

Benjamin Bratt: The "Snitch" Interview

Written by Kam Williams



Born in San Francisco on December 16, 1963, Benjamin Bratt's career has successfully spanned movie and television for over 25 years. His impressive resume includes the critically acclaimed Piñero, in a powerful portrayal of poet-playwright-actor Miguel Piñero; Steven Soderbergh's "Traffic"; and "The Woodsman", a festival and critical favorite starring Kevin Bacon.

Television audiences recognize Benjamin from his award-winning role of Detective Rey Curtis on NBC's long-running drama "Law & Order". He also starred in A&E's miniseries "The Andromeda Strain", based on the novel by Michael Crichton, which garnered seven Emmy nominations. Additionally, he served as series lead as well as producer on A&E's "The Cleaner", for which he received an ALMA Award in 2009.

A veteran of dozens of films, Benjamin's other work includes "The River Wild" opposite Meryl Streep; "Blood In, Blood Out" with director Taylor Hackford; "Clear and Present Danger" with Harrison Ford; "Abandon" opposite Katie Holmes; "The Great Raid"; "Miss Congeniality" with Sandra Bullock; and the screen adaptation of Nobel Prize-winning author Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "Love in the Time of Cholera".

In "La Mission", Benjamin re-teamed with his writer/director/producer brother, Peter Bratt, to star in and produce a story which recalls the culture, people and beliefs of their childhood in the Mission district of San Francisco. He and Peter joined with producer Alpita Patel to form 5 Stick Films, a production company geared towards film of conscience, to tell stories with passion, vision and personal reflection.

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Benjamin is married to actress Talisa Soto Bratt. They live in Los Angeles with their two children, Mateo and Sophia. Here, he talks about his latest outing as El Topo in "Snitch", an action thriller co-starring Dwayne Johnson, Susan Sarandon, Harold Perrineau and Barry Pepper.

Kam Williams: Hi Benjamin. I'm honored to have a chance to interview you.

Benjamin Bratt: It's totally my pleasure, Kam.

KW: What interested you in "Snitch"?

BB: A few things, actually. I really liked the script. [Director] Ric Waugh happens to be an old friend of mine. We sort of came up together. His father, the great Fred Waugh, was the stunt coordinator on the first series I ever did, "Nasty Boys". And Rick, believe it or not, was a kid who happened to be a great stuntman. It was a family business for him and his father and his brother. Since we became friends way back when, I didn't want to pass up the opportunity to come full circle working together again, but in an actor/director relationship. You might look at my part on the page and think, hmm, it's a little small, and maybe not worth flying to Shreveport three times for just a few days' worth of work. But the truth of the matter is I was excited to reconnect with him and also to play a part that certainly looms large over the story as a kind of ominous presence of danger, not unlike the role I played in "Traffic".

KW: I have some questions for you from my readers. Larry Greenberg asks: When you play a hardcore bad guy like El Topo, is it a different mindset from when you play someone in law enforcement?

BB: One might think so, Larry but, surprisingly, the answer is "No." I think most law enforcement people would tell you that there's a very fine line between going one way or the other. On some level, as a career criminal, you're a soldier. And certainly a police officer also has that soldier's "us or them" mentality where the delineation between black and white is very clear. My brother-in-law happens to be a detective on the East Coast. Having played a man in uniform several times, it's always been a fascination for me. And I've spent hours talking to him over the years about the mindset of someone on the force, and it's very clear. There's no gray area in law enforcement. Evil exists in the world and it must be dealt with. And those on the side of good can feel righteous in their approach to eliminating evil. There's no ambiguity there. So, in the case of someone like El Topo, it's not so much that he's evil, but that the director is very keen to point out that he's a man, a father, just as Dwayne Johnson's character is. He has a job to do. He's a businessman. Yes, he happens to sell drugs but, at the end of the day, he has to get the job done and take care of his family. I thought that was a unique take on this kind of villain. Although we don't get to spend much time with him, we get the sense that, yes, he's capable of a great deal of violence, and yet, he's just taking care of business.

KW: Editor/legist Patricia Turnier would like to know: What message do you think people will take away from "Snitch"?

BB: I think the message that resonates most, and definitely the one that resonates with me and my wife as parents, is that there is no length that is too great to go to in order to protect your child. So, it's fascinating to see how Dwayne Johnson, who is a formidable, mountain of a man, is reduced to feeling powerless when his son is suddenly in danger. It's very compelling to watch the process of his coming to terms with what he has to do to get his boy released from

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jail.

KW: Kate Newell says: I love Benjamin Bratt! You've done such amazing work, but I'm going frivolous, here. Will your character, Javier Delgado, be returning to "Modern Family"?

BB: [Chuckles] Yeah, rest assured, Kate, he will be back. We don't have an air date yet, but I just filmed an episode recently which I believe will be coming out some time in April.

KW: Harriet Pakula-Teweles asks: How difficult is it to switch from doing a TV role to a big screen movie role? Which do you prefer?

BB: I'd have to say that acting is acting, and that you always want to convey a sense of honesty and authenticity. So, I approach both in a similar way. For me, though, the great joy of doing this film was that there was so much gravitas to my role. In fact, I feel that I do my best work when the stakes are a lot higher, where I play the heavy, like I did in "La Mission", a movie my brother directed.

KB: Harriet has a follow-up: Is there a remake of a classic you'd like to do with a role for yourself in mind?

BB: I think every actor would like to be in some version of "The Godfather". So, if they're doing "Godfather IV", sign me up. [Laughs]

KW: Patricia asks: Is there a Latin icon you would like to portray in a film?

BB: Not one that jumps out at me. That's a good question, Patricia, and one I've pondered a lot because I'm always trying to be proactive in bringing our stories to the fore, and I'm lucky to have a built in writer/director in my brother.

KW: Your mother brought you to Alcatraz as a child to participate in the occupation of the island by Native Americans. Maybe you'd like to portray Dennis Means, the leader of the American Indian Movement.

BB: That idea has come up before. In fact, I even saw a script at one point. There was a young, charismatic leader by the name of Richard Oakes who spearheaded the initial takeover of the island. He was a Mohawk from New York. I always thought that his would make an interesting story.

KW: Documentary filmmaker Kevin Williams says: How has acting changed for you over the years and how have you managed to mix comedy with drama so successfully?

BB: Good question. I think that I was hungrier when I was younger, and it showed in my work on some level. As I've gotten older, I've grown a lot more assured about what I'm doing. I call upon my training, my research and my life experience. That's the good news about getting older. Your life experience really informs the work that you do in front of the camera, and even more so onstage. That comfort level enables an actor to be more at ease. Being a greater risk-taker comes from the experience of taking on roles, and it shows.

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

BB: I remember being twirled around in a circle when I was about 3 by my dad who was holding me while music played.

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KW: Is there a childhood friend you'd like to reunite with?

BB: Yeah, there are a couple of them.

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

BB: *The Round House* by Louise Erdich.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0062065246/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

KW: The music maven Heather Covington question: What was the last song you listened to?

BB: "When I Was Your Man" by Bruno Mars.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00AHXIEFS/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

BB: Pasta Bolognese. Cooking is one of my favorite things to do at home with my wife. I also make my own homemade sausage with kale and pasta.

KW: That's great. So many celebrities I interview say they never cook.

BB: I know. They're probably single. [LOL]

KW: The Uduak Oduok question: Who is your favorite clothes designer?

BB: Oh man, Armani's hard to beat. Hugo Boss makes some great stuff. Rag & Bone is excellent for casual wear. Calvin Klein has worked out very well for me, and so has Levi's. It's tough to beat Levi's!

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

BB: [LOL] I see a father, and a husband, and someone who is very content.

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

BB: Thank you, Kam.

To see a trailer for "Snitch", visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC95eKEKWmY>