

Winners Conference: BAFTA Fellowship

16 February 2014

Winner: Dame Helen Mirren

DAME HELEN MIRREN: Thank you. I think I am the last person. I hope I am.

Q. Dame Helen Mirren, what does it mean to you, this fellowship award?

A. It means – I don't know what it will mean for a couple of years, I don't think. It will take that long for me to understand that I have got it. But incredible. I mean, I am sort of almost speechless, but not quite. I did manage to make a speech. But you know, I take it just as a sign of encouragement, really, to carry on.

Q. It struck me, when *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* came out, all those years ago, it was a very controversial film.

A. It was indeed.

Q. Tonight you got an award. Peter Greenaway got an award.

A. Yes, I know. That is what Peter was talking about, in a way. In fact, I bumped into Peter yesterday at one of these pre-BAFTA celebrations and we both looked at each other and said: "Can you believe it? Us?" You know, some things happen. As he said, there has been a bit of a sea change. You just have to stick it out for long enough, you know, and be consistent and keep working. And in the end, hopefully, you know, you get accepted, if not honoured, but certainly accepted.

Q. In your speech, you paid a very moving tribute to a lady who encouraged you to become an actress.

A. Mrs Welding, yes. She was the only person who gave me any encouragement whatsoever and who recognised what I wanted to be, what I wanted to do and guided me towards the Youth Theatre, which I didn't know anything about at that time. So I sort of started in the National Youth Theatre.

And I have to say, you journalists – just say this, because the National Youth Theatre at this moment in time is incredibly important. Because the way my business is going, it has become the prerogative of only kids – for the young, only kids who have got money, who have wealthy parents, can go into the acting profession, because it has become impossible to get scholarships or, you know, it is very, very difficult for working class kids to get into the theatre.

So something like the National Youth Theatre is incredibly important, and it was my way because we didn't have the money to go to – I didn't have the money to go to drama school or anything.

So you know, I just would like as many of you, as you can, to mention that.

Q. Absolutely. And the last thing I wanted to talk about was: since you played his grandmother, the Queen...

A. Yes, I know!

Q. – what was it like receiving the award from Prince William?

A. I wanted to have a hanky in my bag and take it out and spit on it and clean his face with it. "Look at you, William!" But a great honour. You know, really fantastic. I have never met him before, actually, and I have to say: he is very, very sweet. He is very charming. He is lovely, very easy. He is great.

NEW SPEAKER: Can I ask if she has enjoyed your success? Have you stayed in touch?

A. Yes, I did go to see her fairly recently. In fact, she was in hospital, I was going to see her when I came back for this and sadly she died just two weeks ago, so I missed her and I am very, very sad about that. But she was very, very important to me. Thank you.