

LIFE – Film at CONCA VERDE on 02.11.15 – Talk by Peter Anderson

Life is a 2015 biographical drama film directed by Anton Corbijn and written by Luke Davies. It is based on the friendship of *Life* photographer Dennis Stock and Hollywood actor James Dean, starring Robert Pattinson as Stock and Dane DeHaan as Dean. The film is an American, British, German, Canadian and Australian co-production, produced by Iain Canning and Emile Sherman from See-Saw Films and Christina Piovesan from First Generation Films with co-financed by Barry Films Production. Production took place from February to April 2014 in Toronto and Los Angeles.

The Plot

The story follows Dennis Stock, who works at the Magnum Photos Agency and gets an assignment to shoot rising Hollywood star James Dean, before the release of *East of Eden*. Friendship develops between them during the assignment, as the pair travel from Los Angeles to New York to Indiana.

Development

Luke Davies started writing the script in 2010. He was initially interested in writing a script about James Dean but as he researched about Dean, he found that the one thing which stood out most was Dean's images at Time Square by Dennis Stock. Afterwards, Davies found out more about Stock and wrote the screenplay for the film. Corbijn initially turned down the offer to make a biopic on James Dean. But the story of the photographer Dennis Stock interested him more as "The photographer and the subject: you know who influences who. The James Dean portion of the story wasn't my interest."

Casting

Talking about the casting, Corbijn said that "Rob has an intensity that I think Dennis would have had. When I see Rob, I see an inner turmoil that is great for the role and Dane is really interesting. He has a beautiful face, but it's a hard face to grasp. It's hard to see how Dane reads [on screen] sometimes, and the same goes for James Dean." Corbijn later revealed that "Rob was quickly on the horizon for me, and after we met I didn't meet anyone else for Dennis Stock's role." While producers Iain Canning and Emile Sherman said that "Finding the right actor to play James Dean was a big responsibility, but Dane's body of work has proved what a chameleon he is and what he will contribute to the role" and further added that "Casting Robert Pattinson and Dane DeHaan brings together two of the most exciting young actors of their generation." Talking about portraying James Dean, DeHaan said that "He had a very specific voice so I've gotta have it, too! It's a challenge. His voice was a lot higher than mine, but it's fun, you know, that's what I like to do. The harder it is, the more fun it is, but it's definitely a challenge, for sure."

Pattinson said about his character in the film, "He's a really bad dad. And you don't really see that in young guy parts. He just doesn't love his kid, or is incapable of it, and it kind of pains him." About the interaction between the main characters he said, "It's a little ego battle, and a lot of it is about professional jealousy, and who's a better artist, who's the subject and who's the artist." And added that's what drew him to the role in the film.

In February 2014, Ben Kingsley joined the cast as president of Warner Bros. Studios, Jack L. Warner. Writer Luke Davies joined the film in cameo appearance. On March 14, 2014, it was announced that Joel Edgerton had joined the cast of the film as Magnum Photography editor John G. Morris. Initially Corbijn offered Philip Seymour Hoffman, with whom he had previously worked on *A Most Wanted Man*, the role of John G. Morris (later played by Edgerton) in the film, which according to Corbijn, "(Hoffman was) trying to find a way to make it work" due to his earlier commitments, but he died before filming began. Edgerton, about his involvement in the film, said that "It was a situation where it was never going to be something I was involved in but for certain circumstances. They lost an actor, I love these people, I love

everything they're about, the story and script was really fascinating. So I left working on Jeff Nichols's movie in New Orleans and just scooted across to Toronto literally for three days and shot five, six scenes. It was a blast."

Critical response

The film received mostly positive reviews from the critics, with Pattinson and DeHaan receiving appreciations for their portrayal of Stock and Dean. Review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes gives the film a 66% rating based on reviews from 32 critics, with an average score of 6.1/10. Metacritic gives the film a score of 55 based on reviews from 5 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews".

Tim Robey of The Daily Telegraph gave the film four out of five stars by saying that "it's an interestingly personal picture about that moment when the shutter snaps, and how it changes the nature of any human interaction" and about performances that "the underrated Pattinson is playing a cold fish here, and does a credible job getting inside Dennis's aura of shifty desperation" and "DeHaan gives us very much his own Dean, and he's immediately rather fascinating." Guy Lodge of Variety said that "peculiarly moving, even subtly queer friendship between the two men that distinguishes "Life" from standard inside-Hollywood fare, while gorgeous production values and ace star turns make it a thoroughly marketable arthouse prospect" and added that "DeHaan and Pattinson enact this anti-romance beautifully, each man quizzically eyeing the other for leads and clues, while coyly retreating from scrutiny. Pattinson, adding to his post-"*Twilight*" gallery of sharp-cut screw-ups, brings intriguing layers of childish dysfunction to a character who is only ostensibly the straight man in the partnership. DeHaan, meanwhile, plays Dean as the more openly flirtatious of the two, a flashier generational companion to his louchely inspired Lucien Carr in 2013's "Kill Your Darlings." Stephen Schaefer of Boston Herald in his review said that, "LIFE is fairly low-key, yet it breathes with an honesty and an astuteness" and that "Pattinson is perfectly cast as Stock, a man adrift with an ex-wife from a teenage marriage and guilt filled about the young son he never sees. DeHaan doesn't exactly resemble Dean so much as inhabit his Fifties hipster lingo, attitude and speech patterns." Little White Lies gave the film a positive review by saying that "As Life proceeds the pace picks up and by the third act, it is a compelling dramatisation of an artistically fascinating alliance." About performance it added that "DeHaan ratchets up Dean's rhythmic speech and sounds permanently like a performance poet reading Allan Ginsberg (sic). He is curt and minimal essaying a very controlled, clock-watching professional" and "Pattinson's performance is as crisp as the white shirt and black suits his character always wears. This is a camouflage for his own problems that slowly unfurl, adding colour and improving the film." While David Rooney of The Hollywood Reporter criticized the film that "*Life* doesn't deliver on its considerable promise" but ultimately praised Pattinson that "While Pattinson has endured a lot of gratuitous bashing post-Twilight, he gives arguably the most fully rounded performance here, even if the character is inconsistently drawn." Peter Bradshaw of The Guardian gave the film two stars out of five and notes that, "There are some pleasing touches, but this film is a frustrating experience."

James Dean

James Byron Dean (February 8, 1931 – September 30, 1955) was an American actor. He is a cultural icon of teenage disillusionment and social estrangement, as expressed in the title of his most celebrated film, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), in which he starred as troubled teenager Jim Stark. The other two roles that defined his stardom were loner Cal Trask in *East of Eden* (1955) and surly ranch hand Jett Rink in *Giant* (1956). Dean's enduring fame and popularity rest on his performances in only these three films. Dean's premature death in a car crash cemented his legendary status. He became the first actor to receive a posthumous Academy Award nomination for Best Actor, and remains the only actor to have had two posthumous acting nominations. In 1999, the American Film Institute ranked him the 17th best male movie star of Golden Age Hollywood in AFI's 100 Years...100 Stars list.

Legacy and iconic status

American teenagers of the mid-1950s, when James Dean's major films were made, identified with Dean and the roles he played, especially that of Jim Stark in *Rebel Without A Cause*. The film depicts the dilemma of a typical teenager of the time, who feels that no one, not even his peers, can understand him. Joe Hyams says that Dean was "one of the rare stars, like Rock Hudson and Montgomery Clift, whom both men and women find sexy". According to Marjorie Garber, this quality is "the undefinable extra something that makes a star." Dean's iconic appeal has been attributed to the public's need for someone to stand up for the disenfranchised young of the era, and to the air of androgyny that he projected onscreen. Dean's "loving tenderness towards the besotted Sal Mineo in *Rebel Without a Cause* continues to touch and excite gay audiences by its honesty. The *Gay Times* Readers' Awards cited him as the male gay icon of all time." His estate still earns about \$5,000,000 per year, according to *Forbes Magazine*.

Dean is mentioned or featured in various songs. The American band Skid Row mentioned him in their song "Forever": "While lightin' cigarettes, like James Dean." The chorus of David Essex's original "Rock On" includes the refrain "Jimmy Dean. James Dean." Dean is mentioned in Rob Zarro's song *Infamous Route 66*: "I'm seeing really cool things, pictures of Marilyn and James Dean." The band X Ambassadors also mentioned Dean in their song "Gorgeous": "like renegades, like James Dean." The Eagles song named after Dean explores his fast and dangerous lifestyle. John Mellencamp mentions James Dean in the lyrics of "Jack & Diane". Lana del Rey repeatedly stated that she was into "James Dean kind of guys" and devoted one of her most acclaimed songs "Blue Jeans" to a former boyfriend who reminded her of the actor. Phil Ochs has a song titled *Jim Dean of Indiana*. In Hunter Hayes's song Storyline, a line in the first verse says "we got a fast car, a James Dean spirit, and a Norma Jean heart". He is also mentioned by Madonna in her song "Vogue": "Greta Garbo and Monroe, Dietrich and DiMaggio, Marlon Brando, Jimmy Dean -- on the cover of a magazine." In addition, James Dean is often noted within television shows, films, books and novels. In an episode of *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, the character Liberty likens the rebellious, antisocial Sean Cameron to James Dean. On the sitcom *Happy Days*, Fonzie has a picture of Dean in his closet next to his mirror. A picture of Dean also appears on Rizzo's wall in the film *Grease*. On the American version of the TV series *Queer as Folk*, the main character Brian Kinney mentions James Dean together with Kurt Cobain and Jimi Hendrix, saying, "They're all legends. They'll always be young, and they will always be beautiful". In the alternative history book *Homeward Bound* by Harry Turtledove, Dean is stated to have not died in a car crash and to have made several more films, including *Rescuing Private Ranfall*, based on *Saving Private Ryan*. Dean is referenced in Lady Gaga's 2009 song "Speechless", off her album *The Fame Monster*, in the first verse: "I can't believe how you looked at me with your James Dean glossy eyes". Beyoncé's song "Rather Die Young" off her album 4 (Beyoncé album) James Dean is mentioned "You're my James Dean, you make me feel like I'm seventeen".

In Taylor Swift's song "Style" on her album 1989, the first line of the chorus references Dean: "You got that James Dean daydream look in your eye." Adam Lambert mentions James Dean in his song "Ghost Town" when he sings: "I tried to believe in God and James Dean but Hollywood sold out" from his album *The Original High*. Sleeping with Sirens has a song "If I'm James Dean, You're Audrey Hepburn". In the Halsey (singer) song "New Americana" on her album *Badlands* (Halsey album) Dean is also referenced "Young James Dean, some say he looks just like his father". Sham 69 reference Jimmy Dean on the album track 'Lost on Highway 46' on their 1979 LP 'The Adventures of the Hershman Boys' The song contains the chorus line 'Yes I can hear you Jimmy Dean, But I'm alive, I'm not dead' The second verse contains the lyric 'frustrated moments on a Hollywood screen, wearing a mask - do you know what I mean?', perhaps a very thinly veiled reference to his debated sexual orientation? The song also includes a section with someone calling the emergency services from the crash site and their sudden realisation the driver is James Dean - "Oh my god, I think it's James Dean".

On April 20, 2010, a long "lost" live episode of the *General Electric Theater* called "The Dark, Dark Hours" featuring James Dean in a performance with Ronald Reagan was uncovered by NBC writer Wayne Federman while working on a Ronald Reagan television retrospective. The episode, originally broadcast December 12, 1954, drew international attention and highlights were featured on numerous national media outlets including: *CBS Evening News*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *Good Morning America*. It was later revealed that some footage from the episode was first featured in the 2005 documentary, *James Dean: Forever Young*.

Debated sexual orientation

Today, Dean is often considered an icon because of his "experimental" take on life, which included his ambivalent sexuality. There have been several claims that Dean had sexual relationships with both men and women. When questioned about his sexual orientation, he is reported to have said, "No, I am not a homosexual. But I'm also not going to go through life with one hand tied behind my back."

By the 21st century, Dean was considered by many to have been gay. In 2005, Germaine Greer wrote, "Looking back over half a century to the meteoric career of James Dean, the one thing that now seems obvious is that the boy was as queer as a coot." She based her opinion partly on the then-new revelations of William Bast, one of Dean's closest friends.

Bast, Dean's first biographer with *James Dean: A Biography* (1956), subsequently published a revealing update of his first book, in which, after years of successfully dodging the question as to whether he and Dean were sexually involved, he finally stated that they experimented. In this second book, *Surviving James Dean* (2006), Bast describes the difficult circumstances of their involvement and also deals frankly with some of Dean's other reported gay relationships, notably the actor's friendship with Rogers Brackett, the influential producer of radio dramas who encouraged Dean in his career and provided him with useful professional contacts. Bast also documents knowledge Dean had of gay bars and customs.

Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon include an entry on James Dean in their book on gay and lesbian history, while journalist Joe Hyams suggests that any gay activity Dean might have been involved in appears to have been strictly "for trade", as a means of advancing his career. Val Holley notes that, according to Hollywood biographer Lawrence J. Quirk, gay Hollywood columnist Mike Connolly "would put the make on the most prominent young actors, including Robert Francis, Guy Madison, Anthony Perkins, Nick Adams and James Dean." However, the "trade only" notion is debated by Bast and other Dean biographers. Aside from Bast's account of his own relationship with Dean, Dean's fellow biker and "Night Watch" member John Gilmore claims he and Dean "experimented" with gay acts on one occasion in New York, and it is difficult to see how Dean, then already in his twenties, would have viewed this as a "trade" means of advancing his career. James Bellah, the son of James Warner Bellah who was a friend of Dean's at UCLA said ""Dean was a user. I don't think he was homosexual. But if he could get something by performing an act...."

Screenwriter Gavin Lambert, himself gay and part of the Hollywood gay circles of the 1950s and 1960s, described Dean as being gay. *Rebel* director Nicholas Ray is on record as saying that Dean was gay, while author John Howlett believes that Dean was "certainly bisexual". George Perry's biography reduces these reported aspects of Dean's sexuality to "experimentation".

The next film will be WHIPLASH on 9 November and finally THE WALK on 16 November. After that the 4 films in Spanish part of the FESTIVAL DEL CINE ESPANOL.

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