



In Conversation with Antonio Banderas: “For an actor, life starts when you say action and finishes when you say cut.”

Award-winning Actor discusses Desperado, The Mask of Zorro, Cat in Boots, Working with Directors Pedro Almodovar and Robert Rodriguez and his Connection to the Arab World.

Doha: October 28, 2011: Star of DTFF Opening Night Film *Black Gold* and award-winning internationally renowned actor, Antonio Banderas spoke about his life and work in a candid and wide-ranging ‘In Conversation’ session, moderated by UAE film producer and director Nayla Al Khaja.

After making his screen debut in 1982’s *Labyrinth of Passion* by legendary Spanish auteur Pedro Almodovar, Banderas has starred in more than 30 films including *Desperado*, *Frida*, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, *Interview With a Vampire* and is known worldwide as the star of *The Mask of Zorro*. He is also the voice of Puss in Boots in the *Shrek* series and the upcoming feature *Cat in Boots* (*Puss in Boots*).

Banderas, who spent his earlier life as a professional football player, explained that he took up acting when a serious foot injury forced him to give up his sporting aspirations. The injury proved to be a turning point in both his personal and professional life, and he soon after began working in the National Theatre in Spain.

“Theatre is like a woman who loves you very much,” Banderas shared with the sold-out audience at Katara’s Opera House. “I loved the ritual of it, the game of everyone excepting that reality. It is the art of the ethereal. It is a unique and personal experience for the audience at one particular moment and doesn’t exist beyond that moment. I think theatre is even more important today when everything is recorded and if isn’t recorded it feels like it doesn’t exist.”

It was during his time in theatre that Banderas met Pedro Almodovar, the Spanish auteur who started Banderas’ movie career after Almodovar met him and told him he had a romantic face and should do movies. Over the last 20 years the two have become frequent collaborators having made six movies together including *Law of Desire* (1987), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990), and their upcoming collaboration *The Skin I live In*.

Banderas described the movies he’s made with Almodovar as ‘very sacred work.’ He also paid tribute to Almodovar as an artist and filmmaker. “He puts you in a situation that is

completely different from every situation you've ever been in. He puts you in a situation where you can create, in that place of insecurity where creativity happens. You have to break yourself down - You have to go back to that place where you break yourself into pieces."

In contrast, Banderas said working with Robert Rodriguez was like working with a "big child, a kid with a camera."

Banderas' Hollywood career began by accident when he was 31 after Almodovar's *Women On the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* was nominated for a Foreign Language Oscar. At the time he spoke no English and as a result had to memorise his lines phonetically.

"Hollywood has provided me with the opportunity to step into many different genres and different styles from musicals to action, horror and the chance to make my first movie as a director," he said.

Working on *The Mask of Zorro* gave him an uncommon experience as the hero had an accent and spoke Spanish. "You don't know how important that was for the Spanish community, that the hero was Spanish and the bad guy was a blonde. It was huge," he said.

Speaking about his experiences as a voice actor playing Puss in Boots, Banderas said working in animated films is not just about voicing the part. "I try to give my heart, my soul to create a personality for the character and not just give my voice. The great thing about animation is that you are allowed to improvise. The script isn't locked, it's a live entity and is always open."

Banderas, who stars in *Black Gold*, the opening night film of this year's DTFF said he considers himself partly Arabic. "I am pretty sure I have Arab blood, I am an Andalucian, from the South of Spain which was ruled by Arabs for 8 centuries. I have always been very interested in Arab culture as its part of my heritage."

Answering questions about the Arab world's developing film industry, Banderas praised the Doha Film Institute's (DFI) work towards creating a sustainable film industry in the region. "Qatar is making a big bet and preparing your own people to be industry people in the Arab world and create your own cinema industry. It will take years but the bet is very serious."

He continued: "Ideally the thing you want to see is Arab stories told by Arabs by Arab directors, writers and actors. That's the ideal situation and I hope it happens but you have to be patient. You have to create an industry first and that takes time. You'll see the results in the next 10-15 years. Even in Spain where we have a longstanding industry we still have problems getting our films seen outside of our country."

Banderas drew parallels between Europe and the Arab world and agreed that cinema in the Arab region was particularly vibrant at the moment because "sometimes the best cinema comes from the need to talk, to break down barriers because you have powerful stories to tell."

Asked to give his advice to those starting in the business, he stressed the need to focus on your craft. "You have to thoroughly love what you do. I love working and I love being in front of the camera and playing characters. I'm 51 years old, I've been in this profession for 33 years. I still love it and I'm still learning."

Discussing the pitfalls of fame and success, he said: "There are a lot of distractions in this profession and sometimes you can get carried away by them. Don't think about success, think about the stories you want to tell, the characters you want to create and commit yourself to that."

For more information relating to Festival box office venues, screening locations, transportation or ticket purchases please visit www.dohafilminstitute.com/filmfestival/info or email boxoffice@dohafilminstitute.com

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Notes to Editor

About Doha Film Institute (DFI): The Doha Film Institute (DFI) is an independent cultural organisation established in 2010 to incorporate Qatar's film initiatives under one banner.

Located at Qatar's new cultural hub, Katara, DFI's many initiatives include film and television funding for MENA and international films, year-round education programs, film screenings, and the annual Doha Tribeca Film Festival (DTFF).

In addition, DFI has established a number of strategic cultural partnerships with leading local and international organisations including Katara Cultural Village Foundation, Tribeca Enterprises, World Cinema Foundation, Maisha Film Labs and Giffoni Film Festival.

DFI was founded by H.E Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. Along with Her Excellency, DFI leadership comprises DFI Board Vice-Chair and Festival Board Chair, H.E. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Fahad Al-Thani; DFI Board Member and Festival Board Vice-Chair, H.E. Dr. Hassan Al-Nimah; DFI Board Member, Mr. Mansoor Ibrahim Al-Mahmoud; Festival Board Member, H.E. Sheikh Jabor Bin Yousuf Al Thani; and DFI Executive Director, Amanda Palmer.

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