

A PINEWOOD DIALOGUE WITH TODD HAYNES AND BRUCE GREENWOOD

Todd Haynes reinvented the biopic with his movie *I'm Not There*, a kaleidoscopic portrait of Bob Dylan—and the 1960s—with six different actors, including Cate Blanchett and Richard Gere, playing variations of Dylan. This discussion with Haynes and actor Bruce Greenwood, who plays the journalist "Mr. Jones," demonstrates that Haynes was not just interested in exploring the details of Dylan's life, but of the fundamental concept of identity as a form of performance, a theme central to all of his films.

A Pinewood Dialogue following a screening of I'm Not There, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (November 10, 2007):

DAVID SCHWARTZ: Please welcome Todd Haynes. (Applause) Well, congratulations. It's just an amazing achievement. (Applause)

TODD HAYNES: Thank you. Thank you. That's so nice. Thank you.

SCHWARTZ: One thing it really does is capture what is special about Dylan's music, which—I think so many of us probably have had the experience of turning to his music at important times in our lives, and when you're searching for something. Tell us what Dylan's music meant to you, because I'm assuming there was a long connection to it early on.

HAYNES: Yes, absolutely. Well, I was a fan first in high school. This was the mid-late seventies in LA. And you know, I loved the records that most people loved—Blonde on Blonde, and Bringing It All Back Home, and Blood on the Tracks. And I remember, you know, the releases of... I think I remember Desire; that might have been the very first one that I was sort of present for; Definitely Street Legal and definitely Slow Train Coming. And that was the first time I actually saw Dylan in concert, was that tour, kicking off his sort of gospel period.

And then I kind of stopped listening to Dylan for a while. I mean, I just listened to other kinds of music and got into different kinds of things in college and thereafter. Then I sort of found myself (as you kind of suggested or intimated) suddenly hungering for

Dylan at a time in my life where I think I needed to be reminded about something that I associated with that earlier part of my life; a kind of fearlessness and a kind of devil-may-care quality in his voice, in his music, in his whole attitude, that I think I needed at the end of my thirties as a reminder that change is good, and change is necessary in your life, and it can really help you move forward or make changes when you need them. Those are harder things to remember as you get older. It's a lot easier when you're young and it makes a lot of sense.

SCHWARTZ: You made a big change—all of us were sorry to see you move out of Brooklyn (Haynes laughs) and out of Williamsburg, to Portland. We said, "What is going on here?" But was that about the time when you started?

HAYNES: It was exactly at that time. Yes, and the resurged interest in Dylan was some kind of symptom of something that was about to happen that I really didn't even see coming. But I was just going to go to Portland, where my sister lived, to go write the script to my last film, Far From Heaven, and get away from the city and be somewhere pretty. Dylan was this obsession during every day. I remember making these cassette tapes (probably the last time that I made a series of cassette tapes) for the drive across country. When I landed in Portland, I started writing Far From Heaven by night... Bruce Greenwood, everybody. (Applause)

SCHWARTZ: [Characters] Mr. Jones and Commissioner Garrett: Bruce Greenwood.

BRUCE GREENWOOD: As you were.

SCHWARTZ: A surprise guest, but thank you for coming. (Laughter) You could ask all the questions as Mr. Jones, if you want.

HAYNES: Exactly... or Pat Garrett, depending on his mood.

SCHWARTZ: Right. (Laughs)

HAYNES: But yes, it was in this period where I was going out there to basically do something else that the Dylan obsession kind of emerged, almost on the side, you know. Not—Unexpectedly.

SCHWARTZ: Now, you had made two films where you were dealing with the whole question of music rights and real musicians—Karen Carpenter being the famous example, and then David Bowie and Velvet Goldmine—where you didn't have the official rights. So here's a case where you actually went to Dylan? I mean, what was sort of the process; you came up with the idea, and then decided, "I'd better check with Mr. Dylan"?

HAYNES: Yes. There was absolutely no way to even begin to conceive of doing this without the rights to the music. There was no way to do the film with pseudo-Dylan songs, or fake Dylan songs. But because of exactly what you said, I had absolutely no—no—valid reason to expect we would get them! I mean just nothing at all. And it was alright; I was in this weird sort of free play of loving that music and getting so into it, and reading the biographies and immersing myself in [them].

I had this idea that I thought was really interesting. But I really had no expectations. I talked to Christine about it on the phone—Christine Vachon, my producer and friend—and she said, "Look, don't write anything yet. You never know, you just have absolutely no idea. Why don't we just take it a step at a time?" And she brought up Jesse Dylan—who is Dylan's oldest son and who is a filmmaker, director—and he lived in LA. She said, "Look, when we're both in L.A., why don't we try to meet up with Jesse Dylan and just see. We'll just sort of suss it out." I had a feeling Jesse would like meeting Christine, indie producer, right? You know? Makes sense.

SCHWARTZ: Oh, right; very good, very smart. (Laughs)

HAYNES: So we did that. We went to L.A. and we met with Jesse, who's this incredibly lovely guy and seemed so well-adjusted talking about his dad. And I think it's one thing about Dylan—whatever you say about his romantic record or marriage history or whatever—you know, he's been a really protective father. He's really tried to keep those kids out of the glare of it all.

Jeff Rosen was on the line in his office—Dylan's long-time manager—on that meeting. I described the concept, and they were both interested in it. But they said, "That means absolutely nothing, that we think so." Jeff said, "Why don't you write it down on a one sheet piece of paper?" Jeff told me all these things; to not say "Voice of a generation," and not say "Genius" and don't say... I remember feeling like they were just like, "Don't... Oh, don't do this... and don't do this... and don't—" So I managed to write something out, and sent it to Dylan with my—through Jeff—with some DVDs.

SCHWARTZ: You had—even before *Superstar*, you made a film, *Assassins*, based on or inspired by Arthur Rimbaud's poetry.

HAYNES: Mm-hm.

SCHWARTZ: So is it true that you pulled the Rimbaud card in writing to Dylan?

HAYNES: Pulled the Rimbaud card?

SCHWARTZ: Well, you mentioned you used Rimbaud—

HAYNES: Oh, on the top of the thing.

SCHWARTZ: On this one page, this one page.

HAYNES: Yeah. No, it started with the subtext "I is another," [by] Arthur Rimbaud, and a quote from Anthony Scaduto's first biography [of Dylan]: "He challenged every step of the way by refusing identity," or something about identity and the sort of whirligig around that.

SCHWARTZ: So Dylan sort of accepted the idea that there would be a film that was supposedly about him, but that would be in this free style, that was not a pure biopic. It fits, obviously, with what his music's all about.

HAYNES: Clearly. Yes; exactly. I mean, it's this innately and fundamentally open kind of approach to a traditional biography film. Clearly, because it described, you know, the Woody character as an eleven-year-old black kid who calls himself Woody Guthrie, described—But it actually said on the one description of Jude, the character Cate Blanchett would end up playing, that this would be portraved by a woman, and that his character would resemble the actual Dylan more than any other in the film. (Laughter) Which I had forgotten I'd even thought about at that time that specifically. So he knew that there was going to be a sense of irreverence and humor in the approach, you know? And I think these are things that he doesn't really get a lot of in the way people treat him and regard him.

SCHWARTZ: Was the script written in a kind of free style, the spirit that you were writing it in, where you didn't worry so much at the time how you would actually get this produced? Because I remember following the project as it was going along, and I know it took a while for the financing, the actual production to come together.

HAYNES: Yes, it took a long time. But that wasn't because the script was written in an open style. It was actually written so close to what the film would be. Right? I mean it really—you read it.

GREENWOOD: Yes.

HAYNES: Or you tried to read it.

GREENWOOD: It was remarkable.

HAYNES: But it was really hard to—it was probably really hard to read it, I would think. I mean... (Laughter)

GREENWOOD: No, it wasn't that hard. But it required a second read, for sure, because a lot of the descriptive narrative—as much as there was in the script, you couldn't begin to get a bead on how many layers of visual information there were going to be when Todd put it together.

HAYNES: Yes; and I tend to get very detailed when I'm writing, because it's sort of like my own blueprint for what I'm envisioning. But I knew that the sort of rhythm and the musical elements of the film—and even the lightness, in a way, of the film,

that I really felt needed to be there—wasn't going to come through on the page.

SCHWARTZ: So could you talk about the casting process? Because of course, after the incredible success of *Far From Heaven*, lots of actors must have wanted, at that time, to work with you and wanted to be involved with this project.

HAYNES: Yes, I guess that's why. I don't know; I was really thrilled. Because I did, I really went to who I thought were the very best possible people for each of these roles, and everybody wanted to take a part in it, which was great.

You know, even in casting... like, I wanted a movie star for the role of Richard Gere's character, Billy. I wanted somebody who carried a little miniature history of American film in the lines on his face, you know? And yet, Richard Gere was *totally* into this. He was so interested in all the ideas that had originated; had gone into creating that story. He even gave me a book at his house one day. He's a great photographer, Richard, and he gave me a book of this photographer Meatyard, which I hadn't—I didn't know his work. And it was exactly, it was so precisely what the feeling of the Billy story should be. We actually ended up copying some of the masks in those Meatyard photographs that you see the kids wearing in the Riddle story.

SCHWARTZ: How did you get cast? Were you specifically looking at—this is a very key role, actually. It's one of the most important non-Bob Dylan roles, Jones, because the interrogation really gets at a lot of the key issues in the film.

GREENWOOD: Well, yes; I don't know how I was cast. (Schwartz laughs) Todd called me, and I said yes before he'd finished half a sentence. Right? You just called me in L.A.—I don't know how you got my number. I mean, I didn't even know—I mean, I've changed it since then. (Laughter)

HAYNES: See, we had so many, you know, name stars in the film, and I sort of thought, "Okay, I'm not going to be able to get—you know, I'll just find a local person in Montreal for Mr. Jones,"—which is an incredibly important part, but the schedule had already been put around these actors and their schedules. Then I was talking to [casting agent] Laura [Rosenthal] one day, and we were talking

about Bruce. I was like, "God, Bruce would be the most—" but I was like, "He would never do this." I mean, because— (Schwartz laughs) Well, no, I just thought—It was a secondary role, it was a horrible, nasty...

GREENWOOD: What?! (Laughter)

HAYNES: Shit! I didn't— (Laughter) In the primary sense of the word. (Laughter) In the primary sense of the word. No; but it was a nasty schedule, because you had to come and go!

GREENWOOD: I was shuttling back and forth from LA.

HAYNES: And I just thought, "How could he? He wouldn't be able to squeeze in into his schedule, and why would he want to? And why, you know?" But I wanted somebody really strong opposite Cate in those scenes. I wanted a real foil for the character of Jude. Obviously, it was written that way; someone with intelligence, and not a simple symbol of the establishment that the counterculture had constructed, you know.

SCHWARTZ: And what did you base the performance on, the characterization?

GREENWOOD: Well, we talked about a couple of different BBC interviewers. David Frost...

HAYNES: Oh, yes.

GREENWOOD: ...we sort of pulled out of the ether. I had a little bit of his hair going on for a while, and then kind of gave up on that. But I guess it was an amalgam of a few people we'd both seen over the years, and...

HAYNES: But remember, we decided it wouldn't be like the guys in—People say, "Isn't it based on those journalists in *Dont Look Back*?"

GREENWOOD: Yes; but no.

HAYNES: It was not going to be that. It was not going to be like an *out of* touch, *fuddy-duddy* English guy.

GREENWOOD: No, we didn't want a guy who was repressed and super uptight and... and so—yes.

SCHWARTZ: Hair seems to be really important to you in finding characterizations. I remember you showed up at the Museum once in a seventies glam rock hairdo a few years before *Velvet Goldmine*, it was like you were doing research—getting into the part. I also understand that Cate Blanchett—I mean, the hair was important to her.

HAYNES: Yes, hair is *really* important.

GREENWOOD: Hair is power. (Laughter)

HAYNES: Hair; but really, the beard was—seriously, the beard was...

GREENWOOD: Oh, the beard was so great. Even that hair was, I mean...when you're talking about hair (Haynes laughs) you know, you put that on, there's four pounds of it, and then you put—literally. I mean, and then you put the beard on. But the beard was kind of like mask work, you know? And if any of you are actors, you know when you put a mask on, the first thing you do is you look in the mirror, and whatever feeling you get from that mask is something that you go with. So I did that; and messed around with that a little bit; and then figured out which parts of the beard would interfere with the way my face moves, so avoid doing that; and then find some kind of humanity underneath that.

HAYNES: Really, actors work with all of these elements to ultimately consolidate a character. It's a cyclical process for a while, and then it finally settles. But it was so interesting, because we were doing this in succession with all of these characters—where they would come into the makeup room, into the makeup trucks, and Richard, we found the length of his—they all had wigs, and we all found the right length and picked the right spectacles. It's a long process. You try this on, you try that on, you keep trimming, you look, you hold it up higher and lower. And you really derive at it. Of course, we were drawing from tons of Dylan stuff. Heath [Ledger]had a wig—they all had wigs—and they were very carefully modeled after Dylan at different times. And we had to pick different facial hair for Heath, to determine different periods in his life with Claire [Charlotte Gainsbourg] and—yes; hair is essential. (Laughs)

SCHWARTZ: Can you talk about Cate Blanchett? Of all the different Dylans—probably when we think Bob Dylan, the first Dylan we think of is right exactly from that period, that sort of definitive period, midsixties—and it's such a master stroke of casting. So what was your thought process in casting her? Did you think of actors, male actors?

HAYNES: No, no. The concept from the beginning, the original idea was that it would be an actress who would play the role of Jude. I didn't have a specific actress in mind when I wrote it, but I knew it had to be a woman playing that role as a man. And it was about—really, it was really just about Dylan's physical state in mid-65, '66. It's something that I feel—because it's one of those famous moments that, as you say, are so familiar—they lose their sense of shock and risk.

What an audience, a Herman's Hermits audience of 1965, must have felt like—or even just an audience that followed his folk, his protest period—suddenly seeing this spidery figure on stage! This... you know, whatever... strange androgyny. Not an androgyny that we would see in Bowie, but an androgyny that you might more associate with Patti Smith ten years later; something completely unmasculine and un-established for the time. And I just felt like that strangeness had to be—in general, my pact with myself with this film was to preserve the genuine weirdness of Dylan. That's forgotten because—you forget it because he's so famous and he's so—he's such a—you know, whatever. He's it.

SCHWARTZ: Talk about those scenes, playing those scenes, with Cate Blanchett, what that was like. They're so critical in the film, and it's such an amazing performance.

GREENWOOD: Well, I can probably better describe the feeling of working with her by describing when I first saw her working, which was: we were shooting in this great big cavernous kind of steel mill with big puddles of grease and muck for two- or three-hundred yards in one direction and a hundred feet high and two-hundred feet wide. It's a big characterless chasm. And it's—you know, even in a room this size it's not easy to create a vibe. You walk into a place like that, that's the size of a stadium with a roof and it's pitch black, and you can't create a vibe.

Yet I walked in, and a hundred yards away you could see there was this little tiny speck of activity. I got about a hundred feet away and I could feel that something was happening. There's some kind of electrical thing going on between the crew and—the crew was literally [gaping] and pointing at the artist, you know? (Schwartz laughs) You could feel that everybody felt that they were witnessing something really, really special. It was like that for every moment, watching her, you know? I mean, when she's at the craft service table she's mellow, and talking about whatever, and having a coffee. But it's kind of like...

HAYNES: Do you remember how weird it was when she'd come back at the end of the day, out of her costume?

GREENWOOD: Like, "Who are you?"

HAYNES: Like, "Who's the blonde chick at the camera?" (Laughter) It was just like... Literally, there was just no connection between them.

GREENW00D: It wasn't even like working with Cate, really. Not that I've ever worked with her before, but it was like working with Bob Dylan from thirty-five years ago.

HAYNES: What was so interesting is the things she was doing the day Bruce first saw her was the projection scenes that you see—it was the background material that we needed to collect for projections in that one scene, in particular, with the projections on the wall. We had this concept—I had this concept—of three white walls with the spider, you see the spider moving across, and there were synchronized projectors that would connect the same image, bend the same image around the frame—those three frames.

One idea—and we did shoot it but we didn't end up using it because it took too long—was to have Jude in almost a silhouette, with a very wide lens moving, also, walking across all three. So that was the very first thing I had Cate do. We had a big, long seamless stretched out, and basically, what it was is that she was reducing the character to it's... distilling it down to its core kind of physical abstract element. Almost doing a dance of what the character was. Now every actor, I think, works from the body and finds some physicality as a kind of

root to who the character is. But this was asking the actor to go all the way there, and to basically do away with everything else, on the very first moment.

SCHWARTZ: Did she get the voice quickly? I mean, it's amazing, what she's doing with her voice.

HAYNES: She did. It was—yes. They all did. They all did really—they were all inundated with the material. Ben Whishaw does something with his—because he's English. The way he incorporates Dylan's syntax and meter of speech—not syntax, but the tenor and the rhythms of his speech—the way he'd sort of gather up syllables by the end of the sentence, is so understated and so subtle, but it's in all of his performance. It's really remarkable.

SCHWARTZ: How did you sort of think about the idea of using real Dylan and then being more free and imaginative? For example, with the music, it was very important to have the real Dylan voice. But then there's sort of covers and new versions and that whole—it's a very big question, I'm sure, for you.

HAYNES: Yes; well, what's funny is the things that you don't even really probably notice, that I think work so well. In that Cate's obviously singing to Steve Malkmus's voice (from Pavement) in the performances of—I mean, in other words, she's not singing to Dylan. She's not lip-synching Dylan. Now, if she lip-synched to Dylan, the illusion would be gone. It would completely go away; and many, perhaps, other vocalists, as well. It needed to have a voice that matched her frame. And because it's his voice, and because it's these covers that both come out of the sort of spirit of those originals but also have adapted them and changed them and fictionalized them within the film, it works even better, and I think the illusion is more complete.

You kind of keep going back to Dylan, but actually it's completely circuitous, the way we get to the core of Dylan. But I think the difference between quoting Dylan more directly and indirectly... In a way, the film does what every biopic [does], which is blend the great moments, the famous moments, the moments that we remember—Ray Charles in a photograph—with the private moments, the moments that we haven't ever seen—of Johnny Cash in the bedroom with his wife, or whatever. Most biopics do this with a continuous narrative,

and try to make it seem seamless, from fact to fiction. This one does that, as well; it goes into places that we've never seen depictions of Dylan, per se (although, really, almost everything in the film comes... we did have so much documentation. All of Robbie, all of Billy comes from stuff that was specific and concrete). But it just separates them...

SCHWARTZ: But you kind of play around with the idea that we can capture the moments of inspiration. Like when he says, "Just like a woman," and it's like, "Oh, that's how that song got created." But you're sort of playing around with the whole notion of what a biopic can do.

HAYNES: Yes, yes. But I also think that in that one scene, he's basically— he's being sarcastic. He's saying, you know, "Thanks for stepping in"—and she did step in, and she got rid of the culprit—and he's sarcastic and says, "Yes, just like a woman." He's using a cliché, but he's actually using it against—which he does in the song. People got very upset about the use of that cliché, even though he is really playing with it.

SCHWARTZ: Yes; which you have been known to do, also. (Laughter) I just want to give you a chance to talk about the editing. I mean, it's such an amazing piece of editing, and I wonder if—and of course, you worked with Jay Rabinowitz. I mean, you lost a great collaborator, Jim Lyons.

HAYNES: Yes.

SCHWARTZ: Could you just talk about that: if there were many different versions, and what the editing process was like?

HAYNES: It's funny; it seems like a film that might have been conceived largely in the editing room. The editing was, is, such an essential part of any movie (and it was to this one), but it wasn't something that changed the structure of the film. If anything, I think it relaxed the inter-cutting that was actually in the script. The script had more intercutting between the stories, and we actually simplified it and kept the introductions to each of the stories longer, so you could get into them more.

But that said, it was more all of these intricacies, and how to weave the music—It was rhythmic and it was sensual and visceral, I think—all of the things

that the editing really focused on and that we both worked really hard on. We kind of had to work round-the-clock because we went over budget in the schedule. We lost like \$2 million dollars (Laughs) in fees and penalties because of overtime costs that somehow just came out of the editing; we were supposed to kind of make up for it. We kind of had the editing table going twenty-four hours a day, so it was quite a feat.

SCHWARTZ: One of the things about Far From Heaven that became clear was that even though you were setting this film in the fifties, and it seemed on the surface to be about the fifties, it was clear that it was about the time we're living in now. It seems like that must be a lot of what this film is about for you: finding your place as an artist, and the whole question of how do we deal with this America now, that we're living in, where the question of what freedom is all about is a big question.

HAYNES: It's funny, I wasn't—although actually I identified maybe most, while writing the script, with the character Claire (who is the Charlotte Gainsbourg character) because I was stuck in my house until Oren came to rescue me—

SCHWARTZ: Your screenwriter, yes.

HAYNES: Oren Moverman, my co-writer—and make it fun again. I was stuck inside with this amazing job that I'd been allowed to take on, you know? But the Bush-Cheney wars were exploding on the television, and I felt like I was studying—like, one hand was reaching out to this distant planet, the 1960s; and the other hand was reaching out to what was happening on television in front of me. It just felt so strange and I felt, we all probably felt so... I mean, we've been going through an unbelievable period over the last seven years and it's really, I think it's so profoundly shattering that it's almost impossible to know what is happening while it's happening. It's going to take, like the sixties, a lot of time to figure out what's going wrong and how to set it back on course.

SCHWARTZ: Which, I guess, is why you can look back to poets like Bob Dylan or Allen Ginsberg, or somebody like Walt Whitman, who makes you question, "What does it mean to be American?" HAYNES: Yes, yes. What does it mean? But I also felt like I wasn't doing anything specific about talking about today. I was *really* focusing on the past and this particular period, and I think it's all there. It's almost like I also wasn't trying to create a tapestry of American sensibility and artistic form, or whatever—and yet that's what Dylan's life, in all of its components, really does add up to in my mind. But that came with the result of adhering to or addressing the specifics.

SCHWARTZ: I want to ask Bruce, in front of Todd Haynes, to talk about what he's like as a director, because there's so many great... this is a film so much about performance and so much—

GREENWOOD: Ooh. He's really a super-positive force on the set. Very, very up, and willing to talk about anything you might drag in, any idea. But mostly, he's so steeped in the history that we're there trying to recreate—admittedly, through the prism of your vision and through the kaleidoscope of Dylan's ever-changing life. But the vibe on the set was always really positive, joyous, and I think that comes through in the movie, too. It's an effervescent movie in a lot of ways, and I think that is, in large part, because of Todd's vibe on the set. (That's fair, don't you think?

HAYNES: It's—I mean, the thing...

GREENWOOD: It is fair. (Laughter)

HAYNES: Thank you, Bruce.

GREENWOOD: Take yes for an answer.

SCHWARTZ: And it must have been a very pressurized production. You had, like, seventy locations to shoot in...

HAYNES: Forty-nine days, yes. It was really, really hard. It was super-tough, yes.

GREENWOOD: But it's kind of like the way, you know, the parents hide from their kids that, you know, the rent isn't here. You know what I mean?

HAYNES: Yes; that's really, that really is...

GREENWOOD: You just say, "No, dinner's on the table and this is all going to be good." And all the

actors are going, "Oh, goodie! I'm so hungry!" You know? (Laughter) And they don't know that around the corner, the bankers are putting the last bead on the abacus, you know?

HAYNES: I mean, I think directors—(Laughter)

GREENWOOD: Well, anyway; I'm just an actor. I don't know what was happening. (Laughter)

HAYNES: I think all directors have some weird mechanism, some unnatural mechanism, to compartmentalize fear and to put it into a separate container, you know? Because you have to just keep forging ahead. Probably a lot of directors also have to be really good actors and keep that cheery disposition. (Laughter) And just try to make people feel like not only do you know exactly what you're doing at all times, but also make them feel secure in what they're doing. That does take a kind of sort of forced will, which makes it even more exhausting and hard. You have to sort of be a machine, in a way, to pull through that.

SCHWARTZ: And you made this without having... you didn't have a distributor at the time, I mean, so...

HAYNES: No, we didn't have a U.S. distributor. We had great, you know—the whole spirit of the film started so great: with Dylan saying yes; these actors signing on so quickly; us getting really robust presales at Cannes in '05... and then all of a sudden everything came to a crashing halt, when we came back to the States to try to get U.S. distribution. Then it was a year of knocking on doors, and going to every single studio, and me pitching this to like, every single studio. That was hard. It all started to feel, you know, more doubtful.

SCHWARTZ: Well, unfortunately, we have to end. I want to just thank you both and congratulations, again, on a masterful piece of work. (Applause)

HAYNES: Thank you so much. Thank you.

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