

UN-CAGED

Looking back on his first 20 years, Nicolas Cage opens up.

CINEMATHEQUE
AWARD

Closing the second decade of a highly successful career, Nicolas Cage has evolved from a punk-rock method actor with a reputation for over-the-top intensity to a mature, romantic leading man and mainstream action hero. His numerous accolades include an Academy Award in 1996 for Best Actor (“Leaving Las Vegas”).

This year, he has been named the recipient of the American Cinematheque Award, which will be presented to him by director Martin Scorsese, with whom he worked in the 1999 feature “Bringing Out the Dead.”

And with one film released last month (“Captain Corelli’s Mandolin”) and two more due later this year (John Woo’s World War II actioner “Windtalkers” and the quirky Spike Jonze-Charlie Kaufman comedy “Adaptation”), Cage is not only one of the best actors in Hollywood but he’s one of the busiest.

Cage spoke with **Todd Longwell** for **The Hollywood Reporter** about his tumultuous beginnings, his hopes for the future and his affection for the American Cinematheque.

The Hollywood Reporter: Some celebrities seem to participate in award galas because they like the attention, but I understand you’re actually a fan of the American Cinematheque?

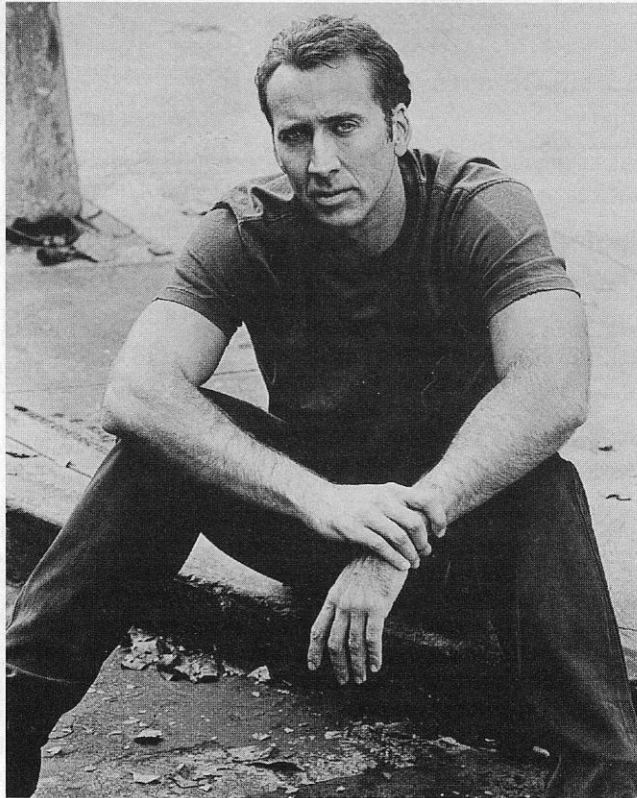
Nicolas Cage: Yes, that’s true. I believe that they do a lot of good work preserving films and presenting them to filmgoing audiences at the Egyptian (Theatre in Los Angeles), where the quality of the prints and the sound systems are excellent. So, in a time where most people like to stay home and watch their films on video, there’s still a chance to see the movies the way the director originally wanted them to be seen. I had one screening there — (the premiere of) “Shadow of the Vampire” (which Cage produced) — and I was very happy with the way it was presented.

THR: You’re a relatively young man. Does it feel strange to be honored with what is essentially a lifetime achievement award?

Cage: Well, not really, because it has been a long 20 years. I started when I was 17, and I’ve been working pretty consistently ever since. I wake up sometimes and wonder where the years have gone, so this sort of puts things into a nice perspective for me. I feel very touched by it.

THR: If you had to program a Nicolas Cage Cinematheque retrospective, which films would you choose?

Cage: I feel like the two decades are very separate and very different from one another in a lot of ways. When I started acting, I was a lot more of a hothead. I wanted to shake things



up a little bit. I was listening to punk rock and trying to bend the rules, if you will, of acting. So I would definitely put “Vampire’s Kiss,” “Wild at Heart” and “Raising Arizona” in that collection. Then, with time, I think I became a little bit more subtle in my approach and wanted to explore other genres, so I guess I would pick “Leaving Las Vegas” and “The Rock.” Those two combined represent both sides of what I was trying to accomplish in the last 10 years, which was to make films that are entertaining and also films that are more thought-provoking and introspective.

THR: You seem to be one of the rare actors in film today that has both the ability and the willingness to move back and forth between serious films and popcorn pictures.

Cage: I just feel that both kinds of movies have stimulated my life and have given me the passion to want to be an actor. When I was a child, I would watch Clint Eastwood and Sean Connery on television and fantasize about being cool like those guys. Then, as I got a little older, I discovered James Dean and Jack Nicholson and that approach as well. So I have two sides that I want to keep intact, and I feel fortunate that I’ve found a place in Hollywood where they keep letting me do it.

THR: Back in the ’80s, you had a reputation for taking method acting to the extreme — wearing your bandages for “Birdy” 24 hours a day. I understand you approach things a little differently today. If you could have a conversation with the Nicolas Cage of the ’80s, what advice

would you give him?

Cage: I would just say, “Be careful you don’t intense yourself right out of the business.” But at the time, I was a young actor of 19, and I didn’t have a whole lot of training, and I was trying to act in very intense scenes without a lot of technique. That was the only thing I knew. The heroes of the day were people like Robert De Niro, who had recently done “Raging Bull,” so I thought that was what you needed to do: Live the part, become the character. I don’t think I made it easy for myself, because I kept taking roles and playing them in unconventional ways that were not necessarily popular choices at the time. I think it slowed down whatever trajectory I was on in Hollywood, until people began slowly to realize that I was playing characters, and they weren’t really me.

THR: In the ’70s, stars such as Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford would take years between projects, making sure that they found the right ones.

But you work constantly.

Cage: That may change. I went through what I guess you would call a prolific period, where I was feeling very ready and willing to keep working. I probably will slow down a little bit. Now that the notion of a strike shut everything down for awhile, I actually sort of had an enforced time off, and it’s been good for me.

THR: You’ve averaged two films a year.

Cage: In the ’30s, actors like Bogart kept working all the time. Somebody once asked him how come he made so many great films, and he said, “I never stopped working.” I like that idea. Plus, I’m happy when I’m working. Maybe I’ll get lucky; maybe I’ll hit something that’ll really pay off. Also, these are my best years right now. I’m in my prime, and I’m not always going to be in my prime, so I’d like to make as many movies as I can while I’m still at the top of my game.

THR: Is there anything you feel you really have to do before you’re done?

Cage: I’d like to find a movie that balances art and commerce. In the ’70s, there were great films that were truly works of art that were very successful, like “The Godfather.” I haven’t really seen anything quite like that, and I wish I could find some material that is very stimulating — artistically and emotionally — that could appeal to a lot of people.

THR: Well, you’re only 37. You’ve probably got another 50 years in the business.

Cage: I hope so!