

ATTACH RESUME...

REVIEWS....

WEBSITE ADDRESS: www.johnrpepper.com

-We admire your knowledge of different languages, it seems like you speak all these languages equally well. It is believed that the native language is the one on which a person thinks. What language is your native language according to this point of view?

I was born and brought up in Italy and my first language was Italian. And it is the language that brings out my joy of life, my passion and exuberance toward others. I have noticed while in Russia that Italians and Russians have the same fast talk, same passion, and same intensity while they speak - -and for life.

Having been born in Italy, having American parents, and being brought up in Europe it was natural to accumulate languages. My mind was trained at a French school, the language of Descartes; hence I apply *logical thinking* and calculate in French. In my mind, I direct actors (although I can talk to them in Italian and French as well, in the technical sense) and do business in English as it is a compact language that allows greater directness and one can often express oneself best in short sentences. I use Spanish (actually I had to unlearn Catalan Spanish and learn Castilian Spanish when I lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina while producing the only film version ever made of Albert Camus' *The Plague* - -with William Hurt, Robert Duval, Raul Julia, Sandrine Bonnaire and Jean Marc Barr.) for its sensuality and sexiness. But Italian is what I use to talk food, politics and women. It is the language I best get angry in...because you can also go from anger to laughter in the same moment.

PS: I am sad that I do not speak Russian. I was only told I was coming to do this play three weeks before I got on the plane. However, I am proud to say that I learned the alphabet and can read the words...the problem is that I do not know what they mean... But, through the rehearsal process, and in living in an apartment on my own, I am slowly begging to accumulate some vocabulary. I mention this because I find it is very important, as an artist and a person, that when one arrives in a country that is new, where the language is new and the culture is new; it is the person who *arrives*, that has the responsibility of making the effort. Not the opposite as I see so many persons doing...who just expect everyone to speak *their* language. But, I must also add how impressed I am with so many young men and women who speak English. The people in Petersburg, old and young, are also so very kind in that they are always making an effort to try to help you, guide you. It also helps when they learn I am Italian...

-According to some reports, you starred in the film with Elizabeth Taylor. If this information is true, do you remember something (maybe some details) about these shootings? Which movie in which you've starred is the most memorable for you?

I love this story because it illustrates my debut in *show* business and also it tells a

truthful, underlying, attitude that I later discovered time and again when I worked in Hollywood.

I was maybe 7 years old and at Ostia beach, near Rome, with my parents; I was bored and playing at helping pull in the catamaran rowboats... A man began talking to me and, having been taught by my parents not to speak to strangers, I pointed to them and quickly ran back to safety. The man came over and introduced himself. He was the Casting Director of Cleopatra that Joseph Mickiewicz was directing at Cinecittà Studios in Rome.

It was the beginning of June, the summer was upon us, and I spent my time going from home to the Studio.

Everyday we rehearsed the *big* scene: Cleopatra's entrance to Rome where she presents her son, Caesarian, to his father, Julius Caesar. Every day I would climb what seemed an endless amount of steps to a small platform atop the 20 or 30 meter high Sphinx that was pulled by several hundred men. The platform must have been 3 x 3 meters, it must have been 20 or more meters and was lifted by 3 *slaves* (Black men), on either side, and then, keeping it perfectly flat, they descended all the way to the bottom where Caesar (Burton) and Mark Anthony (Harrison) are waiting. Boy it seemed very far to me... And I must admit every day I was a little nervous but did my best to hide it.

I would sit next to Elisabeth Taylor's stand-in and applied myself to being as serious as possible about the job. Remember, I was a little boy.

Finally, the day arrived when Miss Taylor, Mr. Burton and Mr. Harrison arrived on the set to try the scene... Although I did not know it, Taylor and Burton were the equivalent to royalty in those days. And you could feel the tension and electricity on the set (by the way there are wonderful photos of this rehearsal taken by the great American photographer Sam Shaw who later became John Cassavettes producer...).

I climbed back to my spot atop the platform and sat cross-legged with my arms crossed crisscrossed across my breast. Taylor sat on her throne, her hands resting upon her knees that were exactly at the same height as my face - -and about 20 centimeters away.

I can vividly remember the bright green turtle neck cashmere sweater with thin gold lines (in August in Rome) flowing down the front and the tight canary yellow silk pants with a small inverted V just above the ankle (I remember thinking that her pants were a bit short). She wore dainty sandals that also had gold thread in the leather. Her toes were bright red (these are all things a kid notices if he is bored...).

Understandably the men responsible for carrying the platform down from the heights were a little nervous to have Elisabeth Taylor on the platform and, for the first time, they wobbled a tiny bit. But that was enough for Taylor!

Gripping her seat she began screaming, at the top of her lungs for Burton in a high pitched nasal voice: “Dick! Dick! Dick!” Being a well brought up little boy I looked up at her, wanting to reassure her and said, with a slight Italian accent: “Don’t worry Miss Taylor, I too was a little scared at first; but you quickly get used to it.” Without missing a beat, she looked down at me, furious and repeatedly jabbing her index finger millimeters from my nose, screamed: “CHARLIE, YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR SKIN AND I WILL TAKE CARE OF MINE!”
That was my introduction to Show Business....and I am still here.

About movies I have acted in...

I was a child actor in Italy and worked with and later for (as Assistant Director) for Joseph Losey. Joe was important in my early formative years and gave me the first jobs as assistant director while in Rome and in Paris. It is there that I met and worked for, also as assistant director, for one of my two mentors, George Roy Hill (Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid; The Sting etc). Eduardo de Filippo was my second mentor - - I spent 2 years with him and was his last *protégé*. I eventually directed Inner Voices by Eduardo de Filippo at the Spoleto Festival in US; I was the youngest director to work on the main stage there.

Wishing to become an actor’s director, I wanted to understand the process actors go through. I took scene and technique lessons at the Actor Studio in Los Angeles. One day George Roy Hill explained that I had to be in front of the camera in order to understand what the actor experiences. So, with some luck and a lot of presumption, I would regularly leave the United States where I was living at the time and returned to Italy where I would act in B movies or TV films. I am not an actor; but it did teach me a lot about actors, their vulnerability, fear, desire to please and the immense responsibility they have - -whether it be on stage or in film. And I learned, as a director to try to say as little as possible. But I never feel I achieve that. I always have a little man in my head saying: “Too many words!”.

- Please tell us about your director's experience - main performances, authors of plays, titles of the plays, in which countries you've made these performances, and at least approximate dates. (Theater critics and journalists will ask us to give them this information .)

See website (www.johnrpepper.com) and attached Curriculum Vitae in Russian.

-Which things have drawn your attention to this play "My dear Matilda"? Why have you chosen it? Have you already identified the genre of the future performance? How are the relations with the Russian actors?

I never accept to direct a play I do not have a personal connection to. Sometimes it is apparent from the start, at others it becomes clear during the process of rehearsal. In the case of *My Dear Mathilda* there were several immediate factors.

To begin with I not only knew and admired Mr. Horvitz's early writings but I had also worked with him around 20 years ago when I was producing a film at Warner Brothers, in Hollywood. It was the late 1980's and we were remaking a French film called *Le Boeuf*. As it often happens with Hollywood projects, the film was not produced but I never forgot Israel's talent for structure and his ear for dialogue. So when his French agent, Marie Cécile Renaud of Agence MCR, called me and asked if I was interested in directing a Horovitz play I was immediately interested. When she added it was in St Petersburg, I was even more interested as I fell in love with the town when I first came to exhibit my photographs in 2012 at the Central Exhibition Hall Manège, invited by Photography Curator, Marina Dzhigarkhanyan (sister of Armen Dzhigarkhanyan).

The moment I arrived in SP, the first time, I knew I wanted to come back again, and again. The next step was that I would be directing Russian actors in Russian, not speaking it!

I thought that challenge was going to be very interesting as I am a very precise person when I direct; I am hyper specific with each sentence, each word and this exercise was going to be about getting the same result but having to *let go*... It was a challenge that I thought would be good since I am in my mid-50's and, in my opinion, at the beginning of one of the most interesting periods of an artist's life.

It is my belief that once an artist is in their early 50's they have enough experience behind you to have a reservoir of knowledge (pleasure, pain, sadness etc) yet one still has the energy, passion and curiosity of a younger person...

Therefore, bearing in mind all of these ingredients (American playwright, a play set in Paris (where I lived for 20 years), Russian actors in Russian, directed by an Italian...I was already inclined to accept; as the French would say, "What a great *ratatouille* !"

And then I read the play and it talked to me. I was entertained by the situation: a 50 year old American man, Matthias, spends his last pennies to fly to Paris where he has inherited an apartment from his father; due to its exceptional location, he expects to sell it very quickly and commence his life again. However, upon arriving Matthias discovers an 86-year-old woman, Mathilde, inhabits the apartment and he has to wait until she dies before he can put the flat on the market. On top of that she has a daughter, Chloe, his same age, who immediately dislikes him and makes his life miserable. The situation is interesting, comic, and the complexities of each character's *needs* make them interesting.

During rehearsals I began to really understand why I was drawn to this project: it is a play about a very selfish woman, who is charming as long as you are not her child; it

is a play about children who never received the love they so desperately needed by their parents and who felt alone, isolated in the world, during their whole life; it is a play about castrating mothers and emasculating fathers; it is also a play about passion in love and finally a play about love found late in life. These cuts and wounds are familiar to me. And also familiar is the light, sarcastic manner in which they are lived by the very smart characters in the play - -how they use humor and wit in order to protect themselves.

When I began to discover these aspects of the play I marveled, yet again, at how amazing our minds are: one part of the gives you many reasons why to accept the project but it is the subconscious that really knows why. And if you do the work, honestly, then you eventually begin to understand.

* * *

Having spent a certain amount of time of my early career studying Stanislavsky I was always wondering what it would be like to work with Russian actors. I knew how the technique, how its principles and the background work was used by European and Anglo-Saxon actors I wanted to experience it first had - -it's a bit like eating pasta dishes in Italian restaurants around the world but never in Italy! And I am thrilled.

My cast (Dmitry, Elena and Natalia) are an immense pleasure to work with especially for someone such as myself who has made his career ambition to be an 'actor's director'.

Dmitry's depth and talent, is like entering Ali Baba's cavern... Everything is there. Elena's experience, her grace and generosity with her partners, her ability to listen is so *bolshoi* that it makes me want run to rehearsals to see what they day will bring, what she will offer... and Natalia's humor and ability to be guided complete the entire process.

As a director I am well served and I only hope I serve them back as well as they do me.

[-Please tell us more about your life and work, some main aspects of your biography? You are the artist, photographer, writer, director ... So which of these professions is the most important for you?](#)

My website has enough information about my background and origins. In short, I was born and brought up in Rome, lived there until I was 18, went to Princeton University, attended NYU Film School and was a Directing Fellow at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. Most recently I was a Visiting Artist at the American Academy in Rome.

I come from a family of accomplished artists. My mother is sculptor Beverly Pepper

(www.beverlypepper.net); my father is writer Curtis Bill Pepper (see Wikipedia); my sister is Pulitzer Prize winning poet and Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard University, Jorie Graham; my brother in law Peter Sachs, painter and my sons, Sheppard (22) and Jameson (20) are emerging musicians. It is in the genes.

* * *

I am often asked about the different crafts that I use to express myself. Although they are different *vehicles* I don't differentiate between what my work is about: it is and has always been about human beings. I am interested in the frailty and beauty of me fellow man. I am interested in exploring what it is that makes men and women get up every day, why they insist on surviving, what their joys are, what their grief and sadness is about. I am interested in the joy of life as well as the deep sense of isolation we are experiencing more and more in this world that is moving faster and faster and getting smaller and smaller; this world where the differences that made us unique and provided challenges are being shrunk, homogenized to such a degree that we risk not only losing our individual cultural identities but we also risk, eventually, losing any individual identity at all.

My directing career has been a constant thread - - as has my photographic career. I consider those as my 'jobs'. Everything else, painting, writing etc., feed these two. The main difference is that the *process* of directing is a 'collective' occupation whereas that of photography is a 'solitary' profession. One fuels the other but I am always telling stories about people. Sometimes I need to retreat to photography to refill my personal psychological and emotional reservoir because I have given so much of myself during the process of directing. And then the opposite is also true. I am lucky that I am at a point in my career that I can choose where I want to be and what I want to invest my time and energy in.

* * *