

# **TCM** THE PLOT THICKENS

## EPISODE FIVE: BOGDANOVICH, THE MISUNDERSTOOD

**BURT REYNOLDS FROM *THE TONIGHT SHOW*:** We have a mutual friend of course, Peter Bogdanovich.

**ORSON WELLES FROM *THE TONIGHT SHOW*:** That's right. As a matter of fact, you have me to thank for the fact that you were asked to be in the picture that was probably the least successful of any of your past.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's Orson Welles and Burt Reynolds on *The Tonight Show* back in 1978. The most popular late-night talk show of all time. Regularly seen in more than seven million homes. Reynolds was a guest host, sitting in for Johnny Carson. Reynolds had been in Peter's last two movies. Both flops.

**ORSON WELLES FROM *THE TONIGHT SHOW*:** My feeling was that the picture needed you.

**BURT REYNOLDS FROM *THE TONIGHT SHOW*:** No, it needed a lot more.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Burt Reynolds was really famous at this point. 1978 was the first of five consecutive years when he was the most bankable movie star in the country. Orson, of course, was a famous director and actor. And one of Peter's closest friends. Burt's jokes Peter could handle. The jokes from Orson devastated him.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, they'd said some unpleasant things about me. Yeah, I was watching it. I sent Orson a note the next day saying, I was watching, I tuned in to see what you thought, how you guys were doing. Something like that.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter is telling me this story late last summer - 41 years had passed. And it's still hard for him. Remembering how he felt when his friend, arguably the man he admired most, made fun of him, mocked him even, on national television.

**BURT REYNOLDS FROM *THE TONIGHT SHOW*:** I had the distinction of getting him on the show.

**ORSON WELLES FROM *THE TONIGHT SHOW*:** How did you get him off?

**BURT REYNOLDS FROM *THE TONIGHT SHOW*:** Well that was the thing.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** By now, I know Peter well enough to recognize the difference between his rehearsed stories - the ones he's told over and over in interviews - and the stuff he hardly ever talks about. The stuff he doesn't want to talk about. Peter doesn't do impersonations in those moments. He becomes a reluctant storyteller. A few days after that *Tonight Show* episode aired, Orson got in touch with Peter.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** An envelope arrived with two letters in it. One long one apologizing, saying it was a betrayal of friendship and he didn't think it was the right thing. And he's very sorry that he did that. So. And the other was a shorter note saying, you deserved it. And then he wrote, take your pick. That was very Orson.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** You say that's very Orson. I say that's incredibly fucked up.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** [LAUGHS] I think Orson didn't know what to say. I don't think he wanted to attack me, it just sort of happened.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** No one can say for sure why Orson made that joke at his friend's expense. Peter thinks Orson was mad at him because of a movie. A movie Peter ended up making. A movie Cybill Shepherd helped him get.

[THEME MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I'm Ben Mankiewicz and this is *The Plot Thickens*, a podcast from Turner Classic Movies. This is Episode Five: Bogdanovich, The Misunderstood.

[THEME MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter had just made three consecutive flops. Two of them with Cybill Shepherd. Now instead of being the "it" couple, Hollywood had turned on them.

It was 1978 and Peter hadn't made a film in two years. He needed a movie and he needed it to be a good. That movie eventually came through a series of events that could only happen in Hollywood. And it began with Peter's first hit.

**THE LAST PICTURE SHOW RADIO TRAILER:** *The Last Picture Show*, nominated for eight Academy Awards, including best picture of the year.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In a strange way, *The Last Picture Show* caused Peter's life to intersect with a glossy symbol of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s: *Playboy* magazine.

In recent years, there's been a cultural reckoning when it comes to *Playboy*. But back then, *Playboy* was almost mainstream.

**PLAYBOY COMMERCIAL:** Wait till the brothers see this month's *Playboy*. The September *Playboy* at newsstands now.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** *Playboy* has always been a magazine featuring photos of naked women. By the 1970s, it had upwards of 7 million subscribers. And during the sexual revolution, it became more than just a magazine. It was a lifestyle and an empire, presided over by one man.

**HUGH HEFFNER MONTAGE CLIPS:** My name is Hugh Hefner. I'm 35 years of age and I'm the editor and publisher of *Playboy* magazine. Hefner's Magazine is most widely known for its total exposure of the human female. A code of relaxed sexual conduct which fit a hip generation.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Hugh Hefner, or Hef, bought a mansion in Los Angeles in 1971. He then made it something more than an expensive home.

**HUGH HEFFNER ARCHIVE AUDIO:** I tried to put in a setting with the pool, the rock and the waterfall.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The Playboy mansion quickly became ground zero for the hedonistic lifestyle Hefner was peddling.

**ROLLER DISCO AND PAJAMA PARTYCLIP:** Hugh Hefner invites you to Playboy's Roller Disco and Pajama Party.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** His parties were legendary. The women in his magazine would attend, but so would celebrities. Some were regulars: Jack Nicholson, James Caan, Bill Cosby.

So, what does all of this have to do with *The Last Picture Show*? Well, *Playboy* had gotten hold of a 35-millimeter print of the film.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Which was easy to get 'cause they said, they were running it at the mansion. And somebody clipped out four or five frames from the picture, in which Cybill was naked, nude, partially.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** There was a short short scene in *The Last Picture Show* where Jaycee, that's Cybill's character, comes to a pool party and is surprised to find everyone swimming naked.

**THE LAST PICTURE SHOWCLIP:** Wanna join the club? Sure. Well, you gotta get undressed out there on the diving board. So everybody gets to watch.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Cybill strips down and joins them in the pool, and that's how *Playboy* got its pictures.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And, uh, they used it in the magazine. Well, this was, this was a very bad situation. Cybill was very upset because I had told her it would never happen. But they, it didn't happen from anybody who'd taken pictures on the set. It was some frame enlargements as I said. Which is really below the belt.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** *Playboy* published the shots of Cybill in its November 1972 issue. Maybe it was a coincidence, but that issue became *Playboy's* best-selling magazine ever. Cybill sued *Playboy* for nine million dollars. *Playboy* fought it and the lawsuit dragged on.

All this was going on while Orson was living at Peter's house. Orson had just read *Saint Jack*, a novel by Paul Theroux. It's about an American pimp in Singapore who dreams of opening his own brothel, getting rich, and then going back to America to retire. Orson liked the book and thought it would make a great movie.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I said, do you want to make it? He said, I think it'd be a good picture. I said, I said, well, let me find out who owns it. It turns out *Playboy* owned it. So, Orson says, when I told him, and he said, why don't you settle your lawsuit and get the rights. Well, I had to ask Cybill what she wanted to do. And Cybill said alright.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Cybill agreed and settled with her lawsuit with *Playboy*. She got half the rights for *Saint Jack*. *Playboy* also agreed to produce the film, along with Cybill and Peter. Orson would write and direct. But Orson being Orson, he dragged his feet, couldn't seem to make up his mind about who should play the lead.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Finally, Hefner and, uh, Cybill said to me, we don't think Orson is going to ever get around to this. We want you to direct it. Well, I couldn't say no, because Cybill had given up her lawsuit and Orson wasn't taking that into consideration. And so, I did the picture, which kind of fucked up my relationship with Orson for a few years.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The jokes that Orson made on *The Tonight Show* didn't help their relationship either. But the real test of their friendship came two years later during Peter's worst moment. Orson would fail, miserably.

Peter has always believed the reason he made three consecutive flops was because he compromised. When he wanted to shoot in black and white again, the studio wouldn't let him. When he wanted to cast Cybill again - the studio wouldn't let him. And he didn't always get the leading men he wanted either.

For *Saint Jack*, Peter decided not to compromise. He and Cybill were now in business with *Playboy*. But they needed studio money to make the film. They took *Saint Jack* to Paramount.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** They said, we'll do it with Paul Newman or Warren Beatty or something. No, I want Ben Gazzara. And nobody would do it with Ben.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Ben Gazzara was a big Broadway star in the mid-fifties. In the 70s, he starred in some of the first independent movies of the era. Experimental films financed without a big studio. Peter had admired Gazzara since seeing him on Broadway.

**CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF ORIGINAL CAST CLIP:** A hot tin roof is an uncomfortable place to stay on.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** He knew in his gut Ben was right for Jack Flowers, the lead character in *Saint Jack*. In the film, Jack Flowers is a pimp, but he's likable charming, friendly, and loyal.

**SAINT JACK CLIP:** Me, all I want is a yacht, a big mansion...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** He has a strong moral center, a tough guy who doesn't take himself too seriously.

**SAINT JACK CLIP:** ... a bowler hat, silk pajamas, play golf, smoke real Havanas.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter was willing to walk away from Paramount and all its money to cast Ben. Leaving the studio also meant Peter took a huge pay cut. Instead of getting more than a million bucks to direct, he'd get about \$50,000.

Peter went to Roger Corman, the Hollywood producer who had given Peter his first big break. Roger loved the idea and agreed to finance it. Cybill wrote a first draft of the screenplay. Then she and Peter took off on a tour of Asia to scout locations. Roger wanted Peter to shoot in the Philippines instead of Singapore because it was cheaper.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And he says, I have a deal there, in Manila. We went to Manila, didn't look like Singapore. We went to Tokyo it didn't look like Singapore. No place looked like Singapore except Singapore. So, we had to shoot it there.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter arrived in Singapore and was soon joined by Ben Gazzara and his old friend George Morfogen, who was producing.

**BEN SLATER:** And they all gathered together like a kind of like they're about to do some kind of heist, showing up in Singapore in the beginning in 1978.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Ben Slater is a film professor in Singapore. He wrote a book called *Kinda Hot: The Making of Saint Jack in Singapore*.

**BEN SLATER:** None of them with any kind of working visa all showing up as tourists piling into a very expensive hotel on Orchard Road called the Shangri-La and trying to figure out how they were going to make this film.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** But there was a big problem. The book, *Saint Jack*, was extremely unpopular with influential people in Singapore. It wasn't officially banned, but the government unofficially hated it.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** 'Cause they didn't like the idea that that, that they were in fact an R&R hub for the kids in Vietnam. The war in Vietnam and they'd come over to Singapore for R&R for 3, 4 days.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And what did R&R mean?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well, it meant getting laid and getting drunk. And they did that, and so Singapore did not like that image.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So, Peter came up with a solution. He pretended to be making a different movie.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** We didn't mention the book. We said, we're doing a picture about, uh, a guy who wants to be a nightclub owner. It was kind of a cross between *Pal Joey* and *Love Is A Many Splendor Thing*. And then we called it "Jack of Hearts," and that's what we, ostensibly doing. We lied like, just lied.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The crew even wore "Jack of Hearts" t-shirts to fool the authorities. Apparently, it worked.

**BEN SLATER:** That ruse did hold for pretty much most of the shoot and they were never really confronted on it.

***SAINT JACK* TRAILER CLIP:** We're on the island of Singapore, making a movie here. Singapore's in the South China sea, right off the coast of Malaya, they call it Malaysia now. Singapore.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter's the star of his own trailer, narrating directly to a handheld camera as he walks through Singapore at night.

***SAINT JACK* TRAILER CLIP:** This is Bugis Street. In daytime they sell food here. And a lot of other things.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter cast himself in the movie. He played Eddie Schuman, a fixer for the US Army, probably working for the CIA, who hires Jack Flowers to run an R&R Camp for overseas soldiers.

***SAINT JACK* CLIP:** Ever since Kennedy and Castro, you can't get a good cigar in America.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter was inspired by his surroundings. He wanted *Saint Jack* to capture the look and feel of Singapore in the 70s. so, he filled the cast with locals who'd never acted before.

**BEN SLATER:** He was looking for people with really interesting and striking faces. And then he was, you know, getting them to perform as naturally as possible.

***SAINT JACK* CLIP:** So long pal. What are you sore about? Who said I'm sore, I'm happy. Now I've got some money, I buy myself a rich boy.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The female lead in *Saint Jack* was Monika Subramaniam. She played Ben Gazzara's girlfriend in the movie. She auditioned for *Saint Jack* on a whim. The choice to cast Monika was great for the movie, not so great for Peters personal life.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** After the break -- we meet Monika.

[AD BREAK]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Today, Monika Subramaniam lives just outside of Phoenix with her husband. She still has prominent cheek bones and a perfect smile. A certain self-confidence and spunk has stuck around too.

Forty years ago, she was living in Singapore and working as a travel agent. One day, in 1978, a neighbor told her about an open casting call for a movie that was shooting in the city. When she got there, the place was packed. When it was Monika's turn to audition, she was brought into a room where Peter and Ben Gazzara were waiting. She hadn't heard of either of them.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM;** And they said, OK, we are looking to just see a personality. And that's all we are here for. I'm going to give you a scenario. I want you to. You work in a bar. I said, OK. So you work in a bar. A man walks in. And now I want you to seduce him. And I answer, that's easy. I can do it. I just sit next to Ben and I said hello, you know. Would you like to buy me a drink? I think something like that. And he said, sure, what would you want to drink? And then I reached over on his chest and I started unbuttoning his shirt a little bit. And so they all both smiled. And then that was it. And he says OK, good job, he says.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Monika got called back twice. At the second callback, she got the news. She'd been cast as the female lead in *Saint Jack*. She beat out 600 other hopefuls for the role. She didn't have a lot of dialogue. But the money made up for that: \$200 a day.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** And that was a big time money. Yeah. That's in 1979 this is big money.

***SAINT JACK*CLIP:** Your Italian? Yeah that's right. Italian. Good lover, bad husband.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Monika had never acted before, but that's what Peter wanted. He was looking for authenticity. He even renamed her character Monika.

***SAINT JACK*CLIP:** Come here I've got a present for you/ I don't need a present/ Monika.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Monika knew how to stick up for herself, and she put that to use in a love scene with Ben Gazzara. The scene required the two of them to kiss.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** We were leaning against a patio door and he reached over and grabbed me and kissed me. So, I thought was just a little lip kiss. So, I gave him a lip kiss and he just pushed me back. and said What do you think this is? A college kiss in? Is it? That's ridiculous. he said. So, then Peter said, Monica, you cannot do that. I said well, this guy is trying to stick his tongue down, are you crazy? I said, no. [LAUGHS] So, Peter said Ben, you've got to watch it, man. Don't be crazy, you know. So, I said, I'm not kissing for \$200 a day. And then I threw a number, which you're gonna be impossible number I'm thinking that they're gonna say no. And I said a thousand. I'll do it. I thinking they might say, oh, you know what? Forget it. We'll just skip the kissing part. Right. But they did not. They they went with it. So, I had no choice. I put the number. I have no choice. I think it was three kisses. I was rich by three thousand.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Monika said the hardest part was learning the lines because she never got her script until the last minute.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** This was like, given to you minutes before. The way this is because Peter is writing as he goes along.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And so was Ben. He helped Peter with the screenplay. Together they turned Jack Flowers into a character Ben was perfectly suited to play.

***SAINT JACK*CLIP:** I'm going to call it Singapura. Lion city.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Before Ben died in 2012, he talked to Turner Classic Movies about *Saint Jack*.

**BEN GAZZARA:** We were working constantly together. We were writing the scene we were gonna shoot the next day the very night before.

***SAINT JACK*CLIP:** Welcome back already, why couldn't you talk to me on the phone? You aren't that desperate, are you?

**BEN SLATER:** So it was a great collaboration and I think there was a huge amount of bonding going on between them over cigars, whiskey and women.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Everything about the *Saint Jack* production felt spontaneous. The crew had to move quickly. They shot in doorways and alley ways. There were no dressing rooms, no prep areas, They were on the run, staging seans at the last minute. Grabbing shots, then moving on.

**BEN SLATER:** They were trying to make the movie totally under the radar by shooting only in private locations like people's houses, hotels. Locations that they could control. And then on the streets. Which they shot very much Guerrilla style.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Even though *Saint Jack* was the story of a pimp, the book it was based on didn't have many details about prostitutes. So, for dialogue, Peter would go to brothels in the afternoons - during off hours and listen to the women speak to one another. According to Ben Gazzara, everything they did was in the service of making the movie.

**BEN GAZZARA:** We walked the streets together, Peter and I, we went to all the places my character would have gone to or did go to, we went to the brothels, we cast whores to be the whores. I play a pimp, you see.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter hired real sex workers to act in the movie. He slept with some of them too. And he paid them generously not to have sex with him. He says he paid them to leave the sex trade.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I, I gave them somewhere between, I can't remember it was, but it was somewhere between \$5,000 and \$8,000.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** To get out of this business.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** To get out, to stop being hookers. Well, it is odd, but you know, I like women. And I, I, and they made me sad to see those girls. They were nice people. I liked them all. I like Women. there was one girl, Mary Lim, her, her, her working name was Ling-Ling. And, um, she was so sweet and she was so frightened. She thinks, she thought the devils were going to get her or something. And I said, look, I'm going to give you some money, go back home. She'd had an illegitimate child and the town turned against her. It was ugly shit. I said, go somewhere where you're loved and liked. And I never heard from her again. But she's in the picture and she was very good in the picture.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Four months into the shoot. During their spring break, Peter's daughters came to Singapore to see their father. Antonia and Sashy stayed at the Shangri-La hotel with their aunt. Peter's sister Anna.

**SASHY BOGDANOVICH:** It was the most amazing hotel. I just never seen like that, of course. And, you know it was really hot and we swam in the pool. You know a lot of the stuff he was shooting was, you know, risqué I guess. Is why we didn't go to the set that much.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** But their visit wasn't without adventure. And Gazzara, like a mischievous uncle let Antonia smoke a cigar.

**ANTONIA BOGDANOVICH:** Ben always smoked cigars. Benny my dad called him. I wasn't even close to being a teenage, but I was like I wanted to try a cigar. My dad smoked cigars too. So, I took a couple of puffs of Benny's cigar and I got so sick. I didn't even inhale but I got sick.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Don't get the wrong impression. According to Sashy this was all supervised, by Peter himself.

**SASHY BOGDANOVICH:** I mean my dad was there, so they were all smoking cigars and Antonia and I smoked a cigar and we proceeded to completely throw up. There was definitely joints going around too, but he didn't let us smoke those, but we could pass them.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Throughout those months in Singapore, Peter felt liberated. A world away from Hollywood and all of the criticism. Whiteout studio executives hovering over him was free creatively. He was also away from Cybill.

In the beginning, Peter and Monika just flirted.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** I think it was we were both drawn to each other. He was an attractive young man at that time. And I didn't look bad myself at that time. So, two attractive people from two different worlds were attracted.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Monika, who was 21 at the time, had a boyfriend. And Peter was 38 and in a long-term relationship with Cybill Shepherd. Monika says nothing happened between them for a while, but then things changed.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** One day Peter says to the crew, weather is not good, we're going to cancel it for a couple of days and we'll reshoot again, blah, blah, blah. So, I was happy and I was ready to go home to my boyfriend saying that now that no job for a couple of days, I could spend some time, quality time with my boyfriend. I rushed back home early at lunch to hopefully, you know, be there at his place. And then I found him with another women. So, I was upset. I'm like, damn fool. That's why it got me going with Peter.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter and Monika tried to be discrete, but Cybill visited Peter in Singapore. She figured it out.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And I remember she looked like she'd been crying all night. And she left. I couldn't do anything about it at that point, you know, we couldn't drop Monika. We never discussed it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter's six months in Singapore marked the end of his eight-year relationship with Cybill. They broke up, and when Cybill got back to LA, she packed up and moved home to Memphis. Shooting on *Saint Jack* wrapped, and Peter flew back to LA to begin editing the movie.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** And I knew this relationship, or this friendship is not going to last. It was something that told me that it's not going to last, enjoy it while you got it. And just move on with life.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** But Peter didn't move on. He was lonely back in LA, with Cybill gone. So he called Monika.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** He was very, very, very down. He called me in Singapore. He said, Ranji, that's what he calls me, Ranji. What are you doing? Can you come to the states? I need you here.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** When Monika got to Los Angeles, Peter already had a houseguest: his mother, Herma.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** Oh, she was a lovely lady. Lovely. I was staying in a hotel and I was in L.A. and she says to her son, that's ridiculous. You put her you bring her to say to L.A. and you put her up in a hotel. Your girlfriend just dumped you. And you worry about what your girlfriend is gonna think, y'know? And he said, no, I don't want Cybill to be upset. And all he said because he was so much in love with Cybill. And his mom says, no, you bring her here to this house right now.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Herma was still living in Arizona, but she visited L.A. often to see Peter and her granddaughters. She would spend her mornings with Sashy.

**SASHY BOGDANOVICH:** I would wake up early like her so she would make me tea every morning with her. It was just my time with her. She to me was always this pure thing who's just going to love me.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Herma's travels slowed down late in 1978 after she was diagnosed with Cervical cancer. Peter would charter a plane and take his daughters to see her after she was too sick to travel.

Herma Bogdanovich died of cervical cancer in early 1979. Peter was at her side with his sister and his daughters. Poly was there too, she had remained close to Herma.

In 1997, Peter published a book called *Who the Devil Made It: Conversations with Legendary Film Directors*. He dedicated the book to his parents, and wrote "To the memory of my brave, dear and inspiring mother. An overly selfless person and also my first director, first editor, first friend."

Eventually Monika left Los Angeles and used some of her money from *Saint Jack* to travel the world. Her relationship with Peter fizzled out.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** It's tough to stay with the same girl, you know, if you're not in love with her. I wasn't in love with her, but I liked her a lot.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Monika still keeps in touch with Peter. In fact, before she agreed to our interview, she called Peter and asked if he thought it was a good idea.

**MONIKA SUBRAMANIAM:** I am one of the fortunate and lucky Singaporean girls that got an opportunity to experience this. I was fortunate. And I am blessed with it. And I don't regret a single day in a single minute of that time.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter and Cybill Shepherd have remained close too. And Cybill says Peter wasn't the only one who cheated. She also had an affair with Elvis.

**CYBILL SHEPHERD:** It was on Sunset Strip. Elvis was playing Las Vegas. So, Peter knew I cheated on him.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** He wasn't, he wasn't mad?

**CYBILL SHEPHERD:** He might have been a little mad.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** But he got past it, because it's Elvis.

**CYBILL SHEPHERD:** Well, I mean, yeah, that's true. Elvis was the king.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Cybill says the thing that really ended her relationship with Peter was her desire to have kids.

**CYBILL SHEPHERD:** It's funny, how you get to a certain age as a woman. For some women. Not all women. And, you know, you just kind of want to have a family. And I fell in love with a Memphis man and--

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I said, what is he, a mechanic? That was my remark. And she said, yeah, matter of fact he is.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Cybill married the mechanic and had a daughter. The marriage didn't last. She married a second time and had two more children, but later divorced.

Cybill still has paintings by Borislav Bogdanovich, Peter's father, hanging on her walls. And she bought the same kind of piano that Peter's mother Herma liked to play. So I couldn't help but wonder, sitting across from Peter, why did he blow up his relationship with Cybill to have an affair with a woman who, by his own admission, he didn't love?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well Ben, it's very tough to, it's an occupational hazard. Truffaut wrote about it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Francois Truffaut was a director and film critic who was one of the leading lights of the French New Wave. Truffaut was known for having affairs with his leading ladies.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** You have this attractive woman who is depending upon you to help her get her performance because she never acted before. Or even if they have acted, you, you know, you're still the director. And so you're sort of creating a character. And you're attracted to that 'cause you're, you're creating it. No, don't say that, say this, you know, don't look over there, look over here. You're directing her, and she particularly, particularly, uh, people who had never acted before.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That is the most artful explanation of one of the oldest clichés in Hollywood: older director falls for young ingenue. Some might call it narcissistic. I don't even think Peter would disagree with that characterization.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The world in 2019, 2020 looks differently on the power dynamics of relationships.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, that's true.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Do you look back on your own actions any differently now?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** No, not really. I don't think I took advantage of anybody. I don't think I was a prick. I was nice to the women I had a relationship with. I have enough regrets about things, I don't really feel like I did anything wrong. The girls knew they were in for a short ride or whatever happened. It wasn't like I had people falling in love with me and I was jilting them or something like that. It was, sex was more casual in those days I think than it is now.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** This mindset, a kind of 70s era, casual approach to sex and relationships was evident throughout *Saint Jack*.

**SAINTE JACK CLIP:** People make love for so many crazy reasons, why shouldn't money be one of them, eh?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** *Saint Jack* was released in April 1979. The reviews started to come in from overseas, and they were good.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** My position in Europe was completely altered by *Saint Jack*. I think they thought I was a pretty good director or whatever. I remember a French magazine called *Positif* did a, did a piece about me after *Saint Jack* and the headline was, Bogdanovich, The Misunderstood.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The film broke Peter's losing streak and it won the Critics Prize at the Venice film festival. In the U.S., the reaction was more mixed, but mostly positive. Siskel and Ebert both raved, with Ebert naming it one of the year's ten best.

**SISKEL AND EBERT CLIP:** My favorite overlooked movie of 1979 was *Saint Jack*. *Saint Jack* is one of the sleepers of 1979 and a movie I think a lot of people are gonna rediscover one of these years with a lot of admiration and pleasure. I think you're absolutely right, I think it's a good film. I think history will bear you out, it'll be a movie people will see for a long time.

**TODD MCCARTHY:** What's important about *Saint Jack*, is that he I felt that he had finally found his own style.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Film Critic Todd McCarthy started writing for *Variety* in 1979, the year *Saint Jack* was released.

**TODD MCCARTHY:** *Saint Jack* introduced a new style and a new feel in Peter's work. He did the long takes. He did the wonderful camera moves. But they were all discrete. The camera was exactly where it needed to be at every moment to maximize the effect of the scenes. So there was a fluidity, an ease a confidence.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Polly Platt, Peter's ex-wife, was surprised by *Saint Jack*. "I loved it," she told a biographer years later, "even though I thought it was frightening in its sexuality. Peter has always been prudish, sheltered, didn't drink, didn't do dope and what was this?"

**SAINT JACKCLIP:** Hey Honey what are you drinking? Hot chocolates honey. Welcome to Singapore.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Years later Ben Gazzara said working on *Saint Jack* was one of the most creative experiences he'd ever had.

**BEN GAZARRA:** Some parts stay with you long, much longer than other ones. And *Jack* stayed with me to this day. I loved the memory of this whole experience. I love Peter. He is such a talented, talented man. Misunderstood in the business. Generous, terrific guy. And a wonderful director.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Of course, even when the reviews were good, the press was still happy to knock Peter down a few notches. A headline in the *Detroit Free Press* read, "Cybill may not love him, but at least the critics do."

*Saint Jack* has now found a cult following. It's a movie that's not just authentic to Singapore, it's authentic to Peter Bogdanovich. It's a movie where he didn't compromise. He used real locations, good actors, long takes, and he avoided clichés.

**BEN SLATER:** As a point of comparison, *Crazy Rich Asians*, which was released two years ago now, which is a film shot in this part of the world and at least set mostly in Singapore, is a film that was very controversial here and considered to be really offensive in its portrayal of multiracial Singapore and a lot of young people watching *Saint Jack* that first thing is that while this is wow this is more authentic than *Crazy Rich Asians*. So that's a pretty great testament to a film that was made in 1978.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Even with the success of *Saint Jack*, 1979 was a tough year for Peter. He lost Cybill. He lost his mother. He and Orson weren't talking. For the first time in his adult life, he was living alone. And he was lonely. So, Peter ventured into the playground that defined that defined sex in the 1970's, the Playboy mansion.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I wasn't a big fan of it. But I did go over there occasionally. I'd have something to eat or hangout with Hef, briefly. So, we'd play Monopoly sometimes.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** You'd go to the Playboy mansion and play Monopoly?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah. Um, maybe two, three times I did that. And, um, significantly, he had a special, issue of the Monopoly board. And the tokens were different than your, than

the ones they used in the regular ones. And one of them was a Playboy bunny. And I always chose the Playboy bunny as my token, you know.

[THEME MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** One evening in 1978, Peter, who was 39, was leaving the mansion when he saw Dorothy Stratten for the first time.

She was 18 and had just moved to LA to work for *Playboy*. As he was being introduced to her, he had one thought.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I said, this is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen, it was the first thing that crossed my mind. So I did the oldest come on and you know, pass in the world. I said, I'm casting a picture, here's my phone number. She never called.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** They wouldn't meet again for almost a year.

On the next episode of *The Plot Thickens*, Peter finds the love of his life. He's on his way up, again and again, an epic fall. But this time, there's no recovering.

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I'm your host Ben Mankiewicz, thanks for listening...see you next time.