

Adrien Brody receives the 2017 Leopard Club Award

Adrien Brody is one of the most brilliant figures in American film who won an Academy Award at just the age of 29. He is known for his immense versatility for portraying a variety of roles and has been appreciated by filmmakers in Hollywood and beyond.

A career award provides an opportunity to go back to where you started from. What sparked your interest in acting and what were the most challenging moments you faced at the outset? It's an odd feeling to receive recognition for a body of work and to reflect on the fact that I've spent over three decades working as an actor. It's gone by so fast. What I see most clearly in retrospect is that the journey meanders and never stops; an artist is compelled to striving and searching for experiences that provide growth and positive change and greater understanding of self and others. When I began acting I was just so excited to have found a vivid imagination and a way to harness a curiosity and enthusiasm for exploring the world. Acting offered an escape and was a chance to see and feel more; to live more and take risks to habituate the lives of others. I found, early on, a sense of gratitude and deep fulfillment and greater empathy; I was hooked. During your career you have managed to work with several of the great masters of international cinema, from Terrence Malick to Roman Polanski, not to mention Woody Allen and Wes Anderson. Do you feel a special debt to any of them in particular? I owe a debt to each and every person who has given me an opportunity to grow espe-

cially with patience and respect. It's a miracle to have worked with so many talented people, many more worth mention as well. I've learned so much. I have been given great insights by essentially having a Masterclass from each of the filmmakers who have directed me. Their trust, especially early in my career, was massively encouraging. However, my greatest debt would be to my parents as they've always believed the most in me. I would not be anything without their constant guidance and patience. One milestone in your career was certainly your performance in *The Pianist*,



which brought you an Academy Award for Best Actor. What has stayed with you from the experience? Working with Roman on *The Pianist* was by far the most challenging and rewarding journey I've gone on as a young man. There was such a tangible responsibility to represent so much history and tragedy to honor faithfully; there was no room for distraction or failure. The physical transformation that was necessary to portray a starving man, coupled with the need to connect deeply to, and actually play some elaborate pieces of music, transported me to another place and offered a profound

sense of both loss and gratitude. I had realized that I had taken much for granted and that was inexcusable. It offered perspective; an individual's suffering in comprehensible, yet the magnitude of loss in the millions is too difficult to grasp. Is there one film you've been in which you feel particularly attached to and which perhaps did not receive the attention it deserved? I've worked for many years so inevitably there are films that are meaningful to me that did not have substantial visibility. *Detachment*, directed by Tony Kaye, is always bittersweet. So many people have

come to me sharing how his movie has affected them. Yet it barely saw the light of day on its release. Obviously a film about the failings of the public education system in America is not a recipe for commercial success but it was such a unique and compelling material. It also served as a reminder of how important it is to be mindful of how isolated so many young people feel and how much we need to work towards providing guidance and solutions to the challenges they face. Your characters live in various historical periods, but they always keep a strong connection with the present. What do you

look for in every character that you play? Thank you for saying that. I guess the key is to remain present, to listen, to not be afraid, to be quiet, or flawed, or vulnerable. We are all of those things and more so the characters that are distilled in film should represent those truths no matter what era they exist in. Certain roles have afforded me greater comedic freedom and lightness which I also cherish but mostly, I am drawn to challenge and exploration, even when a character shares similar traits to another I may have encountered. It's such a rewarding feeling to tap into something new that offers a discovery. I've lived many lives. In terms of production too you've worked both in movies and that were produced in Hollywood, but also in independent films. What are the differences regarding the approach to filmmaking in those different environments? I'm very open-minded as long as the material speaks to me and if the creative team has something exciting to say. I've worked with many European filmmakers, Chinese filmmakers and great American directors in both studio films and low-budget independent movies. The experiences are remarkably similar; everyone is under enormous pressure to deliver their best under time constraints and budgetary restrictions. Sometimes, the added pressure empowers you and forces you into a heightened state of awareness. Regardless, each actor, cameraman, dolly operator, sound technician, script supervisor, makeup artist, or caterer has the pressure on. It's magic when you feel everyone giving their all, day in day out, contributing to the overall feel of the movie. Although this is not necessarily apparent, the untold contributions to the finished work are somehow felt by the viewers.

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Reprinted shortened interview taken by Lorenzo Buccella for PardoLive, the Newsletter for the Locarno Film Festival

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