

A Life in Pictures: Alan Rickman

15 April 2015 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

Boyd Hilton: Good evening ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this very special event where I will be talking to one of the greatest and most admired actors of our time, and you'll get to ask some questions at the end as well. I'd like to thank Deutsche Asset & Wealth Management, our sponsors of the event, working with BAFTA tonight. Thank you.

[Applause]

And before we meet the subject of the evening, let's remind ourselves of his extraordinary career in films.

[Montage plays]

[Applause]

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage, Alan Rickman.

[Applause]

Good evening.

Alan Rickman: Hello.

BH: As the title would suggest, this evening is about your film career mainly. Were there films or was there a film particularly when you were growing up that you particularly liked and kind of inspired you and you thought, oh yeah, I could get into that kind of world.

AR: You have to remember what kind of films were knocking around when I was a child. When I was at school I remember the school cinema club was full of things like *The Tifffield Thunderbolt*. And then things changed a lot when I went to art school, and suddenly you discover there's this person called Antonioni who can make a film where there's a scene with a piece of paper blowing down the street, or Fellini, and you know then you start to wake up a bit and things change. I don't know that I thought this would be part of my life. To be perfectly honest, having a film career at all is a bit of a surprise.

BH: Yes, we'll get into that, yes. As you say you did, you kind of started out with graphic design and typography and all of that didn't you? That was your first professional. So how did the move into acting come about?

AR: I went to a school that had a very strong drama tradition, and so there was a lot of theatre going on, and I still acted

while I was at art school. You know a lot of life is about hindsight it seems to me, and now as I sit here looking, or not looking, at that [points at screen] you can see how the dots join up a bit, and you see that you know at the time when it was a bit panicky about will I go to university or art school at 18, because certainly the idea of going to drama school wasn't on the cards at all. The art school part of me gets put together with the drama school part of me and the theatre part of me, and then somewhere in there you find that there's this desire and this sort of somewhat trained desire to direct.

BH: And you went to RADA, did you enjoy that experience?

AR: Well I didn't go there till I was 25 - fortunately I wasn't actually the oldest person there. RADA was like where you realise that you know, this is my head, this is my body, and we spend a lot of our time you know with a huge dividing line between the two. So there was a real physical sensation of the body sighing with relief that you had put the two things together in the right place.

BH: And your movie, you took part in a lot of plays, you acted on the stage, you got into television, *The Barchester Chronicles* on BBC, *Romeo and Juliet* you starred in, but then, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* became a huge hit in the West End and on Broadway on stage. Was that the key to getting you the role in *Die Hard*, your first film?

AR: Totally, I figured or somebody told me, you've got about two weeks of people's attention. We'd finished six months in New York and so I went to LA and did the round of meetings. And I didn't know how any of this happened; you know I didn't know about LA, I didn't really know anything about the film business. I went to meet some casting directors, I went to meet some producers, and I think it was two days after I got there I was offered *Die Hard*. And never made a film before, but I was extremely cheap.

BH: Before we talk more about that Alan, let's, as if we need reminding, let's remind ourselves of that film with this clip.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

BH: That's the kind of film now that we routinely refer to as a blockbuster, it's a

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kind of a, it's a genre film that we know and recognise instantly. Did you know what you were getting yourself into when you took that role?

AR: I read it and I said, "What the hell is this? I'm not doing an action movie." And agents and people said, "Alan, you don't understand, this doesn't happen, you've only been in LA two days and you've been asked to do this film." "Okay." But I suppose ignorance was bliss in a way, because looking at that scene it reminds me of the discussions that went on, which must have been out of me being stupid, because I was being fitted for all of this terrorist gear in the early days of the putting of the film together. And I said, "Why would I be wearing this when I've got all these huge hulks who are gonna do all the dirty work? So I was just thinking you know, if I was wearing a suit and not all of this terrorist gear, then maybe there could be a scene where I put on an American accent and he thinks I'm one of the hostages." And I left this note on Joel Silver's table saying, 'Please think about this, I think it might be interesting,' and then I went back to England. And I kind of got the Joel Silver, "Get the hell out of here, you'll wear what you're told," and I, "Okay, fine." And then I came back and they handed me the new script, so you know it just pays to occasionally use a little bit of theatre training when you're doing a movie. What did he have for breakfast? Where did he come from? And you know, I'm gonna look ridiculous in those costumes.

BH: And what was it like, I mean there is a lot of action involved and you get involved in a lot of the action, was that something that came to you easily, or was it, how did you find it?

AR: If you look carefully at any of the scenes with the guns you'll see me blinking. I think they may have had to cut those out. You know you can't stop yourself. It's a bit shocking how thrilling it is to shoot a machine gun, that I discovered.

BH: I bet.

AR: And then they, I remember towards the end of the shooting they said, "We have this shot." They came to me sort of not looking me quite in the eyes, "We have this shot at the end, we wanna, you know you've got to fall from the top of the building. And you know we could use, but of course if we use the stand-in we'd have to put it on the back of his head going

down that way." I thought about it, I said, "I'll do it." Of course this is before the days of CGI, now anybody would do it because you know, you'd just be falling nowhere and then they'd blow your clothes in a computer. That had to be done for real. So I said, "How do we do this?" And they said, "Okay, well we'll train you," which meant one afternoon I think of dropping from ten feet, 15 feet, 20 feet, 30 feet and so on. And I remember the guy who was doing it saying, "Okay, what you've got to remember is..." I had to pull my own cord to release me. I had to remember to bring the gun up and get it in the frame. And then he said, "As you're going down, make sure you spread your arms into a kind of star shape, because if you don't you'll start turning and you'll land on your head and kill yourself." So it was sort of challenging, and we did it three times at three o'clock in the morning and it was the very last shot of mine in the film. Just in case. But actually, it was an interesting, just to say, it was, these are the days, we are talking about a film that's what, 28 years old or something. And what was interesting was what they were doing technically and why they wanted to do it, because there was a huge tower down the side of the sound stage, and I was of course falling onto an airbag. But as I fell there were cameras all the way down which were electronically linked to the camera that was on me, so that as I fell through the beams of those cameras, those cameras kept that one in focus. Now they just press a computer.

BH: Yeah, absolutely. I mean it was, as I say, it was a kind of a blockbuster; it was an action as you said, am I going to do this action thriller, but it did have a really good script. I mean you can tell from that scene, it had a different kind of feel to it than your average, regular... Would you have done, would you have taken the job if it hadn't have had that good script?

AR: No, no I mean, that was, you could feel there was a story, and there was actual wit in it, you know there were jokes, and you could feel a line through. And you know, not to get a sledgehammer out to it, but every single black character in that film is positive and highly intelligent. So 28 years ago, that's actually quite revolutionary, and quietly so.

BH: And I guess after doing that film and doing *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* as well, another hugely successful film, you could have done an endless series of huge, big Hollywood films. But did you get scripts

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that you didn't like and turn them down, or did you just want to do other stuff, and that whatever came along appealed to you and you would do other kinds of films?

AR: Well theatre was also always in there, you know so I think somewhere around that time I was also rehearsing *Hamlet* and doing it in small spaces around England, not in conventional theatre spaces. So given the fact that I was 25 when I went to drama school, and forty-something before I made a movie, you kind of feel a bit of you is formed and the decision-making process is going to look... I like the risk factor in work. I like feeling a bit unsafe, and theatre of course is deadly.

BH: And did *Truly, Madly, Deeply* feel like a kind of gamble, a risk?

AR: No, no, that was I suppose what comes around goes around in a way. Juliet Stevenson and I had done a lot of work in the theatre together, I think so much so that she was a bit nervous about me playing the part I found out later. "But I know him too well, he's like my brother." She was a bit nervous about that. But Anthony, it was his first film, and you know now you learn all sorts of stuff that you realise you've stolen down the line, like Anthony's vulnerability on the set; The fact that he gathered the crew and the actors together on day one and just said, "I have one word: help"; the fact that he put huge value, because of his theatre writing, on rehearsal. So we had two weeks of rehearsals to achieve whatever we achieved in that. And the fact that Juliet and I trust each other so much is I think gold dust when you're doing that sort of work.

BH: Let's remind ourselves of *Truly, Madly, Deeply* with this clip.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

BH: A lot of people fell in love with that film and with your character and Juliet's character. When you read that script and when you make that kind of film, do you know how special it's going to be, or does that all happen afterwards?

AR: Something happened during the shooting of it, because it was shot on 16mm, and somewhere halfway through, because I think it was going to be for television.

BH: Yeah, BBC.

AR: And halfway through all sorts of high level discussions were going on about how maybe we should go back to the beginning and start again on 35mm, and then in the end we didn't and they blew it up for cinema release. I don't know, it's one of those films that you know you; it's very, very special for unnamable reasons. It's, that speech that he has there, there's no improvising in that. Every little erm and err is in the script, and it's, you know you've got to obey them. But also, it's a sort of litmus test, because you know you say everybody fell in love with that film, I wouldn't say the critics did.

BH: Oh really, okay.

AR: And I wouldn't say, I think it was even on *Room 101* once, and I think it went down.

[Laughter]

BH: Yes, I guess it was regarded by some people as kind of too middle class and all of that, but they kind of weren't really looking at, it's about people isn't it? It's about love and it's about, some people get fixated on the class and all of that kind of issue.

AR: Yeah, it's about the lights go down and a writer/director says, "Once upon a time." And you either hand yourself over to that, or not. And in England we're often quite good at not.

BH: Yes. I was going to say, because it does feel very improvisational, it feels like almost every scene when there's seriousness and romance happening, it's undercut with humour as we saw in that clip.

AR: That's really to do with Anthony's experience in the theatre I think, and he knew he would be able to, he'd understand the process more if we had had rehearsals. And you know I'm both sides of the fence on that one, sometimes it's great, and sometimes it's great not to rehearse at all and just kind of throw yourself at it for film. And certainly if you're going to work with American actors, there's a lot of them who hate it, so you've got to be flexible. But I'm a big proponent of rehearsal.

BH: Yes, I read an interview recently in *Empire* where you talked about, well they

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asked you whether any particular role was close to you, you know your personality, and *Sense and Sensibility* came out. This character who's kind of very dignified and calm...

AR: I don't think that was the reason.
[Laughs]

BH: That's one of the reasons.

AR: Yes, I'm so dignified, no.

BH: Did that character feel close to you, and what was kind of special about that particular version of that story?

AR: Well I, something I realised that I like in film, and maybe this goes back to what you were asking about before about what films you watched, and so French cinema is of huge interest to me and always has been, because French directors like putting the camera on the person who isn't speaking, they like to leave the shot on two or three people and just watch them interact. It fascinates me that whenever you see Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, nobody bothers to go, let's cut to the close-up, no, because what they're both doing together is so interesting. And so the space between people is what excites me, certainly as a director, and certainly is what one looks for on stage with another actor. What you're saying's interesting, what they're about to say is interesting, but it only becomes really interesting when this space is alive, and that's to do with actors thinking and listening, and I think that that's often thrilling on film. You know, we have to watch Juliet all the way through that film learning stuff, changing. You can only do that... What was your question again?

BH: It was, no I think that answer is good because, let's have a look at this clip and you'll see a lot of, I think a good example of that.

AR: Oh you were talking about *Sense and Sensibility*, right.

BH: Let's have a look.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

BH: Emma Thompson's script and Ang Lee directing, now that seems like what a magical combination that's going to be, but back then Ang Lee didn't speak very

good English did he particularly, so how was it working with him directing?

AR: Well then a lot of people thought, "He's going to direct Jane Austen?" But I'd seen *Eat Drink Man Woman*, and you just thought, well this is an inspired choice really because he's visually so wonderful. And of course he'd understand the rules of family which is really what that's all about, rules and modes of behaviour, and what you're not saying and what you're not allowed to say because of what position in society you're in. And so it's all about the depth of feeling with this kind of order on top of it, and that to me was fascinating to play, and added to which Emma had written an absolutely wonderful script out of her genius and love of Jane Austen. You had to, you know you kind of had to interpret what Ang was saying quite a lot of the time, and he'd have his own way of getting upset about something or think about something, he'd go and disappear off in the middle of a field with a little cardboard box and a big pile of pink buns, just sort of sit there during lunch thinking. And then you had to translate. Emma's put it in her book where things that he said to her, like he said to her, "Emma, try not to look so old." And she had to, we all had to work out what that meant, what it really meant was don't be so knowing. And my one was "Alan, be more subtle, do more." So then you knew it was, do more of the subtle acting. And Kate had, "Never mind, you'll get better."

[Laughter]

AR: So it got to the point quite quickly, and of course the other thing is of course, on that film there was a lot of laughter you know. She's not unfunny Miss Thompson, off set.

BH: And Hugh Laurie was there.

AR: Hugh, Imelda Staunton, Elizabeth Spriggs bless her. Yeah, wonderful people.

BH: And working with Kate Winslet on that film, of course is in your new film, which we'll get to later, but she's recently said, I think this came up at the premiere the other day, where she said she was scared of you. Did you know about that?

AR: I'll have to have words with her, I mean really.

[Laughter]

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BH: Okay, fair enough.

AR: She was 19, so, and she's not now. So now she can say those things, but I guess it would be scary, 19 and you've only I think what made one other movie, and you're walking onto this big set and she's playing one of the two big leads in the film. Yeah, and I'm a lot older than her, and we were going to have to make some sort of believable relationship there, but she was fantastic to work with.

BH: *Michael Collins*, talking of bold, brave choices. You played, it was a real character, and there was some controversy about the script's interpretation of him, that he doesn't come across that well, is quite Machiavellian in the film I guess. Did you have any qualms about taking that role and about the interpretation of him and his role in history?

AR: No I was, I was thrilled to do it. I thought, my only qualm about it, and I think Neil did an amazing job given the fact that if you think, that story of course ought to be a 16-hour miniseries, or it should be like *Heimat* or something, another very influential film to me.

BH: Oh, fantastic.

AR: Where you would just go to the movies and see six big movies about Michael Collins. There are so many choices and Neil took a brave one. Of course what you were dealing with with that was Neil had already made up his mind about de Valera. I think we had a read through and he came over to me and he said, "So, do you hate him yet?" having done my homework. And I've played a few people who have really lived, and the first thing you learn or discover is that you become very defensive of them, because of course the last thing you can ever do is judge a character, you won't be able to play it. So to me he was just, this is just this collection of circumstances, and this collection of personal traits, and this is the way he looks, this is the way he walks, talks and all the rest of it. I thought it was fascinating that when we were in Kilmainham Gaol, and I think I was sitting in the actual cell he was in, somebody from the jail brought over a piece of paper with a sample of de Valera's actual handwriting on pencil. You know he was very tall, this was like Charles de Gaulle or somebody, that sort of stature. The handwriting is the tiniest handwriting you've ever seen, in pencil, a little letter asking the nuns to take care of

his wife. So it's that sort of stuff that feeds you, and you have to have your boxing gloves on with Neil a little bit to make sure it's not being steered down an impossible direction that there's no recovery from. We shot an ending that didn't make it into the film, and I'm sad about that, because I think that would have made it more equivocal, but yeah there's pressure from Hollywood to have a sort of happy ending, so that went.

BH: Okay, well let's remind ourselves of *Michael Collins*.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

BH: I think you get a sense from that clip that, I thought, I remember going to see it in the cinema and thinking, well on top of all of the fascinating historical stuff, and the fact that it could have been as you say an epic 16-hours, but the actual film we get is a very thrilling kind of political thriller isn't it as well.

AR: It's brilliant what Neil and everybody achieved in two hours, it's extraordinary.

BH: I was going to ask about the different directors you worked with: Ang Lee, Neil Jordan, even going back to *Die Hard*, John McTiernan. Do you learn when you're directing, which we're going to move onto in a minute, have you learned different things from all of those directors or kind of did you have your own vision?

AR: I think if you're smart you learn from all of them, and what you, you know it's kind of in what I've been saying. If you talk about Neil Jordan, and then you say Ang Lee, and then you say Alfonso Cuarón, and Anthony Minghella, it's not like a generic title. You know these are very, very, very different human beings, with very different energies and opinions and relationships with actors and rhythms. And you learn from the people where you watch them and you're thinking, well I wouldn't handle it like that, so you learn from that as much as going, well I'm stealing that. That's the joy of filmmaking, yeah.

BH: So your first film as director, which we'll talk about now, *The Winter Guest*. Did you know, you worked on it on stage; did you think when you were working on it in theatre that this could make a film? Were you convinced immediately or did it take time for that seed to develop?

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AR: No I hadn't thought of that at the beginning. I suppose once we started to work on the set we started to talk in very filmic terms, because so much had to be achieved, so many different worlds on a set that didn't move, you didn't cut from one set to the other, it had to be all there, including a frozen sea, and including the inside of a house, and a little park bench, and a bus stop. So I suppose it was once it was up and running it kind of acquired filmic qualities. And then I suppose it must have, I can't even remember now, but it must have occurred to somebody with a chequebook that we had Phyllida Law playing the mother, and Emma Thompson is her real daughter, and so Sian Thomas became the kind of human sacrifice in that, which I guess she understood that of course you know any producer worth their salt is going to say, well let's put the real mother and daughter together in this story.

BH: And before we talk about it more in depth, let's take a look at a clip of *The Winter Guest*.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

BH: I think looking at the finished film of *The Winter Guest*; you would never know it was from a play necessarily, the way it intercuts between the different characters and the different stories. Was it a hard process to make it, or did you kind of have, did the script and your direction tackle that issue, or did you just make it as you wanted to make it?

AR: It's so long since I've seen that. I'm just sitting here thinking what a wonderful actress Phyllida is. I just remember hours and hours sitting at the kitchen table with Sharman Macdonald, who of course since has become better known as the mother of Keira Knightley, and even then we had Keira running around as a little 10 year-old, that's how long ago it was, on the set. Yeah I think that was always the aim, you know we were just always working out how to cut around, and then of course comes the editing room and you start learning about that, and that the film will, you know it rears up and says, 'I have a stake in this. I, film, will change you now, and I will tell you what to do.' And the editing room does have a personality, and you have to listen to it. So I'm sure all sorts, well certainly the ending of the film had to be found in the

editing room, because the ending we shot didn't work.

BH: So what changed from the one you shot that didn't work? What was the original?

AR: It was a helicopter shot, you know hugely expensive and we only had it for one day, and we could only... We shot this film in such a ridiculous time of year, because we only had daylight from nine till three, it was freezing cold as you can tell, we only had one trailer, the two boys were much more interested in spending time in Emma and Phyllida's trailer than they were being on the set. But I had rehearsed them into the ground so that I knew that we could shoot any scene of theirs on any day at any time and they'd know it backwards, because they were what 12 at the time. So yeah the end shot was Emma kind of waking up and accepting that she was going to have to kind of join reality in her life. And it was a sense of, these boys are missing, and Emma goes on a long, long run along the pier and grabs hold of the pier, and is really looking. A bit like Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina*, you know that shot of her at the bow and the camera comes up. It was too ambiguous, you kept testing people's responses, and nothing wrong with Emma at all, it was just people didn't know what she was thinking, and so that was hopeless. And so the end came with us just looking and looking, Scott Thomas and I in the editing room, for how we were going to finish it. And I don't even know how it happened but it was just, it finishes now with one of the boys goes out across the ice, the other one doesn't go and eventually says, "Wait for me," and that's the end of the film. But the trouble with that was that the shot that we had of Sean walking out across the ice, I didn't call cut, but the little bugger had stopped and turned around. So I didn't have him walking and walking and walking and disappearing. So thank God for early CGI, because you get to the furthest point that you can, and then a big bit of smoke covers him up, so that you just have to imagine that he kept on walking.

BH: Fantastic. I wanted to mention Emma Thompson because she's fantastic in that film, you were also together in *Love Actually*. We did *A Life in Pictures* with Emma here, and the scene in *Love Actually* where she's you know in tears because of what you have done to her, what's it like for you watching that

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spectacular scene with the Joni Mitchell in the background?

AR: Well again you know you just have to play your story. My story was, am I going to get away with this? No it's a brilliant piece of writing, again it's like you know there's a scene that has no dialogue, let's trust that. And yes, now that scene of Emma's is a very, rightly, famous scene in the film.

BH: I wanted to ask you about a couple of films that we're not showing clips of but I think are fantastic work in the late '90s, early 2000's. *Dogma*, Kevin Smith's film, I remember interviewing him at the time and he absolutely was in love with you and thrilled that you were taking part in this curious indie, religious epic.

AR: I loved him, you know I'd seen his work and, you're going to have to remind me of the title now. *Chasing Amy*.

BH: *Chasing Amy*, yeah.

AR: Which I loved. And this possibility came up, and I said, "Please," to the American agents, "I want to work with Kevin Smith." And then it happened, yeah.

BH: And was it as fun as you had hoped?

AR: Oh he's fantastic. I mean if you go, it got chosen for Cannes that film, and you have to put on the bowtie and all of that palaver. Not Kevin Smith. Flip flops and sawn-off jeans as we go up the steps to the screening, completely irreverent to the whole process, but he's a brilliant writer. *Dogma*'s really probably a four-hour film with the material we shot, because I don't know how he cut that one down.

BH: There's a lot going on. And around the same time, I think one of the funniest kind of Hollywood comedies, *Galaxy Quest*. Did you know, when you read that script, did you know immediately this was something special?

AR: All the actors did. The brilliant thing that Dean Parisot did on that film was, apart from Tim Allen, and I guess appropriately apart from Tim Allen, everybody else grew up in the theatre, so he was like an alien to us. You know he'd kick down the door of the make-up trailer in the morning and he'd yell, "Number one is here," and all the rest of us are looking at our scripts.

[Laughter]

AR: So it was a perfect marriage of acting energies I suppose, and it meant that those of us playing the actors, we became like this tight little group against the pressures of producers coming out of the gloom first thing in the morning going, "They're still talking, when are we going to start shooting?" And we were able to turn around and say, "Look, just give us 20 minutes and we will have sorted out the whole day because we'll know what we're supposed to be doing," as a group of actors.

BH: Well that worked. And we should mention eight films in ten years where you played the same role in the *Harry Potter* films, of Snape. What was that like playing, did you know at the start what direction that character was going? Did J. K. Rowling tell you, or did you kind of, how much did you know about it?

AR: People think I knew a lot and I didn't. When I was asked to do it there were only three books written I think, and so by and large I was learning with the readers every time there was a new book basically. I was just going, "Oh, I'm still in it."

[Laughter]

AR: But when I was asked to do it and I'd read the first book, and I said, "Look, I really need to talk to her, I can't play this, I don't know where this character's going." And so they put me in touch with her, over the phone, and she was with her sister that day, and she said, "I can't talk now, I'm with my sister, I'll talk to you tomorrow." So that's how much Jo Rowling kept it to herself. And then she gave me one, it wasn't even a fact, she just gave me one piece of information, and I promised her I would never share it and I never will, not that it's anything that people don't know now. But she gave me one piece of information that made me know that I, whatever happened, I had to try to drive down two roads at the same time until all the facts emerged. So I knew there was ambiguity.

BH: And essentially you were making, as I say, eight huge films, huge budget, massive casts, loads of special effects.

AR: Well they were, you know the producers were.

BH: That was my question, did it feel like a kind of mad situation for you involved, or did you just let it all...

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AR: It was a very changing thing of course, as it would be over 10 years. Apart from anything else, three leading actors start out at 12 years old, and then they're 22. You don't kind of notice that happening in a way because once they'd got into the swing of it after the first film, it was an organisational nightmare for them, because all of the adult characters, or a lot of them, were doing other things at the time. You know I was directing plays, or I was making *Love Actually*, or I was on stage doing *Private Lives* here or in New York. A whole bunch of other things were going on through that 10-year period, so basically my job was seven weeks a year, and then sometimes they'd have to get the person that you were supposed to be acting with out at three o'clock because they were on stage that night. I don't know how they did it, complete nightmare. Meanwhile, CGI is growing up along with you. So at the beginning of it all we used to go off on location. Forget that by the end of it, you know we were on a pile of old grass at the back of Leavesden Studios with a big football stadium of lights. And I will never forget on the last film, at three o'clock in the morning Michael Gambon staggering up this piece of old grass and looking at me and saying, "Am I dead in this scene?"

[Laughter]

AR: And in the first film if anybody ever wants to look, of course you've got the problem of kids who can only work a certain number of hours, so sometimes there were 300 children on the set, and at certain points they all had to go off and do some schoolwork. More nightmares of organisation, solved to some extent by, if there were any scenes with say me and Daniel, Rupert and Emma, of course they'd shoot when it was on them it would be on their faces and I'd be there, but when we turned round, in would come the very small actors aged 33 with a wig on their head. So that ain't the back of Daniel's head in those shots, so that we could keep working.

BH: Obviously those films are hugely successful and pop up on TV all the time. Do you ever, do you watch yourself back, do you watch those, those films you know huge special effects productions, do you go, oh yeah, let's see how this turns out?

AR: Well some of it you kind of, you know you're channel surfing and "oh, God."

[Laughter]

BH: Yeah, what do you do? Do you watch or do you turn them over?

AR: No.

BH: No. Why not, why can't you watch yourself?

AR: Any actor will tell you, if you see yourself on screen, all you see is what you're doing wrong. You know this is a kind of hell for me, sitting here doing that. But yeah, no, I don't spend too much time.

BH: Sorry! Okay, and one film I wanted to ask you about was *Snow Cake* which was in 2006, this extraordinary film with Sigourney Weaver playing someone on the autistic spectrum. And I think it's one of her best ever performances.

AR: I agree.

BH: It wasn't a huge success but an incredible film. Does it irritate you when a film like that that's a little gem of a film doesn't end up being...

AR: Well it irritates me when people say things like, which I think certain people did at the time, that Sigourney is way over the top. No she is not, you know that performance is based absolutely in reality, and Angela Pell who wrote the script has an autistic son and so it's written from a deep place of knowledge, and I think Marc Evans is a really wonderful director, we shot that in 25 days, and I'm really proud of it. And it does annoy when people don't look carefully enough or they haven't done their homework and just assume that somebody's doing a bit too much acting, she's not.

BH: No, absolutely. Well everyone should have a look at that film if they can because it's a fantastic piece of work. Let's move onto another maverick director, Tim Burton, *Sweeney Todd*. When you're offered a part in a musical with a lot of singing do you think, oh yeah?

AR: Or one song.

BH: Yeah, well in fact, before we discuss it, let's have a look at that song, *Sweeney Todd*.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

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BH: Was performing a duet with Johnny Depp as much fun as it looks?

AR: He's great to act with, he really is, he's very, very generous and shares himself on the set and really listens and doesn't play rank or anything, he's terrific to work with. Of course what you've got to remember is we're both lip-syncing, we're miming for two days, and we recorded it separately, so I didn't hear it put together until we got on the set. And watching that now all I think of, you may think I'm just going "buh buh buh buh buh buh," but Sondheim makes it so difficult, those notes are not the ones you expect, the timings are not the ones your body wants, and honestly that music was being thrown across the rehearsal room so often. And notes that you don't want to sing, you know you're getting, that's actually a very pretty tune, but occasionally in it you want it to be that note and it's that note. And he's right of course, once you learn it, but you really do think you're never ever gonna get to the note he wants.

BH: Did you meet Sondheim and talk about, yeah, what was he like?

AR: Very briefly. So I had learned the song, now I'm in a room with a pianist and a door opens, now there are three people in the room and one of them's Stephen Sondheim. And without saying much else he just said, "Okay, let's hear it."

[Laughter]

AR: But it's the good news of starting late in this career is you just go, "oh well, what's the worst that's going to happen, he's going to fire me, okay, fine. I'll do my best."

BH: And Tim Burton, what was it like working with, he seems an incredibly visual director; he let the blood flow freely in that film.

AR: Yeah, but you know he's a real example of don't typecast people because I think people see all that hair and his drawings and his wild imagination, and you think that he's going to be like this human pogo stick on the set or something, and of course he's not like that at all. I'm going back to your other question, I used to watch him, and he'd be in-between takes, he'd just pace up and down and you knew, he wasn't taking to anybody, but you knew he was just locked inside his own pictures that he was putting together, or how he was going to stitch it together

story-wise. And I really admired things he asked for like, on the set, it was an interior but an exterior set of Fleet Street, he said, "I want the camera to be able to shoot this through 360 degrees." So this was a piece of scene painting and set construction like you really won't see anymore. And I work a lot at RADA still, and I brought all the technical students onto the set, I said, "You have got to go and look at that piece of scene painting there," with like from here over to that wall, you think you're looking at a shop awning, three dimensions, but it was painted. There were only like a couple of little mirrors on the set to fill in the gaps, but the rest of it totally surrounded us. Really rare.

BH: Yeah, absolutely. Well let's move on to your second film as director, which is out this week I believe, you had the premiere the other night, *A Little Chaos*. What was it, we'll have a look at a clip in a minute, but what was it about this, why was this the script, the idea that drew you to directing from all those years ago?

AR: Well on a kind of just on a technical level, informational level, of course I'd been given those seven weeks every year that I had to shoot, I just wasn't, I didn't have a year and a bit that you need to direct a film, because it wasn't until I'd finished *Harry Potter* that I could do it. Somewhere along the line, it's just, it's that weird circumstance where the letterbox clatters and 180 pages of a script dropped through. Allison Deegan, and it was her first script, although she happens to be married to Sebastian Barry who if anybody's read his books or seen his plays is a wonderful, wonderful Irish playwright and novelist. So writing's in her household, she was an actress, she'd raised her kids and she knew there was more to life, "I'm going to write a script," so she did. And she won't mind me saying that she's extremely dyslexic, so this script was 180 pages not just because it was too long, but because of the way she writes, and that means no punctuation except a comma every three words. So you know, there's quite a lot of work that had to be done before you could get to the essence of it. But still in all I think any actor will say, or director or producer, that four pages in you know if you're dealing with somebody who can write. And I loved the fact that she knew her subject, Louis XIV and the building of Versailles, and I loved the fact that she took it and just kind of tore the pages up of history and said, now let's see not how they rearrange themselves, but you know the central

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character is a woman that couldn't possibly have existed, a woman landscape gardener, or a woman with a job at all. So it's a male-dominated world with a lot of women who were merely decorative objects, weirdly that has modern parallels still, so I liked that about it. The fact that you could tell a story that's set at that time, although of course you're nuts to do it because it's bringing all those attendant financing problems, building problems, weather problems, traffic problems, all of it, in order to tell a story that hopefully people lose themselves inside, but think, wait a minute, this feels very modern.

BH: They were screened last week here and there were hundreds of people here, and the audience absolutely rapt watching it. Let's have a look at a clip.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

BH: This is a very obvious question but I have to ask it, directing yourself, particularly you know that scene, how many takes of yourself did you demand?

[Laughter]

AR: Ralph Fiennes is a good friend and he directed *The Invisible Woman* what a year or so ago, and boy is he in that a lot more than I am in this. You know I show up occasionally in this, and I have no idea how he did that, or Russell Crowe has just directed and he's probably in every shot of that, and Ryan Gosling, so there's a lot of it about. No it's not easy, it's not even I think for me desirable, but for those of you who haven't seen it, I'm playing Louis XIV, and of course his wife has just died and he's gone to this little, private place, a little garden, and she's come to get some shrubs, and mistakes him for the gardener. The good thing about playing Louis XIV is he doesn't move very much, so you don't have to do blocking for him, because people come to him.

[Laughter]

AR: He sits still or he stands still, or he leaves. That makes life simpler, and really you just have to, well, so it's two actors talking to each other, so it's what I was saying right at the beginning about the wire between you, and I guess Kate and I could feel whether the scene was happening. And you learn, one of my great beliefs is not to think about what you're saying, think about

what you're hearing, because what you say is automatic, then you've got the chance of something happening between you because you're not focusing on yourself, you're focusing on the other person. Then there might be a story. And Kate is one of the greatest listeners you'll ever sit in an editing room thanking God for when you want to watch a character learn about herself, which is what she has to do in this film, figure out who she is. Hours and hours of her listening wonderfully and learning stuff. So you've got the raw material there to direct yourself, and above and beyond that, Ellen Kuras, the DP, was under instructions to, you know don't be shy about going again. And what I was going to say before is Ralph gave me a good piece of advice, he said, "the danger of an actor directing themselves is you're embarrassed about going for another take on you," and I could see the sense in that.

BH: It feels like a very, in one sense, a very old-fashioned piece of filmmaking in that it's you know a very deliberate pace, you get to know the characters, it's telling a very interesting story. Was that part of the appeal, it has very modern parallels as you mentioned, but it doesn't feel like a film for the MTV generation to use that cliché.

AR: No, although it's surprising how well, I would not have expected a young, very young people respond to it, and men, you know I wasn't ready for that. But I think the guilt factor kicks in, and quite a lot of men say they were terribly moved, and maybe that is something to do with slowing the pace down. As I say the backdrop is exactly that, and it isn't what I was focusing on, but you have to pay attention to it, and thank God for the experts that you're always surrounded by in filmmaking, because it's beautifully done. And certainly talking to Ellen, I did know that the shape of it, if that's the right word, would be that every so often we would pull back and look at a kind of tableau of the world we were in, and then go inside it. And if you're making a film about people's thought processes, you can't rush it. And then it goes back to what I was saying, I don't know, I'm a ragbag of all the influences from ever. You know, as I say, watch the average French film where nothing happens.

BH: Things do happen, we should say that. Before I throw it open to the audience, so be thinking of your questions, I want to ask you about a film you've got coming up

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called *Eye In The Sky*, which sounds like a fantastic cast. Helen Mirren, you, Aaron Paul, and the South African director Gavin Hood, what can you tell us about that?

AR: Yeah we, it's of course terribly current, it's so current that you worry that - well it's about real stuff, so worrying about a film would be irrelevant - but it's already being overtaken in a way by real events. It's about the moral dilemmas that governments face in the use of drones against terrorists. And this film we shot in South Africa but it's, all of my scenes, I'm the head of the British Army, and they're set in Whitehall in an office with a huge screen on the wall, watching an Al-Shabaab compound in Kenya where we know there are, because of a little camera that big [makes 'tiny' gesture] that's been flown in, we know these are known terrorists that we need to take out. The only thing is in a back room the little drone is making sure that we can also see that there are a bunch of other people strapping on suicide vests, so we know they're about to go out to a supermarket or whatever and kill 150 people. I, the professional, say, "I have to press that button." The ministers around the table are all going, "Yeah, but it's not my responsibility, I need to talk to the Foreign Secretary." The Foreign Secretary's having dysentery on the toilet in Tokyo, so there's a certain kind of ridiculous collage going on, but it's made more complicated by the fact that just outside that compound where the known terrorists are, there's a totally innocent 12 year-old girl selling bread who won't stand a chance. And of course my position in the film is you have to kill the one in order to save the many. So it's, hopefully it's a film that just throws it straight at the audience and says, what do you think?

BH: Fascinating. So it sounds like a political thriller?

AR: Yeah, but it's also, it'll look like an action film.

BH: Thank you. Okay, it's time for questions from the audience. We have roving mics I think, so if you could put your hand up if you have a question and we'll get the mic to you. So can you get that lady back there?

Q: Thank you. You mentioned earlier Hollywood's love of a happy ending, is that something you have come to embrace or do you think it's sometimes to the detriment of the art of storytelling?

AR: I don't know, you know you also learn that every film is different and every circumstance is different. Sometimes it's probably right to push for that, sometimes it's wrong. In *A Little Chaos* it's very important to have a happy ending, that's what it's about. It's not that I feel under pressure to find it, it's important, it's what its resolution is, and it's a serious happy ending if that's not a contradiction in terms. I think you'd have to name, you know one would have to have examples and say, well that's a shame, or that's a good idea.

BH: Thank you. Gentleman just on the second row.

Q: Your portrayal of Éamon de Valera was superb, and you got his voice and his intonation superbly well. Did you have a voice coach, or did you watch old cinema of him?

AR: Thank you. I watched everything I could. One of the problems about playing somebody like him is of course you listen to tapes, but you never hear him saying things like, "Pass the sugar." He doesn't say ordinary things, he's always making speeches or yelling into a crowd, because of course there weren't microphones. The irony of it is that my Irish grandmother who I never knew is called Mary Collins, or was, and so if ever I were to go on *Who Do You Think You Are?* - which I'm not - that would be a great story wouldn't it? De Valera's related to Michael Collins. Yeah but you know, it was full of very memorable moments for me, not just the Irish background that I don't know about, but also playing such an iconic figure, and a character who, in a country where he's half adored and half loathed, and a director who says, "So, do you hate him yet?" And then arriving in Dublin and finding that the first scene you're gonna shoot is up on a platform, which to me felt like a scaffold, in front of 5000 Dubliners who will not be coming back tomorrow when they find out how boring filming is. And I need those 5000 people desperately. And Neil [Jordan], he won't mind me telling these stories, well he probably will, I couldn't work out what was going on because he was following me around and he was asking me all these questions. He'd come into the trailer and he'd say, "So, do you have the accent?" I said, "Yes." I'm not going to do it for you now. "Do you have the haircut?" I said, "Yes." "Do you have the glasses?" "Yes." And then we got

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down onto the set and I was wearing a raincoat buttoned up to the neck, it was taken from a photograph of De Valera speaking on one of the campaigns. I walked onto the set and Neil said, "Is that the costume?" I said, "Yes. You're not helping me here, you know I'm terrified already." But then I realised that what it was, it was Neil's way of showing, not meaning to, but how frightened he was. Because this was a huge scene, and there were seven cameras all around the square, and as I say they weren't going to come back tomorrow when they found out that they just got to stand there. So there's something else I learned, you know there are times when you take on the job of directing, it's absolutely terrifying.

BH: Thank you for that question, which I meant to ask earlier, thank you very much. Gentleman right at the back there.

Q: Hi there. You've not talked about your hilarious performance in *Robin Hood*. I was wondering if you could maybe share a couple of memories of working on that film?

AR: Well, in a nutshell, thank you if you enjoyed it. Thank God for panto training in rep.

[Laughter]

AR: And knowing how to look for information in a script. "I will cut your heart out with a spoon." Oh, that means he's insane. Because you must now say it as if you actually believe that, et cetera, et cetera. Oh, and here's a true story, I had a habit of going and having lunch with a very great writer, playwright now dead sadly called Peter Barnes, who wrote *The Ruling Class*, which has just been revived and suddenly everybody discovers Peter Barnes again. You go, I've always known that man was brilliant, and there are many scripts of his in drawers that nobody put on. But I used to go and have lunch with him, and he always, he wrote in the reading room of the British Museum, when they kicked him out of there he moved to the Leicester Square branch of McDonald's, because there was a phone on the wall. So anyway I used to go and have lunch with him in the Pizza Express over the road, and I knew I was going to do *Robin Hood*, and I said, "Will you have a look at this script because it's terrible, and I need some good lines." So he did, and you know with kind of pizza and bacon and egg going all over the script, because Peter was, well in

his own book he said, "I've made a mess of my shirts, but then I've made a mess of my life." So there was my script covered in pizza, but he said, "Well, you know here, here where it says you're coming down the corridor and you're wiping the scar off of the statue, you should have a wench in a doorway, and then you should say, 'You, my room, 10.30,' and then turn to the other wench and say, 'You, 10.45'." So I'm going [mimes writing] "You, my room, 10.45." I'd also given the script to Ruby Wax who's a great friend of mine, and I'd said to her, "Will you read this script and come up with some lines?" And she came round to my house and I said, "You read the script?" "No, I didn't have time. Just say the lines to me." So I said, "Well, today Peter Barnes said, 'Have a wench there. You, my room, 10.30. You, 10.45.'" Immediately she said, "And bring a friend." [mimes writing] "And bring a friend." And when I presented this to Kevin Reynolds, he'd learned by then not to tell the producers for whatever reason, and not tell the crew or anything, and so he set this up for me to do it. And I said, "Look, I'll say these lines. You put the women in there, I'll say the lines, and then I'll just clear the frame at the end of the line." And nobody knew this was happening except him. And I knew it had worked because as I cleared the camera I saw about 80 members of the crew just go [gestures stifling laughter].

[Laughter]

AR: And then occasionally Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio who was being sort of seriously Maid Marion, she'd come over to do one of the scenes with us, and she'd say, "I want to be in *his* film."

[Laughter]

AR: And then I got a [BAFTA] for it, and when I went up to the microphone with all honesty I just said, "Thank you, this will a very healthy reminder to me that subtlety isn't everything." But panto, yeah.

BH: Thank you. Next question. Lady right at the front in the middle. Just get the mic to you, one sec, so we can all hear.

Q: I just wondered if you ever regretted taking on *Harry Potter*? It obviously took up so many years of your life, and you said that it stopped you from taking on directing projects because you had to do it for seven weeks every year. And also whether you bought the *Harry Potter* books

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and slightly hoped that Snape died in the next one so you didn't have to do it?

AR: Well what would be the point of regretting it? You know, why would you waste time regretting 10 years of your life? So no, I don't regret it. I'll never forget, one night when one of those books came out I went down to the bookshop with the parents of the daughter of a friend who's *Harry Potter* obsessed, couldn't give a shit that it was me playing, she just wanted the book. I said, "I'm coming down there, I need to see this." So we found a disguise, so glasses and some rubbish that were in the back of the car. I said, "There's not going to be anybody there," this bookshop was opening at midnight, and there won't be anybody there. There were hundreds of people there, and it was like dicing with death as I got out of this car and all these people are wearing their costumes, and I was walking around amongst them in this disguise, but obviously not in a black wig so that was the great saviour. But then I thought, we're going to be here until three o'clock in the morning getting her book, this is a nightmare, so I went up to the front of the queue, to the door and I just said, "Excuse me, is there somebody, I just need to ask a question." Somebody came out, I said, "I'm in this film, can you give me a copy of the book because otherwise there's going to be mayhem here in a minute," and so we got out of there.

[Laughter]

AR: But the end of the story, which was the beginning of the story, is that wasn't, you know it wasn't her howling with laughter in the car all the way back. It was somebody who at one o'clock in the morning opened this book and was completely lost inside it immediately. So it's so powerful what that did for children, and maybe not children as well, that you can't possibly regret it. And of course it allowed me to do all sorts of other things that don't have distribution and nobody's ever seen, and I was directing anyway in the theatre, and I was acting in the theatre. You know six months on stage here, New York, doing other movies; it was a great privilege, seven weeks of the year.

BH: Thank you, I think we've got time for one more question. Let's, for ease of, let's take this lady on the front row.

Q: Hello, thank you. Hello. I was wondering if you thought your background in theatre gave you significant advantages or

disadvantages when you were working in film?

AR: At the beginning you realise you have to learn to keep your head still in a close-up, you're not used to that sort of control. And I remember on *Die Hard*, John McTiernan said at one point, he said, "I've learned with you that I have to have everything ready for the first take," because I was like a greyhound out of a trap, you know it was like, okay act now. And I had no idea what take two and three were for particularly, because I thought I've just done it, what are we doing it again for?

[Laughter]

AR: So all I can say is, you learn, and if you're lucky enough to work in both, there's a definite trade-off both ways. And I, on stage I've learned to trust the fact that you can just be thinking something, and if you're thinking it accurately 800 people will pick it up. I wouldn't have known that without doing film. And vice versa, you know theatre training gives you a structure, and if you're not going to get it on the set, you've got something to go back to in terms of the way you look at a script, and the way you mark it, and the way you put little stickers in it, and the way you create a structure to help the director so that you arrive on the set prepared. You know and Kate Winslet is a phenomenon at being prepared, every director's gift, because she arrives on the set knowing exactly what the scene's about, exactly what her place in it is. But at the same time, miraculously, the information is in her and then she drops it, and then all she does is to listen for the first time to that person who's talking and obey the rules of her character now. So it isn't like ossified, it's alive. So there's a trade-off, I'm glad I did both.

BH: So are we. We have run out of time. Thank you so much for your excellent questions, and I could sit here all night listening to our guest, but it just leaves me to thank Alan Rickman.

AR: Thank you.

[Applause]