

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

Danny Leigh: Let me say first thank you to Audi for their support tonight and their sponsorship for the whole Life in Pictures Strand. We are here tonight to celebrate the remarkable career of Jeremy Irons, but let's remind ourselves first of a least some of its highlights.

[clip plays]

[applause]

DL: I could have watched a lot more of that! I could have watched a lot more of that as I'm sure you could too, but please join me now in welcoming to the stage the one, the only Jeremy Irons.

[applause]

Jeremy Irons: I'll just take my coat off.

DL: Make yourself comfortable.

Jl: Thank you.

DL: How are you?

Jl: I'm really well -

DL: Good

Jl: A bit warm, but really well.

[laughter]

DL: Good, good, good, this is a good start. I want to go right back to the beginning though and find out where this - we're doing a lot tonight - I want to find out where this love affair with acting started because - shall I let you comport yourself?

Jl: Yeah, just trying to get comfortable.

[laughter]

DL: Everyone just talk amongst themselves for a moment. I think we're good now.

Jl: I think we're good.

DL: Excellent, excellent.

[laughter]

DL: I'm just going to let that happen. So... For a lifelong actor, you started out in another art form, didn't you, because my understanding is that as a schoolboy in Dorset, Jeremy Irons was not an actor at all, but in fact a schoolboy musician, is that right?

Jl: Well, I used to play in a band. We were called The Four Pillars of Wisdom.

[laughter]

DL: Excellent.

Jl: And we wore Arab headdresses. And did cover songs, you know... The Beatles, and Buddy Holly and that sort of thing. And we would practice in the school time and then we would play at Deb dances and things, to make a little bit, which was nice.

DL: And you played...and you were...?

Jl: I played the drums and the harmonica.

DL: Okay. And do you still play?

Jl: I do. I'm not very good at the drums, I haven't really kept that up. Henry Marsh, who still plays with Sailor, he was our rhythm guitarist and our main singer. Fantastic talent. And he was my buddy at school, my mate. And we had a terrible row one night and walked, he had his guitar over his neck and he walked through a doorway and he broke the neck of the guitar. And he took it off and he said, "now look at what you've done! You- whatever." And threw it on the floor. And I said, don't throw that on the floor, I'll have it. And I had it and I mended it and I learnt to play it. So I started playing guitar and that's the instrument which really stayed with me. Travels with me. And for a time was my way of life. After school, I used to busk. Leicester Square. Did the he cinema queues. And at that time, I was earning £12, no I wasn't, I was earning £5 a week. And I got my board and lodgings for a But I could get £5 in the cinema in one queue for one cinema. So it was like I'd struck gold. It was extraordinary.

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London

DL: So where does acting come in to the equation in that case? Because if you're enjoying yourself as a busker in Leicester Square, where does the urge come in to then take -

Jl: Well, people kept saying as they do when you leave school, what are you gonna do? And I went to a boarding school in Dorset and I was surrounded by people, not the sort of people I really wanted to spend the rest of my life with and they all had plans to become bankers or go in the army or do serious jobs. And I thought oh God, I can't. You know those days you thought you'd start a career and do it for the rest of your life. It's not like that now. People chop and change a bit, thank God, but that it was I thought I'd have to go through.

And I'd sort of fallen in love a bit with, I'd read a lot of acting biographies, actor's biographies. People like, I remember the first book my Dad gave me was a biography of Charlie Chaplin. And I then went on and read more, Grimaldi the Clown and many Mrs. Siddons and whatever McCreedy and Henry Irving. And I was sort of, without realising it, falling in love with that way of life. And I never thought I'd do it, but knew that I wanted to be, so to speak, "playing to the queue" and then moving on. When I left school, I went and became a social worker in Peckham, just at the time there were tearing Peckham down and building those huge estates. I could see it was not a good idea, but nevertheless I worked for a church, St. Luke's Peckham, who had two worker priests. One was a social worker but not in that area and one was a lawyer. So they were working all the week and I would do all the things you could do without being ordained that they had to do. So I would interview people who wanted to get married and set their dates and whatever. And I played the organ a bit. And restocked the wine. And visited the sick and the old and tried to help the, sort their lives out, but I was always told, you mustn't get involved with these people. You must remain objective, don't get emotionally involved. Of course all I wanted to do was to get emotionally involved. And so I felt that after about six months of that, it wasn't satisfying, I was getting nothing

back. I was giving quite a lot out. And I thought, I wonder whether the theatre, maybe...

Anyway, I'd found an advertisement at the back of The Stage newspaper, which asked for an Acting ASM down at the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury. So I applied and I got the job. I started working, I think I worked for about four to five months at the Marlowe and I loved the smells of the glue on the sides on the flats, and I liked the attitude of the actors, I loved the hours which were sort fairly late for me, starting at about ten and finishing at about two. And the fact that you were working somehow as a group, but outside society. So I thought, I better learn how to do this and strangely enough I instinctively auditioned for drama school. I could have well, cause I'm quite practical, I could well have tried to get a job at a drama school as a technician. But I didn't. Most of them turned me down because I had no real reason for wanting to be an actor and everybody come with these great CVs, they wanted to act since they were two and a half and they's all been to, you know, they'd done television shows and all of this. They said, why do you want to be an actor. And I said, I don't know. I just thought it might be a nice way to spend my life.

[laughter]

DL: Surely that the perfect reason!

Jl: Well I would have thought, but it didn't read well.

[laughter]

Jl: So they all said, come back next year when you've had a think about it. Except for one: the Bristol Old Vic. There was a wonderful principal there called Nat Brenner, who was a man of the theatre, a socialist, and a man who'd been through every job in the theatre: actor, lighting technician, director, producer. Wonderful, wonderful man. And he recognised something in me. He said, if I can get you to stand up straight, you'll look good on the edge of a stage.

[laughter]

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
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London

Jl: And so, I remember my audition, I was doing something from *Richard II*, strangely enough, which I then went on to play years later, but I remember him putting me in a half Nelson, marching me around the rehearsal room, saying "Do the speech, do the speech, stand up straight, stand up straight and do the speech." I think from the end of that realised that probably, I could stand up straight and that I might be useful. I had a wonderful two years there, but when I left all my contemporaries, of which there are many, Tim Pigott Smith was a contemporary, Christopher Biggins was a contemporary. They all thought I'd go and be an antique dealer because...

[audience laughter]

I'd spent most of my time buying antiques at the auction houses in Bristol and doing them up a bit and selling them and making a bit. And buying old pictures and doing them up and selling them. And so they thought that's what I would go into. I didn't show any talent. But for some reason, the company, the Bristol Old Vic company which was one of the great repertory companies of the time and is now, I'm glad to say, is coming up again. But they offered five of us a job. I must have been number five, got in by the skin of my teeth. So I went down there as an Acting ASM, which meant that I painted the flats and I made the props and did a little bit of acting and that was my apprenticeship. I stayed there three years.

DL: And you apprenticed in Bristol and then you came round to London didn't you to work on the stage in '71, I think.

Jl: Was it?

DL: I think it was '71. I'm fairly certain it was '71.

Jl: Well, I'm sure you're right.

[laughter]

DL: You were standing up straight by that point, clearly.

Jl: I was, I was. I remember I came to leave Bristol, we used to have coffee

mornings with the enthusiasts, what are they called, the theatre club. They come and have coffee mornings and meet the actors and somebody said to me, a little old lady said, "Well I expect you'll be moving on soon." And I thought, hello. She's probably right I've been here enough. And so I did a tour of South America with the company, *Taming of the Shrew* and *Hedda Gabler*. And then I came back and I thought, I decided by then, because I'm a middle-class guy for all this sort of gypsy living, I'm a middle-class guy and I thought, I met a lot of people in the three years at Bristol, lot of actors and I thought, I want to be able to fund a mortgage and I want to be able to have a wife and a family. I don't think keep on going in Rep, I'm going to ever be able to afford that. So, I thought I must go to London and get my name known. I came to London, I took a little bedsit in Southwark. And auditioned for everything. Hate auditioning. I was never any good at it. But I thought I got to practice this, so I auditioned for everything and if the job took me, was off Leicester or Nottingham or something, one of the reps there, I'd say thank you very much. And if they offered it to me, which wasn't always, I would say sorry I can't do it actually because I knew I wanted a job in London, but I was practicing. And to pay the daily bread, I worked for a domestics agency. There was in those days, I don't know if it still exists, a company called Domestics Unlimited, that advertised on the back of What's On magazine.

[laughter]

I applied. I loved their logo, cause they said "A refined lady Char from Mill Hill said that if I scrubbed the floor, I feel ill. Her employer said don't. If you can't, then you won't. But Domestics Unlimited will."

[laughter]

DL: It's stayed in your mind, hasn't it? Excellent.

Jl: Yeah, very, very good logo. And because I had a very battered old car, I was fairly old car, I was fairly reliable because I didn't have to rely on public

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

transport to get to wherever they needed people. And so I became quite a favourite of theirs. I mean, how people live, you know. You wouldn't believe it.

[laughter]

Because by the time they call us in, their marriage was over, no one was in control of the children, the house was an absolute tip. And you'd have to wipe the vomit off the floor and the dog dos under the sofa that had been there for sort of years. And it was a great lesson. Of course, having been to public school, I knew how to clean.

[laughter]

DL: Of course, of course.

Jl: So I was very good.

DL: And again, as with the musicianship, is this something that you've kept your hand in with. Could you pop round later?

Jl: Strange enough, today, I was cleaning two shower plugs.

DL: Perfect.

Jl: They get terrible, you know.

[laughter]

DL: One of the, I mean really, part of me really wants to talk about cleaning, cause it's very interesting.

Jl: Yes, people always forget bits, don't they.

DL: Don't they just. Under things.

Jl: Ledges. Under things. That's right.

DL: Yes, yes, yes. Now, music does appear. We've already talked a little bit about music and it does appear to be real theme and *Godspell* was one of your first stage performances down in London. The cliché is always that actors fall in love with the stage first and it remains their true love. Is that true with you? Cause you've had this career which was straddled lots of different -

Jl: I've never fallen in love with the stage. I've had some very happy times. Strangely enough, probably feel more open, more alone on the stage than anywhere else. You're completely private in such a way that you're able to open up, much more than I can in real life. So I'm comfortable on the stage, but no it was never a love affair for me. I mean it was something I was comfortable in. While doing *Godspell*, strangely enough, I remember sitting there on the stage and David Essex, who was playing Jesus, was there and there was a girl called Mandy... oh God, she'll kill me -

[laughter]

DL: She'll be here tonight, won't she? Clearly.

[laughter]

Jl: Probably. Anyway, she was singing a song. And I was just able to drift off a bit and think about the laundry and I remember thinking, you know, I drifted into this business. Not very seriously. And it really suits me. And I think I've got something a little individual to give. I think we get on well. And I remember that moment thinking, yeah. I'd been in the business about I suppose four years, and I thought, I think I was a good choice.

DL: And then throughout the '70s, you're working very regularly on stage and on TV as well. And then you obviously have this moment, the end of the '70s, early '80s, when the first thing that happens I guess is *Brideshead Revisited*, which is what we would now call "an event". It was a TV event. I remember it kind of took over culturally. What are your memories of the circumstances? Because I think it aired at the end of 1981, but it had been filmed quite a long time before that, hadn't it?

Jl: Probably.

DL: Probably.

Jl: I think '79, '80 it was filmed. Well I was doing a play by Simon Gray, for instance, called *The Rear Column*, which

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

Harold Pinter directed. I was doing that in the West End and it was very flashy, cause my name was over the marquee, or one of the names over the marquee, lot of us in it, Simon Ward, Barry Foster, some lovely actress. It's very fun having my name up there, but it's not going to put bums in seats because nobody knows who I am. I've got to do either a film or a television series to get my name known. At that time it was impossible to get a film because Simon Ward, who'd played young Winston, was getting all the roles that I might be right for. So I wasn't having any luck with there. And I was doing a play in Greenwich called *An Audience Called Edouard*, about Édouard Manet. And a friend of mine, actually a friend of my wife's at that time, George Howard, who owns a great pile up north called Castle Howard, he came to see the show, we were sitting having a drink afterwards and he said, have you ever read *Brideshead Revisited*? And I said, no I haven't, Evelyn Waugh, isn't it, I said no haven't read it. He said, well you should, because Grenada Television, which I don't think exist anymore, do they?

DL: I don't think it does.

Jl: No, well. Manchester based. Fantastic television company. They are playing to make a series of the book and there is a great part in it called Sebastian Flyte that you'd be dead right for. So, I thought, great, I'll read it. So I read it and I got in touch with Grenada, I wrote them a letter, saying a gather that you're going to do *Brideshead Revisited* and I'd love to be in it in some way. I got a letter back saying, we haven't got a director yet but we we'll be in touch. But I decided I didn't want to play Sebastian Flyte, I wanted to play Charles Ryder. Sebastian Flyte was very similar to a character I'd played in *Love for Lydia* by H. E. Bates, a man called Alex Sandersen who had a similar route through the story as Sebastian Flyte. He loved his mother too much. He drank too much. He fell off a bridge in Episode 8. And I thought, no I want to keep going to the end.

[laughter]

DL: So that's a seasoned actor by that point.

Jl: Yeah, I suppose. And I wanted to play, I felt Charles Ryder, I don't know how many people have seen it, but I think it still holds up actually. Charles Ryder was a sort of, an Englishman, it needed an actor who wasn't going to perform, but just an actor who was. Very sort of internalised Englishman, not able to show a lot, I mean I've played other of those roles too. I thought, I know that man. I was educated to be that man. And I hope I'll grow out of him. That's the one I want to play. I don't want to see another actor play that and make him with his emotions on his sleeve. He had to be like a host at a good party, just get people together and enjoy them, but actually not play too much on the front foot.

Anyway, they got in touch and they said we'd love you to do something come and meet us and I went and met and they said, will you do Sebastian and I said, no I want to do Charles, and they got into a bit of a fuss about that. But eventually, they found someone to play Sebastian, Anthony Andrews, who did it magnificently. And I had a very happy 18 months, except for after five months, we had a strike at Grenada, a technician's strike, so everything stopped. And I had promised a wonderful director, now dead, called Karel Reisz that eventually play this part in this film called *The French Lieutenant's Woman* opposite Meryl Streep. He said, I'd love you to play it. He was dead right, because I was very good casting, despite how I played it. But I said, you can't cause the studios won't let you cast me, cause I'm not a star. He said, well leave it with me. And he called me during the first five months of *Brideshead* and said, you got the role. I've got my star, got Meryl Streep, so I can have you.

[laughter]

I said, oh well that's great.

So anyway, we had the strike and we had a lay off for about three months, I think, and then the producer Derek Granger called me and he said, can you

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

start again in, whenever it was, February. I think we'd stopped in November. I said, well I can, but I have promised Karel Reisz that I will do this film for him. I think we were going to shoot late-March/ April or something. He said, oh it will be fine,

we can work that out, will you come back to *Brideshead*? So I said, yeah. So I went back and we then discovered Grenada wasn't going to have me going off in the middle, which is quite understandable since the film was going to take four months to do. You know, they couldn't just stop the production for four months. So it all got very nasty. And I had to walk out, because I felt I was morally in the right. Eventually, Grenada and the film company came to a deal whereby they both took money in each other's projects and I was able to do *The French Lieutenant's Woman* within the shooting of *Brideshead*, which is of course made the other actors absolutely livid.

[laughter]

Because they sort of just had to hang around for four months, you know. While I was off, doing my thing.

[laughter]

But I knew, because I was thirty, and I knew that if I passed that over by being a gentleman, it would have a huge effect on my career. The chance to play a starring role in an American movie, well an American financed movie, which I was so right for, doesn't come that often.

DL: And then you have this extraordinary thing with hindsight, like buses, two great breakthroughs arrive at once. I'm glad *The French Lieutenant's Woman* has come up in conversation because actually I want to dig into that. But let's have a quick look at a clip first from the film.

[clip playing]

[applause]

DL: I mean, the thing that strikes me though watching that clip is obviously, so you're playing Mike in what was the

present time and you're playing Charles back in Victorian times as well, so you have this twin role, now for an actor who is quite, you're obviously experienced by that point, but you're relatively new to film...

Jl: Not that experienced, as you see, but...

DL: Well, you're being very self-critical. I mean, I'm interested in that, because I mean the performance, both performances, hold up amazingly, but it must have been fairly daunting to take that on, because you're not playing one role, you're playing two.

Jl: What we decided, you know the Victorians, it's a period story, sexually, we decided to think of ourselves as sort of pressure cookers. That it was all inside, but you couldn't let it out because of social convention and so of course that made the sexuality and passion so much stronger than the modern stuff. And that was a big difference between the two. Because he has a relationship with the actress and he has a relationship with the character and they're different. And that was the way we found to delineate them.

DL: And working with Meryl Streep, who at that point, clearly as she is now, I mean she was already a very big name, and had already had several very successful and large-scale films behind her. Was that a challenge that you felt you rose to or was that again was that something that given that you were at a different stage of your film career, was that something that you were slightly trepidatious?

Jl: Well I've always known that to work with the best makes you better. And Meryl, I was so lucky that it be Meryl because she is the most generous, the most extraordinarily gifted actress. And she taught me a very important thing, which was the only thing that matters is the work. That's the only thing. What you're doing in front of the camera. And then all the other things that surround you when you're making a big movie don't matter at all. You know, the length of your car, the size of your trailer, your

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

billing. All those sort of silly things, which across do sort of worry about. So and so has got a bigger apartment than you, or whatever, doesn't matter. What matter is what is happening at that moment when the camera is turning. Everything you do should be geared towards that being the best that it could possibly be. And she taught me that and she taught me that you sacrificed everything for that. You even sacrifice good behaviour, for that. To get that right.

To give you an example of how generous she was, she was living in London with her two children with her husband Don, who's a sculptor, Don Gummer, living down in Kensington. We had a love scene. I think by that time I had done a sort of love scene in *Brideshead*, but it was the first love scene that I'd done on film. John Fowles who wrote *The French Lieutenant's Woman* had described it very very carefully and clearly. One of the things saying that he orgasms in 90 seconds, which I can understand, by the time when gets to that situation with that girl in that time So I wanted to be very accurate, but nevertheless I was incredibly nervous and we were filming in Twickenham Studios, Teddington Studios. What I would do was get there about half an hour earlier than Meryl because I had to have the chops laid on. Ha ha! I remember when we were - Sue Barradell did my makeup, wonderful girl - she would lay them on hair by hair to make them real. You know, it wasn't any sort of stick on thing. I remember we were doing a test at my home, we were living at Hampstead at that time, we did a makeup test and she laid them all on. Harold Pinter was there as the writer of the movie and Karel Reisz of course was there and Lady Antonia Fraser, who was Harold's wife, was also there. And she came up to me, we'd laid on one side, you know, this big chop and she looked at it and she said oh, did they take those from other parts of your body?

[laughter]

Well, they hadn't, they hadn't.

DL: [laughing] I needed to clarify that actually.

Jl: To go back to the story, I would get to makeup about half an hour before. We shared a big dressing room at Teddington Studios, she would be one end and I'd be the other. We had these big sliding doors in between, but we'd do our makeup together. I was there at five o'clock, half past five, laying these hairs on and she'd turned up and the day we were doing the love scene, she turned up and all I can say is that she was my lover. And throughout the day, I think we shot about two in the afternoon or three in the afternoon, that particular scene. But throughout the day she was, without doubt, my lover. Just the ease with which she touched me and the way she was with me, so that by the time we got to the love scene, it felt completely natural between us. And then that evening when we wrapped, she asked me round for dinner and I went round to their house in Kensington and there was Don and there were the kids and Meryl was Meryl again, the mum and the actress. But she 'chameleoned', if you like, into my lover for that day to make it easy. And that's huge generosity.

DL: I wonder personally and professionally, how much things change for you around that time. You have this double whammy of *Brideshead* and then *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, presumably when you're stepping out to the news agents, you're now getting recognised in a way that you possibly weren't before and presumably also there are now offers coming in, of work.

Jl: I don't remember the offers.

[laughter]

But I do remember going up to, we were as I said living in Hampstead and going up to the tube to buy the papers on the Sunday morning and coming back with a rack of them, which I don't normally do. Because I discovered that I was on the cover of four Sunday supplements. My face. Well, that was tough. You thought, woah! But also you thought ooh. I found for the first year or two was I became terribly paranoid. I was used to being private as we all are. You know, you walk down the street and unless you bump into a friend, people don't know

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

who you are. And suddenly many more people that you know, know you. If you walk into a restaurant, maybe it's full, maybe there's only one person in the restaurant who knows you, but you don't know which one, so for you everybody knows you. And I became quite retiring, I didn't enjoy that.

It wasn't until I was out in Australia making a picture with Liv Ullmann and we had a day off and we were sailing and swimming and Sydney Harbour. I was swimming and we pulled in for lunch on the beach and I was having a bit of a swim before lunch and I came up, paddling about, and a voice said hello Jeremy and I looked and there was a couple sitting on the back of their little sailing boat having their lunch. And it was the lady. And I said, hello. And she said, having a nice day? And I said, yeah, thanks, yeah. And we chatted a bit more and we swam to shore and I thought on the journey as I was swimming to shore, that's all it is really, it's just that the world becomes your village. I was brought up in a village. I know about village life. I know about going up to the grocer's and meeting people. It's just that that's now much bigger. And you don't have to get into a fuss about it. People know who you are, and they probably like you. But they can place you. And of course what we all want in life is to be placed. That's why people do this Twitter and Facebook things, so that they have a sort of presence. And if you have celebrity-ness, you have that placement. So you walk into a restaurant and you usually get a table, which is nice, because they know who you are, and they know you'll behave. Hopefully. And, you know, if you get in trouble, it's just quite nice. And if you see that side of the coin, it's great. The bad side of the coin is that everybody wants to know your dirty laundry, so they sort of pry, the newspapers especially. And you have to learn to live with that and deal with that. But if you concentrate on the good side, it's quite pleasant.

DL: But it's interesting, BEcause you've spoken already about the fact that you've been relatively, from early on, strategic and careful and thought-out about your career and the kind of roles

you want to do and the kind of mediums you want to work in. A lot of actors will just say that well everything happens by accident, and you're not saying that. But at the same time, fame seems to have been something you kind of stumbled into and that wasn't really ever the intention.

Jl: No. Well, I wanted to get enough fame that people would come and sit on their bottoms in the West End to see me do a play, but I never thought I would become a film actor because, in those days, all the successful film actors were from the north. You know, Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay... And I was sort of a bit, sort of a feat for all. Fortunately, *Brideshead* swung the pendulum and people began to want people who could wear a suit, which I'm wearing tonight.

[laughter]

DL: Very dapper, as well.

Jl: Now I actually wish I wasn't wearing it tonight.

[laughter]

DL: Let me bring music back into the equation as well, because the next film we want to talk about is *The Mission* from 1986. Obviously, it's very famous for its music in general, but you in particular have a kind of musical role with the oboe, you're playing the Jesuit priest, Father Gabriel, 1750, South America and you sort of pacify and befriend the natives with your oboe playing. And what I wanted to ask about that is because obviously a lot of actors would spend a year studying the oboe beforehand, and I wondered what your relationship with the oboe had been before *The Mission*.

Jl: Well, we were filming in Colombia. In the Caribbean, lives George Martin, who was The Beatles' producer and arranger. He happens to be an 18th century expert, or was, he's dead now sadly. He was an expert on the 18th century oboe. So they flew him in and he taught me to play this incredibly difficult thing on 18th century oboe, I mean, it's not easy. They

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

gave me some music which is what they were going to use in the film. And I learnt to play. And then we came to film it, and they had to give me a wooden one, which didn't play because it had to be broken by the Indians. So I was pretending, so I was doing the right finger work for the tune. When that film came out, what's his name Morricone, had written all the music, including the piece I was supposed to be playing. Any every time I see that scene, I wince because I think "no, no, no, no, no! He's playing the wrong notes!"

[laughter]

"It's not right, it's not what I'm playing!" So I'm rather embarrassed about that, but I did learn to play the bloody thing.

DL: You shouldn't be embarrassed, you will always know that your integrity went in talent. You've told us now. It's not the oboe scene, sadly, but let's look at a quick scene from *The Mission*.

[clip playing]

[applause]

DL: You're shaking your head, looking very grave watching that. I mean everyone else is kind of wrapped.

Jl: Funny you showed that scene, that was the scene I had to audition. I was doing a play in New York, Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, and I got a call from Roland Joffé and he said, would you come down and work with Bob De Niro? Because there's a part that I want you to play in a film that he's going to do. I said, I've got a matinée this afternoon, but there's a two hour gap between the matinée and the evening show, so I got the taxi and I went down to some rehearsal room in the village. I went in and Roland Joffé, the director, was sitting there and he said, now listen, this man sitting in the middle of the room - Bob was sitting in the middle of the room on a chair with another chair beside it - he's sloped over, killed his brother and he's just shut himself off from the world. You have to get him to start facing that, doing something about that. So I went and I sat next to him and tried

to get him to communicate and then, nothing. Just sat there. After half an hour, or maybe it was 45 minutes, it felt like days.

[laughter]

I turned to Roland and I said, well...

[laughter]

So I left, took a taxi back up to the city, did the evening show, thought well there's not much interest there, is there. Finished the show on Broadway, came back to England, and kept thinking about the film because it was a wonderful role for me. Strangely enough the role was written for my father-in-law, for Cyril Cusack, ten years earlier, but by the time the film had got to be made, he was too old. Because the jungle's a bit of a messy place. And anyway, I called my friend David Putnam, who was producing it. Well, he wasn't my friend really, but he was the producer at that time.

[laughter]

And I said, David have you cast that role? He said, no I hadn't. I hear you've done a lot of tests, Christopher Lowe, the English poet had done amazing tests in Los Angeles, he'd wept a lot, I heard [laughter]. Who wrote *On the Waterfront*? Wait, who directed?

DL: Elia Kazan

Jl: Elia Kazan, who was a great friend of Bob's, he'd also been asked to play the role, but he said, no no no I'm a director, not an actor. Roland Joffé just made *The Killing Fields* with Dith Pran and Sam Waterston, an actor and a real person. And it should work really well and Bob wanted that relationship between his character and my character, wanted a real person. So they were trying to find real people. So I said to David, have you cast anybody? He said, no I haven't. The trouble is that we need a young man because it's quite dangerous there and you have very healthy and fit. I said, well. And he said, you wanna play it and I said, yeah I do, I'd quite like to. He said, well does Roland know that? I said, I

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

don't know, I assume he knows since I showed up at the audition. He said, well, you better tell him, I said, where is her? He said, he's in Columbia, he's location recce-ing, So, he gave me his phone number and I rang him up a bit later in the afternoon. I said, Roland, it's Jeremy, how's it going, he said fine, I said listen I'd really like to play that part. And he said, well you better get come out here then. And I said is that it? And he said, yeah, that's it.

[laughter]

So I flew out and I remember before the plane landed I took off my shoes because I thought I'm working with Indians, you don't wear shoes, I have to be close to them, so I should feel the ground as much as they do. I didn't wear them again for four months, I don't think. Except for rock-climbing, I don't think. I had to wear sandals for that.

Now Bob is absolutely furious, because he found himself playing opposite an actor, and what's more, what made it worse, it was an English actor. The Americans are very funny about English actors, I remember Robert Duvall saying to Glenn Close, who I'd just down this play on Broadway, he said, "How can you trust a guy who talks like that?"

[laughter].

So Bob felt much the same, I think. For the first two months of the movie, we didn't talk to each other, he wouldn't even say good morning to me. And then we had the most terrible row in the middle of the jungle in the makeup bus. Word got back, my wife was out there and Bob's girlfriend Toukie Smith, Toukie Smith? Yeah, and they back at camp, a lovely camp, it was on the ocean, a rather nice hotel, grass huts and hammocks and things. Word got back that we'd had a real set to? We did, we let it all out, no holds barred. So Sinead said to Touki, listen the boys got in a row, I think a good dinner might be required. So Touki started cooking, she's a great cook, and she cooked up this great spaghetti bolognese.

[laughter]

And by the time Bob got back and we had this splendid evening and he has remained I think one of my greatest friends ever since.

[laughter]

DL: It's very interesting cause the definitive story of American and British actors is obviously is about Olivier and Dustin Hoffman, but I think you have rivalled that cause I had no idea that it had been quite so...

Jl: I think Bob to his credit, probably the use the antipathy toward English actors in the way he fled about my character. They don't like each other or he doesn't like my character until about halfway through. And it was about that time that we had the row. So I don't know how much of it method, but it was very unpleasant.

[laughter]

DL: Now listen, I know actors don't think in terms of themes of their careers, that's the kind of thing that journalists think about. But one of the themes that seems to have cropped up is, we saw it in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, duality and the kind of double character and another role that I wanted to talk to you about is very much built around that which is *Dead Ringers*, David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* where you play twin gynaecologists and I wondered what your initial response was, when you first had that script. Was this something where you immediately thought this is a role I have to play or was your first response to recoil slightly and think this is the last thing on Earth that I'm going to do?

Jl: Well I was somewhere in between, my wife thought it was the last thing on Earth I should do. She was extremely against it. I was a little concerned by the technicality of it, because film is such a technical medium and to concentrate into the reality of what is happening is quite hard. And I thought, if I got the deal with all this twinning technical stuff as well, I don't think I can do it. Cronenberg came over and sort of said, listen will you come and do a test

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

anyway. Come to Canada and we'll use all the computer technology with the twin cameras and whatever and we'll just do it on video and edit it on film, so it'll be cheaper and we can see how it is. And so I did. And I tried it. And it was remarkably easy. The technology didn't get in the way. So I went against my wife's advice and did it. I went to buy my clothes with the designer on one day for one character, and the next day we went out to shop for the other character. And they built me two dressing rooms in the studio, so you could decorate them slightly differently. I remember sitting watching the rushes of the first day where we saw the twins together. I said to Cronenberg, this is a disaster, you know. Any fool can tell this pair apart, they're just nothing like each other.

Part of the story for those of you who haven't seen it, the two twins must be, you must get confused. Both the characters on the screen and the audience must be confused about which twin is which at which particular moment, sometimes. I thought, they're too dissimilar. I thought we've got to do this some other way so I muddled up all the clothes and made them look much the same. And found an internal way, I don't know where the idea came from, but it was a very good one. I think it might have been mine even...

[laughter]

To find a different energy point for each twin, an internal energy point. Elliot, who was the sort of guy who ran the firm, got the customers, he was the shop window, he was a good speaker and all of this. And he had his energy there. Which is of course where the Indians have their whatnot there. But it's also where, you head-butt people and it's hard area. By putting the energy there, it gave him a certain élan, a certain way of standing, a speaking and looking. And then the other one, I put his energy here, which is where you can die, which is soft and feminine and delicate. And vulnerable. By just switching the energy, the posture changed, the way he spoke changed, the way he looked through his eyes changed. I was able to play the two by just doing that, which is a very simple

trick, but it sort of worked. I think all great tricks are simple, don't you?

DL: I want to follow up on this, but let's look at a clip of this technique in action.

[clip playing]

[applause]

DL: It is so interesting because just then when you talk about this simple, physical trick you use, it reminded me of when you were talking of standing up straight on the stage. It feels like, you mentioned earlier that maybe people don't think of you as a physical actor but does seem very much what you are. You're using physical techniques to crack open characters a lot of the time. Is that fair to say?

Jl: I mean, I don't use them consciously, I'm not one of those actors. I'm no good at doing accents, I can do funny walks but...

[laughter]

But I'm not an actor who works from the outside in. I tend to try to find what the guy is feeling and hopefully have the body and the face that shows that. I'm not a very good liar, for instance. What I'm feeling tends to show, and I think that's quite useful for an actor. But I don't plan. I remember I did *The Real Thing* in New York, we opened in Boston and were sitting around, my wife, the rest of the cast, and Mike Nichols, the director, and Tom Stoppard, who wrote it, we were sitting around in this wonderful hotel suite of Mike's in Boston waiting for the reviews at midnight. Eating lovely food and all of this. And the phone rang and Mike picked up the phone and was listening and smiling, which was good. Sinead, my wife, who can never wait to open a present, she said to Mike as he was listening, said did they mention the gesture? And Mike went... and I said, what gesture? And she went, the thing you did when Annie said she was leaving you. And I went, what thing? And she said, oh you know you did... and I can't remember now what it was. But anyway, she said you did this gesture.

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

And Mike put the phone down. And she said to him again, so they mentioned the gesture? And he said they had written a whole paragraph about 'the gesture'. And I said, but what was the gesture? Anyway it something very odd that I've never done before and obviously it had reverberation for the audience. And indeed two days later, I had a letter from somebody who had seen that performance, and said, how did you know to do that when she said she was leaving you? That's exactly what my husband did when I told him I was leaving him, stood like that. It was something like that [gestures]. It was something really odd and I tried it the second night, because by then it was huge in my head.

[laughter]

And I did it, and it felt absolutely stupid, so I never did it again.

[laughter]

DL: Is that like playing a musical instrument though? Because with a musical instrument obviously the minute you think about what you're doing suddenly your hands can't do it anymore.

Jl: Whereas if you're right in what you're thinking then your body should obey you.

DL: Psychologically though, I mean, we've talked a little just about now about the physicality of your roles. Something psychologically a lot of the roles that you've played, and *Dead Ringers* is a very good example, you would imagine that it takes you to quite a strange place mentally. And I wonder how quickly you shake that off? Are you the kind of actor who as soon as you've finished on the last day and you walk away and it's done, or does a film like *Dead Ringers* stay with you?

Jl: You think at the end of the day you walk away and it is done. I played a lot at the Royal Shakespeare Company, there you could be rehearsing once thing in the morning, playing another king in the afternoon and somebody

else, a murderer, in the evening. So you get used to putting the characters in different drawers. Put film is slightly different from that, because you're always rehearsing, you never have it in the bag like you do when you've rehearsed a play and then open, you're always sort of searching. But I do find I need respite and so naturally at the end of the day, it sort of goes. But, rather like a room which has had a pipe smoked in it, you know, the smell, I think, remains. Certainly doing *The Mission*, where I had a big leap because I was playing a Jesuit Catholic priest, I'm not Jesuit, I'm not Catholic and I'm not a priest. It was a real sort of, I really had to go somewhere. I had Daniel Berrigan, the great American Jesuit, as my mentor out with us. But I think I kept a bit of him always with me and also of course we were living among the Indians and so, my role continued even when the filming stopped, to a certain extent. But normally, I let it go and when I look back, *Dead Ringers* I find quite hard, I cannot watch it really anymore. And a lot of the characters, I find quite creepy.

DL: And the reason, one of the reasons I ask actually, is cause the film I want to talk about is *Reversal of Fortune* and there you are playing Claus von Bülow, who at that point is a very notorious figure. I mean, he had been found guilty of his wife's murder, this is real-life Claus von Bülow, guilty of -

Jl: Attempted murder, she was in a coma.

DL: Yes, that's right. Attempted murder. But then was acquitted after that. And these were recent events at that point. You play von Bülow in *Reversal of Fortune*, what kind of research, I suppose is the word I'm looking for, what research did you do into him?

Jl: Well first of all, I didn't want to do it because I thought it was in really bad taste. The children were still alive, Sunny was still in a coma, and Claus as about. I thought this feels a bit sort of News of the World-y to me, I don't want to do that. It was Glenn Close who was playing Sunny who called me and said, listen, you know, if you don't do it then someone

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

else will do it and you'd be very good in it.

So, what research did I do? I watched him, there was a lot television footage of the court case, they love to televise their court cases. So a lot of watching Claus before, after, and during, when he was just sitting there listening to testimony. I watched him on a couple of chat shows in America during the trial. He became a real celebrity. He was an enigma. Nobody knew if he was guilty or not and there is something very exciting about inviting a possible murderer to dinner. He was living in a real social world, quite a socialite. Anyway, mustn't be rude about him cause he's still alive, lives in London. He is a socialite and he wouldn't mind me saying that. And so I watched all that, but I still wasn't sort of 'in him'. Then I thought about my Dad. What if my Dad had done something, we all trip up sometimes in life, if he'd really tripped up, how would he deal with all this publicity and all this attention and whatever during a trial? I thought, I thought he's probably do it rather like Claus, he's just keep his cool, keep his poise, keep his feeling hidden and get on with it, do it.

And I thought well, I'm very like my father, so thought well ok that's what I'll do. I'll do that. It gave me a way to inside him because he was still alive. And I hadn't played anyone who still alive. You've got to take over, filmically of course. I remember seeing *Patton*, the movie with George C. Scott. Now George C. Scott is nothing like General Patton, great movie if you haven't caught it, old movie of course. But by the time you've been watching for about three minutes, you believe that George C. Scott is Patton, and I thought well that's the trick, carry the audience in, they'd suspend disbelief anyway. And Claus of course is a bigger man than me, he's older than me, but once I found what I felt he was feeling, of course I had to work out whether I thought he was guilty or not, because he'd know that. And I talked to a few people, I talked to an American art critic called Jon Richardson, who was a great friend of Claus' and had almost grown up with him and knew him well. And he said to me, he said to me, play him like a bad

actor. I said, oh dear, I don't know how to play, oh I don't know how to do that!

[laughter]

But I think I must have done cause he is a bit like a bad actor.

DL: Let's see some evidence of this. Let's take a look at a clip from *Reversal of Fortune*.

[applause]

DL: And this is the role that wins you the Best Actor Oscar as well. I wondered quite how unexpected and how life, career-changing that was.

Jl: Well, at the time, it was expected actually, because all the bookies said I was going to win. And there was just a feeling in the air. And you know, it has nothing to do with how good you are or not really. It's just, your time comes. And if, the groundwork had been laid by *Dead Ringers*, which had come out the year before and which was not an Oscar movie, it's not the sort of life-affirming American cultural movie.

[laughter]

And yet a lot of people in Hollywood thought it was interesting work. And so I was sort of in their consciousness and then Claus came out, *Reversal* came out and they decided to run with it for an Oscar. And by the time, in those days, you didn't have to do the whole selling your soul and flying around the world and buying flowers for all the other voters and sort of thing. I mean, you could just, you didn't have to do any of that, you have to do it now but I flew in to New York, I was filming somewhere else and I did the Saturday Night Live, the most terrifying thing I've ever done in my life, I think. Then I flew to Los Angeles and had the day before party and then the following night was the ceremony. And I sort of thought, I mean was up against great people. I think it was Bob De Niro and Hoffman and Richard Harris and somebody else... a great bunch. I mean, how can you compare those actors? You can't. How can you be better than them? You can't! But all the bookies said

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

I was way out ahead, and so I thought, oh well it's my time. Some of them have won it before.

So as the announcement came up, you sit there and think, I must prepare a face to lose.

[laughter]

So you're thinking that and then they mention your name and you think, have I heard that right? Have I heard that right? But yes. So, I got up and kissed everybody in sight. I kissed Madonna, who was sitting in front of us, who I didn't know.

[laughter]

And I nearly kissed Michael Jackson who was sitting next to her, but I couldn't get to him.

[laughter]

Did it make a difference? Not really. We had a euphoric day the next day, where we met up with Harold Pinter, Mike Nichols, Meryl Streep, and chap from Columbia whose name I'm searching for to talk about making *Remains of the Day* together. And that was glorious, because it was a great script and a great movie and I thought this wonderful, and I thought, this is wonderful, this is what winning an Oscar does. Harold and I shared a plane back together, I mean we shared seats on a plane, and he said, I don't know how it's going to work this movie, it might take so much money, it's going to be so expensive this movie, I don't know if we'll ever even make it. We didn't make it. It was made wonderfully by Emma Thompson and Anthony Hopkins, some years later. Probably a lot better than we'd ever do it. So, that was the Oscars.

And then we came back here and you know, the nicest thing, my work didn't change at all and I knew it wouldn't. Well, two things happened. First of all, I had an enormous post bag from my peers, from local councillors, from shopkeepers, which was glorious. All thrilled for me and that was nice because you always that people think,

oh he's a bit shite. But they were all really please for me and that was lovely. The other thing was that everybody who had a script, which they'd never been able to get made, but thought that if I put my name to it then they could get made, sent me that script. And I had to plough through the most unreadable scripts for about six months. So that changed. But otherwise my choices didn't change at all. My fee didn't go up. It's a very comfy place to be, having an Oscar. You sort of feel you've, you know, you got a seat on the sofa, you're no longer squatting on the edge of the bench.

DL: Let me bring things forward a little bit. I want to go forward to 2005, which I think is when I you worked with Tom Hooper on *Elizabeth I*, which you made with Helen Mirren. And the reason I want to bring it up is because, I wonder at this stage in your career, obviously for Tom Hooper, that was early days for him. And he's clearly gone to great things since. As an actor, can you spot a director now? Can you spot one where you're like, he's going to go a long way?

Jl: You can spot a good director certainly, doesn't necessarily mean you're going to go a long way, Charlie Sturridge is a good director, he's made some nice films but he's not flown in the way that Tom has. There are a lot of good actors I know, who haven't flown. You need a combination of circumstances, and you need a particular personality. Tom and Charles are very similar, they're both quite difficult. Tom is really tough on his crew and he's very exacting on what he wants, and Charles is too. You can see a good director, but there a lot of bad directors who seem to get the work, I don't how.

[laughter]

DL: Have you ever been tempted to direct?

Jl: Me? Well, I did direct, I directed two things. Sadly, you missed them.

[laughter]

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

I directed Carly Simon in a rock video, a song called "Tired of Being Blonde". It was great, huge fun to do. And then Sinead and I did a two-man show about refugees. We did it various places, Oxford and just a couple of performances. But the BBC said they wanted to film it. I felt it was very much a piece that needed the actors and the audience, a real feeling of connection in order to work. And I thought, it wouldn't work on film and they kept on and on and on, and I thought, oh well, I said if I direct it, we'll do it. So they let me. And we went down to Pinewood and we shot it in a couple of weeks, I think. I loved it. I loved it so much. I love getting performances out of people. I'm terrible in it. I had no interest in... I had a cast of about 12, I expanded it a little bit. I love designing the shots with the cameraman, a wonderful cameraman Peter Suschitzky shot it, wonderful, very generous of him. I loved that. And getting the actors to feel comfortable and get what I needed. A lot of it was set around this big dining table, and then we get to me, my character, I think ok, fine I'll do my bit, and then what are we going to move on to now. And that's where my real interest lay. And so if you see it, I give a hugely dull performance. Sinead is extraordinary, she gives a speech in it that's extraordinary. Went out on Channel 4. And I'm trying to get it out again. Because it is about refugees, because that is very much a problem, something in peoples' minds today, I'd love for it to be seen again. But I'm not sure who owns it, so I don't know if we'll get it out again.

DL: I'm sure you're both extraordinary.

Jl: No, I'm really boring. Believe me.

[laughter]

DL: I'm aware that I've monopolised the conversation and I do want to throw things open it up, but first I do want to look at one more clip, which is from the film *The Man Who Knew Infinity*, which came out earlier this year. I just wanted to ask you about that film, because it's a film that really deserves more of an audience. Why did you want to do that film?

Jl: It's a great story, it's about a mathematician called Ramanujan, or Ramanujan, I can't remember which is the right way to say it. Indian. 1913. A genius mathematician, a young man, which would dream these equations. He described it as his God Namoo... somebody... would place these equations on his tongue. And in the morning, he's know them and write them down on the pavement. And he filled his notebooks up with these extraordinary calculations. And he had no university education, because he wasn't interested in anything except figures, equations, sums, pure mathematics. Anyway, he is advised to send these notebooks to a great academic at Cambridge, called G. H. Hardy who was a great mathematician himself. He sends the notebooks to G. H. Hardy and three other mathematicians. The other three thought it was a hoax, because they were thought it was a hoax, because they were always hoaxing each other, mathematicians do that apparently.

[laughter]

But Hardy believed it and got in touch and got Cambridge to bring him over. And this guy, it's a story about a very, very – *Brideshead* again - emotionally closed genius, G. H. Hardy and this wonderful vibrant young Indian, married, just married before he left India, and about their relationship which comes together because of their shared passion for pure mathematics. It's really about the relationship, but it's also a bit about mathematics. Which I discovered is like art. I mean it's fantastic, I mean pure mathematics. They think those figures are all out there, waiting to be discovered, waiting to be found. They're extraordinary people. It was a real adventure for me to play this film.

[clip playing]

[applause]

DL: It's a really wonderful film actually, do go and seek it out. It deserves an audience. I have been holding the conversion until now, if you have a question for Jeremy, now is very much the time to ask. There will be

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

microphones roaming. Yes, a hand went up very quickly and vigorously just in the centre of the back row there.

Q: Thank you very much. I'm an identical twin, I'm really interested in the *Dead Ringers* film, which I sadly I haven't seen, but it's a curious experience. I was with some identical twins recently, and they said it was like having a shadow. What was the hardest part of playing that role?

Jl: I think the technical bit, because I knew how each one felt. I mean, I did a lot of research, reading whatever books, the one about Chang and Eng... Chang and Eng? I knew they were sort of still joined by the umbilical, so to speak. But that wasn't hard. It wasn't hard, really. It was about getting both of their emotional journey, which of course depended on each other. It was a well-written script based on a true story about the Marcus brothers, who were two gynaecologists in New York who were found dead in their surgery after five days. Like the Mantle twins. So, I read that book, which is a bit sensationalist but read all the books I could about identical twins. And just sort of fed that in. But I think it wasn't as hard for me probably as it for you being one.

[laughter]

Q: Last night, I was re-watching *Inland Empire* and I was wondering whether you could talk a bit about your experiences working with David Lynch and whether it's tough getting into a Lynchian world, because it's obviously a very complex film.

Jl: Extraordinary picture, *Inland Empire*, for those of you haven't seen it. It's like standing in front of the most obscure, enormous and odd modern painting. And you think, phwoah what's that all about and you just sort of communicate with it, or you don't. It's quite long. Who was my co-star in it? I mean, who is the lady in it? Laura Dern, that's right. Wonderful. I talked to Laura a couple of days before shooting and I asked her what's it about, this? Because he won't give me a script. And she said, well I've been filming a year on it and I don't

know what it's about. So I thought, alright. And I turned up the following morning, and he told me I was a film director. I turned up at a studio at Warner Brothers, which he borrowed from them. It was completely empty except for a table that was laid out with chairs around it, like for a cast reading of the script. And he gave me this full sheet of paper. And I read it. And he said, that's your speech. I said, what this morning and he said, yeah. I said, look I take a while to learn. He said, listen it doesn't matter. What are you, you're a film director, aren't you? And I said, yeah. And what do film directors have? I said, they have notes. He said, right, they have notes. We've got walls, we've got screens, we can write it up there, we can write it on the actor's bra that you're playing, do anything. There's no problem. He said, we've got all day to do it.

[laughter]

Well, I shot in about an hour, because he relaxed me so much. I just thought, all right, okay that's what I'm saying. And then I sort of said it. And it wasn't line for line, word for word, right. But it was enough. All only about that much of it is in the movie anyway. That was sort of part of the Lynchian world.

I remember a moment when he said, where I had to sit, being the director, watching Laura doing some acting. And I had to say "cut!" and that as it. There were three cameras, all three on me. He shoots on video, so little cameras. And I was sitting on my chair and I had my assistant next to me. I thought, this is nice, proper director now. And I knew what I had to do, I had to say cut. I thought, I'd do that, I can remember that line. And they started rolling the cameras. And I sat there waiting for him to say action. Which he didn't. And I thought, I see what he is doing. He wants me to be natural and just be interesting, just be David Lynch. And so I was watching and asked my assistant for some coffee, and I checked the time and started thinking about lunch. Well after about 20 minutes, I saw one of the cameras blinking, which meant that it had run out. Then the cameraman pulls his eye away. And then the other one did. And the third

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

one did. And David said, cut. And he said, Jeremy knows what he is doing. And I thought, do I?

[laughter].

I said, David, umm is that what you wanted? And he said, no I wanted you to say cut. I said, but you didn't say action. He said, I did. I said, you didn't, I didn't hear you say action. He said, well I did. I said, well I'm very sorry. But bless him, because he was David Lynch, he left it running twenty minutes, thinking "he'll give me something".

[laughter]

DL: There's a hand at the other end of that row.

Q: Jeremy, thank you so much. *Dead Ringers*, I remember watching it in the opening weekend in the Odeon on Leicester Square. Haunted me. I wanted to ask you about your experiences working on *The Lion King* and *Die Hard with a Vengeance* as Simon. What were your inspirations for playing the two characters?

Jl: Well, they're quite different characters. Simon in *Die Hard*, you know, Alan Rickman's brother. I met Alan, the late Alan, darling, darling man and I said, I'm going to play your brother, I'm going to play him just like you, but straight.

[laughter]

In effect, I didn't. I went blonde. I remember jogging on the beach in Santa Monica and, blonde, short blonde. And an actor, who I knew vaguely, came near me, going up the concrete bit on the beach. And he said, Jeremy, is it? And I said, yeah. He said, are you alright? Or is this a mid-life crisis? I said, no, no, no, I'm doing a movie that's why I've gone blonde, short and blonde. And I found that wonderful t-shirt, which I think was probably, the best thing I did in the movie, this wonderful t-shirt which Bruce... is it Bruce, Bruce Willis? Which Bruce was deeply envious of. And in fact, in his next movie, I can't remember what it was, but I remember watching it a bit of it and seeing he was in a

turquoise, cut-off t-shirt with blonde hair. He was playing me, because he could see that it really worked.

[laughter]

DL: That's outrageous!

Jl: Outrageous! It was a load of fun, it was my first time on a sort of big juggernaut movie. John McTiernan, a wonderful director doing it. I can't tell you what it was like, sort of being at the end of Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, with most of Manhattan closed and hearing the rumble of twenty huge tipper trucks coming down Fifth Avenue. I mean it's fantastic. And I thought, you can do anything in America, can't you!

[laughter]

And it was lovely, and of course in India, that's what they know me for, for *Die Hard*... "I like *Die Hard*." The only thing they know me for in India. But it was fun to do. John McTiernan, I discovered, you see those directors they don't give you any notes, because they hire you, because you can apparently do it and they never talk to you. Somebody tells you what you're going to do, but they never give you notes. He once came to me, my wife is worried that the audience won't be able to understand your accent, but he said, you know what you're doing, just do it, do what you're doing it's fine, but she did mention that... so I softened the accent a little bit, but that was it.

And then *The Lion King*, of course, quite different. Extraordinary, I always thought you did your mouth in time with the picture on the screen. I thought, that is how you did cartoons. But you don't. They come to you, because it's American, they come to you with a massive group of people, sitting around this table, looking through screens. And artists... animation artists and videos and you have a great long storyboard and some ideas for lines, you make up lines, you improvise lines, you play around, you try and make them laugh, have fun basically. Meanwhile, the animators are sketching you and the video people are videoing you, and the writers are writing any good ideas. And we met about six

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Jeremy Irons
9 September 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly,
London

times over about a year in different parts of the world, they would all come to where I was filming and we'd do a bit more, and they would have a bit more put together. When I finally say the film, of course I was horrified, because they based the lion on me. On all of that and all of that. And I looked at James Earl Jones's lion who was big and rippling with muscles and a mane that shone in the sunlight...

[laughter]

And I looked at my lion, you could see the ribs and scrawny, you know.

[laughter]

And I thought, so that's how I come across. I was very hurt.

[laughter]

DL: But you've got over it in the years since, haven't you? Your self-image has repaired itself.

Jl: Well, I don't know. There are some mornings...

[laughter]

DL: Well, we all have those mornings. Let me ask you one final question. I mean, every film we have talked about tonight shared one thing, which it feels like a challenge. It feels like a risk. And there are films we haven't even talk about, *Lolita*, *High-Rise* from last year, it feels like you're still taking risks. Is that fair to say that, I think what gets you up in the morning is that idea of not quite knowing whether you're going to come off the high wire?

Jl: I think I do like risk. Looking at my pleasures, you know, sailing, horse-riding, motorcycling, seems like I like risk, it energises me. I always feel like I can't do it, when I start an acting job. I'm going off now, got to finish doing the next *Batman*, which we finish next week. Then I'm off to America to make two comedies, and I haven't really been known for my comedy....

[laughter]

DL: You have tonight!

Jl: Well that's good. So I'm going to do something that I'm not sure that I can do. And that it is grist to my mill, although I try to do less now, cause I'm older and go slower now.

DL: I'm sure we'll all wish you bon voyage in America. Please join me in thanking, Jeremy Irons!

Jl: It's been a pleasure.

[Applause]