

BAFTA & BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series: Nancy Meyers
26 September 2015 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

Jeremy Brock: Good evening, I'm Jeremy Brock. On behalf of BAFTA and the BFI, welcome to the third in this prestigious line-up of international screenwriters lectures. This event is sponsored, as some of you will know, by the inimitable Lucy Guard and the JJ Charitable Trust, without whom nothing... Our thanks also to Warner Bros. for so generously helping make this evening happen.

Tonight the Academy is truly honoured to be hosting a woman with 35 years experience at the very top of her profession as both a screenwriter and a director. The best way that I can sum up Nancy Meyers' truly brilliant career is actually to simply list her body of work: *Private Benjamin*, *Irreconcilable Differences*, *Protocol*, *Baby Boom*, *Father of the Bride*, *Once Upon a Crime*, *I Love Trouble*, *Father of the Bride 2*, *The Parent Trap*, *What Women Want*, *Something's Gotta Give*, *The Holiday*, *It's Complicated* and *The Intern*. Nancy has worked with every conceivable Hollywood star, from Jack Nicholson to Diane Keaton, Steve Martin to Helen Hunt, Mel Gibson to Cameron Diaz, Meryl Streep to Robert De Niro.

Nancy will be in conversation with Briony Hanson, the Director of Film at the British Council, after which, as we always do, we'll open up to questions from the floor. Ladies and gentlemen, Nancy Meyers.

[Applause]

Briony Hanson: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. You can't do all that clapping, we've got a lot to talk about this evening and a lot of films we've got to talk about too. I don't want to add much to Jeremy's intro, other than to say that it's a huge honour to be here having this conversation.

Nancy Meyers: Thank you, I'm so happy to be here.

BH: Having my own personal Nancy Meyers film festival, which I've been having over the last few weeks, has been such a pleasure, I can't believe I was at work while I was doing it. Can't believe it was work rather – I wasn't doing it at work! [Laughs]

But Nancy has an incredible body of work. She's known, as you all know, for kind of literate and sophisticated comedies, often romantic comedies, the films come with beautiful interiors and beautiful structure. But you're also particularly known for breaking boundaries, particularly in terms of what age or what sex is appropriate for us movie-goers to see on our screens; you completely confound expectations. So I think we've got quite a lot to cover just in unpacking those few sentences there.

Before we do, you already had a tiny snapshot of some of Nancy's films but we thought we should do a quick montage, which you [Nancy] have provided us, just to remind you, to refresh you about a number of different films, I think pretty much all of your films, all the films certainly that you have written and directed.

NM: Except *The Intern* I think.

BH: Is that not in there? We'll come to that later. So if could you just run the montage and then we'll get to the conversation.

[Montage plays]

[Applause]

BH: Is that strange seeing them all in one go?

NM: It's lot of years, a lot of years of work.

BH: So, of the films we've just seen, you have written all but one of them, you've also directed some of them, you've also produced some of them. Considering that you have all those roles, are you still, at heart, a writer?

NM: Yes.

BH: That is your primary...?

NM: Totally, that's what my passport says.

BH: That is what your passport says?

NM: Yes [laughs]

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BH: I love that, that's great. Is that the thing that gives you the most pleasure?

NM: I do like the writing the best I think. I like editing movies also. You know, it's the actual making of them that's hard. But you know the writing is really where it all happens. And then the directing I find is just executing the writing. That's really why I became a director, honestly it really started out of just protecting the screenplay.

BH: You also, fairly unusually I think, have a writer/producer credit on quite a lot of the films.

NM: Well those were the ones that I did with my ex-husband and he was the director but now it's writer/producer/director.

BH: It's unusual I think, you don't see so many writers and producers. The producer is the person that sort of pulls the whole thing together and makes sure that it delivers, so I'm quite surprised that you don't see more writers taking control to make sure that their work is the thing...

NM: [To the audience] You're mostly writers here right? I think the writer's personality is probably better suited to directing than producing. And you know I think studios like producers that they feel are sort of in their world a little bit, you know? Which writers generally aren't friends with studio executives and management kind of jobs, so I think writing and directing goes perfectly together.

BH: And when you're taking all three roles...

NM: Can I move my chair a little?

BH: Yeah, certainly.

NM: [Moves chair] See I'm directing now! I can move it, because I feel I'm turned too sideways. No I can see them [gestures to the audience] and you.

BH: [Jokily] Buy in some more chairs! Produce the whole event! ... When you do all those three elements, who says no to you?

NM: About what?

[Laughter]

BH: Well about anything. Seriously, how do you rein yourself in if you have all of those three key creative roles? Who turns round, because normally...

NM: Why do you need to be reined in?

BH: Well do you need to be?

NM: I don't think so. Not really.

[Laughter]

BH: Do you never have anxiety about, I mean, are you so confident as a writer and as a director and as a producer...?

NM: Now wait, there are many different areas we're talking about. So 'do you need to be reined in?' suggests out of bounds in some way which I don't, no, I don't see it. You know, I write, let's say any one of these, the ones that I directed, I think I directed all of these except *Private Benjamin* and *Father of the Bride*?

BH: Yes I think so. [Jokes] You should know!

[Laughter]

NM: I couldn't remember exactly what was in there. It was a blur. So, you know, I write the screenplay then I, in the case when Charles Shyer was directing, I produced them or I am the director of them so being reined in suggests, and I know you just said it loosely, but I mean it does suggest that somehow the message is getting lost, which is not it. No, it's all about get the page on screen. So confident, when you talk about confidence, I mean yeah, if I'm at the point where I'm making a movie I'm confident about it or I'm not going to put myself out there and do it. It's another year of my life, I have to be the one that's confident about it, I have to be the most confident about it. 'Cause I have to also bring a whole lot of people in with me; I have to wrangle actors, I have to get the studio, you know I have to really, I have to be the one that

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makes it happen. So confidence I think is critical.

BH: Okay then, so what about the other people that you work with then, normal writers who don't get to write and direct and produce?

NM: That I work with? That I know?

BH: I mean like these people [the audience]. That work a lot with a creative producer that will come in and you can knock ideas together, or a script editor or you know, people will give you notes. Who does that for you?

NM: Who gives me notes? Erm, well I've gone to friends for notes. I remember on *Something's Gotta Give* I thought I was done, it was a year of my life, it was 250 pages that I finally got down to 125 pages and you know who James L Brooks is? He's a friend of mine so I called, for those of you who don't know he won a lot of Oscar for *Terms of Endearment* but he made *Broadcast News* and lots of terrific movies, I've known him for years so I said, "Will you read my script? I'm just going to hand it in, just tell me if there's anything I've missed" you know? And he read the script and he came over to my house and he stayed about six hours and we sort of went through it. He had such good ideas, really good ideas. He's an interesting note-giver because he gives you absolutely no solutions to anything.

[Laughter]

But he says "is there something in the idea of...?" you know, like that kind of a conversation. And then I spent another month based on the six hours he was at my house. So I get notes then. And honestly, over time when your movies start to do well they sort of just let you do it.

BH: And that's changed dramatically, so at the beginning who?

NM: Like in the beginning beginning? 35 years ago? You know I remember the guy who was the head of the studio gave us some notes, but my experience in the movie business is that they don't want to give you too many notes; they

really want you to figure it out. So that's where the confidence thing I think helps, if you show up, like I would never take a pen to a meeting for example. I'm not there to take notes, I'm there to have a conversation and if we talk about something and something comes up. I think if you show up with your little pad, and your, you know, my personal philosophy honestly is I think they want you to feel really confident, they want you to defend what you've done. I'm not saying they don't ever have good ideas 'cause they do and not everybody comes in with a script that totally works but I wouldn't hand anything in 'til it works.

BH: And typically how long does that take?

NM: A long time!

BH: Is there a difference in that some films just come to you and the scripts are out...

NM: No, they all take a long time.

BH: What's a long time?

NM: A year.

BH: With how many drafts?

NM: 10 to 15. More like 15 than 10. [Laughs] Somewhere in the middle, it lands somewhere in there.

BH: Are you typically writing for yourself or can you put yourself in the mind of an audience that's not you and be slightly more perhaps cynical about the things that you're writing?

NM: Cynical? I try not to be cynical. But if I tried to think like what someone else is going to think then I'll get all messed up. Right? 'Cause then I'm second guessing myself. So I don't do that at all. But I think I have very, like my taste is similar to other people's; I don't think I have an extreme point of view about things. You know I'm writing a lot from my own experience, obviously I write a lot about women and when I got divorced I wrote about divorced women. I'm writing a lot about things I know and *Private Benjamin* you know, obviously the plots

of my movies never reflect me, I never joined the army, but I moved from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to California and I left my family, you know that was like my big move. Her big move was breaking away through the army. So I'm writing from things I know, that's always what I've done. So if I were to re-think...I don't even totally get your question but I don't do that I don't think no. But certainly I try to be critical of myself, there's no shortage of me being critical of my options and choices and in the outline I'll put in a place holder saying 'I know that's not good enough' and 'I'll get that later' and I am, but I'm not saying the audience won't think it's good enough, I'm saying I don't think it's good enough.

BH: My question was actually based around, a friend of mine was in a band and a big very sort of successful band and she hated her own music but she knew what her audience liked.

NM: I don't relate to that.

BH: Okay good. [Laughs]

NM: Well because then it's like what am I doing?

BH: Well making a lot of people very happy.

NM: But if you hate your own music...

BH: Hate is the wrong word, but it wasn't the sort of thing she would put on on a Saturday night when she wanted to listen to something.

NM: No I don't do that. People will say to me invariably at the end of every movie "well now if this one's a success do you want to do...?" and I say no, this is what I want to do. These are the movies I want to write, these are the stories I want to tell. I don't have a thriller in me.

BH: And do you feel, it's very strange reading a whole range of reviews and comments about the movies you've made, I wonder if you feel critic proof? Because your films do a really strange thing that they get picky criticisms and then they go on to make an absolute fortune at the box office and break all

sorts of records, and then they get to scoop up awards, Golden Globe nominations, BAFTA nominations...

NM: Am I critic proof? I mean I'm in the midst of it now, my film came out yesterday. And the reviews, I've read a couple and then I stop reading them because every time I forget, and I also think 'now they've going to embrace me, now I'm older, I've proven myself time and again.' Forget it.

[Laughter]

BH: Do you care?

NM: I do care, I wish I didn't care. I wish I was bigger but, you know, I care. I don't want to be, I don't think talking about the décor of the film for example is important in any way, it should not factor in. I can't imagine somebody does some space movie and they talk about the choices that director made to show you what space looks like. Right? Why in my movie do we have to talk about what the décor looks like? Who the hell cares? Just let it be, it's not the story.

It's unfortunate you're meeting me today after the reviews came out.

[Laughter]

I feel really sorry for you.

BH: [Laughs] it's okay we can make you feel better!

NM: Oh no, some of them are great, some of them are great. But unfortunately like all human beings I remember the bad ones.

BH: Don't you get a major sense of satisfaction as...

NM: I've had this conversation at dinner parties with people that are world famous you know actors and everything, and we've all talked about it, they can all quote the worst things ever said about them. And then somebody will say "do you remember the good things?" and not one of us will remember anything.

[Laughter]

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BH: Okay well let's go back and look at the good things, there are a lot of them.

NM: Okay.

BH: Let's start with the first good thing that we knew about which was *Private Benjamin*. Before we look at the clip just tell us, this was not the first screenplay you wrote?

NM: Erm, I sort of wrote a practice script. I wrote something that I never showed anybody.

BH: How did you get to the point of writing even your first practice scripts? Had you been working in the industry?

NM: Yes, I worked as what was then called a story editor, it's now called a creative executive, and I worked for producers and I read scripts for them.

BH: So you were one of the people who gave notes?

NM: I did give notes.

BH: Were you good at that?

NM: I thought I was, I thought I was actually because I tried to help them tell their story, not correct them so much but offered up ideas. And actually there was one writer that I worked with, so long ago, I was in my twenties, and he said at the end of a day, he said "you should really become a writer, you're really good at this, these are good ideas." It was so nice, he was so kind to me, he encouraged me a lot.

BH: Good okay, so then you got, you moved...?

NM: So I did that. Oh were you asking me something I didn't answer? I can tell by your face 'this woman is not answering my question.'

[Laughter]

BH: No no, I was just meaning take us to the point when you got to make *Private Benjamin*.

NM: Oh okay sorry, so take you to the point of how I...

BH: Of you going through your first, sort of, moving from script editor through to...

NM: Right so I left that job and a friend of mine was a TV writer and he knew I had just left this job and become a writer and he asked me if I wanted to ghost write a script for him which means I wrote it and he put his name on it. And yeah, I said yeah and that was fun. So I did that and then he really liked the way it turned out and then we wrote something together and this time I got to put my name on it but he still made all the money. And then...

BH: These were films that got made?

NM: No, these were TV shows that never happened [Laughs]. But it was fun, it was fun. I was so young, it was a beginning you know, I felt I was a writer, I was starting. And then while he and I were writing together, he was the man I lived with, the man who I then married, it was his best friend. So when he would then come home at night, he was a writer, the three of us would have dinner all the time so it was kind of like a fun writerly kind of life. And then I had an idea for a movie, for *Private Benjamin*, and I presented it to them one night after Charles [Shyer] came home and Harvey Miller and I were working. And I said "so I have this idea, what do you think of this? Do you think this could be a movie?" That's how it happened. So I told the two of them the idea, Charles was an actual screenwriter, Harvey had actually been in the army and I was an actual woman so...

[Laughter]

...between the three of us we hammered out that script. It was the most fun writing ever, that was the most fun.

BH: [Laughs] okay well let's have a look at how your actual women came out. Can we look at the clips from *Private Benjamin* please.

[Clip from *Private Benjamin* plays]

BH: So this strikes me as being a very typical you scene, where there's a group

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of women, a big boisterous group of women, they're having a conversation about quite a big thing and they're also talking about quite a lot of smut in the middle of it.

NM: That reminds you of me?

[Laughter]

BH: Well it reminds me of all your films. That happens so often in your films and it struck me then...

NM: [Laughs] I'm sure it's Harvey and Charles.

BH: But it struck me then that this must have been quite a ballsy thing to do. To have that conversation about that subject, was it? Did you feel like you were you know pushing walls down to make that?

NM: I was not aware of that, no.

BH: No? Was that not the kind of thing, I mean...

NM: It did get an R rating 'cause there was some of that. But you know we wrote it in 1979, kinda wanted to talk about things then.

BH: But you were the only person doing that, nobody else was doing that.

NM: That can't be true. In the '70s there were a lot of people, well maybe not about women.

BH: Yeah, that's exactly what I mean.

NM: Oh okay, that could be true then.

[Laughter]

BH: But did you not get any, I mean at that point presumably when they didn't know who you were and what you could do and what audiences would put up with, were you not confronted with a bunch of people telling you 'no, that's too far, you can't have that conversation'?

NM: Actually no. But you have to remember we wrote it at the end of the '70s, it got made in 1980, and in the '70s

there were such great movies, a lot was going on in the '70s in the movies, much more than today. So no, actually, no. I think they were a little bit amused that it was women talking about these things, that was kind of new. But the '70s embraced a lot more freedom in film than now.

BH: They did, but you're absolutely right, we never see that from women, or we never see that with women having those conversations.

NM: Right. Yeah.

BH: I mean now it's all *Sex and The City* and everything else, but not then.

NM: Probably not.

BH: But you had no sense you were doing something different?

NM: No, that's the truth.

BH: Well one thing you must have noticed that you were doing differently, which was the fact that you had, that you got green lit and become very successful, with a film that had a female lead and no male lead.

NM: That was, yes we were aware of that and it was really hard to get the movie made by the way, every single studio in Hollywood read it and passed on it. Nobody even met with us, it was really hard. As a matter of fact one studio had called Goldie [Hawn] and said "if you make this movie it's a career ender." So maybe they weren't that amused actually now that I think about it.

[Laughter]

Yeah they really advised her against making the movie.

BH: And why was that?

NM: Well Goldie was somebody to us that was on the show *Laugh-In*; she was in a bikini, she kind of played dumb, people had a lot of body paint on - anybody remember this? Know what I'm talking about, in the '60s? You've seen pictures of it anyway. So for that girl who was sort of the fake dumb blonde, to the

girl that decks a guy at the altar, that's what happens, she gets to the altar and she punches the guy, throws off her veil meaning 'that's it for me, I'm not going to do this again,' we kind of saw her as a marriage junkie, a girl that had to be married, and finally at the end of the movie she takes her veil off and throws it off and this is sort of I think maybe pre *An Unmarried Woman* and some movies like that, I'm not sure but in that era anyway. So this one studio had called her and said "really Goldie do not do this, do not do this movie, it's going to end things for you." And she said "I don't think so, I don't agree." And then finally, honestly, we got it made at the last moment, the very last person to read it said okay.

BH: And do you remember it changing much in the process?

[An audience member leaves the theatre]

NM: Was it something I've said?

[Laughter]

BH: [Laughs] do you remember it changing in the process, as you went through the process of originally writing it and going through all the fights with the studios, well not fights but you know, being rejected, rejected. Did you change it at all or did you stick with your original?

NM: Stuck with it. Yeah one studio came to us and they said, "We'll make it" – a movie called *Urban Cowboy* with John Travolta had just come out, and Deborah Winger and that was a big hit – so he said "if you make her from Texas we could do this, we'll maybe make this with you." So I looked at the two boys I was writing with and I said "you're counting on me to write the girl, I don't know anything about Texas. Never been there, I don't know how to write a girl from Texas, we can't..." They didn't wanna do it either by the way. But those kind of things happen or used to happen.

BH: Does that suggest that you always write about what you know exactly?

NM: It's best to, for me. Yeah.

BH: And you never bring in elements that...?

NM: No of course, I didn't know anything about the army. This new movie [*The Intern*] takes place in a start up, I knew nothing about a start up. There's all kinds of things I don't know that I'll learn about but the essence of the character has to be what I understand. I understood her upbringing, I put her, placed her exactly in the neighbourhood I came from.

BH: And then when you finally got there, I know you didn't direct it, but when it came good, did you recognize what you'd written? Is it very close to...?

NM: Oh yeah because we'd produced it. We wouldn't sell it, we were new and young and we just said "it's for sale with us as producers." And they sort of 'oh okay, we're stuck with them.' But they were stuck with us.

BH: And then you were lauded and feted and then it won the Oscar.

NM: No, oh yeah so it was nominated for an Academy Award but we didn't win it. That was sad night, I was sitting in the front row of the Academy Awards and Peter Finch presented the award and he was standing right in front of me with the envelope and there was a giant light on him and I read right through the envelope.

[Laughter]

And I didn't wanna say anything to Harvey or Charles because I just wanted them to have their moment but I saw there were not three names on it.

BH: God you could put that in a film.

NM: That was horrible.

BH: So what impact did that have? Oscar nomination was huge and this was just your debut screenplay so did that suddenly, did you find all those doors opening and people taking notice?

NM: Um, yeah, you know obviously I was a great thing and the picture did really well which was great. Like how I call

them pictures? Very old school. So the picture did well so that was great but the next movie we did was a rather small kind of independent movie.

BH: Before you get to that just first, I hadn't realised this, *Private Benjamin* also became a TV show.

NM: Yes it did.

BH: Was that something you were involved with?

NM: No, we had nothing to do with it.

BH: Okay, but you have done that with another of your films?

NM: Yes, because of what happened with *Private Benjamin*. They cast – is anybody related to the girl that was cast? – a very unfunny girl.

[Laughter]

And you can't be *Private Benjamin* if you're unfunny.

BH: Were you intending to get involved with the serialisation?

NM: No, never thought about it, it never occurred to us. But we had heard that, because you know you sell your, they own it. So they went and did it without us, it didn't do well, it failed.

BH: But you did do that with *Baby Boom*?

NM: Yes because *Baby Boom* they wanted, they wanted that to become a TV show. And oddly enough we cast an unfunny person in it.

[Laughter]

You try.

BH: You, strangely, haven't done much flitting between film and TV.

NM: No, I didn't really like TV. I didn't like the experience.

BH: Okay, can you tell us why?

NM: Well I wrote every episode. It's very exhausting, I'd just had a baby, and it

was very hard you know because, there's such brilliant TV, but for me it wasn't a good fit.

BH: Did you find it was a very different discipline? The exercise of writing?

NM: Totally. I mean you have to write really quickly, while you're writing one you're casting one, you're editing one. So there's a lot going on at once. Just for me it was hard, I mean there's brilliant TV so I'm not saying it's a problem everybody has with it but I found it hard. And I had a brand new baby, so for me it was just a really tough experience.

BH: Okay. I'm interested in how you start your screenplays, and particularly I wonder if you start with a character?

NM: Starting is really hard I find, beginning is really hard, the hardest part. Once you get in there it's just so much better but the beginning is so hard. I'll do anything to avoid the beginning.

BH: Okay, we've got some of your characters here [on screen], a quick visual reminder. So how do you build a character? Start with any of these, start with Judy or with any of them, what did you start with? You suddenly thought of her? You suddenly thought of a situation? How do you build a character? How do you test whether it's convincing?

NM: Well the idea of *Private Benjamin* was an idea that I had, I think the initial idea was somebody joins the army to get away from their troubles, and I just started laughing to myself at that; what a stupid choice.

[Laughter]

You know, who could be that naïve, who could be in that position? So to create somebody to be in that position if that was the drive of her character was that she had a problem, what state of mind was she in to be able to actually believe the guy that says to you "it's gonna be beautiful and there's condos and there's yachts" and these things that he says to her. So we had to put her in some kind of situation where she wasn't thinking straight. So we had her husband die on

her wedding night, and this was a girl who very much wanted to be married. And it was, don't forget the year you know, 1980, when all girls were getting married. Course there was then 20 years then when a lot of women didn't get married but back then it was really an important... anyway so it starts like that and it sort of worked backwards from the premise, to who is she to justify the premise. So in the beginning I'm experimenting, I don't know that it's going to work. We didn't know when we wrote that. We played around with it, I'm sure we had other ideas of what else could happen to her but we sort of fell in love with this guy dying on the wedding night and maybe it's her second marriage and she's so young, which leads us into the third guy that she meets which is also a mistake.

BH: And what about, how do you build your characters then? How much do you know about them?

NM: Well that is 'who is she?' She's not just a person getting married, who is she specifically. So we came up with, we talked a lot about who she could be until we land on it.

BH: And tell us about your writer character. Is she you, your *Something's Gotta Give* character?

NM: Well when she [Diane Keaton] won the Golden Globe she got up on the stage and said "well when I play Nancy..."

[Laughter]

But I hadn't thought of it that way but she did. She's the closest to me I would say 'cause we have the same job you know and similar traits and we were both divorced and we both have friendly relationships with our ex-husband and we both met somebody new, so there was all that but none of the circumstances are the same.

BH: Okay and how much do you know about your character's back story?

NM: Oh a lot.

BH: Do you write that out?

NM: I do, I totally do biographies more or less. I really figure out who they were, who their parents were, how they were treated, where they went to school, how did they get to be the person they are. I can't just start writing or they're just going to sound like me, more like me even than she does.

BH: Do you know how they would do a quiz if they were doing a quiz in a magazine or, I mean is it that detailed?

NM: It's pretty detailed, it's pretty detailed. What kind of mother is she, what was her major in college? You know, yeah, it's very detailed, which is why I sometimes drive people crazy on the set because I'll see the set decorator has lined the shelves with books and I'll say "she wouldn't read that."

[Laughter]

And they'll say "it's out of focus in the background" and I'll say "I know but like Diane might see it and it's just not a book she would have."

BH: And then is it different, obviously you know we struggled really to find a picture of a man...

NM: Why? What about Jack [Nicolson]? What about Mel [Gibson]?

BH: Well we'll come back to them, but just using him [Steve Martin] as a representative man...

NM: Him? Steve Martin?

BH: But Jack I think is different because when Jack is in your film with Diane, she's the lead. Steve is the lead in *Father of the Bride*.

NM: I would say it's a two-hander, *Something's Gotta Give* is a two-hander.

BH: That's funny, I think of it as being her, perhaps that what I was looking at.

NM: Talk to Jack.

[Laughter]

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BH: Okay but very definitely *Father of the Bride* is Steve's film.

NM: Well it is called *Father of the Bride* [laughs].

BH: Well there you go, it is a clue. But I know it's slightly different because you were basing it on a film that already existed.

NM: On the Spencer Tracy film, yeah.

BH: But do you think differently when you're building up a character, when you're writing the character, do you think differently when you're writing the character of a man, than you would about any of the other women that you write?

NM: I don't give them less attention no. I work equally hard on their characters.

BH: Okay and do you find it as easy, I mean are you thinking about what he has on his bookshelf?

NM: Yes, I love writing the men, I love writing the men. Oh yeah, for sure, for sure. Yes, I mean like Jack and I figured out the art in his character's house and I remember doing that with him. Oh no the same, I put the same work into every character.

BH: But it's interesting then that you wouldn't make Judy from Texas because you don't know Texas, you didn't know that but you feel comfortable writing as if you're a man.

NM: Right. Well that's a good point.

[Laughter]

But I mean I've known men my whole life, I've never been in Texas you know.

BH: Right, totally fair enough.

NM: I've never been one but I know them better than I know Texas.

[Laughter]

BH: Fair enough, okay. Let's have a quick look at the time you did write the lead male, we're going to look at a very quick

clip from *Father of the Bride*. The original *Father of the Bride*, you wrote two of these.

NM: But not the original *Father of the Bride*?

BH: No no, your original *Father of the Bride*. So we'll just have a quick look at the clip please.

NM: Okay.

[Clip from *Father of the Bride* plays]

[Applause]

NM: Thank you.

BH: So this is you still writing and producing, at what point do you think about actors, at that point, sorry, when you were still writing and producing and not directing. How much did you think about actors?

NM: Well Steve asked us to do this movie with him so we had him from, well he had us from the beginning, we had him from the beginning. So it was for Steve Martin and I'm a huge Steve Martin fan still. So that was an honour really.

BH: So did that mean, when you were writing then, right from the outset you knew you were writing for him...

NM: Which is a gift.

BH: Yeah.

NM: It's a gift because you know you're writing for Steve Martin so you know you can be funny and you can be loose and you can do all these twists and turns in the scene of...

BH: And he has such a very specific comic delivery, such a particular way of talking, how did you get that into your head when you were writing?

NM: It's not so much to get his delivery in my head, it's sort of get, just make it funny enough. You know, I felt, I remember feeling it was a little bit of pressure to be as good as a Steve Martin comedy, but it was so freeing too because you didn't have to worry 'what

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if I get someone who can't do this?' I didn't have to temp or anything.

BH: Yeah and did you find actually when you then got on set, or he got on set and was delivering your lines, I mean did you have it right or did he tweak it a little bit?

NM: He's extremely respectful of the script and he loved the script so he was great with it. [Gestures to the screen] There was no improvising in that scene but sometimes he would say "I have an idea but wait 'til you guys like it, let's get it out, get it as written, be happy with it as written and then if I could try something." And more times than not he would try something and he'd go "oh forget that, that's not good." Yeah he doesn't care, if it's good it's good and we're obviously all going to love it.

BH: And that's quite an unusual situation then, writing specifically for an actor who's already very heavily involved? How often does that happen? Or how often do you just get the privilege of writing...

NM: Erm, that had never happened to me before this one, and hasn't happened since.

BH: And so normally then, what happens when you're normally creating characters? Do you normally have actors in mind?

NM: Sometimes I do yeah, sometimes I do. Because I go to them early to see if they'd be interested in the idea and if they are I sort of write it with them in mind. And sometimes that works, sometimes at the end they'll say yes and sometimes no. Like Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton I wanted for *Something's Gotta Give*. I had them in mind.

BH: So how early did you have them in mind?

NM: I had them in mind as soon as I had the idea. So somebody introduced me to Jack and I met him and I said "I have this idea for a movie, I'd love to write it for you, you don't have to commit but do you like it?" Because I didn't want to spend the next year of my life thinking about him if there was no chance on

earth he would be in this movie. But he told me "I really like the idea, yeah go for it." Which was, if he had said you know "not for me" then that would have helped me because I wouldn't have thought so much about him.

BH: You mean 'go for it' and he was then tied in or 'go for it' and he could've then walked away?

NM: Either way. Obviously I would prefer that he liked the idea, than he didn't, and same with Diane, I met with her and I said "I have this idea I want to write for you" and of course she's hilarious and said "Nancy nobody's going to put me in that movie with Jack Nicholson."

BH: And when you've got somebody whose, I mean again a bit like with Steve Martin, personalities like that, big personalities, we know how they speak, we know the sorts of look they give, is that harder to write for?

NM: Oh it's a pleasure. I had so much fun. Not hard.

BH: And then what about...

NM: But I don't feel dictated by his skill set, it just encourages me, you know.

BH: And then have you, with the others, when you don't have big personalities involved that you've got your sights on, do you, is that harder to just write general parts or do you then just have fun with people looking and saying, I mean how much do you visualise what people look like when you write? How much do you visualise the patterns of speech?

NM: Well when I don't have an actor in mind I try not to get too specific with it, you know. It's hard to explain how you see, I'm sure novelists do the same thing, you picture something, you have some image of the character but you can't, I can't put Robert De Niro's face on it if I don't have Robert De Niro.

BH: And do you ever think that, when you're casting as you write, do you do it against type ever?

NM: Almost always, in my opinion.

BH: Can you think of specific examples when you've done that really dramatically?

NM: Well this movie which you haven't seen yet, *The Intern*, opens next Friday. Robert De Niro plays the nicest guy, he's really erm, he's really a very centered, calm, patient, non-threatening person. Totally against type because in every comedy he's in he's sort of trading on his threatening stuff that people know him from, scary you know, he'll do, in the *Fockers* movie you know he'll put Ben Stiller in a lie detector machine. He's not nuts in my movie at all so I think that's very much against type.

Well like Mel Gibson in *What Woman Want*, pretty macho guy, becomes a feminist.

[Laughter]

Jack falls in love with a woman his age, hello?

[Laughter]

I'd say this is my trademark now that I'm thinking on it!

BH: You've also put people in films where, and I'm wondering at which point you got them into your head when you were writing, films which they wouldn't normally be seen in. Not necessarily that they're playing a different character but they're just playing in an unusual kind of film. So for example Kate Winslet and Jude Law who in *The Holiday*, I think that was a very unusual film for them to choose. They were stretching themselves there.

NM: Yeah, and Jack Black also.

BH: Yes that's true.

NM: Cameron [Diaz] was the only one that seems like the natural person that would be in the movie. But I like doing that, I don't really want to see people doing what they've done in everybody else's movie. I like that. Yeah you don't want to feel like 'oh it's another Kate Winslet comedy'.

BH: Just going back to the point about it being a remake, this one...

NM: *Father of the Bride*?

BH: Yeah. Did you go back to the original script?

NM: Yes I had a copy of the script.

BH: Did you look at the film.

NM: Of course, looked at the movie. It wasn't so much a comedy, it was kind of a light-hearted, you know. We, because we were making a Steve Martin movie, we wanted to make it more comedic, just really definitely funnier stuff all throughout. And Spencer Tracy and Steve Martin have very different strengths so we didn't, you know I think if we were give 'do you wanna make a remake of *Father of the Bride*?' we maybe would've made it a little straighter like the Spencer Tracy version but once we have Steve Martin then you know you just cut loose more and it's more fun.

BH: And then you went back to this film for *Father of the Bride 2*.

NM: Yes, quite by accident in a way.

BH: I was going to say was that a plan? At which point did you...?

NM: There was no plan. I had this idea of, I was just fooling around one day talking to Charles and what if, you know it was a couple of years later, and what if Annie the daughter had a baby the same time the mother got pregnant. And because, then it was fun because, the writing of that was fun because why did she become pregnant? Because he was so upset at becoming a grandfather that he had sex with his wife in kitchen whilst she was making dinner and it happened. You know, there was no plan but it was all based on his own anxiety about becoming a grandfather. That gave him much more anxiety becoming a new father again.

[Laughter]

BH: Was it fun to go back to those characters?

NM: Could not have been more fun. They're the most pleasant people in the world, it's the nicest cast, it's just Martin Short, Diane Keaton and Steve Martin. I mean if you can hang out with them at any time, you definitely should.

[Laughter]

BH: We'll remember that.

NM: And it's also nice to come back when you've made a successful film together because you don't have that pressure built up like 'I wonder if this is going to work.' We already knew people liked them. When I went to see the preview of the second movie, you know previews are before the movie comes out you run the movie at a normal movie theatre, you know kind of out a little bit like an hour away from sort of where I live. And as the second one started and Steve Martin was sort of talking to the audience they started laughing, nothing funny was going on by the way, it wasn't a particularly funny monologue but they just were so happy to see him again in this part that was, you know.

BH: Are there other films that you've written that you would like to return to?

NM: No.

BH: Seriously no? Just this one?

NM: That was a particularly pleasant experience for all of us, yeah. And it had a sequel, the original had a sequel called *Daddy's Little Dividend*. So it felt like it could work again. But the mother didn't have a baby in the original, just the daughter.

BH: Okay, let's move on to your next remake, or your only other remake, which was *The Parent Trap*. Which of course was the first film that you directed.

NM: Yes.

BH: Let's have a little quick look at this. While you're queuing it up I'll just say this is my daughter's favourite film, so thank you for making this. Did you, erm... let's do the clip and then we'll talk.

NM: Okay. She's [Briony's daughter] a twin right?

BH: Yep.

NM: I think we had a screening once of all twins.

[Clip from *The Parent Trap* plays]

[Applause]

BH: So this was another remake, did you do something differently this time or did you follow the same kind of process to get to the screenplay for this?

NM: In terms of what sorry?

BH: In terms of, this was the second time you'd remade, so did you follow the same process or had you learnt lessons on *Father* that you brought to bear on this?

NM: The lesson in a remake, I'm sure it's the same in adapting a book, is don't go too far off of it, right? Modernise it but don't change it radically because what's the point? Make an original movie then. If you're going to remake a classic it has to, you know. I met, of course you know who Hayley Mills is, we had a royal premiere for the movie and they said to all of us, I was there, Dennis Quaid was there, Natasha Richardson was there, and they told us to all come to a rehearsal at 2pm in the afternoon to figure out how to meet the Queen and where you're supposed to stand and all this stuff. Only two people showed up, me and Hayley Mills. Nobody else showed up. Because Hayley was invited because of this [the remake]. So it was just the two of us and they ran us through the whole thing and I introduced myself and I said, you know, I'm the director of the movie and she kind of didn't look at me and shook my hand. And then after the screening that night she came up to me and she hugged me and she said "I was so afraid to see this movie," she said "but you didn't ruin it." I said "thank you." And she said "no, I liked it as much as our version" you know which was the best compliment I could get because I was 10 when *The Parent Trap* came out, I loved *The Parent Trap*, loved it, loved it,

loved it. It's a very girl empowering movie, because the children, the daughters, the two girls make everything happen; they have total control of the destiny of their family. So I had a 10-year-old, I made these two movies for Disney that *Father of the Bride* movies and I said to them "would you ever consider remaking *The Parent Trap*?" and they said "yeah, do you want to do it?" And I said "yeah, I love the *The Parent Trap*." And I was actually trying to start directing something else and the picture didn't get off the ground, I was very frustrated, so then I went into *The Parent Trap*. So anyway the process was, like Hayley Mills said, don't ruin it, you know. Don't try to outsmart something that works; modernise it, lots is different about it. But I think in the original both the girls were from, nobody lived in London right? As I remember, both girls, one lived in Northern California, one lived in Boston. So we made Boston London.

BH: Good decision.

NM: Well, more international.

BH: So what did directing do to you as a writer?

NM: Hmmm. It didn't really, you see I had been very hands-on as a producer because my ex-husband had directed all these movies we made. So I was always there, very present, always in front of the monitor. So it wasn't like my first time seeing my words come to life or anything. You know, I was 48 by the first time I directed. And I'd been making movies for close to 20 years so, it would normally if I'd just been a writer and became a director but since I made all those other movies it was not a horrible transition. You can't curse the writer anymore, you know.

BH: It is interesting though because then your next step was to not write at all, was to direct *What Women Want*.

NM: Erm, I wasn't credited but I wrote the script. It was a funny difficult situation.

BH: Ah okay, that makes total sense, otherwise it doesn't make sense at all.

NM: [Laughs]

BH: Well okay, having directed and then going back to write *What Women Want*, it didn't make you do anything differently?

NM: No.

BH: That's interesting, nothing at all, because you'd been so involved?

NM: No, because I already was making movies. I wasn't a writer at home that first got to be on the set.

BH: Okay.

NM: You do get smarter with every movie, certainly.

BH: I gather, I've read quite a lot about you as a, you're quite a big mood board user? And I'm not quite sure whether that's because you're a director or that's you at the point of writing. You're a big Pinterest fan I see. [One of Nancy's Pinterest boards on screen].

NM: Oh this is my Pinterest. Are you on Pinterest anybody?

BH: I know this is specifically about *The Intern*...so don't look at it too much before you've seen the movie.

NM: This is a bit of an oddball page because it's a whole bunch of different things at once. What is this one? Can we go to another page?

BH: I don't think it's live, I think it's a screen shot. But you can tell us.

NM: Well something's odd about, this is the studio's page maybe, 'cause they then took it. Well anyway. Each character has a page, so that picture in the top right corner is on De Niro's page I believe, or could be on Annie's page, Anne Hathaway's page. So sometimes the images are there for the actors to soak up. So here's the thing, as a writer, as you know, you've been thinking about it and thinking about it and all these people are going to come in and they're going to design the sets, figure out your wardrobe, actors are going to say the lines, the more I can get them in

to my head, the better time it's going to be for everybody, and less constant translating. So that's just sort of to give them the idea of that relationship, 'cause I had read that Katherine Hepburn had said the reason they were so great together was because he [Spencer Tracy] was like a baked potato, she said "he was like a baked potato and I was like an ice cream sundae." And I thought that Anne Hathaway and Bob De Niro a little bit had that combo too so I started referencing that. I figured for Ben, on his page for Bob, loved Billie Holliday, I decided he loved Billie Holliday. So then, you know, that comes into the movie. Some of these are Brooklyn images. Do you have any other boards that are specific to one character?

BH: No it was just a still I think.

NM: I'm not sure what this page is 'cause it's all different things. But a lot of this is Brooklyn.

BH: Well you can have a look later but don't look until you've seen the film next week.

NM: That's alright, it's interesting because you'll see how close we came to our sets, and the look of the movie is very much the look of my Pinterest.

BH: Have you done this with other movies or is this the first one you did on Pinterest? But previously did you do mood boards and...?

NM: No this was the first one with Pinterest but I've always had very big bulletin boards in my office with all kinds of, as a matter of fact in *The Holiday* I had seen this little cottage in *Vogue* magazine, had done a fashion shoot out in somewhere, the Cotswolds I think. And this cottage just stuck in my mind and I had it by my computer when I was writing and then it went up on my bulletin board and then they found it, I remember they called me "we found it! It's impossible to get to. It's impossible we could never film here." So we sort of copied it. But that cottage, everybody knew what we were looking for.

BH: And I don't want to, obviously, talk about your interiors because that's what everyone does, even though I do want that beach house, but how much of your interiors do you script? I mean I know you have your mood board and I know you have bits of inspiration.

NM: I don't script interiors.

BH: You don't describe them?

NM: What I do is I do little maps and floor plans when I'm writing because if I'm writing 'she comes out of her bedroom and goes into the kitchen' I have to know how she gets there. Am I just going to 'cut to exit one door to,' I can do that but I need to know how she got there. Did she go down a flight of stairs, did she walk, so I do a floor plan which we then build, someone makes it good. Like there's this scene in *Something's Gotta Give*, I don't know if you remember, where they're doing instant messaging each other and they say "you wanna meet in the kitchen?" and he comes out of his room and she comes out of her room so I had to have a house built where they could do that, so they weren't both coming out of the same side. You know they had the opposite sides, so we built that whole house, that whole floor plan is based on that moment.

BH: That's amazing. And how descriptive are your scripts anyway?

NM: Pretty descriptive. Not like that like 'she exits her kitchen, takes five steps and lands in the...' you know it's not boring. But I can explain to them, you know. So when I'm making the movie I explain to them how I see somebody getting from one place to the next or why the front door has to have a window next to it because there's the scene where, you know, Steve Martin in *Father of the Bride* is looking out the window, he's watching the guy pull up and oh he drove to fast. You know I have to have a window in the scene where he was standing when the kid drove up. It's just basic stuff but you'd be amazed at what people miss.

BH: And then what about, you know quite often you go to physical comedy,

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that kind of like screwball thing, and how descriptive is that in your script?

NM: Pretty.

BH: Very choreographed?

NM: Yes.

BH: And was that the same before you were the director?

NM: Yes.

BH: Is it more or less now you're the director as well?

NM: The same.

BH: Do you think your scripts haven't changed at all?

NM: I know you want me to tell you that once I started directing...

BH: No, no, sorry [laughs] I'm just asking.

NM: But no, the scripts have stayed the same in terms of details. I think they're better some of them now but I don't think it's because I'm a director. I've just been writing a long time. Sometimes they're worse but I try to make them better.

BH: I'm conscious of time sorry. We've got one more clip to show you before we show you *The Intern* trailer, if we could have *It's Complicated* now. Another one in the most recent series of films that you wrote, directed and produced.

NM: Yeah, my last one.

BH: Let's go to the clip now and then we'll talk.

NM: God I haven't seen this in six years.

[Clip from *It's Complicated* plays]

[Applause]

BH: So this is another of your post-divorce films.

NM: My post-divorce period. I was going to say by blue period but it was pretty good actually [laughs].

BH: So yet again people say is this you, are these characters you? And would you answer it in the same way that you're taking elements?

NM: I was divorced, that's the extent of it.

BH: And it's not autobiographical other than that?

NM: No. But you know a divorced person is a character that's not in a lot of movies. Other than the angry women at the door, dropping off the kids woman, you know. Like the real life, what's life like when you're divorced? So yeah I liked writing it. I haven't seen this in I think six years so it's interesting you know, what he's talking about, I can see why she was irritated by it.

BH: And again with this one where it's older people and you're picking out a particular kind of actor with a particularly kind of look, and I know by this time you're wildly successful and presumably very few people were saying no to you, but did anybody, did you still get a sense of 'well we don't want to see older people'?

NM: Well those are the people that didn't make it but the people that make the movie like it. They have their pick of whatever so if they're gonna say yes to me to make the movie, they're not going to then take it apart and change it. That doesn't happen I don't find.

BH: And were you surprised at how successful it was?

NM: I was very happy... [Jokily] There's a lot of divorced people. But you know it's such great actors, Meryl's brilliant and Steve came in for a secondary part to Alex Baldwin, which was unusual, so I mean I thought I had a shot, the actors were so great.

BH: Um, I'm very conscious that we need to give you some time to talk so let's very briefly end on the trailer for *The Intern* which you haven't seen yet, you can see

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from Friday. And then we'll throw you open to the crowd.

NM: Okay. This one I've seen...

BH: More recently! [Laughs]

[clip from *The Intern* plays]

[Applause]

BH: Did you have any sense that you were updating *Baby Boom*?

NM: I thought of it as a companion piece after I finished making it, towards the end. Not aware at all, while I was making it but it's absolutely a companion piece I think. Women in business and motherhood and balancing and, but much more modern. I mean *Baby Boom* was '87, this is 2015; it's a new world, but the problem still exists.

BH: And significantly *Baby Boom* she's an employee.

NM: Yes she's an employee, it never occurred to me to make this girl an employee, she was going to be CEO, founder of her own company. Which I think the Diane character in *Baby Boom* would have done the same if she was this age today.

BH: Good note to start with some questions.

Q: Hi, with regards to writing comedy, to be funny, I'm always you've got to cram in as many gags per page, just like chuck in as many jokes as you can every single page. But I haven't found that's worked for me.

NM: If someone gave me that advice I'd be frozen.

Q: Well do you have any other...

NM: Yeah, forget that advice.

[Laughter]

Q: Do you have other advice?

NM: I mean that's crazy, how can you do that? The funniest things are the most real, or what's based in something that

everybody can relate to, right? And nobody can relate to five jokes on a page. Honestly don't even worry about it, just do what feels natural to you.

Q: Can I ask a second part to that? With regards to like adding details on the script, like you said, with regards to how they might say the joke, have you found that that may help?

NM: To make sure they deliver the line properly? Oh yeah I'll do every trick, I'll italicise the word I want them hit, sometimes I'll underline it, sometimes I'll put '...' before it, oh yeah I want it to land right. But I know I'm also going to be there to help them, but if you're not going to be there don't worry about it just say 'parenthetical' a little 'just kidding' or 'with ease he says' or 'nervously admits' or whatever, just say whatever you want to direct all the time. For Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep I'll give them parenthetical directions, and I know I'm there and I still do it.

Q: Thank you very much.

NM: Good luck.

Q: Hi Nancy, I watched *Father of the Bride* the night before my daughter's wedding.

[Laughter]

NM: I watched it the night before my daughter's wedding too.

Q: I watched it with my wife, with my daughter and with my mother-in-law and they spent the entire film laughing. I spent the whole film in tears!

[Laughter]

Judging by the montage we saw earlier you're well aware of the pain that's in comedy, there were a lot of tears in that. Is it something you're aware of when you're writing, how painful they can be?

NM: Absolutely, yes always. I often think that some of my movies, if I just described them to you, would be tragedies. But it's my take on it that makes them comedic but underneath for sure, I love doing that. I think *Father of*

the Bride weaves really well, as the original did, between comedy and not so much drama as just personal pain of losing your child, you know. But he comes out the other side, you know, and we can all relate to it. When I first wrote that my kids were young, the flower girls in the movie, you know those two little flower girls? They're now 28 and 35 but at the time, you know, I wasn't there yet, but I already knew if these two little girls were actually going to grow up and get married and leave us this is going to be the worst day of my life. But then, as it turns out, they get married and it's not the worst day it's a great day but I totally get what you're saying. And yeah I'm aware of it. The whole movie, really the theme of that whole movie is father doesn't want to lose his daughter, that's it, you know the original movie, the original original *Father of the Bride* was originally written for Jack Benny who, you know, his whole thing is that he's the cheapest man on earth, so the whole movie started by just being the father didn't want to pay for the movie, he was too cheap. Well there's that, I'm with you on that one too. [Laughs]

Q: Are there any favourite comedy scripts of other people that you admire?

NM: Many, *Tootsie*, *Annie Hall* obviously, *Shampoo*, I guess that was a comedy-ish, a drama/tragedy. Everything Billy Wilder's ever done. Many, so many that I love.

Q: Thank you very much, very illuminating. I wondered if you could talk about your relationship with Hans Zimmer? He seems to do a sound for you that he won't do for anyone else, it seems. And I wondered what your process is...

NM: [Laughs] He would agree with you. He says I'm the biggest pain in the ass he's ever met. Well the only reason you're really saying that is that mostly he does *Batman* and *Interstellar* and so of course he's not going to do a romantic theme in any of those movies. And he loves those movies, much more than my kind of movie. But somehow I've wrangled him three times, I didn't get him on this movie because I think he felt,

well he was doing *Batman* vs. *Superman*. [Mock sarcastically] whatever.

[Laughter]

I said, so when he said "I'm doing *Batman* v. *Superman*" I said "yeah, so?" He said "so I'm not available," I said "...but could you do it?"

[Laughter]

And he said "I really, I can't do it." And then I would call him a week later and I would say "are still doing *Batman* and *Superman*?" [Laughs] So obviously I make the movie... He did an amazing thing on *Something's Gotta Give*. I had a score by another composer, and I really like that movie, that movie is very special to me, and while we were scoring the film and I'm in the scoring session I was just like breaking out into a sweat. I just felt that the music wasn't right. And the music, as you writers will know, it's the only thing that's added to the movie, the only thing that goes on that you don't make happen, you know? If the music is wrong, the scene takes a turn and it's just not right. And it's just suddenly this scene has gone from, it's become too dramatic or it's become too sad, or it's got too sloppy, or it's just the wrong tone. So I was really dying, I didn't know quite what to do but the woman who was the head of music for Sony who made the movie was sitting with me and she kept going like this [shakes her head] and I said "what are we going to do? I don't know what we're going to do." And then on the last day of scoring she pulled me aside and said – by the way I have a lot of respect for the guy who wrote that score so I feel bad saying this – but she said "this score is ruining your movie." I said "I know, what are we going to do?" She said "I've placed a call to Hans Zimmer and he's going to save us. And we had to be finished in a week, in one week the movie had to be done so, I'd never met Hans, so I went over to his place and he said "I saw your movie" because she got him a copy of the movie. And he said "I've come up with something and if you like it I'll do the whole score." And so, as he tells the story, he had his back to me and he was playing the piano, playing this tune and he hears sobbing.

[Laughter]

And so he was afraid to turn around. And so he said he was playing and he hears me [*makes gasping noise*], like it got to that point, and so finally he stopped and he had his back to me and he just turned around and he assumed I hated it and I was in horrible trouble. And I forget what I said, he knows what I said, he's told this story a bunch of times, but it was like he was inside my head. And, it's bringing tears to my eyes now, I just never thought I could've gotten it, I thought something had happened to the movie that I could not fix. So he did it in a week, and basically I moved into his offices for a week and I went to the wine store and I bought like a case of wine and I took it with me the next day because there's a lot of people that work with him. And I was still working during the day on the movie doing other sound work on it. And I would come there at night and he'd be writing all day and so we bonded in the best possible way. Then he did two more I think after that, but he wasn't available on this. But I really love the score on my new movie, I really do, it's great. And I invited Hans to come see the movie last week but he couldn't make it. 'Cause I think he probably thought I was going to somehow say "could you fix..."

[Laughter]

But no, it was done. I didn't invite him until it was done done done. But I love him.

BH: He'll be the one crying this time.

NM: I also got him to play at my daughter's wedding. I wrangled him in to that, I conned him into that.

Q: Hi, so I'm sure there's no way you could properly surmise or give us a tell-tale guide of how to be a good writer, but is there any like three tips, or three major things that you would recommend for a writer to always do?

NM: What kind of screenplays do you write?

Q: Well I'm currently working actually on TV, a little comedy drama, and it's about my experiences living in cooperative housing in Austin, Texas. So I've been to Texas...

[Laughter]

...but you should do go to Texas 'cause it's amazing.

NM: I have nothing against Texas, I just wouldn't know how to write it.

Q: No, I know.

NM: Well you already fit rule number one for me which is to really write something that's you. You know, that's why I haven't directed other people's movies. I mean, for me, that's worked for me, I'm most comfortable. Already that you're writing about an experience that you went through, so nobody else knows, so you are the best person to write that, because that happened to you. So that's the best thing. Then just really, sounds obvious and like your mother talking but, I mean, work really hard at it. I think a lot of young writers think 'well they're going to give me notes anyway so I'm not really gonna fix this part'. Forget that, give yourself every possible note you can give yourself, really beat yourself up if you have to. Really push yourself as hard as you can because they're only going to read it once, you know, in terms of screenplays when you hand one in, when you show it to a studio, you know, they're not going to read your next draft. You have one shot with these people. So it's too late to then say 'oh I knew I should've fixed that scene' fix it before you show it to anybody. So there's two notes, good ones though.

Q: Thank you so much.

BH: Very good ones, they are very good ones. And I think probably we ought to stop there but let me just ask you one final thing. Your daughter has written a screenplay?

NM: Yes, several.

BH: When she started to write, when you thought she was going to be writing, did

you heart sink or were you happy with her choice?

NM: No, it soared.

BH: Do you recommend writing? Do you like writing? Are you a happy writer?

NM: Yes, but you know what worries me about her and all of you is this is such a different time. Because the last 35 years you could make movies about people. This movie *The Intern* was very hard to get made, for me it was hard to get made and I have had successes so there's a track record there they could look at and feel good about. It was still really hard to get made. So I worry about her because I worry about the climate and the landscape, you know, of the movie business. But I think with my movie getting made, you know, and I know a couple of other people that have gotten movies made that are not superhero movies or whatever, maybe the pendulum is swinging back in the direction of human beings and human stories and comedies about adults. So that's the only thing I worry about with her, I don't worry about her, I worry about will she be able to get her work, will it happen for her because the movie business is not embracing the kind of work she wants to do.

BH: I thought we were going to have to end on a depressing note there. We should have ended with the great tips. But that was a good note.

Thank you so much to the JJ Charitable Trust for supporting this wonderful series, thanks to United Airlines for making the series international and thank you to Warner Bros. for making tonight's event possible. Thank you to all of you for your questions but most of all thank you, of course, the wonderful Nancy Meyers.

NM: It was fun, thank you. Thanks so much.

[Applause]