

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE BFI

Editorial enquiries

21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN

t: 020 7255 1444

w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

e: S&S@bfi.org.uk

Social media

f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag

t: twitter.com/SightSoundmag

i: instagram.com/sightsoundmagazine

Subscriptions

t: 020 8955 7070

e: sightandsound@

abacusemedia.com

Volume 29 Issue 11 (NS)

ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

CONTRIBUTORS**John Bleasdale** is a freelance writer based in Venice**Jo Botting** is a fiction curator at the BFI National Archive**Tom Charity** is programme coordinator at Vancity Theater, Vancouver**Bryony Dixon** is curator of silent film at the BFI National Archive**Ryan Gilbey** is film critic of the *New Statesman***Matthew Harle** is a research fellow at the Barbican Centre, London, and author of *Afterlives of Abandoned Work***Philip Horne** is a professor of English at UCL**Pamela Hutchinson** writes about film at silentlondon.co.uk**Nick James** writes about films and is also writing a fictional memoir based on someone he once knew**Tony Rayns** is a film critic, commentator, festival programmer and screenwriter**Sophia Satchell Baeza** teaches at the London College of Communication and King's College London**David Thompson** is a freelance writer and maker of arts documentaries**Ginette Vincendeau** is professor of film studies at King's College London and author of many books on French cinema**Catherine Wheatley**'s most recent book is *Stanley Cavell and Film: Scepticism and Self-Reliance at the Cinema***COVER**Portrait of Martin Scorsese by Riccardo Ghilardi/Contour by Getty Images
Repro by DawkinsColour**NEXT ISSUE**Digital edition available: 4 November
On UK newsstands: 7 NovemberContents **Reviews****FILMS OF THE MONTH**52 *By the Grace of God*54 *The King*56 *Non-Fiction***FILMS**58 *Ad Astra*59 *After the Wedding*59 *American Woman*60 *Angel Has Fallen*61 *The Beach Bum*62 *Brittany Runs a Marathon*62 *Chained for Life*63 *The Day Shall Come*64 *Downton Abbey*65 *Driven*65 *Farming*66 *The Goldfinch*67 *A Good Woman Is Hard to Find*68 *Hitsville: The Making of Motown*68 *Hustlers*69 *The Informer*70 *It: Chapter Two*70 *Joker*71 *Jonathan Agassi Saved My Life*72 *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*73 *The Laundromat*74 *Making Waves: The Art of Cinematic Sound*74 *Monos*75 *Mystify: Michael Hutchence*76 *Official Secrets*77 *The Peanut Butter Falcon*77 *Skin*78 *Sorry We Missed You*79 *Tehran: City of Love*80 *What You Gonna Do When the World's on Fire?***HOME CINEMA**83 *Comes a Horseman; Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean; The Extraordinary World of Charley Bowers; Fragment of an Empire; The Incident; Pasolini's Trilogy of Life: The Decameron/The Canterbury Tales/Arabian Nights; They Made Me a Fugitive***DVD features**82 **Nick James** admires Abbas Kiarostami's *Koker* Trilogy85 **Rediscovery: Tony Rayns** welcomes the first release in the West of Jissoji Akio's Buddhist trilogy86 **Archive Television: Robert Hanks** watches *At Last the 1948 Show* and *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, two comedies that geared up for *Python*88 **Lost and Found: Jo Botting** finds lessons for today in post-war refugee drama *The Lost People***BOOKS**90 **Pamela Hutchinson** flicks through a treasure trove of Hollywood letters91 **Robert Hanks** explores Michael Newton's history of the film star92 **Catherine Wheatley** surveys a trio of books about Chantal Akerman

56



68



80



73

And online this month Criticism in the age of TikTok | Piatat's actors | *El Camino: A Breaking Bad movie* | BFI London Film Festival reviews and comment... and more bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

THREE AND A HALF HOURS WITH

SCORSESE

The gangland thriller *The Irishman* is in some ways a return to familiar territory, reuniting him with old friends like Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel and Joe Pesci. But at 76 the great director is – as he tells **Philip Horne** in this wide-ranging interview – as inspired as ever, still hunting for fresh ideas, fresh methods, fresh ways of telling stories

Well, what can I tell you?" began Martin Scorsese, when I spoke to him in New York a month before the British premiere of his latest film *The Irishman* at the BFI London Film Festival. "I've nothing to say!" But then he laughed, and we talked for three and a half hours – slightly more, in fact, than the duration of the film. We met one warm afternoon in a comfortable Midtown hotel suite that he uses as a quiet venue for scriptwriting and for meetings. He had been working on the script of his next film, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, to star Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio, as well as other projects; and to begin with was visibly weary, as a man half his age might have been under such pressure.

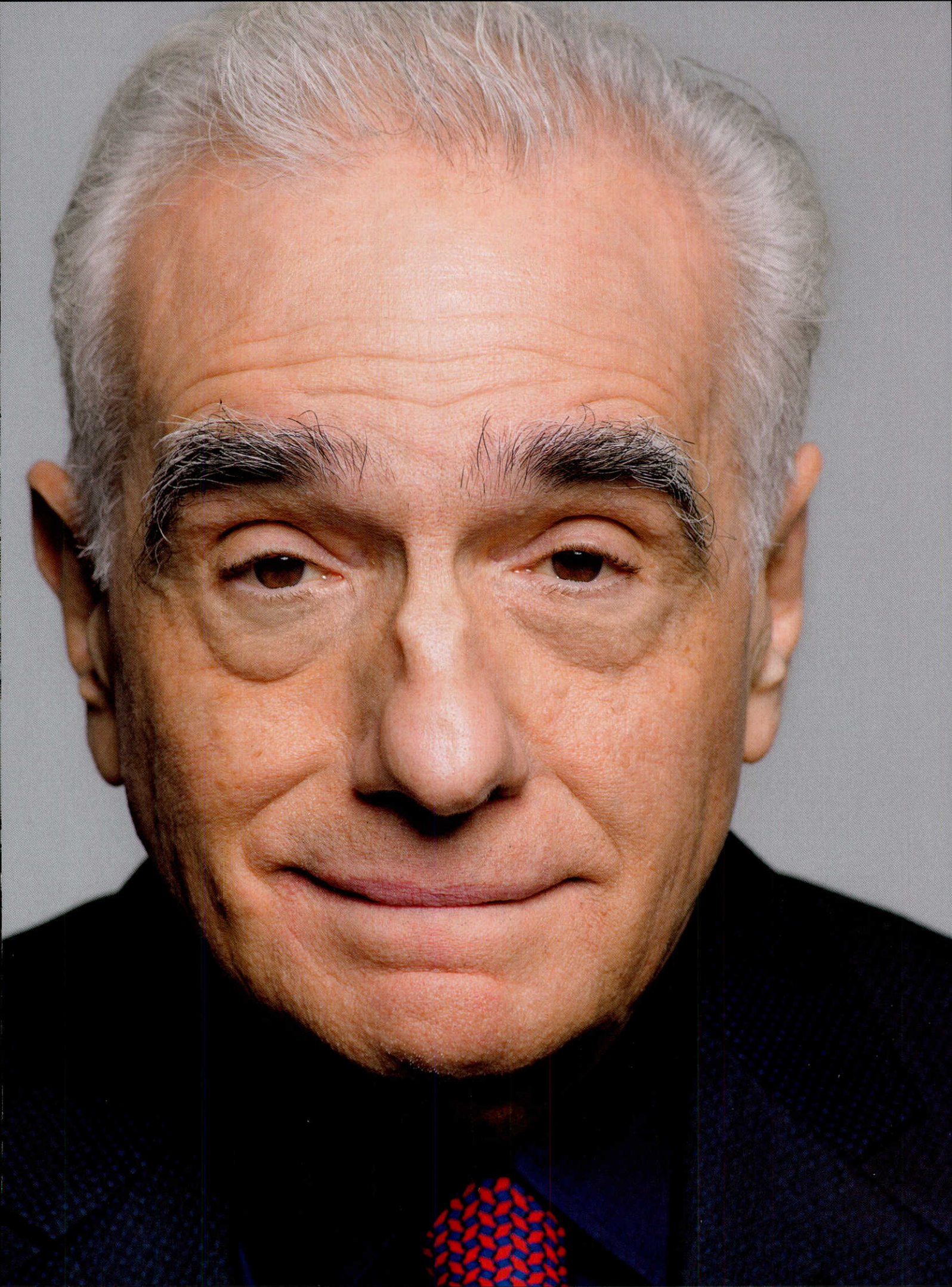
After the agonies and spiritual torment of *Silence* (2016), the grand, dark epic *The Irishman*, running to three hours and 20 minutes puts us back in more familiar Scorsese territory – in the world of Italian-American gangsters, and after a five-film partnership with DiCaprio, back with De Niro, their ninth film together and the first since *Casino* (1995). The movie, based on Charles Brandt's true-crime book *I Heard You Paint Houses* (2004), tells the story of Frank Sheeran (De Niro), the Irishman of the title, from his 211 days of combat in World War II, tasked with 'handling' – aka murdering – prisoners-of-


war in General George Patton's 'Killer' 45th Infantry Division, through to his recruitment as a handler of 'matters' by Mafia bosses Russell Bufalino (Joe Pesci) and Angelo Bruno (Harvey Keitel). It tracks his progress out of a life of hustling and post-war petty crime to his close but Mafia-sponsored friendship with Jimmy Hoffa (Al Pacino), the tough, charismatic, now unimaginably powerful boss of America's biggest labour union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, whose disappearance in a Detroit suburb on 30 July 1975 has never been definitively solved. In fact, it takes us further, beyond all that.

It might have all seemed too late: Scorsese is 76, De Niro 75, Keitel 80, Pacino 73 – and Pesci, 75, had to be coaxed out of retirement. But director and actors are still in sprightly, and magnificent, form. Pesci, De Niro and Pacino, the central grouping here, are quite spellbinding. In particular, it's De Niro's best performance for years, quiet but immensely subtle and cumulatively very moving, brutal but also confused and vulnerable. Pesci is as terrifying as in *GoodFellas* (1990), but in a wholly new mode, his violent ruthlessness veiled by his mild, avuncular manner. And while Pacino's extrovert Hoffa gives grandstanding speeches, and his fiery outbursts are spectacular, there's a core of tenderness in his relationship



PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIGITTE LACOMBE



 with Frank that heightens the tragedy. The film was made possible by a refined CGI process painstakingly developed by Pablo Helman of Industrial Light & Magic, called 'youthification' by Scorsese, which de-ages the actors while retaining the nuances of their performances – allowing De Niro for one brief scene to go back even as far as World War II, when Sheeran was 24, but mostly just making them convincing as forty- or fiftysomethings.

If the subject-matter sounds like vintage Scorsese, the approach is startlingly fresh and ambitious, both challenging and intensely pleasurable for the audience. There's a big canvas, stretching over more than half a century, full of striking set pieces. Sheeran's story suggests Mafia involvement in the failed 1961 invasion of Castro's Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and in the election and assassination of JFK; and includes the murders of Mafia bosses Albert Anastasia in 1957, Joe Colombo in a 1971 rally at Columbus Circle – where Travis Bickle tries to shoot the presidential candidate in *Taxi Driver* (1976) – and Joey Gallo in 1972 at Umberto's Clam House. There are superb, intense chamber scenes where these great actors play off each other thrillingly – small group sessions, so to speak, full of nuances, that are always edged with both comedy and threat.

Scorsese, together with his screenwriter Steve Zaillian and his longtime editor Thelma Schoonmaker, also constructs a very fluent double-flashback structure, giving an overarching unity of feeling to the large narrative. Within that, he seems open to all kinds of experiment. While there's a powerful narrative in *The Irishman*, it's full of invention: the liberating lessons of his documentaries – most recently the thrilling, radical *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story by Martin Scorsese* – seem to carry over here.

The film, like *Rolling Thunder Revue*, has been financed by Netflix – so though guaranteed a limited initial theatrical release, it will thereafter only be available through the streaming service. This 'venue' has meant that for once Scorsese has not been under pressure to bring a film down in length, or indeed to simplify the storytelling – and he has made the most of this freedom. Viewers will be able to watch the film repeatedly – more than one viewing has always been almost compulsory with Scorsese's films – and one senses this has been freeing. As Schoonmaker told me, a saying of her late husband and Scorsese's mentor, the British director Michael Powell, became their watchword during the editing: "Never explain."

In the conversation which followed his announcement that he had nothing to say, Scorsese's quicksilver intelligence, restless curiosity, sense of humour and generosity of spirit were, as always, much in evidence. Happily, 'never explain' wasn't his rule as we talked.

Philip Horne Do you have a way of describing *The Irishman* for people who haven't seen it?

Martin Scorsese Well, generically it's in the underworld of the American north-east, organised crime and unions, and the political ramifications thereof, during the 1950s, 60s, 70s. It goes up to about the year 2000, yet it focuses on one character, Frank Sheeran, who is a devoted member of this so-called dark society. It's a story of a man who finds himself in a position that he hadn't expected, and it's based on love, duty, loyalty and, ultimately, betrayal.

We tried to make a film that is on a big canvas, but focuses down to one person, and stays with that person until the very end – really the end of their life. People come and go, governments come and go, strange things happen, people find themselves being used as pawns – not to ask any questions and just be a good soldier and go out and do what you're told to do. And the ramifications thereof no one talks about. It's really a moral conflict – a film about how Frank balances what he is as a human being with what he does in his life, which ultimately overwhelms him. And it has some very funny moments too! [Laughs]

PH Is it true that Robert De Niro found Charles Brandt's book *I Heard You Paint Houses* when he was doing background research for something else, and brought it to you?

MS [Screenwriter] Eric Roth gave him the book. We had wanted to make a film together: we hadn't since *Casino* in 1995. Over the years we tried various projects. I would always check with him what he was doing and vice versa – and we just never connected on what he wanted to do and what I wanted to do. And then finally, he admitted to me, "I'd rather, with the time we have left, revisit that world that we feel very comfortable in." I said, "Well, all right, but there are so many stories out there, the genre has become saturated – so what's new in that?" And then Eric Roth gave him this book.

We had been playing around with another project called 'Frankie Machine' [based on the novel *The Winter of Frankie Machine* by Don Winslow], and that was a good example of something, ultimately, that I realised I cannot do. I tried. It's a mixture of a genre – I just feel like I don't want to do genre, meaning a real genre of... I guess the extension of the B film or *noirish* film in today's marketplace. And the very fact of the place and genre limits us, and I couldn't find where to go with that character – in this configuration, in this story.

We had a deal actually, at Paramount Pictures. [The late Paramount head] Brad Grey said, "I'll give you a green light, and on the phone Bob said, "Actually, we've found this other book." And he said, "Well..." Now I *knew* what he had in mind, Bob, because when he presented the idea to me – and I hadn't read the book yet – he



Scorsese on the production
 'I realised it had to be done in a certain way: I had to eliminate as best I could the complications of major production'

UNION CITY BLUES
 Al Pacino as Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa in *The Irishman* (left), and Joe Pesci as mobster Russell Bufalino with Robert De Niro's hitman Frank Sheeran (opposite)



became rather emotional, and I realised *that's the key*. If I could feel the same way, or create something that allows me to get to that emotional state, creatively, that might be the way to go.

So I had that conviction. I knew it. So when Bob said to Brad Grey on the phone, "I think we have another project, we found this book," Brad Grey says, "Let me get this straight. You wanna switch from a greenlighted movie to a development deal?" And we said, "Er, yes!" [Laughs]

PH You were both busy with other projects at the time?

MS Bob was making other films. I was making, I guess, *The Departed* [2006], and then *Shutter Island* [2009], things like that, so I was working. I was trying to get *Silence* made, really – and so that also pushed this picture back. So when I finally did *Silence*, that was when we realised we could not have Bob play younger any more. And that's when Pablo [Helman, of ILM] came to me on the set of *Silence* and said, "We can do this with youthification."

But I skipped a very important point, which is that immediately they'd made the deal, I hired Steve Zaillian. And he put the script together. And once I saw the script, I knew we had something. I realised the kind of picture it would be. What I wanted to do was seeping in. I told Bob. He didn't ask me to explain it. He knew that I felt something. I said, "It has to be done a certain way, and I've got it. I know." And [that way meant] eliminating as best I can the complications of major production... Now, eliminating certain elements like that, we created other complications with the CGI. But there was a trade-off. We could concentrate *there*, get to the heart and soul of the movie, rather than an overcomplicated, unnecessary situation where you're dressing three city blocks or going to actually shoot in Pittsburgh and places like that. All this action takes place in a closet, basically. So I knew at that point the sort of picture it had to be. It had to really rely on the interplay of the characters, the actors.

PH Brandt's book is great, but perhaps – given that he is a lawyer – it goes in all sorts of directions. It must have been hard to adapt?

MS There are so many wonderful things in the book, but I had

to get it down to *him* [Frank Sheeran], to find *my* way with him, not Charles Brandt's. And also the tone of the voiceover... that's why we went back to some of the audiotapes, to get the *actual* language. Somehow these were... it's good, but it is... from the point of view of an interrogator. We need to go from the other point of view. And we have to stumble our way through that.

PH Did Steve Zaillian go off and do the script more or less on his own?

MS Oh no, we were here [in this hotel room]. We used these rooms, and we talked, primarily about the road trip.

PH So was the road trip the film keeps returning to, with Frank and Russell and their wives driving to the wedding in Detroit in 1975, always there as a structuring element, punctuating the narrative?

MS Always there. To the wedding, which isn't really a wedding. And Frank thinking it's the road trip: we're just driving along; we talk about the past a little bit...

Then it was a matter of choosing significant moments rather than spectacular scenes. I mean moments in their lives or how they behave. For example, to show just a little about the bond between husband and wife in that world, the scene when Pesci comes back at night covered in blood. You don't have to explain anything, you don't have to say anything. She just says, "I'll clean it up." That's not in the book, but it's real, and when you have that kind of complicity and trust, that loyalty, that's the world you're in. You just are.

Zaillian and I went through it a number of times. Then I wanted him to layer in more of Anna Paquin's character, [Frank's daughter] Peggy. I didn't want any dialogue. So he said, "How are we going to do that?" Of course, we'll do the scene at the beginning when she's a kid [when Frank beats up a grocer] – that certainly leaves an impression on her. And then I insisted on going back and layering in Peggy more, to be an observer... not an observer, but she's part of the group, part of the story. She knows Frank. She doesn't have to say a word. When she's looking at him and he's sitting eating his cereal, listening to the report [about the death of Joey Gallo] – "A lone gunman walked in." The look on his face – it's *him*, obviously. Now, whether he really killed Joey



CS Gallo or not, or whether he killed Hoffa... I'm not interested, it's a matter of the moral choices that he has to make, that he's forced to live in, that all the people around him are affected by, in his life.

And we also layered in Chuckie, the adopted son [of Jimmy Hoffa played by Jesse Plemons] as much as possible. I even think I was doing some of that while we were shooting, adding characters to certain scenes, to try to keep a balance going on in this giant fresco.

PH Particularly towards the end, it feels as if you're going from the crime film with the plots in which people are in danger of being killed, to a film that's more just about life. For example, there's a moment late on when Frank hears that his lawyer is dead and asks, "Who did it?" – and the FBI man answers, "Cancer."

MS That's the first thing that comes to mind, if you're in that world. It doesn't mean that the FBI have to know about it. It's just, like, "Wait a minute... Oh, no, it was natural causes, OK." They're in that world, and it's convenient to say that it's not very different from the – how should I put it? – the establishment. It's not very different. It's all about power. There's power here – but ultimately, it's about love. How he has to deal with what he's feeling and what he's obliged to do, and then how he deals with himself afterwards. And the different steps of dying off: all the old men dying off, his family dying off – or being lost to him, his daughter [Peggy] particularly, Anna Paquin who's terrific in the film, she only has one line of dialogue. But that one daughter *knows*, she knows everything, just with looks – and that's the one he wants to be with, that's the one he wants to love him [but she refuses to speak to him after learning of his crimes] – and he tries to explain all these things to his other daughter.

And he's right, there were bad people out there. Fighting your way up the boot of Italy, if you survive for 411 days of combat, it does something to a person. I'm not saying it's an excuse, but... when he talks about "You don't know what's out there," they don't. [Laughs] It doesn't mean he has to behave the way he did. But they simply don't.

PH You feel sorry for Frank because of his experiences in the war.

If you didn't see the kind of thing that he had to do in the war you would feel differently. It sort of sets everything else up.

MS It really does. But there's an oversimplification: "He's this way

because of the war." Not necessarily the case: a lot of people came back, didn't do what he did. He just has that in him as part of his human condition, he's prone to it, and he gives in to it. But the fact that he feels slightly uncomfortable killing the unarmed men [as we see in flashback] – and he has that line, it's in the book, where he says, "Maybe they dug their own graves, I can't understand how they kept doing that. Maybe they thought that if they did a good job the guy with the gun would change his mind." And then immediately: *shoot. [Snaps fingers]* He didn't change his mind. It's terrifying.

So there's that humanity in him that goes against it, and he's struggling with that – he comes out, but he winds up in the same world. It's like he's forced to do what he does. That's not an excuse, it's the world he's in. He can pick up and move out... What other milieu is he going to find himself in? Truck drivers in one place, truck drivers in another place. Mafia here, organised crime there. Wherever. He's on a certain level, he's not going to go and suddenly start reading *Middlemarch*. I'm sorry. He's not going to take comparative literature in college. He's stuck with his life.

PH When Frank says the Mafia boss Russell Bufalino "took a shine to combat," it's immediately after he's said that he's had all these days of combat. Russell knows Frank's a thief, he's not denounced his confederates so he isn't a rat, and he knows how to follow orders.

MS Yes, he's a big man, a tough man, he can be brutal – but he's efficient. If you notice, the killings in the film are executions, they're not spectacular in any way. I guess the Umberto's Clam House killing [of Joey Gallo] is spectacular, but it's very efficient, very quick. And Frank talks about the philosophy thereof, of each hit. In this case, "Don't shoot the bodyguard, Pete the Greek – well, don't shoot him to *kill* him." It's his job. He's a bodyguard, we're all professionals – just the leg or the arm, that sort of thing – and get in and get out fast.

PH It's striking how high up he is, to do that. You wouldn't expect the president of a union local to be doing these things.

MS Yes. The more I read, the more the tentacles go out to areas that I don't really want to know about any more. But the game is played, and that's how it happens. There are always the *real*



Scorsese on De Niro

“We had wanted to make a film together since *Casino*. Bob said, ‘I’d rather, with the time we have left, revisit that world we feel comfortable in’”

QUIET IS THE DON
De Niro as Sheeran in *The Irishman*, with Pesci as Bufalino, ‘the Quiet Don’ (right), and Martin Scorsese (opposite, centre) on set with Al Pacino (opposite, left)



‘higher-ups’. It’s just the nature of power. And organised power. Everybody’s doing well. You have to behave. And if you don’t... You know, we have ways of dealing with it. And that’s it.

PH The film touches on huge political matters – the Kennedys, Cuba, JFK’s assassination – but keeps at a distance from them.

MS The whole thing about [Mafia involvement in] Dallas itself is something else. I don’t even get into that. The conspiracy theories are always compelling and entertaining. But I’ve got to say, I do believe there are elements that are absolutely true. Whether that was the final cog in the wheel, I don’t know. But they’re fooling around with some bad people.

PH In *The Irishman*, the violence is portrayed differently to the way it is in *GoodFellas*, and things like *The Sopranos* where they’re all fans of *GoodFellas* and so on, isn’t it? Partly the role of Peggy is about that. You can’t simply enjoy the violence. Here the moral cost is being counted as the violence is experienced.

MS Yes, exactly. I think that’s what I was struggling to get to, without verbalising it. To live a life like that – you pay, they all pay. Everybody around him and her, they all pay. And so it’s not a glamorous life, it really isn’t. And yes, there are elements of humour – a dark

humour so to speak is certainly there – but this picture goes another way... I think I only saw one episode of *The Sopranos*, for example, because I can’t identify with that generation of the underworld. They live in New Jersey with the big houses? I don’t get it. They use language – four-letter words – in front of their daughters, at the dinner table? I don’t get that. I just didn’t grow up that way.

PH The language of *The Irishman*, a lot of which is taken from the book, is so euphemistic – “Taking care of that particular matter.” These people don’t want to incriminate themselves; they’re issuing orders all the time.

MS It’s cold-blooded. Russell Bufalino’s known as the Quiet Don. I’d never heard of him before reading the book. He was a very, very powerful man. The euphemism is such that when Frank has to tell Jimmy Hoffa that “it is what it is” [ie, he will be killed if he doesn’t compromise], Jimmy won’t accept it. And he goes further, and finally Frank says, “This is it. It’s the bottom line.” He won’t say it. He can’t. “This is it. It’s it!” “Well, I’d better get bodyguards.” “Don’t get bodyguards.” And they’re back and forth, but: “How many times do I have to tell you, looking you in the eye, and telling you, ‘It’s over. It’s over.’” And then his reaction is, “They wouldn’t dare.”



SCORSESE ON... THE REFERENCES AND INSPIRATIONS BEHIND ‘THE IRISHMAN’

“It’s fun and enjoyable to read which filmmaker was influenced by which film for a series of films that he or she made, but here, by giving certain titles, I think it makes it simplistic for a younger person – to say, ‘Oh, yes, he took this from that film, and this from that character.’ It’s almost like trying to explain how you work – I don’t know any more, I can’t explain it.

But I knew that what I liked were the British noir films, also some Seth Holt films, and J. Lee Thompson, the earlier films from the 50s and 60s. The French films of [Jean-Pierre] Melville – over the years I’ve liked *Le Deuxième Souffle* [1966] and *Le Doulos* [1963], particularly. And Jacques Becker. I like his films – *Casque d’or* [1952], but particularly *Touchez pas au*

grisbi [1954], starring Jean Gabin – there’s a reference in the film, we use the theme music in *The Irishman*. It’s when [Frank Sheeran and Russell Bufalino] are speaking in Italian, that’s the theme from *Grisbi*.

There was this idea I had when I shot *Casino*, when De Niro’s looking at Sharon Stone throwing the chips in the air, and you hear ‘Love Is Strange’ by Mickey & Sylvia, and the camera moves in on him, in slow motion. He looked to me there like Jean Gabin (pictured) in



the late 40s, early 50s. There’s a certain solid quality there, and I said, “Somehow I’d like to explore that.” I’d liked the way Gabin looked in *Touchez pas au grisbi*, and in some of the films he made with Bardot also, like *Love Is My Profession* [*En cas de malheur*, 1958], where he plays a lawyer, and he falls in love with her, and she’s wild. But there’s something about Gabin, in his late middle age, that I liked. Particularly in *Grisbi* and a few other things. And I tried to show Bob that a little bit.”

There's no need to say certain things, there just isn't. That's what's so... I guess cold-blooded is the word, but it's efficient.

PH The use of 'In the Still of the Night' by The Five Satins on the soundtrack, framing the film, is wonderful – it could be about the Mafia, or it could be about God, or the family.

MS Exactly. [It goes back to] the Catholic preaching I used to hear back in 1950, 1951: "Like a thief in the night, Death will come" – and 'the still of the night' is when it happens. So this is always something in my head. Now we're there – at a certain age. The still of the night: it's clandestine, it's love, danger, everything. And that's the quintessential song of that type. For that time, you know. It's simple – and kind of moving. It created an atmosphere and a mood when that came out. You would hear it on jukeboxes, radios. And so... that was the movie, that song.

PH About the use of 'youthification' in the film. You were quoted as saying at an earlier stage, when I think you weren't happy with the first version, "Does it change the eyes at all?"

MS That's the second time I've heard that as if it was a negative thing. Actually not. What I was saying was: "That's the job, that's what we have to do." In other words, you keep the eyes, but even if you keep the eyes, there's much more to that: there's the crow's feet, there's the bags under the eyes, there's the eyebrow. There's the way the light hit. So every frame you see, there's infinitesimal work that's been done. Ultimately, it's about the performance and about the character.

I knew the sort of picture it has to be. I said, "I can't have the actors, these actors, with mechanical objects on their heads" – because they're not going to do it, it gets in the way. But then Pablo [Helman, the film's visual effects supervisor] came back to me and said, "I think I've figured a way." And he made the... I guess they're called contacts; little pieces of fabric or something that really were invisible. And you know, you could be wearing it like, round *here* [indicates his face], and at a certain point you're talking to a person, you're not talking to a machine. The *challenge*, as they say these days, was to take those elements and keep the person, not lose them in something that is cleaned up. It's really about keeping

that character, keeping those emotions and their faces alive.

In one scene where De Niro's younger, for example, and he's talking to some people and he has to convey a kind of vulnerability and a haplessness – making him younger, a couple of times we noticed, made him look like he was threatening them. Now why's that? The line around the mouth. So, let's go into the mouth, work on that. A week later they bring it back. "No, it still looks like he's threatening." Well, maybe the eyes have to be fixed – around the eyes. I'm going for what the performance is. Ultimately, we felt that we regained through the youthification process the vulnerability in that moment.

PH So it makes you look very closely at the actual way that facial expressions work?

MS Yes, at every aspect of the face. And then of course as the actor moves in the frame, the light changes. So a few frames this way – you've got to put some texture here... and so you're really creating, *recreating*, the performance, in a way, with the basic truthful elements of the actor, and protecting those. We stumbled through that. We said, "What about trying this? What about that?" It would come back a week later, we would say, "It looks a bit youth here, or there." And so we'd go back. We did that with *every* shot, with Joe Pesci and with Al too. It's a learning experience.

In a way, I look at it as... well, there's the convention in cinema of the use of make-up. If you look at an older film, there was an acceptance by the audience where the hair is powdered, or you *know* that that's make-up and that the moustache is fake. But you went with the illusion. I always remember the great Dick Smith, and the old-age make-up he made for [Dustin Hoffman's 121-year-old character in] *Little Big Man* [1970]. Or the make-up in *The Elephant Man* [1980]. Where's the heart? Where's the performance? It's *there*, because John Hurt was great. But I know that's make-up, so as a viewer I go with the illusion. I give you something back so I can get something from the world that you're trying to depict for me and the characters. It's another level of that, I think. And ultimately, it might be superior in the long run, to creating an illusion. Rather than having to apply prosthetics and that sort of thing. Mind you, we did a great deal of make-up on the film too.

SCORSESE ON... RANDOM DIGRESSIONS FROM A LIFELONG CINEPHILE

Other films about Jimmy Hoffa

"[Danny DeVito's 1992 film] *Hoffa* I saw some years ago... Jack Nicholson's performance I thought was great in it. Once Jack Nicholson plays it, I mean, come on! You know it's something else. And some of the scenes with Bobby Kennedy I thought were terrific. I don't remember much else of it. I decided not to see any of the stuff about Hoffa at all. [Norman Jewison's] *F.I.S.T.*, with Sly Stallone, came out the same day, or within a couple of days, of *Raging Bull*, but I didn't see it."

French director Eric Rohmer

"I found the Rohmer films hard. Néstor Almendros [Rohmer's regular cinematographer, who worked with Scorsese on *New York Stories*, 1989] used to talk to me about him, and I always wondered, "Why can't I connect with this stuff?" Aside from *My Night at Maud's* [1969]. I find [Korean director] Hong Sang-soo easier. He's more accessible. Maybe it's a class issue, or maybe it's a sense of... I guess in

French they use the word 'bourgeois', and I'm just not part of that world. I'm not interested. I'll try, but I didn't find it as compelling. So I'm looking forward to seeing a few more now. I may check out *The Green Ray* [1986]."

Japanese director Ozu Yasujiro

"It took me a little while [with] Ozu, but now Ozu is the balm in Gilead, you just look at one of his films, you know that this is where you reset yourself to. You reset whatever's left of the mechanisms in your soul. Take a look at one of his pictures, if you want to go a little bit further, go on. Mizoguchi I preferred, because his were the first Japanese films I saw. Mizoguchi and Kurosawa, but Ozu took me a while. And I get it. I get it."

The Czech new wave

"This director Juraj Herz, his film called *The Cremator* [1969]: it's amazing... It's a kind of horror film in a way, but I was fascinated by his framing and cutting. Another one

he made called *Oil Lamps* [1971] – really remarkable. And *The Fifth Horseman Is Fear* [Zbynek Brynych, 1965]: terrific. Black-and-white Scope. It's something. And Vlácil – *The Valley of the Bees* [1968], that was a revelation. And then of course his three-hour one, *Marketa Lazarová* [1967]."

Richard Burton

"*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* [Martin Ritt, 1965]. Very, very austere. Very much Le Carré. Yes, my taste in cinema's a little different. But there's something about watching that film – it's a devastating movie, really. And [Richard] Burton, he's brilliant in it."

Polish cinema

"I was immediately taken by the Polish cinema... the Wojciech Has films – *The Hourglass Sanatorium* [1973] is a revelation. Has's *The Saragossa Manuscript* [1965] is wonderful. Wonderful. But *The Hourglass Sanatorium* – widescreen, colour, it's quite something."

PH Do you think this system will have an effect on other films that are made?

MS I think so. Obviously, it may have an effect on films that are trying to create more of a futuristic world. But it's as good as the people doing it, really. Pablo and his group and ILM were amazing; and we were – myself and Thelma – on them to work in the slightest, the most scrupulous way.

One of the key things was, I didn't want to make a film dealing with this subject-matter, and this character – and where we were taking him, to the very end – and have half the film working with younger actors that were supposed to be Bob, supposed to be Joe, and supposed to be Al. I just didn't. And so you may find that now that's something that is doable: actors playing themselves younger – or older. This is a first time and there is an element of cost. But I think the more it's used, the more the cost will become reasonable.

PH De Niro's performance is wonderful. Was he involved in the script?

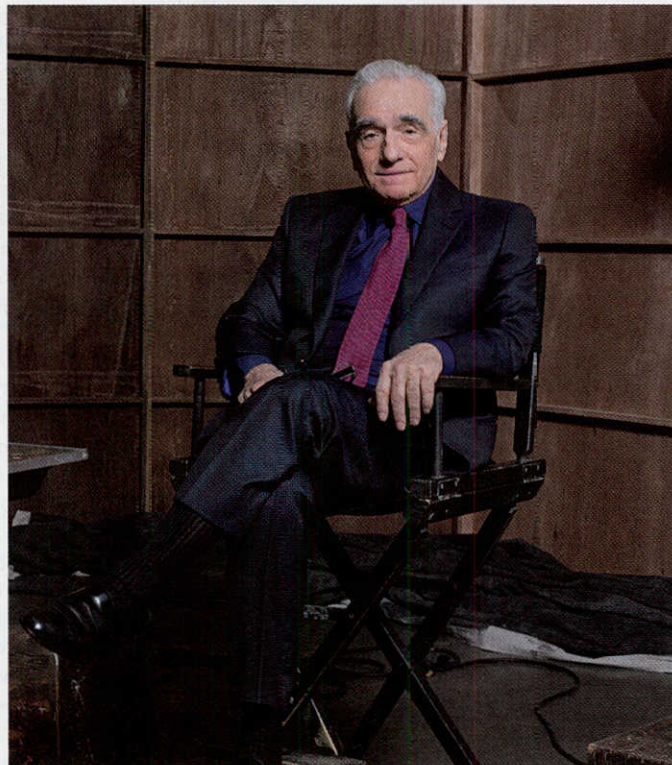
MS Yeah, once he'd read it he had questions, and then we made some changes as we were shooting too. But we just found our own way really.

PH Al Pacino was the new actor for you. He came into the production after some of the others. I read that he was slightly nervous joining the team.

MS I guess he was, but we didn't really rehearse or anything, we just would talk. I go back with Al. Francis Coppola introduced me to him the first time in 1970. Francis had come to my mother and father's apartment on the Lower East Side and we'd be eating dinner, and I became friends with him that year. Francis was telling my mother about *The Godfather* [1972] and how he was casting it but the studio didn't want who he was casting. "They didn't want Marlon Brando" and "I may have to do a screen test, but I can't tell Marlon it's a screen test." All this was going on, and then he said, "And then I have this new actor to play Michael," and he told my mother, "He's named Al Pacino and he looks just like your son. He's a terrific actor but he's never done a film before and they don't want him." And he said, "What am I going to do with these people?" And he said, "I'm gonna take you to the Village." And he took me to Greenwich Village, and I saw this play by Israel Horowitz called *Rats*, which was really interesting, and it was directed by Al. That's when I first met Al, that night. And then later on, Al, after *Godfather*, was in a different situation, of course, and I think I met him for *Serpico* [1973]. We talked, but they were on another level of production, it was like him and Dustin Hoffman – they were up, in a way, and we were still scrabbling in the streets in a sense.

PH So you were considering directing *Serpico*?

MS No, they were considering me! Thankfully, I didn't get it: it's a Sidney Lumet thing, and he handled it beautifully. I wouldn't understand... I couldn't... No, there were a lot of meetings that I... I was considered for but found that I couldn't fit in. Then he started working



Scorsese on working with Netflix

"They were excellent to work with. If I wanted to add something, nobody told me 'Cut 15 minutes out of it'"

organiser Big Bill Shelley [played by David Carradine].

PH I very much enjoyed Ray Romano's performance [as Bill Bufalino, the attorney who represented the Teamsters and worked closely with Hoffa].

MS When he read for me for *Vinyl* [the 2016 TV series about the 1970s New York music scene], the guy was great. They said, "Well, he's known from TV." I said, "Well, I know, but I never really watched the show, and I didn't realise." But he is spot-on every time. Everything he does is within the character. No, Ray Romano is a wonderful actor – in there with Al Pacino and Bob, and hanging in there. Whatever they threw around, he picked up.

PH You seem to have found Netflix to have been very good to work with.

MS For me they were excellent to work with.

PH And it's a very long film.

MS Yes, it is. Again I took advantage of the venue. I tried doing long-form television – but in order to really do that right you'd have to be doing every episode, almost every season. And so here I was just trying to experiment with form. And I know that people might be more amenable to spending time watching a film that's not a series, and so... I came to terms with the nature of the story itself and how I wanted to do it and how I felt I should do it. If I felt I could add something here, that would change this last section, we had really no sense of people coming in and saying, "Cut 15 minutes out of it." Which is... my life...

PH Historically, that's because they wanted theatrical releases, and long films would interfere with schedules?

MS That's right. That's been a struggle and a fight, a war in a sense. So now we just said, "What happens if I just push it here, a little bit? Now if I could sustain the interest, that's interesting." So that's how I pushed the construction of the film. They

with Brian De Palma a lot, but over the years he was always very good with me, respectful. We tried to work on a project one time in the 90s, on *Modigliani*, but we unfortunately never got it made. Or maybe in the late 80s. At that time I really couldn't get anything made. Nothing.

PH Pacino's performance in *The Insider* is very precisely judged in the way that he's so angry – and he's pretty much of a raging bull in certain ways – but then there are also these very tender moments...

MS Yes. I think a lot of it has to do with... that's Al's personality. There's a relationship between him and Bob that goes on for years, and that's what was tapped into. I don't know if the actual Frank Sheeran and Jimmy Hoffa were that way, but I do know from the book and from what I've read, that they were close. And they trusted each other. He was a confidant, so to speak, from what I can tell.

PH The film is a sort of reunion of lots of actors you'd worked with before, including Barry Primus from *Boxcar Bertha* [1972], which is a film about unions, isn't it?

MS That's right, it is: about the famous labour



← were very good with me on that, they gave us all the financial support we needed, and so that was the way this film had to be made. We could not get it made otherwise.

Ideally, I like films in theatres. But on the other hand, we tried to get this film made [through other studios] – it was the other aspect of those nine years when Steve wrote the script and we were trying all these different things and I wanted to do *Silence* – but nobody would give us the money. I’m not talking about an elaborate budget, I’m talking about a decent budget. Believe me: at this point in time, in my life, in Bob’s life, the way the picture had to be made, not even the CGI – they still wouldn’t give us the money. We can move fast. On the other hand, we may need to take a little time here and there. You know? And we’ve fought over the years to get that time. And the rug was pulled out from under us, really. They don’t care. Because the way that the Hollywood studios are now... it doesn’t exist any more, so we lost out that way. And Netflix stepped up. I thought, “Well, at least it can be shown in a theatre for a week or two. And maybe at a film festival, and maybe at some point it can be shown in theatres in a retrospective of some kind.” You know, it will exist. So that’s the way it transpired.

PH The mode of storytelling you use in the film is suited to the medium. I was thinking about David Simon talking about *The Wire* and saying that he wanted the audience to be “leaning in” to it – that he wasn’t explaining things, that you were immersed in this incomprehensible world, and you had to make sense of it...

MS Exactly. To see if you could join that world. As an audience. And go with that, let them take you, rather than us leading you.

PH The partly fictionalised Dylan documentary you did earlier this year – *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story by Martin Scorsese*, which was absolutely thrilling, has some parallels with *The Irishman*. Partly it’s the period – there’s a lot of focus on that particular moment, because it’s the 70s: 1975-76.

MS It did influence the structure of *The Irishman*. Because once we had *Rolling Thunder* constructed, [editor] David Tedeschi and I looked at it, and I said, “It’s conventional. It’s just a film about a group of people who go on the road and they sing some songs. I’m going to have to start all over.” We have to go with the music, maybe, go with the spirit of the *commedia dell’arte*. And then the words started to come in about possibly people who weren’t there, being there. [Laughs] That’s interesting. That’s a challenge, as they say. Let’s pursue that. Let’s say Sharon Stone represents certain things. What about the businessman, the marketing man? And that’s [the head of Paramount] Jim Gianopulos. And Irwin Winkler [producer of *Raging Bull*], my old friend, they started Chartoff-Winkler, they were agents for famous musicians in the 60s. So why don’t we not stop there? What about the filmmaker? Great. And he had to be taken advantage of. [Laughs] He possesses the performers, he wants to be them. It’s like us, making this... we love the music and the performers so much that the only thing we can do is photograph them and edit it, right? And we wanna be them. And no matter what, we’re left wanting more.

PH So that fed into *The Irishman*?

MS Well, yeah. Let me put it this way: something that I’ve been working on over the years is with narrative. On certain films I’m locked into a narrative – I used to say plot, but it’s more than plot, it’s narrative. But I’ve been trying to break free of it, and tell stories in a different way, and I found that the documentaries helped me with that. *Rolling Thunder*; the George Harrison one, *Living in the Material World* [2011]; *Public Speaking* [2010], about [author] Fran Lebowitz. They helped me go by tone – where the inspiration comes from takes us to another story, or to another place – and it’s more spatial than time.

PH Is this new approach about trusting intuitive connections more than you perhaps had done in the past?

MS Yes. Totally. Intuitive connections. Almost improvisatory... And then structuring that somehow. Finding where that takes us – and how you feel at a certain point, or what you’re thinking, and then pull it back here. And shock and then move again and take off, fly off at some other beautiful piece of music or something or, you know, some wonderful monologues.

PH Do you hear back from Dylan?

MS No. I’m good friends with his producer and archivist Jeff Rosen, and Jeff is the one. Last time I saw Dylan was at a big dinner for Armani, 20 years ago. I met him a few times with Robbie Robertson. That’s about it. But I do enjoy doing the films. They’re almost impossible, and it’s like *working out*, in a way, creatively, in that it’s not a matter of making the story of a tour. Who cares? It’s capturing a time and place. Even little things like when Allen Ginsberg is talking about poetry – and that you don’t have to use a [fancy] phrase like “diamond fairies dancing” or something, just listen to the room [instead]... listen to... maybe there’s a sound, even the sound of your pencil or pen on the paper. There’s the poetry there. I mean, naturally, one could argue against that, but it makes you think another way. And so that’s fascinating to me.

PH In *The Irishman* – and in *Silence* too – you use little mini-dissolves within a scene. That’s because there are bits of two different takes that you wanted?

MS Yeah. Just pragmatic. But it works.

PH It’s a technique from documentary, isn’t it? You notice, but you don’t mind.

MS Exactly, and that’s what I was trying to get to. I enjoy doing that now particularly from the documentaries. Sometimes you find yourself unnecessarily locked into a form: “Oh, you can’t go from here to there.” Well, you know what? Let’s just do it. And we’ll know if it’s disruptive. We’ll feel it. Let’s break the form. Really, this film is pretty straightforward in that way, but – well, it’s all throughout the picture, too, there are moments like that. I’ve been trying to fight that form and “It isn’t done that way!” Well, maybe it should be.

PH Thinking again of *Silence*, the shot of Hoffa’s body being cremated, where he’s got the gun beside him, reminded me that there’s the cross on Rodrigues’s body as he is cremated in *Silence*...

MS Yes, that, and it’s very close to what Dylan says at the end of *Rolling Thunder*, which I disagree with in a way, but he says “What’s left of this tour? Nothing, dust, ashes.” And then we punch into ‘Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door’. And we end with Allen Ginsberg, with the spirit of the whole tour, and his wonderful monologue at the end, and so it kind of refutes what Dylan says – but in his mind, from what I understand, he felt that those elements that put together that tour, and those 70s, will never happen again. It’ll happen in different ways, maybe, but for a different society and a different way of thinking – I don’t know, a different world. He used the word ‘ashes’, and so I was always reminded of the church of the Capuchin monks in Rome, where the head of the order in the 17th century, Cardinal [Antonio] Barberini, has his tombstone on the side of the church, and it says: “Here lies dust, ashes and nothing.” And I saw that 40 years ago and I’ve never forgotten it. And the Dylan thing reminds me of that and here, the cremation. And the passage into wherever it is. Oblivion.

PH But my feeling watching the *Rolling Thunder* film was that it was thrilling, these possibilities, it’s exciting...

MS It really was. He can say that about his perception of it. But the point is to let younger people know there was a time when such a



Scorsese on *Rolling Thunder*

‘On certain films I’m locked into a narrative. But I’ve been trying to tell stories in a different way, and I found the documentaries helped me with that’

FOREVER YOUNG

In making *The Irishman*, Scorsese drew on the renewed sense of creative freedom he’d felt making *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* (right), and 2016’s *Silence*, starring Andrew Garfield (opposite)



thing could be. Just for the value of itself. Not necessarily the big arena, and the money and the ads and the iPhones, and all that. There was a time when just the purity of this form was able to express itself that way. “Go out and make it for your own eternity” – that is what Allen Ginsberg says.

Actually, I had to make a speech for my daughter’s school graduating class two years ago, and I ended with that, “Go and make it for your own eternity.” How beautiful you are, how beautiful your friends are, just go and do it for yourself, for your own eternity. And I think that supersedes whatever feelings he may have had, or has, about this quote unquote ‘tour’. Maybe I’m romanticising it – but there was a purity in it, I think. Because it was a reaction against, I think, the *Before the Flood* album with The Band, going on tour, with the big arenas, and that sort of thing. That’s where rock and roll was going, but... [Dylan said] let’s go back the other way now, let’s go back to the essentials.

PH So in a way it’s like your earlier Dylan documentary, *No Direction Home* [2005], which is so stirring about the way he’s refusing all that stuff being loaded on to him.

MS Yes, exactly. Reinventing yourself, and ‘making it for your own eternity’. Just try to stay as best you can with the elements you choose to work with, or the world you choose to work in, try to remain as true to yourself as possible. Whoever you are. [Laughs] It’s all searching anyway, and so if you choose to go a certain way, there are certain elements that you can deal with. And that means, in terms of film, many different venues, now especially. I’m thinking about Agnès Varda. She used the tools, and if the tools became a digital camera that she could just point and shoot, that’s what she used. Whether I prefer seeing a film in a theatre or not, the point is that for the artist, or for a person who’s trying to be an artist, use what’s there, and you can create the venue somehow and get shown.

PH You’re about to make *Killers of the Flower Moon*, the story of the Bureau of Investigation handling of the 1920s murders of members of the Osage tribe in Oklahoma, who had become immensely rich through their oil rights. The narrative, in the book it’s based on anyway, is more linear than it is in *The Irishman*, isn’t it?

MS Yes, but again, I don’t know if I’d do it that way. I’ve been working with Eric Roth on the script for a few years now, and we’re – now, actually, yesterday, in this room, and last night – we’re knocking away at this script, and restructuring it, rethinking it. Because it’s convenient to do a sort of detective story, but we all know what it is. So I want

to explore something else, and that is the nature of a whole way of thinking as being complicit in genocide. It’s dehumanising people.

I was out in Oklahoma about six weeks ago, and ultimately, as the Osage told me, it’s about greed. And therefore you could think that these people don’t deserve any of it because they’re not human anyway. Not *really* human. That opens up a whole interesting situation, let’s say, with William Hale [the jovial, sinister white local patriarch] and his nephew Ernest, and [his Osage niece-by-marriage] Mollie, beyond even the Bureau of Investigation and [its agent] Tom White, who’s a good man, comes in – he couldn’t pin it on anybody, he couldn’t get evidence – they were *all* doing it. Or they’re all, at least, complicit in sins of omission. They were quiet about it. And ultimately that’s the story, the whole idea of the *status quo* being guilty.

PH De Niro is going to be in it?

MS [Yes, as] Bill Hale. William Hale. Gotta get him in there. And Leo [DiCaprio], I think playing Ernest at this point, the husband. And we haven’t yet settled on Tom White, but... yeah, it’s shifting the story from – since we know what happens and we know certain characters... Then how do you tell the story from the *inside* rather than from the exterior in. It’s going to take a few more months to get that right. But I was in Oklahoma, met with the Osage, Chief Standing Bear and his family, and it’s quite remarkable. I was certainly – how shall I put it? – *surprised* by the landscape. This is very different. I’m more used to the South-west, California, New Mexico – I did a film there. The landscape here is something that I hadn’t anticipated. The *space* of it. And the isolation is interesting. I mean, we’re just *beginning*, but I hope to get there, I hope to start shooting it by March or April.

But it’s exciting, and we’re just grappling now, getting the script together. I have to go around, do some travelling, for *The Irishman*, but these days it’s best just to get to work. ☺

WHERE TO SEE ‘THE IRISHMAN’

The Irishman closes the BFI London Film Festival on 13 October, when it will play simultaneously in select cinemas across the UK. See whatson.bfi.org.uk/lff for full details. It is released in UK cinemas on 8 November and streams on Netflix from 27 November. It will be reviewed in our next issue

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.