

Interview With The Oscar Winning Actor Nicolas Cage

Written by Kam Williams
Sunday, 10 April 2011 19:06



[Nicolas Kim Coppola](#) was born in Long Beach, California on January 7, 1964 to August Coppola, an English professor, and Joy Vogelsang, a dancer and choreographer. He attended Beverly Hills High in L.A., which is where he developed an interest in acting prior to studying theater at UCLA.

Nicolas Cage made his big screen debut in 1982 in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, before changing his surname name to Cage to avoid any accusations of nepotism as the nephew of director Francis Ford Coppola. He then embarked on a remarkable career which has included an Oscar win in 1996 for

Leaving Las Vegas

as well as memorable performances in everything from

Raising Arizona

to

Moonstruck

to

Face/Off

to

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Snake Eyes

to

Adaptation

to

National Treasure

1 & 2 to

The Bad Lieutenant

to

Kick-Ass

which was #2 on this critic's Top 10 List for 2010.

Here, he talks about his latest film, *Drive Angry* 3-D, a supernatural thriller where he plays a fugitive from Hell intent on rescuing his granddaughter from the gang of goons who also murdered his daughter.

Kam Williams: Hi Nicolas, I'm honored to have this opportunity.

Nicolas Cage: Oh, thank you. Thanks for inviting me.

KW: I'd like to let you know that I loved *Kick-Ass* which was the #2 film on my Top 10 List for last year.

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NC: Oh was it? Thank you! I'm happy to hear that.

KW: What interested you in *Drive Angry* 3-D?

NC: There were a lot of different elements, starting with working with [writer/director] Patrick Lussier. Within ten minutes of talking with him, I realized how imaginative a person he was, and how passionate he was about the genre. When he said that I was going to get my eyes shot out and handed to me on a silver platter during one of the film's more unusual moments, I sparked to that immediately and said "I'm in!" for some reason which I can't entirely explain. Plus, I wanted to work in the 3-D format to see what I could do with it.

KW: How would you describe your character?

NC: I envisioned Milton as a mysterious, physics-defying phantom from Hell. So, I tried to play him like a ghost, almost, where you couldn't tell what he was thinking.

KW: Larry Greenberg says: *Drive Angry* may very well be the breakout film for the live-action 3-D genre. What was it like working with this advanced technology?

NC: During the first week of photography, Larry, I was like a kid in a candy store. I was doing whatever I could to mess with the format, trying to see if there was anything I could that would be unique in the 3-D format. Then, in the second week, I settled down when I began to realize that it was in many ways not unlike working on a regular movie with two dimensional cameras. It's a credit to Patrick because you can easily blow out the 3-D effect, if you're not careful about where you put your cameras and how you line up your actors. But because he had already done a movie in 3-D, he was a real maestro of the format and was able to shoot it efficiently.

KW: Children's book author Irene Smalls asks: Does being an action hero require taking a different approach to preparing for your role?

NC: I think that the main difference is in having to be more dense, more succinct, because you only have but so much time to develop and then convey the character. So, every moment has to count because there are other needs of the genre that have to be facilitated, like the car chase, the fight sequence, and so forth. Therefore, if you want to push a character through in this genre, you have to be precise and very efficient with any opportunities for development. But in answer to Irene's question, I'd say that overall, in terms of preparation and commitment, I'm

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equally committed and working just as hard whether it be an action film, an art film, or any other type of film.

KW: Harriet Pakula Teweles asks: From a lover in *Moonstruck* to a villain in *Face/Off* to an alcoholic in *Leaving Las Vegas* to a fugitive from Hell in *Drive Angry*, which of your roles have been the most challenging and which were the most fun?

NC: Well, it's been kind of a challenge to play a living dead man. So, I would say that *Drive Angry* was perhaps more challenging than those other because there's not a real frame of reference to rely upon. You have to build something totally from the imagination by asking yourself: What are the physics of being a living dead man? How does that unfold and what would create those odd moments which might make people scratch their heads and wonder who this guy really is? In terms of fun, Harriet, that's really a matter of who I'm working with. Here, the experience was great working with people like Amber Heard and Billy Burke. But it might not be fun when you're dealing with more moody subject-matter, but I don't want to mention names.

KW: Kathy Ancar says: I'm your biggest fan in New Orleans. You have always sung the praises of New Orleans, and we sincerely appreciate it. However, financial challenges forced you to give up the two homes you owned here. How involved were you in the rebuilding efforts of the city, and do you plan to ever again call New Orleans home?

NC: Thanks, Kathy. Some part of me will always have a home in New Orleans, in terms of my memories, and the amount of movies I literally make there. So, I'm always returning to the city. I feel like I was almost reborn in New Orleans. I've had experiences there that bordered on the fantastical. So, I can't ever really leave it. As far as the rebuilding, I don't want to toot my own horn, so to speak. I've been more interested in immediate response as opposed to actual rebuilding.

KW: It makes me think of that famous quote from William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It isn't even past."

NC: That makes sense to me, because everything's circular.

KW: Peter Keough asks: What place does the supernatural have in your life, given the haunted house you lived in New Orleans.

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NC: What's interesting about the supernatural to me is that it's something that is very natural. It's not more than natural. It may be super-physical in the sense of something out of the range of our physical awareness, so that invisible forces like spirits play into it. But in my opinion, all that stuff is very natural.

KW: Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier says: I love your work especially *Face/Off* [and *City of Angels*]. You are an actor, director and producer. What advice can you give to young actors who want to expand their venues in the movie industry?

NC: The main thing, Patricia, is to stick to your guns and to remember to ignore the negativity from people who say that you can't do it. That's a start. And that's something you have to remember even after you enjoy a measure of success in your career, myself included. Any kind of abuse can really discourage you from believing in yourself and from having the confidence to realize your dreams. I would especially offer to anyone just starting out that when someone tells you "You can't," that person has negative intentions towards you.

KW: Nick Antoine asks: Is it true that you discovered Johnny Depp?

NC: That was years ago. We were friends, but we really haven't spoken to each other in decades. At the time we were both kinda just starting out, and we had a mutual friend and, yeah, I did see something in him and thought that he would be able to achieve what he has.

KW: David "Mr. B." Barradale asks: How would you compare working with Cher in *Moonstruck* vs. Penelope Cruz in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* vs. Kathleen Turner in *Peggy Sue Got Married*?

NC: Well, they're each extremely talented, but I would have a hard time comparing them because I wouldn't want to praise one in a way which could possibly hurt another one's feelings. But they're all extraordinary actresses.

KW: Jimmy Bayan says: Nicolas, moving the searchlight over your life, are there five minutes that you would just love to live over again? And are there five minutes that you would just rather forget?

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NC: [Laughs] Yes, there are both, Jimmy.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

NC: No.

KW: The Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

NC: Yeah, I mean, that's part of the human condition.

KW: The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

NC: Yeah, that's also part of the human condition.

KW: The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good laugh?

NC: Last night.

KW: What is your guiltiest pleasure?

NC: I do like sugar.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

NC: A 19th Century novel called "Zanoni" by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton. <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1451597002/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

KW: The music maven Heather Covington question: What are you listening to on your iPod?

NC: Stowkowski's "Bach Symphonies" and Axl Rose's "Use Your Illusion 1."

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

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NC: Ultra-spicy eggs over easy with whole red peppers.

KW: The Uduak Oduok question: Who is your favorite clothes designer?

NC: I don't have one.

KW: When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

NC: Me again.

KW: If you could have one wish instantly granted, what would that be for?

NC: A peaceful world where children aren't hurt.

KW: The Ling-Ju Yen question: What is your earliest childhood memory?

NC: I must have been four years old. I was lying in a bed being shaken by women who were humming something in a foreign language. I was in a small, European village called Rodi. The women had cooked fox stew and they made me drink Anisette, a licorice-flavored alcoholic substance. They might have been trying to cast out demons.

KW: The Dr. Cornel West question: What price are you willing to pay for a cause that is bigger than your own self interest?

NC: I guess it would have to be the ultimate price, but I hope that doesn't happen any time soon.

KW: The Tavis Smiley question: How do you want to be remembered?

NC: As somebody who cared about people and about the Arts.

KW: Thanks again for the time, Nicolas [Cage], and best of luck with the film.

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NC: Thank you Kam [Williams]

Nicolas Cage's filmography:

1980 *Brubaker*

1981 *Best Of Times*

1982 *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*

1983 *The Outsiders*, *Valley Girl* and *Rumble Fish*

1984 *Racing with the Moon*, *The Cotton Club* and *Birdy*

1986 *The Boy in Blue* and *Peggy Sue Got Married*

1987 *Raising Arizona* and *Moonstruck*

1988 *Never on Tuesday*

1989 *Vampire's Kiss*

1990 *Tempo di uccidere* , *Fire Birds*, *Wild at Heart* and *Zandalee*

1992 *Honeymoon in Vegas*

1993 *Amos & Andrew* and *Deadfall*

1994 *A Century of Cinema*, *Red Rock West*, *Guarding Tess*, *It Could Happen to You* and *Trapped in Paradise*

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1995 *Kiss of Death* and *Leaving Las Vegas*

1996 *The Rock*

1997 *Con Air* and *Face/Off*

1998 *City of Angels* and *Snake Eyes*

1999 *8mm* and *Bringing Out the Dead*

2000 *Gone in Sixty Seconds*, *The Family Man* and *Welcome to Hollywood*

2001 *Italian Soldiers*, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* and *Christmas Carol: The Movie*

2002 *Windtalkers*, *Adaptation* and *Sonny*

2003 *Matchstick Men*

2004 *National Treasure*

2005 *Lord of War* and *The Weather Man*

2006 *The Ant Bully*, *The Wicker Man*, *Too Tough To Die* and *World Trade Center*

2007 *Ghost Rider*, *Grindhouse*, *Next* and *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*

2008 *Bangkok Dangerous*

2009 *Knowing*, *G-Force*, *Astro Boy* and *Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans*

2010 *Kick-Ass* and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*

2011 *Season of the Witch*, *Drive Angry*, *Trespass* and *The Hungry Rabbit Jumps*

2011 *National Treasure 3*

2012 *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance*

2013 *The Croods*

Some of the many Awards:

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1988: Festival de Cine de Sitges Award for Best Actor for *Never on Tuesday*
1995: Golden Globe for best actor for *Leaving Las Vegas*
Los Angeles Film Critics Association Award for Best Actor,
National Board of Review Award for Best Actor and
National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Actor (all these awards were for *Leaving Las Vegas*)
New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Actor for *Leaving Las Vegas*
1996: Oscar for best actor for *Leaving Las Vegas*
2001: Toronto Film Critics Association Award for Best Actor in *Windtalkers*

About the author of this article: Kam Williams is a syndicated film and book critic who writes for 100+ publications around the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada and the Caribbean. He pens for www.eurweb.com, www.afrotoronto.com and so on. He is also a columnist for www.megadiversities.com. Some of Williams' articles are translated into Chinese. In 2008, he was voted most Outstanding Journalist of the Decade by the Disilgold Soul literary Review. Williams is an erudite jurist who hold a J.D from Boston University, an MA in English from Brown University, an M.B.A. from The Wharton School. Kam Williams can be reached at kwilliams@megadiversities.com.