'The Interview': Richard Linklater Sees the Killer Inside Us All

0:01

[Music] from The New York Times this is the interview I'm David

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maresi if I ask you to think of a Richard linklater movie what do you think of maybe it's the cult favorite

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days to confused that's the movie that launched Matthew mcc's career or maybe it's Before Sunrise the first

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installment of his beloved Trilogy about Big Ideas love and fate or maybe you'd think about the low-key Coming of Age

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epic Boyhood which link later famously filmed over a dozen years and of course

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you can't forget School of Rock his biggest hit which exists in a category all of its own and to me that's the fun

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of Link Leader's work you never quite know what he's going to make next so I wasn't surprised to see him getting into

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romantic crime Thrillers with his new movie Hitman it stars the great Glenn Powell who also co-wrote it it's

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excellent but I would argue that it's excellent because it's actually not so far off from his other work as it might

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seem between all the thrill the crimes and the sex Hitman sneaks in a pretty

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provocative exploration of one of Link Leader's favorite themes the changing nature of identity basically what it

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means to be a person it's also a movie as so many of Link later's films are that understands just how much fun it is

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to watch smart characters talk to each other exploring ideas making each other laugh and even testing each other a

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little bit it's the talking that made me fall in love with link Leader's films because those are the kinds of

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conversations that are most meaningful to me me I don't want to make too much of all this but I can see a pretty clear

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line from teenage me sitting around watching Waking Life and slacker over and over again to me here now talking

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with those films director Richard linklater who as it turns out sounds a lot like a character from one of his

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movies here's our [Music]

1:55

conversation I think um it's fair to say that a lot of your films

2:00

are asking questions about identity and formation of identity and given that that's a recurring theme in your work

2:09

I'm curious how you think about your identity at 63 years old do you feel

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like it's fixed do you feel like you still have formative experiences yeah isn't that the the

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question of self it's the kind of thing I thought a lot about my entire life you know just like what could transform me

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what could make me feel different than how I feel who how I see the world so

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I've always kind of monitored that you know like what what's going to change me and I was probably more in the camp of

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where fix give or take whatever little percentage around the edges and we sort of accept ourselves so I was more

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interested in this notion lately that oh you really can change you know you know you really the personality

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isn't fixed but that seems sort of current you know in a way this notion of

3:05

self and identity you know gender anything I I sort of like that it's all on the table that that everybody's

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thinking like well you kind of are who you say you are you know like to me that's interesting do you have a lot of

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different identities uh yeah probably as as many as anybody else what are the different

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ones well you know if you get me on a pingpong table like an area where like

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my my third rail is Athletics you know I cross into this realm where I was

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acculturated and just good enough to like figure I should be good and Achieve

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and I I have this bar for myself so I I feel this little rush of competitiveness

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which I really don't have in the world of art at all or my life even I don't see it anywhere but it's in certain

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areas and I try to avoid them because it's not the best me but every now and

4:04

then it can be fun kind of push yourself but you know I'm I'm the guy looking at

4:09

the world through glass you know I was always the guy in the corner thinking about everything I was I'm not an extrovert I'm a I'm an introvert who

4:16

gets put in extroverted situations occasionally and I could play that role but roles I currently

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play I don't know it's it's nice to care less about it as you get older

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about what like consistency maybe H but my pure self is on the set making a

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movie I'm pretty convinced my the self that I've worked for and the Pinnacle of

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my time and effort I realize is you know rehearsing and shooting the movie and

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whatever writing before like that's the pure me but it's manufactured me you know catch me at dinner later and you

4:55

get a the same guy who's processing the of the day and you know having his

5:02

lectures about what I know and whatever lunatic political ideas that are flowing

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through my system in real time like everybody else but I process the world through ART and in particular Cinema and

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that's the space that I've been lucky enough to live in what's a lunatic

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political idea that's in your system right now ah you're really going to well you notice I don't really uh if you're

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unfortunate enough to be sitting next to me at dinner or in around me I often

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just spout off but I don't have a need to share that publicly so much because I know it's not a long-term thought I

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guess the meticulous long-term nature of making a film is a certain kind of

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personality and someone who has to be on Twitter or whatever spouting off their

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momentto moment taking in and spitting out of the the world I have those ideas

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but I know they have no value I know I'm not going to Enlighten anyone

6:03

but I really do draw a line I'm like yeah I could mouth off like I could share my brain snot with the whole world

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the way everybody else did but I don't see any value in it for me personally

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you know cuz I've been privileged gifted whatever you want to say to make the greatest most expressive storytelling

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art form ever invented so I'm the one of the few who get to do that so why would

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I put any effort into these transitory weird little reactive areas I

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think you should file away brain snot as a possible uh fictional band name in a

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film the name of a punk EP maybe a seven inch brain snot that's pretty good well

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that's what so much of the world feels like doesn't it brains notot yeah overactive like conspiracy you know it's

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like it's activated brains but just unfiltered

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unaccredited what was kind of fun a long time ago oh let's just say conspiracy or

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alternative thinking and all that just to see it metastasized into something so lethal and harmful and you know so it's

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kind of like wow I I don't want to participate in that at all you know I want to ask you a question that

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connects a little bit more to Glen Powell and Hitman where you know in the film Glen Powell plays a half dozen or

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so different Hitman he's assuming his character is assuming these different

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roles within the film and it's really sort of a I think a I hate to use a corny term but kind of like a star

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making performance you know and I think he's someone who who people have a sense that you know this guy's a a big star in

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the making and you've done movies with a bunch of big stars you know you did uh uh obviously Matthew mcconahy and in the

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Newton boys and and da and fused and in Bernie you know keano Reeves and a scanner darkley Ben affle I mean the

8:04

list goes on Shirley mlan Jack Black both in in Bernie and I always wondered do you feel like as a director you

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understand what makes someone a star every actor I work with like oh this is

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a star to me I love him I think my camera loves him I love the character so

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it's always been a mystery to me what happens with people's you know futures you just don't

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know I think there's luck there's a lot of elements involved that no one person's in control of you know I don't

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think anyone's ever surprised me like I'm not surprised when Matthew becomes a star or Ben Affleck or you know you look

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back and it all makes sense it's like yeah of course they were great they had this and and I'm probably more surprised others didn't get that opportunity or

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aren't seen as that or Hollywood doesn't know what to do with but there's kind of

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an eternal mystery of opportunities and culture moments that you get and you

9:01

know so I think Glenn's having one of those right now perhaps you know it

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seems but I think anyone who knows Glenn who's worked with him in the last 10 years would say oh that could have come

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10 years ago you know Glenn is Glenn he's got that star quality I've known that for a long

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time do you think actors can see in themselves the qualities that you as the

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Director can see and I'm I'm thinking of an example that uh you know a few years

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ago I I interviewed uh Brad Pit around the time of Once Upon a Time in Hollywood and I was asking him about

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this one specific scene where you know he he just sort of like turns towards the camera a little and he's got this

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smile on his face it's just a a perfect example of how Star Quality can can make

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a scene like and I was asking about it was clear he had no idea like he didn't really remember the scene had no idea

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what I was talking about and then of course after the interview was over I realized like oh that was actually a question for quent and Tarantino like he

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understood something in that actor in that moment it it's not about whether the actor knows him but do you think you

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see things in these personalities that they aren't aware of it's not the kind of thing you talk about consciously

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there's nothing to be gained from telling the actor well you're such a star in this you don't need to you know you can just turn and look that you know

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you just say hey look over here and look that way you know what you're dealing with you you you know they're a star and

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Cinema rides on this kind of star Charisma Brad Pit knows he's a star that's been drilled into his head

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every day for the last 30 years but maybe how it's used and you know

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whatever you know what I'm saying you know I I read I think it was the New Yorker profile of you probably around

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the time of Boyhood and in there it said that there was some point in your life

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as a young man where you were watching something like 600 movies a year you would go to a theater and watch three or

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four movies in a row and I think a a lot of us can relate to that feeling

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especially in sort of early adulthood or late adolescence of of really like falling in love with an art form you

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almost get kind of drunk on it and I'm curious what the feeling you get from

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movies now is and and how it's different from what it used to be yeah I don't

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think you can ever replace that initial just passion and fury when

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you've discovered your art form and you just take it in with your entire being in my you know six I'd write down every

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movie I saw 650 films a year I mean that was really nothing and a lot of it you

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know looking back is like oh that's what you had to do kind of you're transitioning from The Real World to

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your world and your world in my case it was it was just Cinema the Arts or or

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this other world you you want to live in not the world you live in but it's different now you know I don't I don't

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have the need to see that many movies I still love movies and still life dedicated to it but uh you know you feed

12:06

yourself in different ways do you still get like the the electricity or the jolt from seeing a film that you used to like

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what's a recent movie that kind of blew the top of your head off yeah that's a good question I you know no I I can't

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get the same jolt yeah I just you can't you can't get the same jolt I can get a jolt but it's a different kind of jolt I

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I know too much I'm I'm behind the camera I know what they're doing but I

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can still you know I judge films on like ah what got my cinematic

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blood circulating what really kind of got me like oh that was Cinema you know

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so maybe I kind of put zone of interest in that category I was looking at that going bold you know boom yeah let's that

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that's a movie I think there's a sense currently that we're sort of in a weird

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moment for Cinema and I've even read interviews with you where you've

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wondered about whether the current generation of audiences values Cinema and whether you came up during kind of

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like the last I think the way you put it was the last good ERA of film making what makes you wonder those things like

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why are those questions in your mind well I don't think I said good ERA of film making I would say maybe the

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culture was different and it's always the last question you know you're talking about your new movie it's always what do you think about the state of

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cinema today and it's like oh be careful because it's I don't know we're all

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prone to these overarching big important statements about the state of things and

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if you know anything about the history of Cinema it's that's all it's ever been it's always been the end of Cinema

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something was wiping it out you know even sound color Technic color you know

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cinemascope TV it's always been under threat it's always been very volatile feeling the industry's always threatened

14:00

I think cuz it's a industry that's prone to technological change you know things can come along and just wipe it out or

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change it pretty significantly so it's different than painting or literature or other art forms it's sort of technology

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and commerce are really nearby kind of codependent within the art form so I

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think everyone's always on alert and everyone's always a little

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paranoid that the system that they've known is coming to an end well you're

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working currently on an adaptation of uh the santai musical merily We Roll Along

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which the musical takes place over the course of 20 or so years and your plan

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sort of like what you did with Boyhood where you filmed it over a period of years and years is that you're filming

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your adaptation of merily Le We Roll Along over 20 years or so at least that's the plan um and so if when you f

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finish this movie I guess with the caveat if you finish this movie yeah yeah throw that

15:04

in there please you're going to be over 80 years old I'll be about 80 and so

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it's going to be kind of a life and career Capstone I would think so tell me

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why that project given how like the place you know it's going to occupy in

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your life and your career you want to hear something that's

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technically insane and admit it yes you said Capstone to a career at age8 I've

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never thought that ah cuz I see myself making a film when I'm like 94 I really do so I don't I think it's

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like oh yeah you know those years will go along I'll try to stay in shape try to be healthy hope to get

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lucky and you know I I just I mean I'm not an idiot I know you

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know but it's all at the behest of we're telling a story that takes place over 20

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years and it's really important for this story to work that you feel those years go by so

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it's the same reason that you know Boyhood put its you know that was Boyhood you had to feel life going by

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and this movie is about long-term you know friendship and the

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way life treats people and how that shifts around over 20 years but uh you know I I I just think you can in the

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Arts you can Will things into existence and if people are passionate about it you make it happen you know everybody

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involved in that is clearly doing it because they care so we just have to assume they'll keep caring and they'll

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care 10 years 15 six 17 more years but you know you judge people on that you go

16:45

oh before I cast someone I go you're a lifer you know you're going to be doing this I did that on on Boyhood I asked

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Patricia Arquette like what are you going be doing 12 years from now and she's like I'm going to

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be probably looking for a part play I said yeah and I'm going to be trying to make a film so let's just start now and

17:02

we'll we'll be who we are now and in the future and that's all that's all it was it's not some huge leap of faith yeah

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it's blowing my mind that you could say this movie that I'm going to spend 20 years making that I'm going to finish

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when I'm 83 I'll be 80 sorry don't add anymore I mean there're going to be but

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that's solely uh because that's sort of what you think the the film itself is demanding and not because it's like a

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meaningful overarching statement of some sort if anybody spent 20 years working

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on something you'd say well that says something about who they are and what's important to them telling a well-told story the right way is what means the

17:42

most to me you know finding the form that meets the content that's what a director does you feel not just the

17:48

story but how to tell it what it should look and feel like and I I I don't know I like long so many art forms are fairly

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quick I think Cinema has the ability to be you know I love that it's at the

18:02

Whitney that that J Deo painting the rose that have you ever seen it it's that it's it's huge right it's huge it's

18:09

thick it's it's like a foot thick because she spent so many years painting

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layers of paint on it I just love it I find it so moving just knowing the

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effort first it's a stunning work but how do it get so thick and just you know whatever I mean most artists we have

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found the right therapy for our conditions or whatever

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neurological whatever neurological conditions we're dealing with but uh you

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know we're just everyone's just wired a little different so I admit that about

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myself and just go with it it's like okay well it's the way my brain works do you have some sort of contingency plan

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if I don't know if your vision starts to go 10 years from now what happens to the film oh good thought h i

18:59

well if I had everything else in the vision went I would probably get I don't know that's a good question I can make

19:06

you a list I I would I don't know I would adapt somehow just turn the whole thing over to someone I don't know not

19:11

that I'll deal with that when it happens it's it's funny funny to think that way

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but I mean what's the alternative most people live their life like there's no tomorrow that's but I'm

19:22

kind of the opposite I I I I think of death regularly and I kind of see life

19:28

as very fleeting and you know we're all grateful to be here every you know I I

19:33

but then I have this other side that just expect to play it out I guess you think of death

19:40

regularly sure I'm yeah not in a bad

19:45

way just I you know I just see life as kind of fleeting is that bad it sounds

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like a question that could be posed by a character in one of your films well it

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comes from somewhere I mean you know it's kind of poetic to know I'm not going to be here forever no one is you

20:02

know I like I walk through graveyards and I I I read o bits but I'm not morbit

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about it I just kind of acknowledge life passing and all of us

20:12

being here for a little while and it's kind of beautiful that we're all here Crossing path at the same moment I saw

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that as a kid saw what as a kid just I knew it from the earliest of Ages I I liked astronomy and I

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liked science and just knowing how old everything was and how brief humans

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lifespans and like oh we really are insignificant so that scares some people

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but I love that feeling I love that feeling of just how random and

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small we are in the universe I I'm maybe going to put this

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question in slightly pretentious terms but I think given that I'm talking to Richard link later and certainly there

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are conversations in your films that some other people might say are slightly pretentious I'm going to give myself permission to do it yeah I'm fine with

21:01

that but uh I was uh just reading about this poet Delmar Schwarz and and he has this poem called uh Saras like the the

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painter George Saras Saras Sunday afternoon and it's it's all about uh the artist is someone who observes life but

21:17

doesn't fully participate in it so I I read that and I was then thinking about you and your films because I think of

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your films as really having all these sort of very closely and intimately

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observed moments of what on the surface just seemed like normal life you know could be two people walking and talking

21:36

you know or just throughout Boyhood there's countless scenes of just normal life that's all it is and then I thought

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well what is your interest in that have to do with or how does it affect your

21:49

sense of observation of your real life when it's happening like are you always sort of sitting back and observing life

21:58

kind of from a distance always yeah that's the curse I'm in the moment I'm

22:03

out of the moment it kind of robs you of the in the moment experience but then

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there's also kind of a mentality I think not uncommon to writers and film people

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is like this will only be real when I process it through my art form like

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something terrible is happening right in front of you you know your loved one's dying or relationships ending and you're

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like oh you're just processing it not in the moment but like I'm going to have a

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character in a movie someday experien this and I'm going to try to capture

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this what I just felt very very deeply but you're robbing yourself and

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the person you're with or whatever of that moment but maybe it's a

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self-preservation way of just taking something and storing it away or

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processing it through so I I share that you know like uh nothing's really real

23:02

until I make it work in a movie in some way maybe we'll get into

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it when we talk again but I really have questions about the last 15 minutes of hit man oo but for

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this time thank you very much for taking all the time and I'll talk to you in a few days okay yeah we'll

23:22

continue after the break more Reflections from Richard linklater on Art life and why mellowing out isn't

23:29

something to be afraid of I've had this conversation over the years with filmmaker friends am I as passionate as

23:35

I was in my 20s would I risk my whole life if it was my best friend or my negative drowning which do I

23:43

save the 20-some self goes I'm saving my film [Music]

23:56

[Music]

24:02

hello Richard how are you oh hey you know there was something that I

24:09

realized was totally on the tip of my tongue the whole time we spoke and uh I

24:16

just didn't know if it was okay to bring up and that was the ending of Hitman which I found kind of threw me for a

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loop and uh I think there's probably a way to talk about it without giving too

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much away oh I'm not a spoiler person I don't care you know most people forget by the time they get there I don't

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believe things anyway so I don't mind spoilers all right well so Glen Powell's

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character Gary commits a morally problematic act to say the least and one

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of the ideas of the film is that uh sort of we and this is something we talked about earlier is that uh we all have the

24:54

power to create our own identity and the film then

25:01

suggests that that includes the identity of someone capable of murder and then

25:08

living seemingly happily after having committed murder that's pretty

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dark yes but uh I don't know I I think most people

25:19

kind of think they could probably handle that the people who have flirted with this I mean everybody wants someone dead

25:25

probably I I asked this around like could you murder someone I said I've been in the film business over 30 years

25:32

of course I could murder somebody who do you want dead no I I don't want anyone dead I don't want any neither do I I I I

25:40

spread that out I don't want anything dead yeah but I think there's a surprising number of people in the world

25:47

who to whatever degree voluntary or involuntary who have done something

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that's ended alive and can compartmentalize it away I don't know if you saw my documentary

26:01

you know I was going to say what you're talking about now directly reminds me of uh the doc you did for God saved Texas

26:08

the HBO series do you want to tell people what that documentary was about if they haven't seen it yet well it's an

26:13

exploration of my hometown and the world I sort of grew up in and around it does

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kind of take on the death penalty mainly from the people who are involved in the

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killing machine of it the state sanction murder part of it you grew up in

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Huntsville Texas which is the town where Texas carries out its state executions

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that's where the prison system is based and they do the executions there yeah but you know the the questions posed by

26:44

uh your documentary about how people basically find a way to coexist uh with

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you know it's really a moral Abomination which is the death penalty and the state sanctioned killing of other people also

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reminded me of uh how you mentioned uh Jonathan Glazer's zone of Interest was a

27:03

film that uh you'd sort of admired that came out recently which in sort of a an

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even more extreme way asks similar questions about how people go about their lives right beside something awful

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happening and I wonder do you feel like you have you have an understanding of how people are able to

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compartmentalize in that way like did you learn anything about people from from making your

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documentary I've always been fascinated by that you know how we can compartmentalize you know and if you

27:36

spread around the horror of abomination you know just think of the way we treat animals if you eat meat you are

27:43

supporting a really super cruel horrible system that creates incredible

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pain and suffering and you've been a vegetarian for a long time right yeah I me you know but I'm just saying human

27:58

psyche has no problem or what is done by your government in the name of this or

28:03

that I mean you can't make it through the modern world without you know pushing out the horror show that is a

28:10

lot of life right so you pick your spots and what you can participate in affect

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change but you know we're all doing this little psychic dance to let ourselves think we're not horrible

28:24

people and I you know I have this whole you know I'm we're suing the state of

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Texas right now I have this like political wait what I didn't know that what are you suing Texas for for heat

28:36

conditions in prison my friend uh Bernie TAA which is oh the the real life inspiration for your movie Bernie yeah

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he's the lead PL in a seat you we're going to hopefully change they have a

28:48

just an unbelievably cruel system where they don't have to air condition state

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prison cells they do federal they do local jails they do animal facilities but somehow you don't have to for state

29:02

and it's just hor I mentioned it in my documentary The Heat conditions not only for Corrections Officers but for the

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inmates so we've just there's this big lawsuit that we really think will will

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change a lot of people's lives for the so I don't know I you go into Political

29:20

Realms and you can that's a whole another you could dedicate your entire life to trying to make the world a

29:26

better place but I I picked my spots you know you know can I bring up something yeah it was only after the thing for the

29:34

next hours I processed and just all the thoughts I did not articulate very well go for it which is

29:41

everything most of what I say um when you were asking if I felt

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and it a poignant important question I think I just don't think I raised to the the question it

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was what's your relation now to the work back then are you as p passionate are

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you still seeing 600 moves a year how different yeah and you know I really had to think about that and my analysis of

30:06

that is you're a different person with different needs and a lot of that is

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based on just confidence when you're starting out in an art form or anything

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in life you can't have confidence because you don't have experience but you have to be pretty confident to say

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make a film so the only way you counterbalance that lack of experience

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and confidence is just absolute passion fullon dedication kind of fanatical

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spirit and I've had this conversation over the years with you know filmmaker

30:43

friends am I as passionate as I was in my 20s would I risk my whole life if it

30:48

was my best friend or my negative drowning which do I save the 20-some

30:54

self goes I'm saving my film good luck and now it's not that answer and

30:59

I'm I'm not ashamed to say that you know because all that passion doesn't just go

31:05

away it disperses a little healthfully I I'm much more passionate in this world about a lot of things you know that the

31:12

most fascinating relation we all have is obviously to ourselves at different times in our lives and you look back and

31:18

it's like God I'm not as passionate as I was at you know 25 it's like thank God

31:24

that was a crazy that person very insecure very un you know you're better

31:29

than that now and you're you're Chiller maybe a better person less selfish and

31:36

it's you look back at it as kind of heroic or or something necessary and it is it absolutely is it makes total

31:42

sense but I don't think you can do that forever if that's the only way you can work you're not in it maybe for the Long

31:49

Haul well you know uh probably 23 or however many years ago I was just laying

31:57

on the floor High out of my mind watching Waking Life thinking how can I get inside that movie I'm much happier

32:03

to be talking to you today than to be laying Stoned on my floor watching Waking Life and I still love waking life

32:11

oh thank you um thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me I appreciate it I really gotten a lot out

32:18

of your movies over the years so thank you for that too really nice talking to you too we'll do it again I'm sure sometime have the first merily interview

32:25

17 years from now all right let's do it put in the calendar it's

32:31

on that's Richard linklater Hitman is in Select theaters now and will be available on Netflix starting June

32:39

7th this conversation was produced by Seth Kelly it was edited by Annabelle bacon mixing by aim Shapiro original

32:47

music by Dan Powell and Marian Lozano photography by Devon yalin our senior

32:53

Booker is priia Matthew and our producer is Wyatt orm our executive producer is Alison Benedict special thanks to Rory

33:00

Walsh renan burelli Jake Silverstein Paula Schuman and Sam dolnick if you

33:05

like what you're hearing follow or subscribe to the interview wherever you get your podcasts and to read or listen

33:11

to any of our conversations you can always go to NY times.com thee next week Lulu Garcia Navaro speaks

33:19

with Julia Lou dfus those few days that we shot the pivotal scenes in the movie

33:25

I had to call home a lot I I really uh was a tad

33:31

unhinged I'm David maresi and this is the interview from The New York Times

33:37

[Music]