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British Academy of Film and Television Arts
The 2005 David Lean Lecture given by Woody Allen

Transcript



BRITISH
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OF FILM AND
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ARTS

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The David Lean Lecture is named in honour of a man who was not only one of the UK's finest directors, but also a key member of the group of famous British filmmakers who nearly 60 years ago established the British Film Academy. The David Lean Foundation, an educational charity established in 1997 with funds generated by David's films, shares many of the objects and aspirations of our Academy, and we are very grateful to the foundation and to its trustee, Anthony Reeves, for joining with us five years ago to establish and support this annual lecture given in David's name.

Each year, 213 privileged members of the British film industry – in fact as many of you as we can cram into our Princess Anne Theatre – gather to hear from someone who has made a major contribution to the artistic development of the film form. Tonight, that description rings especially true. We are obviously absolutely delighted that Woody Allen, a man who needs no introduction to this or any UK audience, has come to the Academy to speak about his work. All the more so because after 40 years of making movies that, whatever else they are, are always love letters to Manhattan, he seems to have fallen for London. Naturally we are all aflutter, enormously flattered but afraid to take anything for granted. Is it the real thing, or just a

way of doubling Woody's chances for a date on a Saturday night at the movies? I hope that tonight we'll learn the truth.

Drawing Woody out is a man who, in addition to being a BAFTA member, is the film critic for Radio 5, a writer for [The Observer](#), contributing editor to [Sight And Sound](#), and a regular contributor to the BBC's [Culture Show](#) and [Newsnight Review](#), Mark Kermode. Thank you very much to Mark for taking on the enjoyable but important job of asking the questions.

And now, because we know from Woody that "eternity is a very long time, especially towards the end," I think I'd better move on. We are going to kick start the evening with a short compilation of clips from Woody Allen's career.

Duncan Kenworthy OBE
Chairman of the Academy

Mark Kermode: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I'm going to talk to Mr Allen for about 40 minutes, and then he has very kindly agreed to take 20 minutes of questions from the audience. Let's start by talking about [Match Point](#). It's your first film in the UK, in London. What brought you here? How much was London an influence on the story?

Woody Allen: I shot it in England because that's who gave me the money, that's really the story. In the United States they are perfectly willing to bankroll my films but they want to participate. The studios like to participate. They don't like to be thought of as "just bankers," that's their phrase. They want to read the script before they invest their money, they want to talk about the casting and they want to generally give input. I have never worked that way and can't work that way – not out of any arrogance or ego – I just am not comfortable working that way and I've never had to do it. In the United States industry, this is required more and more.

In Europe, and in England in this particular case, it's not a studio system. The artist is able to work more freely and is less encumbered. I was able to come over here and work for people that respected all the artistic idiosyncrasies that I have, so it was a pleasure to come and do the picture. Originally I created it for New York City and had to Anglicise it, but this was not as hard as one might think. There were a number of changes I had to make but they were basically cosmetic because London is not that dissimilar from New York City. Although it's more tacit, a class structure exists in the United States. In England, it's out in the open, spoken about more. In America, there is the sense of a very equal democracy but, the truth of the matter is, there is a great class system; the story worked very well for New York. I could have done it there, but it was a fairly easy transition to London. I had a very nice time making the picture here – such a nice time that I returned last summer and shot another film.

Mark Kermode: Since we are here at BAFTA, and since you said that you had such a good experience working here, I wonder whether you could spend a couple

of minutes just lavishing praise on the British film industry and how good it is.

Woody Allen: Well, I can. I was trepidatious when I first came here because I made all my movies in New York. The sudden thought of living in a different environment for an extended period of time and not being in my own bed and having all my little habits within arm's reach was frightening to me. I had no idea what it would be like working with English crews but I found it to be a delightful experience. Everyone was wonderful; there is a great pool of enormously gifted actors and actresses. In [Match Point](#), every one-line part, every tiny bit part, is beautifully played. I mean it's just impeccably played, which was really something I appreciated.

I fell in love with the London weather. For me, it's a treat. You know, if you have a melancholy disposition, this is a wonderful climate. And I do. I sometimes wait for days on end for clouds and overcast conditions in New York City. Also in the summer, when I usually shoot, New York is very hot. In London, it was cool and the skies were grey all the time and this was wonderful for photography. I found London very obviously cosmopolitan, like New York, full of action and culture, full of theatre and museums and restaurants. My family had a wonderful time here, so it was a great, great experience on [Match Point](#). I came back the following year and did another film because I kind of looked forward to spending another summer here and shooting. It was that pleasurable the first time around.

Mark Kermode: Many members of the audience will have seen [Match Point](#), and some of them won't. Is it possible to describe the basic outline of the film for those who haven't seen it yet?

Woody Allen: I don't want to give anything away, but it's simply the story of a young man who is a tennis instructor. He gets a job teaching another young man who comes from a very wealthy family. He is taken in by that family and starts a relationship with the young man's sister. The family is very good to him but he also gets involved with the young man's fiancée and finds

himself in a terrible dilemma. He's involved deeply with his good friend's sister and his good friend's fiancée. And this leads to an agglomeration of life-threatening situations and harrowing adventures.

I was very lucky because I got this great cast to play it. I got Scarlett Johansson for the girl and the British cast comprises everyone else in the film. I was able to get Jonathan Rhys Myers, who is this incredibly beautiful, tortured, sensitive actor. It was a pleasure to work with him because all his emotions are on the surface. It is nothing for him to call up the deepest kind of conflicts and he has these big sensual lips and Scarlett has these big sensual lips and so you can imagine the chemistry between them. It's physics, not chemistry.

Matthew Goode was a young British actor that I didn't know but when I saw him on tape I just thought he was born to play his part. Brian Cox came along and Penelope Wilton and Emily Mortimer, who I had always wanted to work with. They fleshed out my script in a way that brings enormous pleasure to a writer because, when you write it at home, you do your best but it is kind of lifeless. Then suddenly you get these people saying the lines and interacting and, in this case, everybody came together. I caught every break you could possibly imagine on the picture. If we needed a rainy day to shoot, I got a rainy day; if I needed a sunny day, I got a sunny day. This was the picture that I couldn't screw up, no matter how hard I tried. Everything fell in place for me. I don't think I could do it again. It was just perfect.

Mark Kermode: *It's well known that you don't like to watch your films after you've finished. But it has been reported that after you finished Match Point you said, "You know, actually I'm very proud of this." Do you think Match Point might be the film that you break your golden rule with, and go back to watch at some point in the future?*

Woody Allen: Well, I don't want to get crazy. I like the picture; I'm not in love with it! You know, I've made a lot of pictures over the years. Usually, I'm very critical because most of them disappoint me when I'm finished. I have these grandiose ideas when I'm plotting them at home alone in the bedroom. I think I'm going to make

Citizen Kane all the time and then I make the picture and it comes out to be, you know, not as good as I had hoped. So I'm very critical of most of my films. This picture, as I say, just came together beautifully. I take some credit but a lot of it was just good luck. So I watched it, but I don't like to watch [movies] after I make them because when you go back and look at your old films you only see the mistakes. There is always a weak spot or a mistake, at the very minimum, that you know you could make better because time has elapsed. So I don't like to look at them again because I become anxious and depressed and think "Oh God, I did this so poorly, if only I had another 10 million dollars I could correct that." But of course, I don't have it.

Mark Kermode: *Without wanting to give away the plot, Match Point does have a very dark side about guilt and, you said it yourself, life-threatening acts. To some extent, it harks back to Crimes And Misdemeanours. Do you see any connection between those two films?*

Woody Allen: I myself don't see any connection outside the obvious one – they are blood stories in both cases. But the moral issue in Crimes And Misdemeanours is basically a religious issue. It was an existential issue in relation to a Godless universe, in the sense that if you commit a crime of some sort there may be nobody out there to punish you. So if it doesn't bother you and you get away with it, then great. You are the only one who has to make the moral choices for your own life. If you can live with it, then you can do it.

In Match Point, the basic theme of the picture is that we are all dependent on luck to a much greater extent than we like to believe. We like to feel that we control our lives, that we make our luck. We feel if we work hard and stick to it, we'll accomplish something. If we exercise and don't smoke and eat right, then our health will be good. We feel these things, and many others, are under our control. They are, to a small degree, but much smaller than we think. We are largely dependent on luck. This is a terrifying notion to think about. You know, if you turn the wrong corner, if you go out of the house and you are at the wrong place at the wrong time – the falling

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piano hits you. It's very dicey stuff. They are both dark films, but the basic heart of them is quite different.

Mark Kermode: *You're a quintessential American filmmaker but you grew up watching European movies and specifically, as I think is very well known, you're a great admirer of Bergman. What was it about Bergman's films that spoke so clearly to you?*

Woody Allen: What I liked about Bergman, and still like about him, is a few things combined. One is that he touches on – not just touches on but explores – all the themes that are very meaningful to me personally. You know, man's terrifying position in the universe, the silence of God and the inability to communicate with other people. These are all themes that resonated very profoundly with me. He presented these themes when no other filmmaker was really dealing with them; he dealt with them quite explicitly. He considered them with style and great flair. Most importantly, as a great entertainer, he was giving you movies that were full of very intellectual themes – referencing Danish and German philosophy and quite deep issues – and it wasn't like homework. You'd go to a Bergman film and it wasn't like, "Well I know this

is great because they tell me, but it's kind of boring. Yet I'm sure it's wonderful and good for me..." It wasn't like that at all. You'd go and sit on the edge of your seat because he electrified you with a great sense of theatre and drama. While he was doing that, you were seeing something that was well worth your while as a mature grown-up. These were not the usual cinematic themes but themes that were explored more in European literature. I went to his films all the time and saw them over and over and was constantly riveted by his theatricality and his drama. He had a great sense of acting, a great sense of photography and there was a stunning tension to the films and profound intellectual content that I could go home and think about.

Mark Kermode: *There are some Bergman films which are loosely defined as comedies, but you've never been a fan of Bergman's comedy films, have you?*

Woody Allen: I personally haven't. Everyone tells me that Smiles Of A Summer Night is a great film and I'm sure it is. It is elegant and tasteful and it's got a beautiful moment at the end but it's not his strong suit. He did another film, a colour film, that's a comedy. They're fine and they're interesting because it's him and you want to know what he

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thinks is funny, but they are not nearly as fulfilling as his dramatic films.

Mark Kermode: *There’s been a great resurgence of interest, particularly here recently, about your early stand-up work. The albums have been re-issued. I first interviewed you ten years ago and I asked if you would ever consider doing stand-up again. You said: “I can’t because the preparation for each act is too much.” But then I heard you on the radio saying that if you could do just one gig, you might consider it.*

Woody Allen: I was a nightclub comedian and it’s really hard work. Not only because you do two to three shows a night, night after night after night, month after month throughout a series of nightclubs – if you want to survive, that’s how you do it. You can’t just cherry pick your spots and do a little concert here and there. In addition to that, when you come out on stage you are all alone and you face the public alone. Some folks are out there for an hour or more sometimes. You’ve got to make them laugh one after the other, it’s so concentrated; you need so many jokes. They can’t look like jokes; it’s got to look like you’re just talking and you’re a regular human being chatting with them. It can’t look obvious.

So you’re talking and it requires a certain amount of acting skill and you chat with them and you’re in a certain sense ‘speaking in joke’ but they don’t know it. You’re not speaking the way you speak to your butcher or next door neighbour.

You’ve got to have a million funny things to say. For every one joke that works, six or ten don’t. It takes a long time to accumulate an hour of really dynamite nightclub material and I couldn’t make that commitment. It would take two years or a year away from movie-making. And then I wouldn’t simply be able to say, ‘I’d like to do one concert here and one six months later’. You have to get back into that grind and I just wouldn’t like to do that now. But it is pleasurable – when you have the material and you’ve done it before – to walk out there and know you’ve got a full house or a royal flush or something. You get out and nail the audience and they laugh and you’re out there with them for an hour and they are enjoying it. It’s a very, very exhilarating experience.

Mark Kermode: *There was a hint of that when you made your appearance on the Oscar stage, when they did the tribute to New York. You came on stage for a few minutes of stand-up and telling jokes. It was evident that you were enjoying yourself.*

Woody Allen: I was enjoying myself. I went on the show because the terrible 9/11 tragedy had occurred and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in LA was doing a very nice thing. They felt bad about New York and they wanted to make a special tribute and they wanted someone from NY to come on, and so I did.

I didn’t want to just go out and seem like a gloomy, self-pitying, poor New Yorker so I wrote a couple of lines for myself before I began and tried to be amusing in as skilful a way as I could. I got some laughs and it was fun. I did get a sense, that old sense, of working in clubs again. But it is interesting when you work the Academy, when you work that atmosphere, because of the size of the audience and the particular room, there’s a beat before the laugh comes back. In a nightclub, you say the joke and the laugh comes right back. There I would say it and there was a little bit of a pause, and then the laugh would come back and you’re very sensitive to those meticulous nuances.

Mark Kermode: *On a performance level, what about playing your music? I think you’re playing here in Brighton, is that right?*

Woody Allen: Yes. I don’t say this with any false modesty but I’m a terrible clarinet player. I love to play jazz and I’m terribly devoted to it and I play it with enormous enthusiasm and dedication, but I’m terrible. I don’t have a great sense of rhythm or a great ear for music. I go and I play with my jazz band – we play New Orleans music which is a very obscure form anyhow – and we fill up these opera houses and concert halls. It’s because people have seen me in the movies and they come more to watch than to listen to me. Monday night we’re going out to Brighton, we’re going to drive out there and the band’s going to be there, and we’re giving a concert at a big venue and we’ll play this real authentic New Orleans music. We do take ourselves seriously and we play very authentically. It’s stuff that, believe me, most of you will not care about for two seconds. It’s Jelly Roll Morton and old Louis Armstrong records and things like that, but it’s meaningful to us. People pay to see us and they are enthusiastic and sweet about it, so it’s fun.

Mark Kermode: *Music has played a very significant role in your films. There are scenes in Manhattan which play like a musical and you actually made a musical in the shape of Everyone Says I Love You. I interviewed you around that time and you said that the greatest surprise was discovering that when you do musical interludes, the film becomes extremely long.*

Woody Allen: Right, I was shocked to find that out. I wanted to make a musical for people who couldn’t sing and dance because I thought that would be fun. The average person gets into the shower and sings, or walks down the street and sings. I thought it would be fun to do a musical where you don’t get these wonderful trained voices but just average people singing and dancing and doing the best they can. Who cares if it’s not perfect? And so I made this movie and I got classic songs and integrated them. Then I found that the movie was very long because each song is three minutes or more, and people sing and dance, and suddenly I found myself with a 2½ hour movie. So I had to cut out a number of very good musical numbers that were really delightful.

Mark Kermode: *King Kong is three hours; it’s perfectly fine. You could just put it all back together again at 2½ hours.*

Woody Allen: King Kong may hold up for three hours but my musical would not have. You would have dozed off, I think, at three hours.

Mark Kermode: *One of my favourite films is Sweet And Lowdown. It’s clear to me you have a passion for that story about the outlaw musician. Tell us something about the invention of a character who is clearly based on a very famous guitarist.*

Woody Allen: I was going to play that character years ago, completely not knowing at the time that I never would have done a good job on it and that I would have played it quite terribly. When I first wrote that script, I was going to play the guitar player but cooler heads said, “I don’t think you should; this is not really your kind of thing.” So I put it in the drawer and 15-20 years later I took it out, reworked it a little bit and got Sean Penn to

do it, thankfully. The character that he plays is largely based on Django Reinhart, the famous guitar player, but it's an amalgamation of other musicians. There's a little bit of Jelly Roll Morton, there's a little bit of King Oliver. There are little anecdotes about musicians that I know that I threw in to round out the character and make him interesting. Sean had never picked up a guitar in his life, so we gave him lessons before we shot the movie. He played the guitar and when he couldn't play, he faked it, so that I didn't have to do those kinds of shots where you'd see somebody else's hands. There were never somebody else's hands playing. I could film Sean and pan down and it would be his hands. He was amazing.

I didn't discover her but I found out that there was this little, wonderful English girl named Samantha Morton who I just saw at that point in a very off beat, tiny film that Juliet Taylor (my casting director) showed me. The minute I saw her face, I thought she was like something that stepped out of silent movies with Charlie Chaplin; it was just wonderful. I paired the two of them together and Sean's brutality and her sweetness were a wonderful combination in the movie. It's full of wonderful music and beautifully photographed by a Chinese cameraman who spoke no English. We did the picture together and it's one of my favourites but it had a very small audience, not a lot of people came to see it.

Mark Kermode: *You also got a fantastic performance from another great British actor, Kenneth Branagh, in Celebrity, which again was an unusual bit of casting because that character was very much against stuff Branagh had done in the past. Why him for that role?*

Woody Allen: Well, you know I always loved Kenneth Branagh, I was always a great fan of him. I was looking for an American actor and couldn't find one, is the truth. Then I started to think, well maybe I could get an English actor who could do an American accent and who would be correct for the part. Kenneth did the part and a lot of people said: "you should have done that part, he's doing you." But he wasn't doing me. I could never have done that part the way Kenneth did it. First of all,

he's 30 years younger than me and he did it with such dimension. If I played it, yes, I would have gotten a certain amount of laughs but Kenneth did a much more complicated, much deeper version. Kenneth is an actor who can play Shakespeare, who can play Chekhov, who is a superb three-dimensional actor. I'm a one-dimensional actor. I was very, very lucky to get him because I thought he fit the part perfectly.

Mark Kermode: *On this subject of 'doing you', of roles that people interpret as you in films – I know this happens all the time and you have to say: "people interpret those roles as me and it's not me; it's somebody else." However, around the time of Deconstructing Harry you did say to me that the role of Harry in that film was closer to you than anything that you had done up to then. Were you being serious about that?*

Woody Allen: I was being sarcastic. I'll tell you why. I knew everyone would think that I was Harry because he was a writer. And if you think I'm Harry – a guy sitting home, drinking, having prostitutes come over to the house, blocked as a writer, kidnapping his child – you know it's not me; I can't do it. I've never had a writer's block in my life. I'm a very modest drinker, I'm not an alcoholic, I don't have women coming over to my house for paid sex night after night, I don't have the nerve to kidnap my child or any child; it's just not me. I'm not a good actor; I don't have a big range. But the one thing I do, I can do well.

I've played an intellectual neurotic over the years – and I've said this before publicly – the public thinks that I'm intellectual because I wear these glasses, and they think I'm an artist because my films lose money. Neither is true. I'm not an artist, I'm not an intellectual and I'm not neurotic. I'm not saying I don't have a quirk here and there; you know, everybody has that. But I've played the part of a neurotic so much that everybody thinks when they see the character on screen that I'm a person in relentless psychoanalysis, afraid of this and afraid of that, phobic and crazy and immersed in one unpleasant relationship after another. Not true. I was 70 a few weeks ago; I have had maybe one bad relationship in my life and all the rest have been great. I've had long term relationships

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with everyone I work with, I'm very productive, I'm not a drinker, I'm not a druggie, I don't sit home morbidly obsessed with things. I lead a very, very middle class life, totally unlike Harry in Deconstructing Harry. I get up in the morning, I take the kids to school, I do the treadmill, I work on my writing, I practise my clarinet, I go to the basketball game. You'd be bored stiff if you had a close look at my life.

Mark Kermode: *In Stardust Memories, there's this famous scene of a filmmaker who's tried to change direction and his audience kind of doesn't want to come with him. The extraordinary thing is that over the course of the movies that you've made – which have gone from farce to historical drama to murder mystery to magic – the audience has come with you. I wonder whether you have any understanding of how you've managed to change gear so much and whether you ever feel there have been occasions when it's been harder than others?*

Woody Allen: I think it has always been hard, and they come reluctantly. You know after Annie Hall, I did Interiors. Some people liked the movie very much but there were many people who were really angry at me. It wasn't just that they said, "I don't like this film," which is fine if they don't

like it. But they would say that it was a film made in bad faith and that it was a betrayal of my muse. They levelled accusations at me which went beyond simply "you made a bad film," which I do as much as anybody else does. Whenever I make a film the audience comes reluctantly. Over the years, I've brought them with me and lost them and brought them back and tap danced and did a little con job and did a little publicity and had a lucky film. I've managed in some way, that combines luck and a little talent and a lot of indulgent people, to have a long-term career on my own terms – working the way I want, doing the films I want to do, having people abandon their dedication very, very often, losing money a portion of the time, breaking even some of the time and making money sometimes – never really a bonanza. I've managed to do it with guts and luck and the indulgence of some nice people who've sponsored me. It has been a continual fight but I have managed to keep it going since I was 30 years old.

Mark Kermode: *One last thing from me before we throw it open to the audience: obviously some of the films have been more financially successful than others. I know you don't watch them but when you look back at the*

arc of films that you've made, are there any that you're particularly proud of, where you think: "you know, actually, that was pretty good"?

Woody Allen: Yes, there are some I'm proud of. Proud for me is not proud for you necessarily. Proud for me means I had an idea when I was home and I got all excited over the idea, then I executed it. When I see the film I think "great, look at that, I made the film that I set out to make", so I'm proud of it. Most of the time I don't make the film I set out to make. I screw up, I make mistakes, I'm forced to make compromises, I do things I shouldn't do. There have been a few films over the years that I've felt very satisfied by. One of these films, interestingly, is Match Point.

I'm the first to say I was lucky on Match Point and I don't know if I could do it again but if you see the film, you'll like it. I'm telling you, it really works. Other films that I like that you may or may not like were The Purple Rose Of Cairo and Husbands And Wives because I had a particular idea and I fulfilled it. Both were critically acclaimed films of mine, certainly in the United States, that maybe broke even at the box office at best. But they are films of mine that I much prefer to others that were financially and publicly successful. I also had a pretty good feeling in terms of fulfilment of an idea with Bullets Over Broadway. It was a concept of mine and I worked it out. When I saw what I had when it was over, I felt that I had not ruined it.

***Audience:** A little earlier when you were answering the question about Sweet And Lowdown, you said it was a script that you put in a drawer for 15 years. Do you have lots of other scripts in drawers?*

Woody Allen: I don't have lots of other scripts. This has been one of the lucky things of my life: I have never had to spend a lot of time raising money because I've been for the most part involved in multiple picture deals where studios would put up money for six pictures. It's very little money for each picture, as I always work with small budgets but for that small budget I get a lot of freedom. As soon as I pull the script out of the typewriter, I can bring it to my producer

and get it budgeted right away and that's usually what I do. [Sweet And Lowdown] is very rare; I think it's probably the only time that I listened to people and said "you're right, I don't think I could play this part," and dumped the script. But I don't have other scripts in my drawer.

***Audience:** Do you think you might consider having a chat with Mel Brooks about the wellspring of comedy? I think it might be really fascinating to have that put down on film for future reference.*

Woody Allen: I've never thought of it because those things come out boring all the time, when you get two guys talking about their profession. I did a thing for The New York Times once, me and Martin Scorsese had a chat and, you know, you could go to sleep. It's not what you'd think it might be. You think: "these guys are two directors, they probably have a lot to say and exchange ideas and stimulate each other," but it gets to be a study in deference. I love Mel Brooks; I wrote the Sid Caesar show with him when I was very young and he was the big writer on the show at the time. He was very nice to me and very lovely and over the years I've certainly been quite friendly with him.

***Audience:** Can you say a bit about where you think cinema is going at the moment, specifically with regard to the digital revolution that is flowing through various aspects of cinema. Is that something you find interesting and possibly useful?*

Woody Allen: There is a sense that society has dumbed down. This, of course, can't be true. It's an illusion I think that every generation has about past generations. They think that the past generation was great and you get all these old men and old women saying "In my day this was great but they are so stupid now and they're doing such bad films now, this is terrible." There is a sense that movies are not going anywhere creatively, that [studios] are making films that are special effects films and big budget films to make big profits from. And a sense they've given up on small movies that are quality movies because the small profit doesn't interest them anymore. It appears that way but I don't think it's really true.

Digital technology will improve constantly, home screens will become more spectacular and every family will not have the hassle of going to the cinema and waiting in line and getting a bad seat. You'll have a big screen in your house and it will be razor sharp definition and you'll call up and say "at 8:15 I want the Barbra Streisand film shown in my house" and they'll bill it to your phone. That night, your friends will come over and you'll see it and it will be great. There will be no reel changes. It will be very wonderful but it will be a different experience and the communal experience that we've been used to since Greek times will go back to the theatre. People will still go to rock concerts but they will go back to the theatre because something in the human being craves that communal dramatic interaction. You won't get it in movies. Movie theatres will close more and more and it will become home video. It's probably a good thing, and there will be a revitalisation of theatre as a communal experience. That's my crackpot theory.

***Audience:** Mark has touched on the fact that some of your mid-period films like Interiors and September may possibly be seen as an homage to Bergman. I was wondering to what extent Hitchcock and late 50s/early 60s thrillers influenced Match Point?*

Woody Allen: Well, of course I never see my films as homages in any way. September to me was a film that was Chekhovian, bad Chekhovian but Chekhovian, not Bergmanesque in my opinion. I wasn't thinking of Hitchcock when I made Match Point. I was thinking, really, of showing the audience that luck is something that we are totally contingent upon in our lives. Having said that, when you grow up watching these people with great affection, like Hitchcock who I love and Bergman who I love, and many other filmmakers who I love but those two certainly, these things get into you by osmosis and creep into your work without you knowing it. It becomes part of the anxiety of your influence and you know – just like a musician who grows up listening constantly to Charlie Parker or Louis Armstrong or whoever you love – when they play, you tend to hear that person in their playing until they rid themselves of that

influence. That's what I think happens to me and other filmmakers, but certainly to me. Having grown up adoring Bergman and Hitchcock as well, these things get into your blood and they come out in your work unconsciously. If you see those things, they are probably in there but I never meant them to be in there.

***Audience:** You've written some great parts for women over the years. You direct women well and a lot of actresses say the one thing they'd really like is to be in one of your films. Some great actresses like Diane Keaton and Dianne Weist have done their very best work in your movies; you bring out great performances in these women. I wondered why you think that is?*

Woody Allen: Well, you know, it's funny. This will sound again like I'm being facetious but it's because I hire very good actors and I don't get in their way. I hire great people. They were great before they met me, they're great after they leave me and, if I don't ruin them, they're great when they're with me. I give them very free rein. I always let my actors eliminate any lines from the script that they hate, add any lines that they think are great, and improvise. I give them an enormous amount of freedom.

Some of the best moments that you see and best lines and best emotional peaks that they hit are things that they're doing by themselves. They're making them up and so, at the end of the film, it looks terrific but it's because they're doing it. They are very gifted people who are doing their thing and I'm not interfering. I'm not dotting the "I"s and crossing the "T"s and telling them exactly what to do. I don't go under the assumption that my instincts are better than theirs. I assume that their instincts are at least as good as mine and very often better. By giving them all this freedom they have not let me down over the years.

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