

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH
ACTOR, CASTING DIRECTOR, AND ACTING TEACHER
MATTHEW BARRY
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Host: Bryan Smith

Matthew Barry (00:00:00):

As a producer, I'm offered up actors all the time and it's so tempting, because I know I'll get the project made, but it's wrong.

Bryan Smith (00:00:07):

Right.

Matthew Barry (00:00:07):

It's not right. I'm putting in an actor in a role that I feel he can't handle, or isn't right for, or the audience isn't going to believe. Now, I'm all for 'Yes, can, Will Ferrell do drama?' Yes. But it's gotta be the right drama. You know, can a comedian, Jim Carey, do drama as well. Yes. If it's the right role. Can a dramatic actor do comedy? Eh... Not so much...

Bryan Smith (00:00:34):

Brian Smith here and welcome to the DreamPath podcast, where I try to get inside the heads of talented creatives from all over the world. My goal is to demystify and humanize the creative process and make it accessible to everyone. Now, let's jump in.

Bryan Smith (00:00:51):

Matthew Berry's on the show today. Matthew was a Los Angeles based actor, casting director, and acting teacher. Matthew's film career was launched in the late seventies at the age of 15, when he landed a role opposite Jill Clayburgh in the Bernardo Bertolucci film Luna. In the 1980s Matthew landed multiple roles on television series, like Family Ties and Cagney and Lacey, as well as films like Indecent Proposal with Robert Redford, Demi Moore, and Woody Harrelson; and Ed Wood directed by Tim Burton and starring Johnny Depp and Bill Murray. By the early nineties, Matthew found his way into casting, becoming one of the most sought after casting directors in Hollywood.

Bryan Smith (00:01:30):

Matthew was the casting director on the Nick Cassavetes films, Unhook the stars with Gena Rowlands and Marisa Tomei. She's So Lovely with John Travolta, Sean Penn, Robin Wright, Penn and James Gandolfini; John Q starring Denzel Washington, The Notebooks starring Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams; and Alpha Dog, starring Justin Timberlake, Emile Hirsch, and Amanda Seyfried. Matthew was also the casting director on Con Air with Nicholas Cage and John Malcovich, Rush Hour and Rush Hour Two with Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker, as well as the soon to be released film All Star Weekend written and directed by Jamie Foxx and starring Robert Downey jr, Gerard Butler, and Benicio Del Toro.

Bryan Smith (00:02:11):

If you want to see Matthew's full list of television and film credits, go to his IMDb page, which I'll link in the show notes, because they're just too many cool credits to include in this intro. I've talked to creators from many industries on the podcast, but Matthew was the first casting director I've interviewed. It was nice hearing from Matthew about how casting directors fit into the film world, and how important they are to the process. Casting is an aspect of filmmaking that is so behind the scenes, so off the radar to most audiences, yet it's so integral to how film comes together. So, I'm glad Matthew took time to sit down and tell us his story. So, let's jump right into my chat with actor and casting director Matthew Berry. Hey!

Matthew Barry (00:02:52):

Hey, hey there!

Bryan Smith (00:02:53):

Matthew.

Matthew Barry (00:02:55):

What's up bro?

Bryan Smith (00:02:56):

Hey, not much, man. Thanks for making time for me.

Matthew Barry (00:02:58):

You got an old Gretsch up there?

Bryan Smith (00:03:00):

You know, it's an old Gibson.

Matthew Barry (00:03:04):

Yeah, that's what it- yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:03:04):

An f-hole Gibson and it's- I bought it from a friend of mine. It was sitting in his closet for many, many years and it's one of my favorite guitars now.

Matthew Barry (00:03:13):

Oh, it's gorgeous.

Bryan Smith (00:03:15):

Yeah. Do you play?

Matthew Barry (00:03:16):

I did, I'm an old punk from New York.

Bryan Smith (00:03:18):
Oh yeah?

Matthew Barry (00:03:18):
Yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:03:18):
Right on.

Matthew Barry (00:03:20):
Yeah, I did the CBGBs and the Mud Club and all those places way back in the day.

Bryan Smith (00:03:24):
Oh, right on. So what timeframe was that? Seventies?

Matthew Barry (00:03:28):
No, that was- I'm not that old dude. { laughs } Uh, no, early eighties. In 1981, 82, mostly 82 before I came out here.

Bryan Smith (00:03:42):
Okay.

Matthew Barry (00:03:42):
Yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:03:42):
'Cause I know you're friends with Chris Kincaid and I think Chris was playing with Rail back in the seventies. So, I thought maybe you were in that same generation.

Matthew Barry (00:03:50):
Yeah, no, I was a New Yorker born and raised. So, I got to- I was very, very inundated in the punk scene. So it was...

Bryan Smith (00:03:57):
Oh, right on.

Matthew Barry (00:03:58):
Yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:03:59):

Yeah. So, what made you leave music and head to -well, New York music anyway- and head to LA?

Matthew Barry (00:04:05):

Well, I think that, one: I wasn't very good. Two: I was much better at acting and making a better living at acting than I probably would have made it making money in music. So, but I had a great time, great time playing with some great people and great clubs and just had a good time. You know, when you're young, you try things out. So...

Bryan Smith (00:04:27):

Yeah. So, where in New York did you, or were you, born and raised?

Matthew Barry (00:04:32):

I was actually, I was born in Brooklyn, but I don't remember Brooklyn, 'cause we moved to the projects when I was two years old in Chelsea.

Bryan Smith (00:04:39):

Oh.

Matthew Barry (00:04:39):

And so I lived in the projects until I was eight and then my parents moved down to this huge artist complex down in Greenwich village, which- I grew up with guys like Vin Diesel and Dash Mihok, who's on Ray Donovan.

Bryan Smith (00:04:55):

Wow.

Matthew Barry (00:04:56):

And a lot of Josh Hamilton, I mean, there's so many great artists that came from this place called Westbeth. And that's basically where I grew up. It was this huge 385 apartments, and it's just great complex with all these kids, we all grew up together. And quite a lot of famous people too. Gil Evans was -the great jazz musician- was my neighbor, played with his two kids Miles and Noah. And it's funny, I like to tell this story where I was playing with Miles and Noah, and Gil who's a very famous jazz musician, would be composing upstairs. And one day this guy walks in and he was the scariest African American guy I'd ever seen in my life. It turns out it was Miles Davis.

Bryan Smith (00:05:36):

What was so scary about- I mean just intense?

Matthew Barry (00:05:39):

Oh, he was just so intense and just like this- Just these deep set eyes, it's like, you take one look at him and he's just got this energy, had this energy. And I was like, Whoa. You know, as a kid, you're easily intimidated.

Bryan Smith (00:05:50):
Right.

Matthew Barry (00:05:51):
And so this, this guy walks in and I was like, "Uh..." And I didn't know who he was, and I told mom, I was like, "Yeah, there was this scary..." It was like, "Oh yeah, that's Miles Davis."

Bryan Smith (00:06:00):
No way.

Matthew Barry (00:06:01):
'Cause him and Gill were collaborating on an album.

Bryan Smith (00:06:04):
Oh, that's so cool.

Matthew Barry (00:06:05):
Yeah, yeah. So it's- I had a pretty nice childhood. I can't complain.

Bryan Smith (00:06:10):
I would imagine that that type of... Being in that environment would be formative in terms of your direction artistically.

Matthew Barry (00:06:18):
Yeah. It definitely... We all got together and played music. We had, down in the basement of this building, there were all these studios and basically we bribed the management. We said, "Look, you can give us one of these studios for free or we can tear this place down." And so they relented and gave us our own studio where we could go and jam and experiment and play music and hang out and do things that teenagers do. And we just had the greatest time all day, every day, just experimenting and playing, you know, playing music

Bryan Smith (00:06:54):
Who were your influences back then?

Matthew Barry (00:06:57):
Zappa. Frank Zappa was, still is to this day. I mean, Frank his music was just so- It just, I was probably 11 years old in summer camp, and I heard this music coming from the camp counselors bunk area. And I remember I was so fascinated, it was Over-Nite Sensation, and I was fascinated by this music. And when the camp counselors went out to go get some chow, I

snuck into their camp and looked at the record. And that was one of the very first purchases, when I was 13 years old and made money, the very first purchase I made was Over-Nite Sensation by Frank Zappa. And then, of course, I had to buy the entire back catalog. And I was just incredibly, just inspired by Frank. And then a little later on it was Elvis Costello, who came out of the punk scene, but was more pop punk.

Bryan Smith (00:07:43):
Right.

Matthew Barry (00:07:44):
And so he was very much the inspiration, but Zappa and his music, it was just incredible. So, he was the one that kind of influenced where I wanted to go. Even though I kind of geared more, the band I had was more towards the punk scene and just having good old rock and roll, you know?

Bryan Smith (00:08:03):
Well, Zappa to me is like, if that's your first, what you're gravitating towards first, the analogy I would use is: If you're a grade school kid and the first book you open is like a neurosurgery book or something. That's the most inaccessible, difficult music to understand and absorb and you're going right there to Zappa, right to the most-

Matthew Barry (00:08:26):
Right, and it's...

Bryan Smith (00:08:27):
-abstract.

Matthew Barry (00:08:29):
And I look at the charts today and I go, "Are you kidding?"

Bryan Smith (00:08:33):
Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:08:34):
You know it's just, wow.

Bryan Smith (00:08:35):
Yeah, yeah. What a loss that was too, but Dweezil seems to be kind of carrying on the family torch.

Matthew Barry (00:08:41):
He has, and I got to tell you, 'cause I've seen probably every one of Dweezil's shows when he comes to town, or even when he's not in. I follow him around to San Diego or when he goes up

North. And it's just, technically speaking, he's better than Frank, except Frank had such emotion when he played. Frank played with emotion. Dweezil is technically incredible.

Bryan Smith (00:09:03):
Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:09:03):
But it's... And it's, that band he has is just tight, as Frank's bands were. And I got to see Frank a few times as well, but it was... Yeah, I've seen Dweezil quite a number of times. So, any of you listening to this or watching this, look up Frank's music, go to Over-Nite Sensation or One Size Fits All; just incredible musicianship. And if you're a fan of music, and you don't know Frank's music, then I really say that you should go listen and pick up some albums.

Bryan Smith (00:09:33):
Definitely. So, how did you make your way into acting?

Matthew Barry (00:09:37):
Well, I grew up- My dad is a Broadway playwright and he ran a theater company in New York called the Hudson Guild Theater Company, which was right down the block from my school. And when I would, instead of going home I would go to the theater, which was right down the block. And I would sit and do my homework in the pews, I guess. And I would watch him work with the actors all day long. And I was just fascinated where watching him direct, and watching him get out of the actors what he could get out. And I was, one day, I think I was eight-years-old, I said, "Well, I want to do that." And he said, "Okay." You know, so he- My dad was a little tough, tough Irishman, and so he worked me pretty good.

Matthew Barry (00:10:20):
And he was like, 'Alright, this kid's got some natural talent.' And I auditioned for this off-Broadway play Roundabout Theater, which is now a Broadway, considered Broadway. And I got cast when I was eight-years-old in this really bizarre piece called A Piece of Fog, and that was kind of my introduction to the stage. And then it just kind of blossomed from there. Wound up doing a TV series when I was 13-years-old called Ivan the Terrible for CBS. It was terrible, but I got a very, very quick education from all the great Borsh Belt comedians who were in the show. And they taught me everything about sitcoms and beats, and it was just an incredible education. And then the big break came when I was 15, I starred in a Bernardo Bertolucci film called Luna, and how that came about was I auditioned for it.

Matthew Barry (00:11:13):
And at the time Liv Ullmann was the great actress. Liv Ullmann was slated to play the lead in the movie and I was deemed too young for the part. So, the casting director put my picture in the reject pile and when Liv fell out and Joe Kleberg came in, by accident Bernardo's wife walked into the wrong room (as she was looking for the exit to go to the bathroom) when she

walked into this other room, and she's literally saw my picture standing there on the top of the reject pile.

Bryan Smith (00:11:43):
Wow.

Matthew Barry (00:11:44):
And she picked it up, and she looked at it, and she showed it to Bernardo. And she said this -she told us all to me, of course, post film- and she said to Bernardo, she goes, "This is the kid."

Bryan Smith (00:11:52):
Wow.

Matthew Barry (00:11:53):
And so, they called me back, and I came in and everybody had been sucking up to Bernardo because he was Italian and they played soccer. And so he's asking me all these questions. And I was just this naive kid who was just very open and honest. And he was like, "Well, what's your favorite sport?" I was like, "Baseball." He was like, "Really? Tell me about that." And I was just, I went on and on and on and on about baseball and the Yankees and blah, blah, blah. And he said, "Okay." So he tested me with eight others. And by the time lunch arrived it was down to three. And it turned out to be me, my friend Todd Graff, who was an actor and now a director and a friend of mine.

Matthew Barry (00:12:31):
So, we were up against each other and somebody else. And they eventually narrowed it down to myself and Todd, and after hours and hours of going back and forth with Jill, I got cast in lead. And literally the next day they called my parents and they were like, "Well, we need to come over and talk to you about this. 'Cause it's, you know, the film's subject is a little heavy, and my mom and-

Bryan Smith (00:12:51):
{ laughs } To say the least.

Matthew Barry (00:12:52):
Yeah. And my mom and dad, they came over and they were like, "We've seen Last Tango, we know what we're getting into."

Bryan Smith (00:13:00):
Okay.

Matthew Barry (00:13:02):
So...

Bryan Smith (00:13:02):
That's all you need to see.

Matthew Barry (00:13:03):
Exactly. So, they came over and literally like two days later on 4th of July, I was on a plane to Italy and we were with my dad and it was just like, I had no idea what was happening. And I spent four months in Italy shooting the film.

Bryan Smith (00:13:18):
Well, I watched it last night, the Italian version on YouTube, 'cause I couldn't find it anywhere else. I was looking for it on streaming services.

Matthew Barry (00:13:26):
It just came out. It just came out on...

Bryan Smith (00:13:28):
Oh, it's on DVD now? Okay.

Matthew Barry (00:13:29):
Yeah, yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:13:30):
Okay, great. Yeah. I'll check out the English language version, but yeah, I watched it in Italian and, of course, didn't really understand some of it. I could definitely- I read the Wikipedia description of it, so I knew what was happening as I was watching. And I was struck at a couple of things. First of all, as a first time film actor, you are involved in this film, this Bertolucci drama, that I would imagine at the time you may not be understanding where it's going. Because these scenes are so long and he lets things simmer. There's not a lot of action and there's a lot of emotion, but not a lot of action. So, at the time when you were in the film were you grasping what Bernardo was trying to accomplish or the storyline, was it sinking in for you at the age of 15?

Matthew Barry (00:14:21):
No. Fricking idea. You kind of got a grasp of it. I was still a virgin at the time, and I lost my virginity on the film on my 16th birthday. Uh... So I was getting a very, very fast education into sexuality.

Bryan Smith (00:14:38):
Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:14:38):

And my mom was there with me. My dad was there the first month and then my mom came in. And my mom was very, very open and we had a lot of discussions about it. And it was a quick education.

Bryan Smith (00:14:50):

Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:14:51):

You know, like anything in life, we get thrown into it. We go, "Okay, alright, here we go." You learn and you learn quickly. It's just like the first time after you pass the bar, the first time you were ever in front of a judge, you're nervous. But then, of course, after the first time it gets easier and easier and easier the more times you're in front of the judge. So it was kind of-

Bryan Smith (00:15:16):

So-

Matthew Barry (00:15:16):

Go ahead.

Bryan Smith (00:15:17):

The second observation I had, sorry to interrupt you.

Matthew Barry (00:15:19):

No, no.

Bryan Smith (00:15:19):

Yeah, the second observation I had was probably the more obvious one that most people would ask, which is: How did your parents and the director and you navigate these scenes where you are, basically, in very sexually provocative scenes with this adult woman, Jill Clayburgh, and the legality of it I'm wondering about? Because I don't know if Italy just has more lax laws, or what. How are you navigating that and your parents and Bernardo, do you remember?

Matthew Barry (00:15:51):

I think at the time, again this was '77, so it wasn't- The 70s were a very weird time. Coming out of the 60s and 70s was very strange, a strange period for everybody to grow up in. At the time it wasn't as bad, I think until... What was the Brooke Shields movie that came out the... Was it the Louis Malle film?

Bryan Smith (00:16:14):

Oh, Blue Lagoon?

Matthew Barry (00:16:16):

No, no, no. Before that...

Bryan Smith (00:16:17):
Before that...

Matthew Barry (00:16:18):
Lolita!

Bryan Smith (00:16:19):
Oh, okay. Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:16:20):
So, it was- There wasn't so much of a controversy until that film came out, where it wasn't as prevalent as it is now, the sexual predators...

Bryan Smith (00:16:30):
Right.

Matthew Barry (00:16:31):
...And such. it was kind of, "Eh..." You know, it was- Back then it was understood, now it's...
Back then it was just called-

Bryan Smith (00:16:39):
It's taboo.

Matthew Barry (00:16:40):
Right, right. So, it was a different time. So, it was a little more understandable, so to speak, back then where everybody was kind of coming off the 60s, where it was free love and everything else. And so it kind of, it was the tail end of the 70s. So, it was, again, it was kind of understood. And again, Europeans- Americans are very tight when it comes to sexuality. Europeans are incredibly open. If any of you have ever spent time in Europe, it's very free. It's not as emotional as we are in America. It's very kind of, "Hey, let's get together and let's have sex." And America was like, "Oh no, we can't do that." But there in Europe it was very, "Hey, let's just have a good time." And I think that's- If you look at the films from that era, it sparks to it. Whereas in America we were still kind of very, very conservative, so to speak, compared to the rest of the world- Or most of the world. Or compared to Europe, anyway.

Bryan Smith (00:17:45):
When the film was released, were you tuned into reviews and how well it was received? And were you kind of paying attention to that aspect of the movie?

Matthew Barry (00:17:58):

I was completely overwhelmed. When the film came out I was 17, and it was New York and it was '79 and it opened at the New York Film Festival. And I had so much smoke blown up my ass- Can I say ass on the podcast?

Bryan Smith (00:18:11):
Sure, you can. Yeah. Fully.

Matthew Barry (00:18:13):
Yeah. I mean, I remember the premier in New York, it opened the New York Film Festival, closing night at the New York Film Festival. And I had Richard Gere come up to me and just tell me how great I was, and my performance was. And Warren Beatty came up to me and was just like, "God damn kid." You know? And I got the greatest lesson from Warren Beatty, 'cause I literally said, "Hey, can I ask you something Mr. Beatty?" And he smiled and he said, "Anything." I said, "How do you do it?" And he said, "Do what?" He goes, "How do you get all those beautiful women?" And he smiled at me and he said, "Just let them talk."

Bryan Smith (00:18:54):
Great advice.

Matthew Barry (00:18:54):
And it's worked. Great, great advice. And then Woody Allen was inviting me to his place to go party with him and his friends, and Diane Keaton was coming. I'm like, "Holy shit!" You know, as a 17-year-old my mind was blown. And then what happened was cocaine.

Bryan Smith (00:19:12):
Oh.

Matthew Barry (00:19:13):
And, uh...

Bryan Smith (00:19:15):
80s.

Matthew Barry (00:19:15):
Yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:19:15):
70s and 80s.

Matthew Barry (00:19:15):
Late 70s/early 80s. And I was invited to Studio 54. And so, when you give a 17-year-old that, and the great reviews and whatnot, and you're hanging out and Andy Warhol wants to interview

you. And I'm just like my- I was just like- Couldn't handle, just didn't handle it at all. And it just, it was a disaster.

Bryan Smith (00:19:43):

How long did that disaster last? What was that timeframe?

Matthew Barry (00:19:48):

Yeah, it was... You get caught up in the hype. And I mean, I moved to Los Angeles. I made a bet with my parents, I said, "If I can make more money than you, can I move to Los Angeles?" And they were like, "Yeah, sure." So, shortly after the film I went to Los Angeles, because that's where the fun is. And I had the greatest agent in the world, Ed Limato was my agent; who was Richard Gere's agent, who was Mel Gibson's agent, who was Denzel's agent, was Michelle Pfeiffer's agent.

Matthew Barry (00:20:19):

So, I went to his house and I'm hanging out with all of them. And I'm like, one of these things just doesn't belong here. And like, Madeline Kahn became my friend. I'm like, holy shit. So, and then Los Angeles in the 80s was Quaaludes and lots of partying. And so we partied, and we partied pretty freaking hard. And then River Phoenix died. And that was kind of the end of the party. River Phoenix died, John Belushi died. And so it was kind of like, okay, it's over.

Bryan Smith (00:20:53):

Kind of a wake up call.

Matthew Barry (00:20:55):

Yeah, it was definitely a wake up- The real wake up call for me was, Dennis Quaid was a friend of mine and he had been dating my cousin, Leah Thompson at the time. And they were living together, and he wanted me to come in and audition for a role in a film that really launched his career called The Big Easy.

Bryan Smith (00:21:13):

Hmm. I remember that one

Matthew Barry (00:21:15):

I said -it was fantastic- and I said to Dennis, I said, "Well, let me come in. I don't want it- I want to get this part on my own. I don't want to get this part because I'm a friend of yours." He was like, "Okay, okay, whatever you want, Matt." So, I went in and auditioned for it and crushed it. And the casting director at the time, Lynn, the great Lynn Stalmaster, who was one of the top casting directors in Hollywood at the time, turned to Dennis and again, not knowing that we were friends, and he said, "Don't hire him." And he was like, "Why not?" He was like, "He's effed up, he's on drugs and he's a disaster." And, of course, Dennis told me this, and that was my wake up call. And so that was it.

Bryan Smith (00:21:52):

How did they know, just by looking at you or by reputation?

Matthew Barry (00:21:55):

Reputation. What really happened was, I did an interview with Interview magazine, Warhol's magazine, with a couple of his people from the factory. And basically they got me really, really high, so to speak, and asked me questions that they probably shouldn't have asked. And being the open, honest person that I was I answered them all. And of course they printed them all. And I basically pissed off a lot of people, and basically admitted to being this fucked up kid -sorry- messed up kid. And so-

Bryan Smith (00:22:32):

Oh, you can, you can cuss. It's a podcast.

Matthew Barry (00:22:37):

New Yorker. And so that pretty much ruined my career at the time. And it took me a while to kind of get it back and to kind of prove to everybody that, hey, I'm cool. I'm clean, I'm fine. You know, I'm back. We all deserve a second chance. And so Eileen Stargate, who was a casting director, really took a liking to me and put me in a couple of films that kind of relaunched my career.

Bryan Smith (00:22:59):

Yeah. Was The Wraith one of those films?

Matthew Barry (00:23:02):

That was, yeah. Yeah, that was the first film that she cast me. And it was interesting, because the description in the script and in the breakdown was a blonde, blue-eyed hunk. Well, let's strike one, strike two, strike three. And I was a skinny little kid, and the director looked at me, Mike Marvin, who's one of my best friends today. He looked at me, he looked at Eileen and was like, "What the hell is this?" And she was like, "He's a great actor. He's a great actor. Just trust me." And I did my thing. And he was like, "Wow... Fantastic." And I beat out a lot of people. I beat out Johnny Depp, director Mike told me.

Bryan Smith (00:23:42):

That's great. Is that where you met Nick?

Matthew Barry (00:23:44):

Yeah, yeah. We,- It's very odd that, you do a film, you do what- You get very intimate on these films for a couple of months, and then you kind of go your separate ways. And you might have a friend or two, kind of acquaintance, but we all became best of friends for years. I mean, I'm still friends with Charlie Sheen to this day. Nick, I've known since the film and we've worked together now, unless you can see behind me, two of the three films. I've done every one of his films and we've just been just this incredible collaboration over the years, and watched our families grow

and wives and girlfriends. And we've just been incredibly supportive of each other for, gosh, how long ago was that? 30 years ago? 30+ years.

Bryan Smith (00:24:32):
Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:24:33):
Yeah, so-

Bryan Smith (00:24:34):
Looking at the- When I was interviewing Nick Cassavetes, I was looking at his filmography and then I was talking to Chris Kincaid, and I was looking at your filmography. And then I'm seeing all of this crossover, and I'm seeing Clint Howard is popping up in a lot of Nick's movies and Mike Marvin, and there's just this- It looked to me like there was a family, this very tight-knit tribe of friends that were sticking together, as much as they could in the industry. Is that how you remember the last 30 years is just, you meet this core group of friends in the 80s, like Nick and Mike and these folks that you acted with, and then you're just in those same circles for decades?

Matthew Barry (00:25:21):
It's loyalty. It's very- I've found in my years and years and years in Hollywood that loyalty is something you don't often very find. And Nick has been incredibly loyal. Mike has been loyal, and I'm a very loyal person to a fault. And Nick grew up with, obviously, John Cassavettes who basically his mantra was, 'Work with your friends.' And if you look at John's films, he worked with the same people over and over and over again. I think that kind of trickled down to Nick. And Nick has been incredibly loyal and, again, we really work well together. And I think it's also, he trusts me, I trust him. I don't blow smoke up his ass. I tell him honestly what I think. And when I don't like something, I tell him and he doesn't like it, but he knows.

Matthew Barry (00:26:13):
He always knows. I'm going to tell him the truth instead of blowing smoke up his ass. I'm not gonna sugar coat it. I'm just gonna- I mean, I've had films that he's wanted to do and I go, "Nick, I hate this movie. I don't want to do this movie. I don't know why you're doing that. Why you want to do this movie?" It was all, "Because I like it," or, "passionate about it." I go, "I don't understand why." Go, "'Cause I want to do it." But that's our relationship. And that's- It's been a fantastic Keith Richards, Mick Jagger kind of collaboration for years.

Bryan Smith (00:26:44):
So that's how, really if you look back, that's probably how you got the part in Luna is your honesty with Bernardo Bertolucci. Just, you're not trying to tell him what he wants to hear. You're telling him what you really feel.

Matthew Barry (00:26:57):

I think that's how I got the TV series as well. 'Cause I remember walking into the audition and that, I can't remember what the question, but I remember they asked me a question and I answered honestly, and I remember them just all cracking up. And I wound up doing a, at the same time as the TV series, a Broadway play called Legend, which opened and closed in one night. And I got that role as well, because the director made me run around the stage. And then they asked me a question and I just answered honestly, and I made them crack up. And so, that's kind of helped me along the way in my entire life, it's just being blatant, not sugar coating. Which I'm hoping in this, on this podcast is they're getting a sense of who I am and what I am.

Bryan Smith (00:27:40):

Yeah. I guess we have to contrast that with the drug-fueled honesty in the Andy Warhol interview, we've gotta be a little bit careful sometimes. With your honesty.

Matthew Barry (00:27:51):

Learned my lesson. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:27:54):

So, tell me about casting and being a casting director, and how that evolved from acting into casting actors in films.

Matthew Barry (00:28:04):

It was interesting. I was doing some really bad television shows and I was about to turn 30, and I remember, I was on the set of some really bad TV show that I was doing. And I remember thinking, "Oh, I'm just doing this for the money." And it was good money. But I remember thinking, I remember feeling so unsatisfied and so I wanted to do something else. And so, I went to UCLA film school and wanted to learn everything there was about producing and production, and quickly realized I knew everything because I'd grown up on sets my entire life. So, they weren't really teaching me anything new. And so, I had a friend of mine who worked for Barry Levinson and she asked Barry if she could hook me up and get me- I said, "Look, I'll be a PA I'll sweep floors. I'll go get your laundry. I'll do anything. I just want to be on the set behind the scenes, learning everything about what everybody does."

Matthew Barry (00:28:58):

I wanted to know what a gaffer was. I wanted to know what a gaffer is and what he did, and what the electrician did, and what everybody's function was, and how to deal with people. And so she introduced me to Mark Johnson, who in his own right is a phenomenal producer. And I've done a couple of projects with him since, and he said, "Okay, let me see what I can find for you." And he called me a couple days later and he said, "Well, they need some help in casting. Do you want to work there?" I said, "Okay, I'll work in casting. But you know, when it's over I want to work on the set."

Matthew Barry (00:29:30):

He was like, "Okay, okay, calm down." So Ellen Chenoweth, I worked for Ellen Chenoweth, great Ellen Chenoweth, and just busted my ass. And I knew actors and she knew- Pretty much everybody knew me from Luna. So, she was like, "Why are you doing this?" I was like, "I just, I want to do something new." She really took me under her wing. And I, again, I worked on the Robin Williams film Toys, which is a project I worked on and really helped her out. And once that was done, I went back to Mark and I was like, "Okay, okay. I can- Ready to sweep floors now." And he said, "Yeah, we had to give that job to the director's friend, or the producer's friend." Or somebody else. So, I went home and cried for two days.

Matthew Barry (00:30:11):

And then I get a call from Vicki Thomas, who was just honored by the Casting Society of America for being one of the best casting directors in the world, for the project that she's worked on. And so, she called me up and she goes, "Uh, Chenoweth says you're pretty good." I'm like, "Yeah, yeah." She goes, "Can you come down and interview with me?" I was like, "Sure". I was like, "When?" She goes "Now." And so I said, "Okay." So, I drove down to Paramount Studios and this beautiful African American woman, just gorgeous woman. And she said, "Look, I've just come off of working for Francis Ford Coppola on Dracula and he kind of beat the shit out of me. And I just did White Men Can't Jump, and I'm really tired. And I'm dealing with this maniac Adrian Lyne on this film called Indecent Proposal. And I just need somebody to kind of babysit him and just take the pressure off of me."

Matthew Barry (00:31:05):

I was like, "Give me the ball, give me the ball." And I said, "When do you want me to start?" And she was like, "Now." I was like, "Okay." And I was introduced to Adrian, and Adrian knew who I was from from Luna. You know, "what the hell are you doing here?" I was like, "I'm here to help you out." And so I had a very, very interesting relationship with Adrian. And one of the first things that Adrian had me do after we had cast Demi and Woody was, he comes to me, he says, "Listen, Matt." He says, "I need you to find me this great brick guy." He goes, "I need you to find me, like, two people that look like Woody and Demi and I need them to jam."

Matthew Barry (00:31:47):

I said, "What do you mean you need them to jam?" He said, "I want them to jam, man. You know, right?" And I was like, "You want them to have sex?" He was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." I was like, I said, "Adrian, that's pornography." He goes, "Yeah, you can find that for me, right?" So, I go to Vicky, I go, "He wants me to find these two actors to have sex. You know, these two doubles to-" And it was like, "Just give Adrian what he wants." So, it turns out I was playing baseball out here with a guy named Randy West, who just happened to be the Robert Redford of the adult entertainment industry.

Matthew Barry (00:32:25):

So I said, "You want to come in and audition for a feature film?" He goes, "Hell yeah!" So, introduce him to agent and Adrian flips out, 'cause he looks just like Robert Redford. I mean, he could be- He was the Robert Redford of the adult entertainment industry. So, that's okay. So, he

was happy. So, now I gotta find the Demi for him to have sex with on camera. So, I bring him, I find this girl, dead ringer for Demi, and she's as dumb as a box of rocks. And Adrian blows up at me and starts cursing me out. And, you know the pressures of being director, and I'm letting him take it out on me. He goes, "What the hell you bring me?" Screaming. And I looked at him and I say, "Adrian, if you talk to me that way again, I'm going to come over to the other side of the desk and I'm going to beat the shit out of you." And as soon as I said it I went, "Oh fuck, I'm fired." And it was that moment where you look at each other where he's pissed off and he's got that look in his eye and I'm like, "Okay, okay, you're fired." And then he just breaks out into this big grin and says, "I like you."

Bryan Smith (00:33:26):

There's your honesty again.

Matthew Barry (00:33:28):

And so he was like, and any time- Because this was before the internet, this was before everything. So literally, when he was in Vegas I had to drive all of the audition tapes to Vegas, and hang out and wait for Adrian in his room, and show him all the tapes. And we had a great time. And then when we had the table read with, when we hired Redford, it was Redford, Demi, and Woody. And Adrian called me in to read all the other roles and the stage directions and everything. So, it was just basically the five of us and the producers in a room in Vegas, reading the script. And I'm like, "Oh my God, this is fantastic." And that was kind of the launch of my casting career. And I owe it all to Vicky, 'cause I got to work. I jumped from that to working on Ed Wood with Tim Burton, I mean, are you kidding me?

Bryan Smith (00:34:19):

Oh, man.

Matthew Barry (00:34:20):

And so it was- I got- I worked with Jerry Bruckheimer and it was just this incredible, quick, fast education. And again, I knew a lot of actors from my days as an actor, so I would bring them in and introduce them to Vicky and Jeannie McCarthy who, her right man and is a phenomenal casting director as well, was working with Vicky as well. So, we had this incredible casting team, I mean, it was like an A+ casting team. And we just worked on these amazing films, and we put together Con Air with an amazing cast in that. And just-

Bryan Smith (00:34:54):

Nicholas Cage.

Matthew Barry (00:34:54):

Yeah. And just broke all these careers. And so, that was kind of the launch of my career. And about four years later, it was time to move on and Jeannie was moving on, and it was time for me to move on. And I asked my former agent Nancy, who worked at an agency called Ambrogio/Mortimer, and they were going through some problems and she was looking for a

career change after 20 years. And I love Nancy, because she was like a great agent for me. And I said, "Well, why don't you come work with me?"

Matthew Barry (00:35:25):

And she was like, "What do you mean?" So it's like, "Come work in casting." She was like, "I know nothing about casting." I said, "You know, actors, don't you?" She goes, "Yeah." And so she said, "Okay." And so we branched off on our own, formed our own company. It was like, okay, now what? Now we gotta go get some jobs. So, we did a couple of little films and then our big break came from a woman named Valerie McCaffrey, who was the head of casting at New Line at the time. And she introduced us to this young whipper snapper named Brett Ratner.

Bryan Smith (00:35:56):

Ah, Brett.

Matthew Barry (00:35:58):

And Brett has this- The Rush Hour movies. And he was doing Rush Hour and his energy was just fantastic. And I loved his energy. I was like, "Oh, yes. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." And he loved us. 'Cause I was still young and aggressive at the time. He took a spark to me and yeah, we worked our asses off. And he was very, Brett, is incredibly demanding and saw that, yeah we worked our asses off and he was like, "I need every rock unturned." And so we unturned every rock to help them out. And then New Line was impressed, and the film was a hit. And so they gave me a bunch of films, and I think I did seven or eight films for New Line. And that was just, my film skyrocketed. And then, of course, The Notebook came out. That was kind of like the icing on the cake.

Bryan Smith (00:36:44):

Yeah. That's one of the quintessential casting- I mean, if you look at the casting choices in that film, it could have been a completely different trajectory, I think, for that movie, if it wasn't Gosling and McAdams

Matthew Barry (00:36:57):

Sure. I mean, it wasn't Gosling and McAdams to begin with.

Bryan Smith (00:37:00):

Oh, who was it to begin with?

Matthew Barry (00:37:02):

It was, I think at the time it was... It was going to be, oh god, the kid's name is escaping me, from Star Wars. Yeah. He was gonna beat it. But he wasn't the greatest of actors. I'm sorry to say, back then. I think he proved himself a little later on, but he was the, one of the originals. I think Reese Witherspoon was one of the originals, but she felt she was too old. And then Nick went and met with Kate Beckinsale, and it wasn't quite a chemistry fit between the two of them. So Nick turned to me and said, "Who you got?" And we were doing this other film, we were

trying to get this other film off the ground about a year before. And I introduced him to Ryan Gosling, who my partner flipped out over when she saw this little film called The Believer where Ryan played this, like Neo Nazi, and she just flipped for him.

Matthew Barry (00:37:57):

And he came in and met, and we fell in love with him. And so he was the first person we mentioned, Ryan Gosling was like, "Absolutely." So, he came in, was so smart was just really right. And New Line was smart enough to know that he was the next up and comer. And so they were like, "Okay, we like Ryan, but you gotta find the girl." And so we started our search for the girl and we started interviewing everybody. And I worked with Brittany Spears for a couple of days. She came in at the height of her career and worked with him. I still have those tapes, which I've shown my students, but I haven't released it to anybody, but my students get to get to see. And she came in and like a whole bunch of other- We flew everywhere, interviewing actresses on their sets to do... What's her name? Uh, Justin Timberlake's wife?

Bryan Smith (00:38:49):

Jessica Biel.

Matthew Barry (00:38:51):

Jessica, oh yeah. We flew. She was doing Texas Chainsaw Massacre. And so we flew down to Texas to- Where they were shooting. And in our trailer, we auditioned her. Then we flew to New York and interviewed all the top people in New York. And meanwhile, Nancy and my agent at the time was Rachel McAdams' agent at the time. And Rachel had just come out in this Rob Schneider film called The Hot Chick. And we didn't want to tell Nick, "Hey, she's the girl from The Hot Chick, she should be starring in this film." So, we were like, eh, you know. So Kenny, her agent at the time, called up Nancy and says, "Hey, I've got this girl, will you just meet her?" And Nancy said, "Sure. You know we'll do anything for you, Kenny. We love you."

Matthew Barry (00:39:34):

So, Rachel came in, met with Nancy. Nancy was like, "Yeah, this girl's got something." So I said, "Here's 14 pages. Come back on Sunday." This was on a Friday, "Come back on Sunday and come in and audition." So we fly in, this was a Saturday, we spent all day auditioning people in New York and flew back on the red eye. Got barely a couple of hours of sleep and we were- And we had all this, big session set up with all the heavy hitters. You name them back then, they were there and sat there. And we looked at the list of everybody that's coming in and we're like, "Who the fuck is Rachel McAdams?" And Nancy was like, "I liked her. I met her, it's 15 minutes. Let's give her a shot." All right. Nobody knows who she is. Rest is history. Online is like one scene that they've shown. But no, she literally, there's three scenes. That again, I have never released that. I only show my students, but it was literally a 14 page audition. And she rushed, it never in my history -up until Kat Williams came in and blew me away- have I ever had an actor come in and just floor me. And she came in and floored me and the rest is history.

Bryan Smith (00:40:46):

As you may have noticed, there are great resources and advice mentioned in all our episodes. And for many of them, we actually collect all of these resources for you in one easy place: our newsletter! You can go to dreampathpod.com/newsletter to join. It's not fancy, just an email about each week's episode, featured artists, and resources to help you on your journey. Now, back to the interview.

Bryan Smith (00:41:11):

So, I don't understand much about the casting process and how a casting agency gets paid and works with studios and directors. Can you tell my listeners the process from start to finish of, okay, we've been hired to cast this film. How soon before shoot do actually begin the process of finding talent? How do you do it? And then what type of contract do you enter into? Is it a flat rate? Is it an hourly? And I'm not asking for numbers, but I'm just curious about that relationship, because I would imagine if you're casting an independent film, that's much different than if you're casting a big Marvel movie or something like that. For a variety of reasons, you've got a lot more decision makers and people to answer to with the bigger films.

Matthew Barry (00:42:00):

Oh yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:42:01):

But can you tell us more about that dynamic?

Matthew Barry (00:42:04):

Back in the day, basically, we're always the first on and the first off, which is really depressing sometimes, because when everything's just about to go, we're like, "Okay, we need your offices get out." So, we're always generally the first on, I think it's the casting directors and the DP, and maybe the first AD who were always the first on. So, there's barely anybody in the offices. We're the ones that sit down with the director and everything's calm, because each week that goes by, the director gets a little more tighter and tighter and tighter until he explodes, because the director is always under tremendous pressure.

Matthew Barry (00:42:41):

So, we're kind of there to guide him or her along and to collaborate and to argue our points, and the director will argue his or her points. And to basically- It's a puzzle and you have to, everything has to be right. It has to look good. I mean, if you, those of you who watch movies and TVs, you go, "Everything's perfect." We just watch them, but everything is meticulously planned out and argued about and put together. 'Cause otherwise, you can't have two people that look alike, 'cause the audience will be confused.

Bryan Smith (00:43:10):

Okay.

Matthew Barry (00:43:10):

So, we're always the first on and you sit down and we always have the director's attention. You make your lists of everybody that you think will be right for the part. And then you call the agents and you set up meetings and independently, you make offers and eventually somebody will stick. But what happens is back in the day, I'm trying to, my brain is working faster than my mouth. Before you used to get a flat rate or you get, like a step deal where, okay, we'll pay you this amount of money until we get going. And then once the film gets going, we'll pay you this amount.

Matthew Barry (00:43:42):

Years ago, and I won't bore you with all the details, but I was on a plane when I was doing Rush Hour 2. And I was talking, I was sitting with one of the Teamsters and he was talking about union this and union that, and I'm like, "We're not union." It's like, "What do you mean?" I was like, "We're not union." Long story short, by the time I landed back in America, I was introduced to the Teamsters and fought with the Teamsters for five years to get a contract with the studios for the casting directors. And so now, all the casting directors are union. And so nobody can screw us over, because casting directors used to get screwed over royally. And so, thanks to the wonderful Steve Vairma, who's now the president of the Teamsters, he put together an incredible for the casting director.

Matthew Barry (00:44:33):

So now, even if you're independent, there's rights for all of us. And so, we can't quite get screwed over, because they have to sign a deal with the casting directors. So realistically, as of now it's become a lot tougher than it was. Now everything is presales and tax credits. So, it's a bit more difficult to cast a film, 'cause you need those names, and everybody's doing the same thing and there's charts everywhere and lists everywhere that you can get on the internet that has foreign value. And there's a lot of brokers out there now who will broker a film and they'll sell the territory so to speak. And this is long and boring for your listeners and viewers, but so to speak, basically we were on first, it's usually a 10 week deal.

Matthew Barry (00:45:18):

You'll kind of get your names settled. And then the rest of the cast kind of fills itself out. And you use a service called breakdown services, and you put down what you're looking for, and all the pictures and resumes come in, as opposed to how it used to be, where the agents used to come to your office and pitch. And we'd say, "Oh yeah, we like him. We like her. Oh, this guy is interesting. Tell me about him. Tell me about her. Okay. We'll meet them." Now everything is, you can do self-tapes and everything's online, which is wonderful. But basically you get to pick and choose, and you set everybody up, and you still talk to agents, and everybody comes in the audition, and your director makes their selections, and your film is cast.

Bryan Smith (00:45:59):

Yeah. And if you're part of the union, you're going to get a minimum rate?

Matthew Barry (00:46:03):

Yeah, yeah.

Bryan Smith (00:46:04):

Right? And then if you're really well known in the industry and sought after you're probably going to get paid more?

Matthew Barry (00:46:10):

Yeah. I mean, look, it's generally how it works. We're not making as much as we used to, I think back in the late 80s and 90s, when it was a lot of fun. We made a very good living, no complaints at all. Now it's very corporate and everybody has to- Everything is by the book. It's one, two, three, four, five, you know, there's six or seven people having to make a decision on one-liners. So, it's a little tougher these days. And definitely not as much fun where it was really a director's medium, and it still is in the sense for the independent world. But the studio wise, it was definitely very- It changed. It very much changed

Bryan Smith (00:46:56):

One of the most difficult- When I applied to law school, there was this law school admission test that I had to take. And the most difficult types of questions were called logic games, and logic games where there's a dinner party and there's 15 people and here are the rules. You're in charge of the seating chart.

Matthew Barry (00:47:15):

Right.

Bryan Smith (00:47:15):

Susan has to sit at the head of the table. Jerry cannot sit closer than two seats away from Susan, that type of thing. And what you described to me sounds like a really complicated logic game. All of these moving parts that you're trying to get a handle on with the director and the producers and the actors. And there may be a great fit, Rachel McAdams and Ryan Gosling might be perfect, but maybe Ryan's attached to another project. And so that's going to slow down when the shoot starts. And man, it just sounds like a kind of a nightmare, frankly.

Matthew Barry (00:47:50):

It's not easy. It's definitely, it's not easy. I mean, I'm going through it now. 'Cause I think independent films, it's been really, really tough over the years to get any independent film financed just because of the criteria.

Bryan Smith (00:48:03):

Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:48:03):

And the agents know it, they know that it's foreign sales and tax credits now. And so they know what their clients are worth. And so, you make your pitch and they all want to make sure that

their clients are going to get paid and these are not going to fall apart, because, everybody's doing pretty much the same thing and saying, "Well, I've got this great film and yes, I've got the financing. I've got the financing." But in reality, you don't have the financing until the star kicks in. So it's kind of this roundabout catch 22 that you're always dealing with and very, very frustrating. And it's difficult to get anything made. But I think nowadays, if you can find a film where you can make for half a million to a million dollars, you're going to be golden. So, you're going to start to see a lot of road pictures pretty soon. You're gonna see easy rider again, good old motorcycle movies, you know?

Bryan Smith (00:48:56):

So what are- When I look at your filmography, I noticed kind of a lot of what I noticed about Nick's filmography, because you work together a lot with him. One thing that struck me is the new talent that emerges from these films like Alpha Dog and The Notebook. What did you see in Amanda Seyfried and Justin Timberlake, Emile Hirsch, Ben Foster. I mean, Ben Foster is one of those guys that, every movie I see him in, he just blows me away with his intensity. And also, he doesn't have to be intense in every movie, but there's, he's just this effortless guy. But what did you see in these actors that led to casting them? And now they're just huge stars.

Matthew Barry (00:49:41):

Foster, I had my eye on since he was 18-years-old. And I have a picture, which I show my students, I have a whole collection of first pictures and resumes, and I had Ben's first picture and resume and he'd come off of a Barry Levinson film as well. And I had him come in and meet me, and he was just so incredibly smart. And he looked at my refrigerator and he was like, "You got any beer in there?" I was like, "I sure do." And he goes, "Can I have one?" And so we just literally sat on the floor, drank a beer, and just shot the shit. And I was like, "I fucking love this kid." And so when Alpha Dog came around a few years later, he's the very first actor I brought to Nick, and Nick didn't know he was. I said, "You've gotta meet this kid." And so Nick came in. Nick generally doesn't read anybody, he just likes meeting actors.

Matthew Barry (00:50:24):

And he said his criteria with me is, only bring me three actors because I want to hire them all. And everybody thinks their client got the role, because they have such a great time with Nick that I have to go, "No, no, that's just how Nick is. He didn't get the role. We're just meeting people. Tell them to hold on." But with Ben, Ben came in and sat down with Nick and was exactly how I expected Ben to be, just incredibly bright, smart, terrific. And Nick said, "So which role you like?" Thinking that he wanted to play Jesse James Hollywood, the lead. And he goes, "I like this role." And Nick perked up and went, "Really? Tell me why." You said, "'Cause I think I can do a lot with this role. This is the kind of role that I want to play." And proceeded to tell Nick everything about him. And literally Nick said, "Role's yours". And Fred looked him as like, "Really?" He was like, "Yeah, role is yours. It's yours."

Bryan Smith (00:51:18):

Wow.

Matthew Barry (00:51:19):

And so that was the first one Amanda- Which is there's a funny story, Amanda, her agent was a gal by the name of Abby Bluestone, and we went to high school together in New York. And Abby was like my only friend in high school, because we went to the professional children's school, because we were all professionals. And Abby called me and she goes, "You gotta meet this girl. You got to meet this girl." I said, "Okay, you know, I'll do anything for Abby." So this girl, Amanda, walks in, I had never met her. Nick had never met her. She sits down and proceeds to cry and she was 17-years-old. And she was like, "I don't want to do your movie. I just want to go home. I just, I just miss my family." And she was like crying the entire, she literally cried the entire time.

Bryan Smith (00:52:05):

For real, like a real cry?

Matthew Barry (00:52:07):

For real. She was like, "Please don't hire me. I don't want to be in your movie. I just want to go home." And so, of course, Nick looking at decided to torture her and kept her there for an hour. And she was just so lovely and vulnerable. And so we just had to find something in the movie for her.

Bryan Smith (00:52:25):

How can you not work with her after that?

Matthew Barry (00:52:26):

How can you not? And he was just like, "So there's nudity in this movie. You have a problem with that, I don't care. I don't get it." She was 17 at the time, she was just gonna be 18 by the time she was shooting. And so we immediately were like, I was like, "Abby, she's in the movie." Just let her know she's in the movie. So, she went home, got to see her family, and then of course she got really excited. And pretty much everybody in that movie became a star. I mean, Amber Heard was in the movie. She just came in and I was just like, she was a tornado. And it was like, you couldn't just the energy. Just her energy was like, "Oh yeah, she's gotta be in the movie."

Matthew Barry (00:53:00):

Emile was interesting, because it was down to Emile and another actor. And this other actor, we had hired Ben, and this other actor came in and they were auditioning together. And literally what happened was, they were doing this intense scene, I think it was one of the intense scenes in the movie. And they literally got into a fist fight in the audition. It turns later that they knew that they knew each other, but I'm like, I'm having to go in and break it up. And Nixon, behind the table laughing his ass off, he was like, "I love the intensity." So, it was literally down to Emile or this other guy. And we went with Emile, 'cause Emile was, he was kind of this good looking kind

of punky... he fit the part a little better than this other actor who's probably a little bit of a better actor, but Emile was kind of softer. So you knew he would kind of fold a little bit as his character.

Matthew Barry (00:53:53):

Olivia Wilde was another one who nobody really knew. And what happened with Olivia was, she came in and she was just wild and open and didn't give a shit about anything. And what happened was, is that we brought back three girls for that role. And what we didn't tell them was we had hired all the guys and we brought all the guys in and they had them sit behind the table and the girls came in, and all Nick told the guys to do is to give her shit. Olivia walks in and the first thing she said was like... She made some comment about one of the guys, like having a small penis and-

Bryan Smith (00:54:30):

She gave it right back.

Matthew Barry (00:54:32):

She gave it right back. And it just kept going on and on and on, the guys were like hooting and hollering and they were like, "She's in." 'Cause she was one of the guys.

Bryan Smith (00:54:40):

Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:54:40):

And so, Timberlake we had wanted, we had met Justin on a previous picture that didn't go and we loved Timberlake. And Nick had suggested Justin early on. And I said, "Hell yes." I said, "Anybody, who's a musician, let them come in and talk to you about it." And he said, "Can I just make this character fun?" Absolutely. And nobody liked the idea. It was one of those where, "This is the worst idea. This is horrible, you can't act, he's a boy band guy." And we're like, "No, no." We went against everything and he was phenomenal, just phenomenal in the film. And it's one of the casts that I'm incredibly proud of just because everybody, almost everybody on that poster, it just blew up after that, you know? And it just, it really, to this day, makes me incredibly proud to have put that one together. And what a job.

Bryan Smith (00:55:33):

I watched it leading up to Nick's interview and I was struck- It was the second or third time that I'd seen the film, maybe more. 'Cause it's one of those movies that you can go back and watch again once a year, and it's still fresh. It still holds up. And it ages well, but one of the things I noticed about the film, the last time I watched it was, it is a real pressure cooker of a movie with all of the intensity from all of these actors. And there's also the subtlety and nuance of the performances, because for instance Emile Hirsch, when he's looking at the intruders in his house and he's watching one of them take a shit on his carpet, and he's just kinda cowering. And you realize this kid is, he's not a bad ass. He's a lot of bark and no bite.

Matthew Barry (00:56:23):
Right, exactly.

Bryan Smith (00:56:23):
And there were- So he needs these people who will do these acts for him, because he doesn't have the courage to do it.

Matthew Barry (00:56:32):
Right.

Bryan Smith (00:56:33):
And it's that type of nuance that I love in these performances. But then it's also like watching a train wreck too, because it's like, you see these two trains coming at each other and you're like, "Oh shit, this is not going to end well." You just know right from the beginning, this is not going to end well.

Matthew Barry (00:56:49):
Well, and as an audience too, it's like, you think, "Okay, how is this kid going to get out of it?"

Bryan Smith (00:56:53):
Right.

Matthew Barry (00:56:54):
And he doesn't, that's the whole thing is that's the shock about to an audience, because you watch these films and you go, "Okay, somebody is going to come by to save the day. Somebody will, somebody will come by."

Bryan Smith (00:57:04):
Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:57:05):
"Something will happen and this kid will be safe." Because you feel for him. And then all of a sudden you just- And when he's shot, it's so freaking heartbreaking, it's heartbreaking. It is. And it just leaves you with this feeling in your gut of like, "Oh my God, this didn't end the way I thought thought it would. How's this gonna play out now?"

Bryan Smith (00:57:27):
Yeah. And the beautiful thing about it too, is that Nick was able to capture this story, and he just grabs it. It's out there and he grabs it and puts it on paper in a screenplay, right? And he puts this film together in a way that, I don't think you could read this story in a GQ writeup or Vanity Fair or Rolling Stone or something, and it just would not hit the way that it came together through your casting and through Nick's direction. And it's one of the best teenage sort of thriller dramas, I think, of that decade.

Matthew Barry (00:58:01):

I think it still holds up, too. And anybody who's listening to this, who's young, should really watch that film, because it's kind of, I mean, that was 12, 13 years ago, maybe even longer. But it's still holding up to this day, with the youth, that's- The anger and angst that the youth of today, and the pressures of the youth of today have, and just the lack of parenting.

Bryan Smith (00:58:29):

Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:58:30):

And these kids, a lot of them, they weren't poor kids. Some of them were well off.

Bryan Smith (00:58:36):

Yeah.

Matthew Barry (00:58:36):

Most of them were well off, and wow, the decisions you make as a young adult, and if you're a young actor listening to this, it's a film that you should study. Especially all of the characters in the film, it's just an incredible piece for all of the actors. Not just Justin's performance, but Emile's and Ben's, and everybody in the film.

Bryan Smith (00:59:02):

Yeah. I think it's a good example of the duality of man, showing that every character in that film has the capacity for good and evil, in every scene they have the ability to make a different decision. And it's just almost by chance that they decide to keep going on this path that's going to lead to something horrible happening, but they could just as easily make a different decision, pick up the phone and call the police or something. And then everything would be completely different.

Matthew Barry (00:59:32):

Right.

Bryan Smith (00:59:32):

But it's a fascinating study in that respect.

Matthew Barry (00:59:35):

Well, I mean, again, look at what's going on in the world right now. I mean, it's like the decisions, it's that close. I'm a big believer in, we make choices. I don't believe in regrets, because you make choices. If you decide to cheat on your spouse, well, that's your choice. You'll live with that choice. You have to suffer the consequences. What choice are you going to make? Are you gonna make the right choice or the wrong choice? Do we all make choices? Again, as a lawyer, you know as well, we make choices and those choices affect if you wind up in court or not.

Bryan Smith (01:00:11):
Right.

Matthew Barry (01:00:11):
So yeah, it's hard. One actor I stupidly failed to mention was the incredible Anton Yelchin, the late great Anton Yelchin who, again, nobody knew except my partner who had seen him in a film. And they were there, I can't remember the other actor, they were trying to push on us to play that role. And Nancy was like, "No, it's gotta be Anton. It's gotta be Anton. It's gotta be Anton." And Anton came in, and I think he was 16 at the time, and he was just so innocent and so beautiful and just, it was like, "Oh yeah, absolutely, absolutely." I give my partner Nancy full credit for that one.

Bryan Smith (01:00:50):
So, he passed away?

Matthew Barry (01:00:53):
Yeah. He, unfortunately, he had a driveway that had a steep hill, and he had a Jeep at the top of it and he thought he had put it in park.

Bryan Smith (01:01:01):
Ok.

Matthew Barry (01:01:03):
And he didn't. And it backed into him and crushed him.

Bryan Smith (01:01:06):
I remember now. Yeah. I remember the story.

Matthew Barry (01:01:09):
Yeah, absolutely, incredibly heartbreaking. And just an incredibly talented, I'm getting choked up just thinking about it. And his mom was just such a sweetheart, just a lovely, incredible woman. And to lose him that early, and to lose everything that he had done in his career was just really, really sad.

Bryan Smith (01:01:29):
One more casting question.

Matthew Barry (01:01:30):
Sure.

Bryan Smith (01:01:30):

Before we move on to your acting classes, the She's So Lovely movie, Nick talked about it, a read or an introduction with John Travolta. And I think Sean Penn was there and there was some drama. I don't know if you heard that interview or not, but with Robin Wright-Penn and Sean, and were you involved in that particular meeting that Nick was referring to, where John Travolta showed up and kind of the stars aligned and he agreed to take on that role?

Matthew Barry (01:02:00):

I was there the day that he said yes, I remember that. I remember that Sean and Robin had come on, and we went after John and he said, yes. And everybody was excited.

Bryan Smith (01:02:11):

Yeah.

Matthew Barry (01:02:12):

I don't know what happened afterwards, but I know Sean really was really, really invested in the film and I- That like, after the first day of shooting, they had shot John, and Nick and Sean had some difference of opinions. And so we had to reshot that scene, but I thought they were all terrific. And Gandolfini, the late James, great Jimmy Gandolfini.

Bryan Smith (01:02:33):

Yeah. What a great actor.

Matthew Barry (01:02:35):

Oh, he was so great in that. And yeah.

Bryan Smith (01:02:38):

Was that one is one of his first films?

Matthew Barry (01:02:40):

That was one of his, I actually, I put James- Okay, here's a funny story, and I hope Nick is not listening to this, 'cause he's not going to like what I have to say, but I may have told him this, I may not have, but I'm going to kind of out myself here. So, I was doing a film when I was working with Vicky called Money for Nothing with John Cusack. And we were looking for John's brother in the film, and we met this guy who was working, he was working as a dock worker, I think, in Pittsburgh. And he came in and was just incredible. And Nick had come in Los Angeles. Of course, Nick was one of my best friends and it was down to Nick and James Gandolfini to play Cusack's brother. And we watched the tapes, watched the tapes. And the director said, asked everybody's opinions and said, "Matt, what do you think?" And I went, "Gandolfini." I had to vote against my, one of my best friends. But I thought Gandolfini was better for the better for the role.

Bryan Smith (01:03:33):

Oh yeah. I think he'll forgive you, because it was Gandolfini. If it was anybody else, maybe not.

Matthew Barry (01:03:38):

I'll give you one last Gandolfini story. I know you're pressed for time, but one last Gandolfini story. So, I'm doing a film called Crimson Tide, and we're looking for this- One of his characters. Can't find it, can't find it, can't find it, can't find it, can't find it. Well, he wanted a- Tony Scott had wanted Gandolfini, 'cause he had done True Romance with Gandolfini, but Gandolfini wasn't available. So, couldn't find it, couldn't find it, couldn't find it. We're close to filming, close to filming. At the last minute, the schedule changes. And I look at the schedule and I call his agent and I said, "Wait, is Gandolfini going to be available?" And he called me back and he said, "Well, he's shooting a film in France, but his last day is your first day of filming." So I said, "Can we make it work?"

Matthew Barry (01:04:18):

And of course, Gandolfini wanted to work with Tony Scott, he wanted to be in this film with Denzel. And so it works out. So Gandolfini flies in, literally sleeps in his trailer on the set, first day of set, very first day of filming. And we're on this thing called a gimbal. And a gimbal is basically a set that's on these gigantic hydraulics, 'cause we're in a submarine. And so they need to move the submarine for the angles and the cameras are off. They have to push the entire set away so they can move this gigantic set, so they can go on an angle. And so all it is the actors. And then the camera crew was on the other side of the gimbal. And so, the very first scene is a confrontation scene between Denzel's character and Gandolfini's character. And so, we rehearse it where Gandolfini puts his hand on Denzel and Denzel slaps it away, and everybody draws their guns and cut. That's the first take. And action. Again, Gandolfini grabs Denzel, Denzel hits him, Gandolfini doesn't let go. Denzel hits him again. Gandolfini doesn't let go.

Bryan Smith (01:05:22):

{ laughing } Oh no!

Matthew Barry (01:05:24):

They start to tussle. They start to duck tussle. Gandolfini punches Denzel.

Bryan Smith (01:05:29):

Oh my God.

Matthew Barry (01:05:31):

Well, since we're on at this angle, this gimbal, they start going out of frame, out of camera. And us as actors, I was actually on the set at the time, I drove the submarine. Were going, "What the hell? What the hell is-?" And everybody starts going, "Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey!" They start tussling. They're trying to get the gimbal back up to regular so we can- Denzel is furious. And of course, since I worked on the film casting it, I was working with Vicky at the time. I was like, "Oh my God, we don't have a backup. Please, don't fire him. Please, don't fire him." And Denzel was hot. And this is, again, this is the first day and Bruckheimer's there and Tony Scott's there. And

so about an hour later, Gandolfini comes back and apologizes. He said, "Look, I'm a method actor. I just, I haven't had time to really get into the character. And I just, I just went- I apologize." And so, of course, everything was cleared up, but it was like, Oh my God, the first day of filming.

Bryan Smith (01:06:24):

Yeah. And Denzel was big at that time.

Matthew Barry (01:06:27):

He was huge, yeah. Yeah, it was a big hit too.

Bryan Smith (01:06:30):

Well. So, I'd like to ask you about your acting classes and Matthew Barry teaches, because I've looked at your website and I am just so impressed with the talent that comes out of your class. And how loyal, talking about loyalty, how loyal they are to you to give you those types of accolades on your website. When did you start teaching acting?

Matthew Barry (01:06:53):

It was about nine years ago. Somebody, a friend of mine in San Francisco, said, "Hey, what do you think about coming up here and teaching a class?" And this was probably the height of my career. And I was like, "Yeah, okay. I've never done it before, but sure. Why not?" So, I went up there and loved it and realized that I was good at it. And again, growing up in New York, I had worked with Lee Strasberg at the actor studio. And I didn't get along with Lee very well, 'cause I didn't really like his methods at the time. And I did study as well at HB Studios with a variety of teachers, including the great [unintelligible]. So, I had kind of a vast education on theories, techniques.

Matthew Barry (01:07:33):

And basically I decided I'm not going to enforce my technique on them. I want actors to be organic and I want to try- I can definitely get the best out of every actor. And so I quickly realized, "Hey, this is a lot of fun." And it kind of grew and grew and grew. And everybody kept asking me, "Hey, will you- Can I work with you? Can I work with you?" And it was just like, "Oh my God, okay. I just, I don't have the time." And then as the years went by, I found myself enjoying it more and more and more, and helping actors live their dreams. And as the business changed, I found that I was enjoying educating and teaching actors. I love actors and it really- Being an actor and making the mistakes that I made, I can help actors to not make those mistakes, to be professional and to teach them all about being a professional; putting your ego aside and just doing the work.

Matthew Barry (01:08:26):

And the advantage I had over a lot of other teachers was, I was a successful actor and I was a successful casting director. So, I know what I'm doing. And so, I took that knowledge and impart that onto my students, who obviously have an advantage over your traditional acting studios,

where I know how to work the camera. I know how- I know what a great audition is like. I know how to work. There's a big difference between stage acting, acting, and auditioning, but a lot of people don't know the difference. And so I teach them the difference, especially when it comes to camera work and especially being on the other side. I wish that I had known half the things I knew as an actor that I do in casting. I probably would have booked a lot more jobs, like not using props, for example, with- All the things that can cost you a job.

Matthew Barry (01:09:16):

There are so many ways, so many things that will cost you a job that I try and eliminate them all, so that the director focuses on you and your talent. And so, that's another way- My job is to get the best out of you. Whether it's a baseball coach or a football coach, their job is to get the most out of your athletic ability. Well, my job is to get the most out of your emotional ability. And so I'll push you, I'll push you, I'll push you until you are just so comfortable that you can do anything. And that is incredibly rewarding for me. Not only that, but it's so rewarding for me to help people achieve their dreams. We all have dreams. We all have goals in life. And if I can be a part of that, it's so rewarding.

Matthew Barry (01:10:06):

It's a great feeling, like when I'm working on a film and you cast a perfect cast, it's rewarding. It's a great feeling. It's, when my students book and they tell me they've booked, it's a great feeling. When they're booking TV series, when they're going on to have great careers, it's a great feeling. And so I continue to do it. And I opened this wonderful studio I have here in Sherman Oaks. And I have nice, comfortable leather chairs and good seating, and good food and snacks, and a nice environment for the actor to kind of nurture. 'Cause actors are, can be, a very, very fragile group. And my job is to give them that confidence to go out there.

Matthew Barry (01:10:44):

Auditioning sucks. Doing casting for 28 years, it's horrible. It's nerve wracking, being in front of somebody and saying, "Please, I know you're judging me, but please, can you just give me a shot?" And it's like, "No, just go." Just to try and impart on the actor to, no, just go in and not give a crap. We want you, we want to see you, we want your personality. Come in and just be you. That's what gets you the job, that and talent, of course.

Bryan Smith (01:11:12):

Yeah.

Matthew Barry (01:11:12):

But just, it's nice to see when it's not phony, when it's not nerves. Of course, it's going to be, you're going to be nervous. It's nerve wracking. So, I try and teach everybody how not to be nervous just to go in, do your thing, and the rest is complete- It's out of your hands. You never, you don't know what goes on behind the doors. I remember when I was an actor, I went and there was a TV series, we all wanted to do called The Hill Street Blues.

Bryan Smith (01:11:39):
I remember it well.

Matthew Barry (01:11:40):
And I went in all the time, and the casting directors loved me. And I went in and this there's one role, worked on it all weekend, went in and just crushed it. I was like, "This job is mine. Nobody's better for this role, it's mine." And I'm waiting for the phone. I'm like, "Is my phone working?" And I'm checking this, I'm checking to see why hasn't my agent called? I call my agent, "Have you heard anything?" I didn't get the job. Why? About six weeks later, the show comes on the air. I go, "Okay. Who got the job? Who got- Who was better than me?" And I watched it, and okay, here it comes, I know the script here comes the scene. Oh, it's Forest Whitaker. You know, if I had my choice between hiring Forest Whitaker or Matt Berry, I'm hiring Forest Whitaker, you know?

Bryan Smith (01:12:23):
Right.

Matthew Barry (01:12:24):
So, as an actor, I try and impart that. It's like, you don't know what goes on behind closed doors. Another film, I went back three times for this TV movie, I was fantastic. Director loved me, producer loved me, phenomenal, phenomenal role. The role was mine. I didn't get it! And so film comes out, it comes a year later or so. Who got my role? Who got my- Oh, Jim Carrey got my role.

Bryan Smith (01:12:51):
{ laughs } Okay.

Matthew Barry (01:12:52):
And Jim was great. And I went, "Oh, that- The funny guy? This guy got-" Well, and I gotta hand it to him. He was better than me.

Bryan Smith (01:13:01):
Yeah.

Matthew Barry (01:13:01):
He was more right for the role than me, you know, I get it.

Bryan Smith (01:13:05):
Well, I saw an interview with an Austrian actor by the name of Christoph Waltz.

Matthew Barry (01:13:09):
Yeah.

Bryan Smith (01:13:11):

From Inglorious Basterds. And it was just last night, I was watching this. He was on Jerry Seinfeld's Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee.

Matthew Barry (01:13:18):

Yeah, I saw that. I watched that.

Bryan Smith (01:13:19):

But he said, "If you put a great actor in the wrong role, you're going to get a bad performance."

Matthew Barry (01:13:26):

Yep.

Bryan Smith (01:13:27):

And I think that reminds me of what you're talking about, which is these producers, these directors, these casting directors are probably looking for, not just great actors, but the right actor for this particular role. And you can never know that as an actor. So, you can't take it too personally, it sounds like.

Matthew Barry (01:13:45):

You can't. I mean it's, as a producer, I'm offered up actors all the time and it's so tempting, because I know I'll get the project made, but it's wrong.

Bryan Smith (01:13:55):

Right.

Matthew Barry (01:13:55):

It's not right. I'm putting an actor in a role that I feel he can't handle, it isn't right, or the audiences isn't going to believe. Now I'm all for, yes, can Will Ferrell do drama? Yes. But it's gotta be the right drama. Can a comedian, can Jim Carey do drama as well? Yes, if it's the right role. Can a dramatic actor do comedy? Eh... not so much. I've had that experience where they go, "Oh, he can be funny. He is funny." But you know, sometimes it works like, The Other Woman, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau.

Bryan Smith (01:14:29):

Yep.

Matthew Barry (01:14:29):

Nobody ever thought he was funny, but we knew he was funny. And we showed the studio he was funny. And guess what? He was funny.

Bryan Smith (01:14:36):

He was.

Matthew Barry (01:14:37):

So, it's gotta be right. And sometimes you gotta convince people that they're right for the job.

Bryan Smith (01:14:44):

Well, Matthew, it's been great talking to you. Can you let our listeners know where they can find you on social media and the web?

Matthew Barry (01:14:51):

The website is www- Do we still have to say that now? Www?

Bryan Smith (01:14:56):

No, I don't think so.

Matthew Barry (01:14:58):

matthewbarryteaches.com. That's with two T's, M-A-T-T-H-E-W, matthewbarryteaches.com. A lot of information. Anybody can reach out to me. I answer every question from anybody: agents, managers, anything that actors have. It might take me a day or two to get back to you, but I will answer everything. I'm on all of this social media, I'm on Facebook. Twitter is bigmouthbarry, 'cause I'm a big hockey fan, and I have a big mouth when it comes to hockey. So-

Bryan Smith (01:15:28):

Nice.

Matthew Barry (01:15:29):

-bigmouthbarry is my Twitter handle. But the rest is Matthew Berry or Matthew Barry teaches on Instagram. I'm not on tik-tok yet, but I guess I have to get on there.

Bryan Smith (01:15:40):

Oh, another one, yeah. You gotta figure that one out.

Matthew Barry (01:15:41):

It's all the kids, we're getting old, man. We're getting old, I can't keep up.

Bryan Smith (01:15:48):

Yeah, well, it's been a real pleasure talking to you, Matthew. Thanks for sharing your story about your life.

Matthew Barry (01:15:52):

Thank you. Well, thank you for doing this. It's wonderful that- And thank you everybody for listening, for taking the time to sit through everything that you have to offer.

Bryan Smith (01:16:01):

Yeah. It's been a lot of fun.

Matthew Barry (01:16:03):

Yeah, I had a great time. Thank you.

Bryan Smith (01:16:06):

Hey, thank you for listening and I hope you enjoy today's episode. If so I have a favorite ask.

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Speaker 4 (01:16:35):

[inaudible].