

**EH:** Oh sure, definitely.

**BH:** Oh great, oh there you go. Thank you. Gentleman there in the purple.

**Q:** Yeah I was, I suddenly sat up, sorry I haven't seen the film, but Shakespeare and Company and I was there doing a play of mine, *Sorry About Jack Kerouac*, the 2003 first Shakespeare and Company festival, and we were wishing you were there, but we sent over to his club for Johnny Depp and he didn't show up either so we had to get a local actor play Jack Kerouac. But anyway, all that, and then there was George Whitman, who may have named himself after Walt I'm not sure, and the original Shakespeare and Company which he bought that shop I think in '54 or something, published *Ulysses*. And on a completely slightly random point, Paul Thomas Anderson was around the other day and somebody asked him why his dialogue was so good, and he said it wasn't his dialogue, it was Thomas Pynchon's, and I asked him can we expect *Gravity's Rainbow* next, and he said he couldn't finish reading that because it was too difficult. What I'm really interested in, who are your literary gods? Are they Thomas Pynchon, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, or other people?

**EH:** Literary gods? My literary god would be Tolstoy. You know, I kind of think there's Shakespeare, and then there's Tolstoy, and then there's a lot of other people. But I think that Tolstoy was a giant you know, so when I think about what literature, you know mostly because, you know when we were talking about that high art, low art thing? You know Thomas Pynchon is a genius and he's brilliant, but it's very difficult to read. And what's beautiful about Tolstoy is there isn't an idea and a concept that he doesn't tackle from politics to religion, to Eastern, Western, from Catholicism to



## BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke

18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

Buddhism, to slavery and, I mean it's very, he attacks it all in a really simplistic voice, a voice that is approachable to anybody. And while there is a beauty and a kind of John Updike pyrotechnics of language, for me, John Steinbeck, Tolstoy, Salinger, you know, people who are kind of, I feel they're writing right from their heart, that moves me the most.

**BH:** Thank you. Yeah, the gentleman just about four rows from the back.

**Q:** Hi, I just wondered about your perspective on the Sony hacking crisis and the pulling of *The Interview* from cinemas? How would you feel if one of your films got pulled from the cinema, and do you think...

**EH:** Got pulled from a cinema. Well whenever they censor anything, you know the great thing about the, you know the Russian literature and stuff when it was heavily censored, is they said the literature was never as good as soon as you got rid of the censors. The great thing about being censored is you make writing important, do you know? Right now there's this great, people are, you know there's this void in criticism, you know I do these interviews, nobody fact checks anymore. When I first started doing interviews they would call you up and fact check, nobody does that anymore at all. I mean *The New Yorker's* the only place left that fact checks, and writing is not important and ideas aren't important. And the second they censor that movie, and the second these terrorists say they're gonna kill somebody because they do it, wow you just made that piece of art important you know, and there's something awesome about that. And now everybody in the world wants to see that movie you know.

[Laughter]

And they will, and as soon as you make something taboo. I mean the breasts are the great example you know, cover it up and all of a sudden, "Let me see it, let me see it." And the same is true of ideas. I know, you think that's gross, but I like breasts, I ought to say it.

[Laughter]

And so it's this beautiful, beautiful speech that Tom Stoppard puts in Vladimir Belinsky's mouth you know in his play *Coast of Utopia*, about the beauty of censorship, about it inspires people to really take ideas seriously. Because it lets you know that there's a war. There always is a war, you know consciousness is fighting, openness, beauty, forgiveness, compassion is always at war with fear, anger, jealousy, greed, it's always happening, there's always people in this world that are trying to shut ideas down, and sometimes they're totally invisible. And two things are to blame for that censorship, the weakness of Sony, and the scumbags who are threatening people. And it creates an interesting dialogue for us to say hey, what do we think about this? So in a way I'm grateful to it.

**BH:** Thank you. I liked the breasts analogy, I thought it was great. We've only got time for one more question, so who shall we go for? There's a lady there, yeah, thank you.

**Q:** Hello. Just to ask you because obviously you came up in the film industry at a very young age, thinking about the actors of this generation, are you, how would you feel Ethan of this generation coming up at such a young age with TMZ, all the people coming into your private life a lot more. How do you think the actors cope these days, and how would you cope if you were younger in this generation?

**EH:** I don't know, I was talking about it earlier, like if you think about even the state of photography. I got to work with a director that we didn't mention, Pawel Pawlikowski, who's a brilliant director. And his use of photography is very classic and very beautiful, and I was looking, if you haven't seen his new film *Ida* it's absolutely out of sight, and how much harder it is to make an arresting image now, because I think there have been more photographs taken in the last probably 18 months than have been taken in the history of the world before it. And if you take the last five years since the invention, since the iPhone became a common, or a smartphone became a common thing. So photography itself is

## **BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Ethan Hawke**

**18 December 2014 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London**

changing right, so this is changing the film industry while not only in distribution, but even in how it's made and what we do. Then throw onto it how much young people, their egos are so huge anyway, and they see themselves in third person anyway, and Facebook and all this stuff is making people, it's fanning the flames of that self-importance, and it is eliminating the amount of time we spend bored. My son and daughter are, they're never bored, you know they always have something thrilling to do on the damn phone, you know and if you deny it to them it seems so weird you know, it seems like, what are you, you're crazy, I mean all their friends are, it's a different climate we're living in. And I really, if I had advice for young actors, I'll tell you what I've done scenes with young actors now and they're on their phone, and you know sometimes up until action you know, and I think, you think this isn't affecting your work? Like you think, this is, our whole job is about imagination. And what I really think is, oh my God; Phil Seymour Hoffman would take your head off.

[Laughter]

And I don't know what's gonna happen, because I kind of feel, I don't know what to say to them because I didn't grow up with that, and I don't know what it's like, and I'm sure there's going to be insane advantages to it you know.

**Q:** Do you think it's for the worse, though?

**BH:** Is it for the worse?

**EH:** Every generation thinks the new generation is for the worst right, so I'm always dubious, you're announcing yourself as old as whenever you say, "Those young people are stupid," you know. But if I were their friend and they asked, I would tell them not to be scared to be bored, and I would tell them that there's probably no need for 90 percent of the things they're doing with their day you know.

**BH:** I'm going to cheekily wrap this up by saying we haven't been bored tonight, and thank you so much for answering all our questions. Thank you all for coming.

Thanks to Deutsche Bank and Ethan Hawke.

[Applause]