

Film Close-Up: Richard Gere

by Joey_Berlin

Richard Gere is a charming sleaze ball in "The Hoax," the new film from Swedish director Lasse Hallstrom. It is the mostly-true tale of New York writer Clifford Irving, who conned his way into selling a biography of the notoriously reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes in the 1970s. The catch is, he is faking the whole book. Or most of it, anyway.

RICHARD GERE - Richard Gere plays sleazy writer Clifford Irving in the drama 'The Hoax.' CNS Photo courtesy of Ken Regan.

In "The Hoax," Gere unexpectedly comes upon exclusive information that makes his lie more convincing; therefore, he swindles a major publishing house until the real Howard Hughes arrives on the scene. The scam was a colossal scandal at the time, making the national news. Gere portrays Clifford Irving as a somewhat sympathetic scoundrel and, in an interesting twist, the real Irving has challenged the film's accuracy.

Aside from his film career, the 57-year-old Gere is a devoted humanitarian and remains a highly visible activist for Tibetan causes. He is married to actress Carrie Lowell and together they have a 7-year-old son. Following "The Hoax," Gere will have two more films in theaters this year. He stars in the upcoming crime thriller "The Flock," and then he will portray one of five "incarnations" of musician Bob Dylan in the unusual biopic "I'm Not There."

Q: The script for "The Hoax" makes us care about a man who knows he is doing something morally wrong. Should we really care about him succeeding? Why?

A: Because he's just a human being, you know? He's just a schmo. And he's so much like all of us. We all lie. Everyone does, small lies, big lies. We lie to ourselves, we lie to other people. They're usually not big enough that it hurts anyone, but we all do. And I think it was important to set up the idea that this guy was underappreciated. Certainly he felt that he was, and there was a kind of superior attitude from the literary world about him that he's really not cool.

He's really not of a stature that needs to be respected. I think we can all identify with that, in the sense that there are authority figures and experts that really don't know so much and we'd really like to prove to them that maybe we are better than they think we are.

Q: Did you have many conversations with the real Clifford Irving? Did he seem to want you to play him as sympathetic?

A: No, it was nothing like that. I mean literally, he would just send me books that he had written since then,

autographed things and little notes that were just "good luck" kinds of things. There was no direct attempt to get to me and manipulate. But he's obviously a very manipulative person. And I had a clear sense of what I wanted to do with this. There's so much research material, like his own books about what happened and all of the notes that he gave to the writer and the producer when they were working on this. There was more than probably I've ever had, in terms of research material on a specific person.

Q: So you had no desire to speak to him at all? Even on the telephone? It just seems like a natural thing for an actor to want to do.

A: I didn't want to be manipulated by him. I didn't want the performance to violate him, that wasn't the point, but I think it's a natural thing that we all want to come off well.

We don't want our worst sides to be explored. We want our best sides to be explored - in the world, in the universe. And no matter what our conversation would be, there would be a strong element of, "I hope I come off well in this." Which I think he does, because he's deeply human and I can relate to everything he does in the film.

Q: If someone was filming your biography, what would you want to make sure they kept in?

A: That I've only been intelligent, funny, with beautiful women and was nice to old people and dogs. And kids.

Q: Is there a lot of resistance in Hollywood to making movies about reprehensible protagonists?

A: I've done a couple. They're such rich characters. I mean heroes are not that interesting in the end, unless you see them become heroes, turn from selfish, damaged losers and have a moment of grace. We like that because it's what we aspire to ourselves. And that is deeply human. The worst of us has a moment of grace. I don't see a resistance to this type of story.

Q: Early in your life, was there someone who inspired you to believe in yourself enough to accomplish what you have? Was it something they said to you?

A: I don't know why I'm flashing on this, but I remember a friend of my sister's. And it wouldn't have been at 8 years old; it would have been at 10 or 12 probably, maybe a little older, even. And this friend of my older sister's said, "What are you reading?" And I wasn't reading anything. He said, "Look, I'm going to give you a

book list." He gave me a book list and I read those books. It made such an impression on me; he's the first thing that I thought of when you asked the question.

He cared enough to give me a book list that he thought was important for me to read. There was a wide range of them. The one that sticks out the most was an Erich Fromm book, "The Art of Loving." It was an exploration of what love is, and different types of love.

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