

Women In Motion

Cate Blanchett and Coco Francini

20 MAY 2023

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Alright, good morning.

Cate Blanchett

Good morning.

Coco Francini

Good morning.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

I'm so excited to be here with both of you.

Coco Francini

Us as well.

Cate Blanchett

Yeah, thank you.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Congrats on your premiere yesterday. How was it seeing it with an audience in the theatre?

Cate Blanchett

Yes, we had a film we co-produced with Scarlet Pictures, *The New Boy*, which is from one of our favorite directors of all time but wonderful Australian Indigenous director Warwick Thornton and he won the Caméra d'Or – was it 15 years ago? – for his first feature *Samson and Delilah*, so should be returning to that quadrant of the Festival for *him* and for all of us in his wake was really profound, and I think it screened really well. We're very proud of the film and it was a great, you know, platform here.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Now I want to talk more about *New Boy*, but first let's talk about how the two of you came together as producing partners. I know that you met on *Mrs. America*. Is that correct?

Coco Francini

We did. We met on *Mrs. America*. We joined forces – I mean, Cate and Andrew – about three years ago and three is our lucky number. We have three films coming out this year, I guess: we had *Shade* at Sundance, *New Boy* here, and *Fingernails*, upcoming with Apple in the fall.

And I think we just gravitated towards each other. Because we were so passionate about film-makers and we had so many amazing film-makers work on that show with us. And when we were finishing, you know, we decided to partner up.

Cate Blanchett

Yeah, the conversation was great. I mean that's the thing. Everyone talks... Even though we're very director-driven as a company and we've both been very driven in our separate experiences, and I have been as an actor, you know and also as a producer, film-making is a conversation. So you know being in dialogue with Andrew, of course, who is, you know a work partner and life partner, but also with Coco is really invigorating.

Because it makes you think in a different way, you know when you ask each other, you know maybe the questions that you hadn't thought of, or they challenge your assumptions or your way of working.

And so, it keeps things sort of robust and you know it's good to have that person and that definitely happened with *Mrs. America*. You know there were some directors that Coco threw into the mix who were really, really exciting: Laure and Janicza, and so that was really exciting. So, we had a sympathetic taste, and it was great to allow that to evolve.

Coco Francini

Yeah. And now I think we've built the company and we're building a company that's really about supporting those voices, supporting those film-makers and you know, really when we come onto a project, the producers were there to support the vision 100%, and that's why we joined forces.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Now Coco, can you talk about how you got your start as a producer?

Coco Francini

I've worn many, many hats, and which I think is a good thing for a producer.

I worked for many years with Quentin Tarantino, which I think informed the way that I work with film makers. And I've been like a publicist, I've been a producer. I raised \$3.1 million on the Internet for Zach Braff's film 10 years ago. So I think that it's all about finding the ways to get things done, finding the ways to get things made. And that's been, you know, my career from the beginning to now.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

And Cate, at what point did you have this interest in producing and why did you want to explore that side of the business?

Cate Blanchett

Well, I've always been interested in that wonderful American phrase that you're always using: "the process from soup to nuts", you know.

So it's not just everyone talks about, you know, why did you choose the role? And for me, it's never been the role. It's always been about who you are in conversation with it. I'm as interested in the development process as I am in the process of shooting it and then I'm really interested in the post-process right through to how distribution and marketing.

And Andrew and I ran the De Facto National Theatre Company in Australia for what we did for almost 10 years from 1996, and it was really great to be producing the work of emerging performing artists, as well as mid-career and late career artists, and placing them in dialogue with one another. And so, this feels an extension for me of my work as an actor.

And that just to your point too, like I think both Andrew and Coco and I have... We understand how films get made. Like we're not prepared to pick up the gear and move it around. And people usually associate that kind of lugging with women, you know like we're prepared to do the jobs big and small. You know, you go this kind of way. And that's the way we make films in Australia and it was really great to discuss, you know, to realize with Coco, just realize that's exactly the way you do. I say we're you, you as a producer, you are kind of have to be a publicist sometimes you do have to be, you know, a crew member.

Coco Francini

And get people coffee.

Cate Blanchett

Yeah, you do, you do: a lot of coffee. Yeah.

And also you need to know what the post-process means and I think we understand, hands on, all of those things in a creative way. So I think... Getting the money, of course; none of us would be here if you know that wasn't. It's a big, enormous part of the job.

But I think what often gets lost in the art of producing is that creative dialogue with the people who are at the center of the process. I think we're here to protect that part – not in a sacred way, but ask, you know, the creative important questions, but also support that creative vision. So that just feels for me like an extension of my work as an actor

Elizabeth Wagmeister

And Coco, can you talk about working with Cate, obviously with so much experience in this industry, how that's an asset to her work as a producer?

Coco Francini

Well, I mean, you know, there's the process like Cate said, there's a process of making the film and that can be a sacred process, you know, in the best-case scenario and then there's a process of everything after. And I mean –

Cate Blanchett

Which can be a bun fight...

Coco Francini

Yeah, exactly. And Cate, you've been doing this for so long and you've seen that process through in so many different ways. I've always found Cate to be incredibly smart in the way that we're talking about marketing a film.

And beyond her creative insights, and I noticed when we were doing *Mrs America*, we were in the post process and we were working on notes together. It's just you are so.... you're so able to get to

the *heart* of what each character needs and what they're trying to say, in like the most minute ways and the largest ways. And so, it's so interesting for me as a producer, working with you as an actor, because I don't, that's not the natural lens that I come at things from. So, I've learned so much.

So, there's kind of two-fold, there's the creative process and then there's the experience of bringing something out and getting the largest platform for something, and supporting the piece of work you've all made together. And so, it's just been wonderful to do that together over the past few years.

Elizabeth Wagneister

In *New Boy*, you obviously have a role in that film. But I know that most of the slate, at Dirty Films, you do not. You're behind the camera, so when do you choose to act in one of your projects or not?

Cate Blanchett

I'm always trying to get out of acting. I have been trying to stop acting my entire professional life and you know, I remember, you know, an Australian film director saying to me really early on in my career that, you know, I had to stop taking small roles.

And I said: "Why??" I said, that was the most interesting role and I didn't want to play the lead – I wanted to play that one, because I can experiment with it and I really want to be in dialogue with *those* actors and *that* cinematographer and *that* director on *that* set in that location.

And so the idea of, I remember when Andrew and I were running the Sydney Theatre Company, when I directed a show or it was a show that we've produced, large or small, on opening night, when I'd wish the actors the best of luck and they walked onto the stage and I went into the auditorium, I had this profound relief, you know, in a way.

But then I what I did realize that the nerves are *exactly* the same. Like it's more nerve-wracking if you've directed a show sitting there and knowing you've got no control over what's gonna happen in the evening. But yeah, I think it's... For me, I just said it earlier, it's about the conversation. And sometimes that conversation involves me being in front of the lens, and sometimes it's, you know, back behind being a little bit too bossy sometimes, yeah, from behind, cause the facilitation is equally as creative.

Elizabeth Wagneister

Now, whoever wants to answer this: can you talk about the name Dirty Films? Where does that come from?

Cate Blanchett

Well, I suppose like the company, it has evolved. It's been in Andrew's and my life for a long time. When he was a freelance editor in Australia, they... when they were cleaning the negative for the... they used to mark it up with like a China graph pencil and they had to clean it and run it through the solution so that they could screen the rushes.

And he and the other editors used to have a joke that they don't, they don't screen dirty films, they clean them. So, it was about the editing process. But it has evolved.

We kept it because it's kind of cheeky. I mean, we've got some really inappropriate emails because of our name, you know, maybe we might evolve. Who knows?

Coco Francini

You know, we know, you know, always keep our options open.

Cate Blanchett

It's a very lucrative industry apparently, but it has evolved, I think because we're very interested in process and so we, we like the idea. We don't mind getting our hands dirty. You know, we... We're interested in the complicated and often messy process of making something that it doesn't.... We're not we're not results-driven. We're not trying to end-game before we've got into the weed, so to speak. I'm using many metaphors.

Coco Francini

We want our fingerprints on that film.

Cate Blanchett

Yeah.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Yes.

Coco Francini

Yeah, I think. And when I joined Cate and Andrew, we talked about the name. We're like, are we gonna, is it? Is it new? And for me, I was like, I love this. And I love the tangibility of the name. That's really about something that you can fold your hands.

And you know, I've done more.... I've done more work on *film* than I actually have on digital because of working with Quentin. And in *Django Unchained*, my office was surrounded by film rack. So I kind of I grew up in that in that environment too, so it meant something to me and it was nice for those kind of ideas to come together.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Now, can you talk about what sorts of projects you were looking for at Dirty Films?

Cate Blanchett

For me, I'm a little bit wary of mission statements, saying "we make this type of cinema". I think our taste is really eclectic. And I think in the end, it's.... I think the types of films we're interested in and the *brand* of a company evolves over time and I think that's what I love about working with Coco and Andrew: it's that we never discount any conversation, because you never know where it's going to lead you.

But I mean I think it's like, currently, I suppose it's...

Coco Francini

Oh yeah, we're yeah, I mean, we are working with a lot of International film-makers, we're working with a lot of female film-makers. But I think that all you have, obviously, you have your ability and that can be learned. But your taste is something that evolves over time, that is wholly your own.

And we've been so lucky the three of us. Anytime someone's like, hey, I'm thinking about this thing we were like: "Yes!" I mean, there's never been a situation where somebody said, well, I'm not sure. So we've just been so aligned on our case and it is eclectic, It is.... You know, sometimes I feel like we're like, is this the hardest thing we could possibly do? Like, let's jump into that.

But yeah, it's... It's really writer-, director-, filmmaker-driven primarily and we're just excited and all levels – emerging film makers, established film makers – we're kind of working in both of those spheres right now.

Cate Blanchett

But also, we're involved in a really interesting VR project that Coco founded with a group called Marshmallow Feast.

Coco Francini

Marshmallow Laser –

Cate Blanchett

Marshmallow Laser Feast. And it was a called Evolver, about going inside the body into the process of breathing. And they were using techniques that they have used for people with PTSD. And so it was a really fascinating insert of VR installation that I never would have imagined being involved with but it absolutely fascinating. It was at the Tribeca Film Festival.

Coco Francini

Yes, Terence Malick executive-produced it with us and Pressman Films. It was just one of those... and it will tour I hope and Cate graciously leads you into the experience by reading some poetry. It's really fantastic. So we're interested in all these different areas, certainly not fitting into a box.

Cate Blanchett

Because I think too – and Andrew and I really learned this in the theater, and something that can be frustrating sometimes when you're working on a film project is that – sometimes things happen incredibly quickly. And so you need to be able to jump fast and move fast, and you don't want to arrest the natural momentum of a project.

And then sometimes, some projects can take a decade to realize. So you know it was great to work on that Marshmallow Laser Feast, because you know: installation. It happened super super quickly.

But say something like *New Boy* that's it's been in Warrick Thornton's bottom drawer for all you know almost 18 years and but then when he pulled it out, we knew it had been percolating for a long time, so we knew we needed to act quickly before we lost him again, yeah. So, it just you have to be alive to those different rhythms. And the different scale, too.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

On *Mrs America*, I know that was mostly female directors. I never like to assume anything, but I imagine that that was a very specific effort that you wanted to have women direct those episodes. Can you speak a bit about that?

Cate Blanchett

Well, we thought it was gonna be.... We just sort of were around the table one day and look, let's just make a list. Let's make our best efforts. And without drawing breath, we suddenly had a list of 17 women who were all completely qualified, capable and inspirational. And then it became like, oh God, who's available? We've only got eight episodes.

Coco Francini

Nine.

Cate Blanchett

Well, it was eight at the beginning, then it was nine.

Coco Francini

I think it was 6 and then it was 8 and 9.

Cate Blanchett

Yeah. Yes, it gets bigger and bigger. So I think that was, that was so exciting. It's just a bunch of women making this show going let's make our best efforts, and then realizing just how easy it was and how lazy it is, how lazy the industry has been and neglectful, you know, to its detriment. You know, there was a profound malaise and a level of homogeneity to the work. Because the people behind the lens who are making the work were too homogeneous, you know?

And so when you get, when you get a diverse perspective, and I'm not just talking about the gender and sexual orientation and cultural diversity and emotional diversity, I'm talking about generational diversity. And so, I think then the work becomes really exciting and I think that that's what made *Mrs America* what it was.

Coco Francini

And it carried through to the crew as well. Our DP, one of our DPs, Jessica Lee Gagné. Amazing.

At the time 31, French Canadian, DP, she works with Ben Stiller. She's incredible. And we made a rule basically for every single member of the crew that for every position you must interview a woman and you must interview a person of color.

And just pushing people towards that goal brought out all these very qualified people that they just haven't met before, hadn't been pushed towards finding, so our crew was incredible. And lots of women behind the camera as well, not just the directors.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Is that for all your projects that you interview a woman and a person of color?

Coco Francini

It's something we, yeah.

Cate Blanchett

I think it's important. Yeah. It's also it's just: it's, why not? Be having this conversation right? Right. I'm not telling you off.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

I think we shouldn't have to be having it in yet, we do. Because if not then it's not happening.

Cate Blanchett

No. And I look forward when we, when to the day when we don't even need to have a, you know, interviews about women in cinema. You know, where you know it's a non-issue.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Right.

Cate Blanchett

But we've both had experiences where we've walked on set and done the headcount and you know you wonder why the you sort of slightly feel alienated and annoyed some days, because you realize you get onto the block-through and you do the headcount and I realized not only among the only woman in the cast, you know, in the block-through – there are 62 men. And, yup, I'm the only woman.

So you go, this ratio is bad; I'll do it tomorrow. OK, 37 men, three women: no, not good enough. And so, it's not even like if the ratio is 7 to five. You know it's really disproportionate.

And it means that you're always laughing at the same jokes. You're always, you know, it's like and so the hours. I, do have a really good sense of humor, but it's like, you know, let's, let's change it up, yeah.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Can you talk about, Cate, the changes that you have seen for women in this business since the time that you started out?

Cate Blanchett

I think it's top of mind. I think diversity is top of mind, and I think it's in a way that you can feel sometimes, if I'm honest, you can feel sometimes people going, "OK. I'm having the diversity conversation".

That's good. That means we're having it a lot and unfortunately we need to keep having it you know, until all of the rooms and all levels of the process of making cultural products, for want of a better phrase, until the product is as diverse as it should be.

But I've noticed enormous changes. Yeah, definitely. And I feel that.... that there's a lot more from when I started off as an actress in the film industry.

There was a sense of – and to be frank, it did come from the media more than it came from the women that I encountered on set – that you were competitors, you weren't collaborators. And we are natural collaborators. And so I've noticed that women have really got each other's backs.

You know and that they, that the women who have power to, you know, elevate the wage to say we're going to have faith of nations on this set, in terms of you know all of this sort of perks although on the types of films that we make, there are no perks. But you know, to make sure that there's, that, the women you know who maybe don't are not in that position to argue their corner, you argue it for them and with them, and empower them to have that voice on set.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Right. Now, if you look at the statistics, it's still staggering, when you look at women versus men, behind the camera, in executive positions, there are not that many female directors who are getting these big budget films. Cate, are you ever interested in directing?

Cate Blanchett

I get asked a lot.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Um-hm.

Cate Blanchett

Yeah, I do get asked a lot. But for me, you know, there's so many things that I find enjoyable in the process of making a film and so many directors that I, yeah, wanna work with as an actor and as a producer.

And it takes a long time you know I'm slow as an actor I would be triply slow as a director. There's a project that I'm very – *we're* – very keen on, that we're discussing so hopefully that will come to fruition, but it's about making the time. You know, and knowing intimately how long it takes to development through, you know, all of those processes, the write-through to being there, you know, at every event like this. But the movie.

I also have four children – and a garden, that you know, which I don't want the plants to die.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

The garden takes a while.

Cate Blanchett

It does. Yeah, but I mean you do learn it. It's a cliché, but you do learn patience, which is something I need to learn. And you learn that from gardening.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Yeah.

Cate Blanchett

I have killed a lot of cauliflowers.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Coco, can you speak a bit about your upcoming slate? You mentioned those three films.

Coco Francini

Three films are coming out this year, all in the fall. I feel like that is a good sign.

Cate Blanchett

Yes, busy year.

Coco Francini

It was a busy year. We have a film with Ben Stiller that Cate and Ben are going to act in together as well, called *The Champions*.

Cate Blanchett

And he's directing.

Coco Francini

And he's directing. What else should we announce?

Cate Blanchett

I don't know if we can announce it.

Coco Francini

You know, we have, we have a very large slate, to be honest with you. We've probably got 15 films in development. We have – we have a film with Emma Corrin that we're gonna shoot this fall. And we have....

Cate Blanchett

I don't know if we can talk about...!

Coco Francini

We're gonna tell you about it soon.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

We'll stay tuned. Now what do you both think about the state of the industry? Because right now, there's more content than ever, which is a positive because there's so much room for new voices. But is it hard to stand out when there's so many places to look, and so much content to consume?

Cate Blanchett

Yeah, but it's also.... There's a lot of fear around, too, so you might be able to get some money to make something. But then you gotta say, is that the right partner? Are they gonna lose their nerve? And so sometimes you just think, oh, you know it's... - probably you are going to hate me for saying this – but it's probably good to take a little bit less money, but to have a really brave partner to, you know collaborate as to make the thing. I think there's a lot being made, but then there's also a lot of things that are being not so well-made.

Coco Francini

I think it's hard to find things. I think if there's a lot of noise. When I, as a film, as an audience, I'm finding more films from international auteurs, international female film-makers, film-makers that are so exciting. Hmm. And. More, I think today more than ever, there is an emphasis on getting those films made, which is very, very exciting to us.

But it's about getting them seen. You know, and I think that's the big challenge that we're facing –

Cate Blanchett

-- and how they're seen.

Coco Francini

And how they're seen. And how they're kind of contextualized and obviously seeing a movie in a movie theater is an incredible experience. It's been through, we've had a couple rough years, but in terms of filmmaking and the interest in interesting points of view, new points of view, I think it's more exciting than ever.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Speaking of movie theatres, what is doing well right now is big franchise superhero films.

Cate Blanchett

Are they?

Elizabeth Wagmeister

They are. They are. Yes.

Cate Blanchett

That's good.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

What do you think about that? Do you think that Hollywood needs to take more chances on fresh ideas, and new ideas?

Cate Blanchett

I know you live in LA. I don't know what Hollywood means. I actually don't know what Hollywood means. I think Hollywood is a – I am going to sound like a t-shirt slogan – it's a state of mind, you know. And I think you could find you can find a version of Hollywood thinking in Australia or in France, you know, in Germany.

I think a healthy industry is one that is that it is diverse in scale. You know and I think often we butt up or trying to compare once again the media does this. You know, it's like apples and oranges. How can you possibly compare the ambitions and the resources of a film that's made for \$250 million and one that's made for 1.5? You know and the production design and the level of inventiveness and costumes and the resources that they did or didn't have, you know, like I think a healthy industry gives a platform and access for an audience to that entire cornucopia of cinematic experience. And I for one as an actor, have enjoyed being in those films of different scales. So yeah, I don't know.

I mean if you're talking about at the box office, you also gotta look at the amount of screens that those things are on, you know. So it's for example, this film made with Todd Field last year. He was very particular about how it was released. So, it was only released when it first came out in the States on *four screens*. And people were saying, oh, you look at the box office and we didn't do very well. It's like it was *on four screens*. Those numbers were phenomenal. Phenomenal. It wasn't on, it didn't go, it didn't really start on the 1,000 screens.

So, you just gotta kind of, you gotta do the math on that stuff and not and not be quick to judge and sometimes it's good to start in a niche way you know. So, it's really important to look at how those things are... are they doing well? Are those being so-called blockbusters really the blockbusters?

And you know, I love going to see Julia Roberts and George Clooney. Yeah, I do. I love them both. Who doesn't?

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Who doesn't?

Do you think it is harder to get financing for a project as a woman?

Coco Francini

I'm sure it is. Undoubtedly.

Cate Blanchett

It's hard to get paid as an actress. So, I'm guessing.

Coco Francini

Yeah, undoubtedly. I mean it's... we're not there yet. You know. We make films for an audience. We'd love for our industry to look like our audience, and we're not there yet. But I think we're we are making progress.

Cate Blanchett

But I think transparency is very important.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Yes.

Cate Blanchett

I mean, we always talk about money like we shouldn't be talking about money. But why don't we talk about money? We talk about all the other, we open out all the other aspects of the process or we're expected to. I think the more transparent all of that stuff is. The more you can work out how the money is flowing and where it needs to flow and where it's not flowing yet.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Do we have time for a few audience questions? Can you take the mic over there?

From the floor

Hello. OK. A question to Cate Blanchett. Your roles, recent roles, portray very strong women: the women of *Tár*, this movie also where your character is very strong, but also very weak maybe. Can you talk about how you design this change of tone between a very strong woman who can reach every single goal, but has also fragility inside?

Cate Blanchett

I think you're speaking to complex characters, which I have always been drawn to, or you know early on in my career when there weren't opportunities in there to make an opportunity out of what was traditionally called a "girlfriend role". You would try, you would try and play against the banality or the simplicity of the character on the page.

But when Todd Field has written a character like that, when you know that he is always gonna put the camera in the right position to capture the nuances that you're trying to inflect the character with. Then you are in really good hands. That character was on the page. You really didn't need to change a syllable. I just had to try and rise to that level of complexity. But it was there.

And then of course when you're working opposite Nina Hoss, you know, I mean: the queen of complex nuance and fascinating female characters. But it was... You know sometimes you can, sometimes, the characters written like that on the page, but the filmmaker doesn't trust it, you know, but that wasn't the case with Todd. That was him.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Your performance was phenomenal.

Cate Blanchett

Oh, thank you.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

It was incredible. I believe we have time for one more question. Over here?

Stacy Smith

Hi, my name is Doctor Stacy Smith. I'm the founder of the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. Cate, thank you for the shout-out.

Cate Blanchett

Thank you.

Stacy Smith

Thank you, thank you.

Cate Blanchett

That was Todd, actually: he wrote the script.

Stacy Smith

It doesn't matter. But thank you and I will thank Todd too.

Everything that you were articulating about the industry: on-point. Finances. Market size. Distribution density of theaters or territories. All on point.

My question is far more, I just think, basic. Are there a few film-makers or voices you talked about their visions, but specific film makers that you're really excited to work with in the future, maybe not having a project attached, but people.

And Coco for you, in particular, are you interested in directing, because you've been in producerial role and all these other lanes: might directing come your way?

Coco Francini

I would love to direct. We have discussed that. We have discussed it, yes. Film-make... I mean, we're working with so many amazing film makers.

Cate Blanchett

Lucrecia Martel, for me. Lucrecia Martel.

Coco Francini

Yeah, we loved working with Janicza Bravo on *Mrs America*. We thought to continue our work with Janicza. Antonetta, who directed an amazing Croatian film that won the Caméra d'Or here a couple of years ago called *Marina*, and we, you know... Some men too. Some men too. Um, yeah. Jenny Soon. We're making a film with her in Hong Kong. So, we've... Absolutely. That is, that is most of our conversation is who we're excited about.

Stacy Smith

Thank you.