

Bryan Singer: The “Jack the Giant Slayer” interview

Written by Kam Williams



Bryan Singer has consistently entertained audiences between a bold visual style and richly drawn characters ever since his making a noteworthy feature film debut in 1993 with the Sundance Film Festival’s Grand Jury Prize-winner "Public Access." He gained widespread attention a couple years later with the crime thriller "The Usual Suspects" which won Academy Awards for Kevin Spacey (Best Supporting Actor) and Christopher McQuarrie (Best Original Screenplay).

Singer’s subsequent film was an adaptation of the Stephen King novella "Apt Pupil," followed by the wildly successful "X-Men" and "X2: X-Men United." He was next tapped to helm "Superman Returns," the first blockbuster shot on the Panavision Genesis digital camera, and the first live action film to utilize the post-conversion 3D process.

Most recently, Bryan made the World War II drama "Valkyrie," starring Tom Cruise. And he is currently in production directing "X-Men: Days of Future Past," which reunites numerous cast members from the franchise’s previous films.



For television, Singer directed the pilot and was executive producer on the Emmy and Golden

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Globe Award-winning series "House," starring Hugh Laurie. He also produced the ABC series "Dirty Sexy Money" and the HBO documentary "Vito," about author and 1980s AIDS activist Vito Russo.

Bryan has directed and/or produced a myriad of other projects through his Bad Hat Harry Productions, a motion picture and television production company formed in 1994. To date, his projects have grossed over two billion dollars worldwide.

Here, he talks about his latest film, “Jack the Giant Slayer,” a big screen version of the classic fairytale.

Kam Williams: Hi Bryan, thanks for the interview.

Bryan Singer: Sure. Not at all, Kam. My pleasure.

KW: Guess what? I met your mom in a waiting room last year. We happen to have the same dentist.

BS: Oh really? That’s cool. Are you from Princeton?

KW: Yep.

BS: How random! That’s funny. How did you know it was my mom?

KW: I struck up a conversation with her, and mentioned I was a film critic.

BS: And I bet it was the first thing that came out of her mouth.

KW: Just about. She’s a very proud mama who’s very knowledgeable about film in general. We had a great chat!

BS: That’s so nice, since she’s a big movie fan, herself.

KW: I invited her to attend the screening of the film the studio set up for me locally, but she declined.

BS: Yeah, she’s flying out to join me at the premiere here in L.A.

KW: What interested you in making Jack the Giant Slayer?

BS: At the time, there were no fairytale movies in development that I was aware of, so I thought it would be a great opportunity to do something different that I hadn’t seen before and that I hadn’t done before. A product existed called Jack the Giant Killer, which I kind of rewrote from scratch with Chris McQuarrie and Dan Studney, who are also Jersey kids. So, it began with that and my desire to see beanstalks and giants in a way they’ve never been portrayed before.

KW: I was familiar with Jack and the Beanstalk, but I don’t remember reading Jack the Giant Killer as a child.

BS: Jack the Giant Killer was from the 1700’s, and kind of an Arthurian character who went around slaying giants and sending their heads back to King Arthur. This film takes some

inspiration from both fairytales but, frankly, it's its own original story.

KW: Larry Greenberg asks: Can you tell me about how you directed the relationship between Jack [played by Nicholas Hoult] and Isabelle [played by Eleanor Tomlinson] with all the chaos going on around them.

BS: How do I put this? By basically making sure there was enough material that could build between them. But one of the key things was something I shot very late in the game, namely, the opening scene. I still didn't feel that their destiny was cemented, so I went to New Zealand to shoot the opening where you see them being read to as little kids, and designed it to be intercut, much the same way the next scene is intercut when Jack's uncle and Isabelle's father are scolding them. By doing that you set them on a path of romantic destiny. So, that setup not only gave the history of the giants, but put the idea of the two characters being on a trajectory to be together in the audience's mind. By the way, I used some of [director] Peter Jackson's stages and crew from the Hobbit for that. And I got to go to the Hobbit premiere while I was down there, which was a lot of fun.

KW: So you shot some of the film in New Zealand?

BS: Only those scenes where the parents were reading to the children. Those scenes also established who Jack and Isabelle were meant to be had his father and her mother not died. Now, Jack is fatherless and trapped on the farm, while Isabelle is motherless and trapped in a castle by an overprotective father who is afraid of losing the only other woman in his life. So, that opening tableau sort of sets the characters up in a fun way, and we shot it in New Zealand over a couple days. The rest of the movie was completely shot in London.

KW: Is there a message you want people to take away from the film?

BS: No, I don't think of it as that kind of film. It's just supposed be entertaining. Awards season is over, so it's time for an adventure.

KW: Documentary filmmaker Kevin Williams says: I'm from Trenton and almost everyone I meet from Princeton says they know you or your mom. His question is, how do you fight off complacency, and do you look at scripts any differently today versus earlier in your career?

BS: Well, early in my career, I really wasn't look at scripts. I was developing them from scratch. Now, I look at them for inspiration but, ultimately, I'm driven to a kind of movie I want to make, knowing that eventually I'm going to bring aboard my friends, some of whom I grew up with, like Chris, and others whom I met later in life, like Dan. So, initially, I'm just looking for an idea, for a kernel of a story.

KW: Have you met Damien Chazelle out there in Hollywood yet? He's an up-and-coming young director also from Princeton whose short film just won at Sundance.

BS: No, I haven't, but it would be great to meet him.

KW: Erik Daniels, who teaches at West Windsor High School South, your alma mater, says: We all know how formative the high school years are. How influential was your high school experience in shaping your desire to direct?

BS: It was very fostering. I had a communications teacher named Denise Mangani who really opened up my mind to the cinematic arts in general. And I also had a creative writing teacher,

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Mr. Berridge, who was very inspiring in terms of thinking about stories. Another was my social studies teacher, Ms. Fiscarelli. She was very influential because she taught a comprehensive unit on The Holocaust. That material has found its way into many of movies, from Apt Pupil to X-Men to Valkyrie to X-Men: First Class, as well as into some of the documentaries I’ve produced. That subject-matter has been very important to me.

KW: Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier asks: Is there a new genre of film that you would like to tackle for the first time?

BS: Yes, horror. Something supernatural. I always enjoy a good horror film, and there hasn’t been a great horror film like The Exorcist for awhile.

KW: Patricia also asks: What director did you admire the most growing up?

BS: Steven Spielberg.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

BS: I’ve been reading a lot of David Sedaris lately. I recently finished “When You Are Engulfed in Flames”

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0316154687/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

and his “Holidays on Ice.”

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B003H4RDZQ/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

And I’m currently reading “Barrel Fever.”

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0316779423/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

KW: Harriet Pakula-Teweles notes that you produced the TV series “House” which is set in your hometown, Princeton. She asks: Were you also involved in the writing?

BS: No, the original script which was written by David Shore, was set in Boston. I moved it to Princeton because I didn’t want it to be just a city hospital. I also felt Princeton was a perfect location to have a diversity of patients.

KW: When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

BS: Time moving forward, not backwards. [LOL]

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

BS: I don’t cook, but I love eating sushi.

KW: If you could have one wish instantly granted, what would that be for?

BS: Eternal good health.

KW: The Ling-Ju Yen question: What is your earliest childhood memory?

BS: My father reading a storybook to me at about the age of 2. It had a fly on every page, and whenever we saw the fly, we’d fall back on the bed together and laugh.

KW: Thanks again for the time, Bryan, and best of luck with the film.

BS: Sure thing, Kam, and if you see my mom in town, tell her I said “Hi.”

KW: Will do!

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BS: Thanks!

To see a trailer for Jack the Giant Slayer, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZ6aeaGQKUE>