

Program note for **Pinewood Dialogue with James Toback** and screening of ***Fingers***

June 23, 1996

Series: *The Art of Screenwriting*

FINGERS

Brut Productions, 1978, 91 mins. 35mm print courtesy James Toback and Turner Entertainment Company.

Written and directed by James Toback. Produced and original score by George Barrie. Photographed by Michael Chapman. Edited by Robert Lawrence. Sound by Les Lasarowitz and Bill Varney. Production design by Gene Rudolf. Costumes by Albert Wolsky.

With Harvey Keitel (Jimmy Angelelli), Tisa Farrow (Carol), Jim Brown (Deems), Michael Vincente Gazzo (Ben Angelelli), Marian Seldes (Mother), Carole Francis (Christa), Georgette Muir (Anita), Danny Aiello (Butch), Domenic Chianese (Arthur Fox), Tanya Roberts (Julie), Ed Marinaro (Gino), Zack Norman (Cop), Murry Mosten (Doctor Fry), Jane Elder (Esther), Lenny Montana (Luchino), and Frank Pesce (Raymond).

About James Toback:

James Toback was born in 1944 in New York City. He was graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1966, earned an M.A. from Columbia University in 1967, the year in which he published his first critical essay "Norman Mailer Today" in *Commentary*. He was a free-lance journalist (writing articles for *Dissent*, *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *The Village Voice*) and a full-time professor of English at CCNY. His 1971 book, *Jim: The Author's Self-centered Memoir on the Great Jim Brown*, relates his experiences in Los Angeles while living with football legend Jim Brown. He began screenwriting with *The Gambler* (1974), and then directing with *Fingers* (1978). He is currently in pre-production with *Harvard Man*.

Article by Stewart Byron, in *The Daily News*, Sunday, March 27, 1977:

"I'm aware myself of always dealing on two different levels at the same time, and the characters I create are always dealing on two or more levels. I'm not interested

in films like *Rocky*, which move simply and obviously and predictably and uncomplicatedly. Actually, the Keitel character in *Fingers* is not an intellectual in the strict sense-the way many serious musicians aren't, really. He's interested mostly in music, although he's even split on that score, too-he likes both the Bach B Minor Cantata and rock songs like The Jaimie's 'Summertime, Summertime' and the Chiffons' 'One Fine Day,' all of which will be on the soundtrack. Other than music, he's interested in passion and obsession."

Toback has detailed this obsession with, he says, "sexual material that goes beyond what has ever been attempted in American film." Just how much of this material will remain after *Fingers* tries to get an "R" rating remains to be seen, but as Toback describes a raunchy scene with a urologist, another in which Jim Brown forces two women to make love to each other, and a third, a bedroom scene between Harvey Keitel and Tisa Farrow ("The way he makes love to her! The dialogue when he makes love to her!"), he flatly declares: "There is no American movie which has ever come close to trying any of that stuff."

Like his mentor Norman Mailer, Toback is convinced that sex is at the center of the human experience, and he philosophizes about it. "There are hardly ever two people in bed. There can be three, four, 10 or 20-but they don't necessarily have to be physically present. I want to make the audience feel that. The scenes with Harvey Keitel and Tisa Farrow are filled with suggestions of sexuality spilling at unsuspected moments into every area of sexual possibility."

The Pinewood Dialogues, an ongoing series of screenings and discussions with significant creative figures in film, television, and digital media, as supported with a generous grant from The Pinewood Foundation.

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