

# **TCM** THE PLOT THICKENS

## EPISODE ONE: BUGS

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** why do you think there are so many presumptions about you?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I don't know, You know, I became successful, famous early on, that irritates people, some people. And, um, I don't know. Jealousy, envy, irritation. Maybe they don't like my pictures. Well, I probably was too outspoken or something. I don't know. I don't really know. I, I don't think that the picture that was painted of me was really close to accurate. I didn't think I was an arrogant bastard. But maybe I was. I, I certainly had self-confidence to a degree, which I think scares people sometimes. I don't know Ben I don't know.

[THEME MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I'm Ben Mankiewicz, and this is season one of The Plot Thickens - a new podcast from Turner Classic Movies... each season, we'll bring you an in-depth story about the movies and the people who made them.

We're starting off with a familiar story in Hollywood... one of remarkable success at a very young age....and failure just a few years later...

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** success is very hard to handle. And then failure after success is even harder.

**NEWS MONTAGE:** Peter Bogdanovich is a man of many Passions/Peter Bogdanovich burst upon the film world/Peter Bogdanovich is best known as a Director of films like The Last Picture Show

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter Bogdanovich helped change the way movies were made in Hollywood, starting with his first hit in 1971, The Last Picture Show.

Peter had the looks and charisma of a movie star. And even when he was just starting out, he had the vision and confidence of a seasoned director.

For a while, Peter seemed invincible.

**Dick Cavett:** There's a number of Myths about you already, even though you are very Young. Like the Fact that you had a goal set for yourself that you would make a movie at the same age Orson Welles did---

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Oh, I wanted to, I thought I'd be a failure if I didn't make a movie by at least by the time I was 25 which was when Orson made Citizen Kane and I was a disaster because I didn't make one until I was 27.

**FRANK MARSHALL:** His self-confidence. He knew what he wanted to do.

**Todd McCarthy:** Peter's career was kind of the ultimate triumph of the film nerd, film geek, film buff.

**Cybill Shepherd:** He's, he's humbled by age. That's what happens when you get older

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter's story is also one of romantic, all-consuming love...and what happens when that disappears...

**New Clip:** Soon she fell in love with another man, director Peter Bogdanovich

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** and what happens when that disappears...

**New Clip:** -Playboy Magazine's 1980 Playmate of the year has been found Shot to death

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And finally, around 11:00 the phone rings. And I answer it. It's Hefner. He said two words. Dorothy's dead.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** This is a story about how things fall apart...how tragedy changes a person.

But it's also about what remains, what keeps us going... and in Peter's case, that's always been the movies...

Whether he's watching them or directing them on set, movies connect Peter to others. I actually think it's part of how he understands his own humanity.

Peter's written books about movies and he tells great stories about how they were made. At 80 years old, he still watches them almost every day.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I cried last night when I watched it. It just killed me. You know, I cry at quality. [laughs] I do. When I see something well done, I get choked up.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And when the movies brought Peter to the top.... it was glorious.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I called Cary Grant and I said, guess what Cary, my new picture is opening at the Radio City Music Hall. Oh that's nice, I had 28 pictures play the Hall. You did? And 28 pictures? Yeah, every picture I made played the Hall. [laugh]Um, I tell you what you must do. Put on some, a raincoat or some sunglasses, well you won't need that, but go there

and stay in the back, and you listen, and you watch while 6,500 people laugh at something you did. It will do your heart good. And he was right, I did go, and it was amazing.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** This is the story of how Peter Bogdanovich became Peter Bogdanovich - one of Hollywood's legendary directors. We begin with Episode One...Bugs

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** in school and from the time I was in, in, uh, kindergarten through the 12th grade, um, they called me Bugs. Mainly Bugs because I did a Bugs Bunny impression when I was a kid.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Ye' what's up doc?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter Bogdanovich, even at 80, is still a great mimic.

**Peter Bogdanovich:** And then later on they called me Marlon 'cause I did Brando and Dean and Jerry, I did them.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** When you did Brando what did you, what Brando did you do?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well, it was On The Waterfront I guess. [Marlon Brando impression] I could have been a contender.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Oh it's good, that is good.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** [Marlon Brando impression] I could have been somebody. Somebody instead of a bum which is who I am, let's face it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** This is one of my favorite things about Peter, his ability to do impersonations. Whenever he tells stories about the Hollywood stars and directors he has known, Peter imitates them.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Cary Grant,

**PETER BOGDAOVICH:** [Cary Grant Impression] People do not like beautiful people

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Otto Preminger

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** [Otto Preminger Impression] I Don't get ulcers, I give them

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Orson Welles.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** [Orson Welles Impression] This is Orson Welles. I can't tell you how long I've wanted to meet you.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** and Howard Hawks

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He said to Bogart [Howard Hawks impression] you're the most insolent man on the screen and were going to make this girl more insolent than you.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** This is Peter doing the director of Psycho, Alfred Hitchcock, on CNN back in the 80s.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He said to me, [Hitchcock Impression] Paramount Pictures made for me a torso made entirely of rubber. When you plunge the knife in blood would spurt out. Oh, it was wonderful.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I'm telling you, when Peter does impersonations, it's impossible not to laugh.

I met Peter for the first time eight years ago. I was really nervous. Nervous because Peter knows so much about Hollywood history. More than I ever will. Nervous because I was worried he might see me as a fraud, faking my way through my job as a host at Turner Classic Movies.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Hello I am Ben Mankiewicz. This is Turner Classic Movies. Tonight, three in a row from one of the finest actors to appear on screen...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Yeah, that's my day job. Anyway, there was another thing I was nervous about.

*Citizen Kane* Clip: Rose Bud

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Citizen Kane. A movie that came out in 1941. Many film critics and scholars say Citizen Kane is the greatest movie of all time. Peter certainly admired it. It inspired him to become a director.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** when I saw Citizen Kane, believe it or not. I just said, oh, he directed it... that guy on the screen. I think that's the first time I ever became aware of the necessity of a director.

*Citizen Kane* Clip: Charles Foster Kane is a scoundrel. His paper should be run out of town.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And, Orson Welles, the man who directed and starred in Citizen Kane, was Peter's hero and...for a while, his close friend. So, what's that have to do with me?

My grandfather, Herman Mankiewicz, was a screenwriter. One of the first and one of the best. He wrote the screenplay for Citizen Kane. But believe it or not, that's a controversial thing to say.

My family had one foot in media & politics -- and the other in Hollywood. On the left, my dad was Bobby Kennedy's press secretary.

**FRANK MANKIEWICZ:** Senator Robert Francis Kennedy died at 1:44am today, June 6, 1968

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** He delivered the news that sent the country into mourning. He eventually helped run George McGovern's presidential campaign and became president of National Public Radio. On the right, my great uncle Joe wrote and directed movies – famous, Oscar-winning ones - like *All About Eve*.

*All About Eve* Clip: Playing that childish game of cat and mouse. Not mouse, never mouse. If anything RAT!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** But Herman, he was the first to break into Hollywood. He was a former newspaper man and *Citizen Kane* is the movie he's most known for - which is appropriate since it's set in the world of newspapers. He shared Kane's screenplay credit with Orson Wells.

In 1971, the late critic Pauline Kael wrote an essay in the *New Yorker* saying that Orson Welles had very little to do with the screenplay for *Kane*... She gave most of the credit for the script to Herman. This did not go over well with fans of Orson Welles. The mere mention of "Pauline Kael" sends them into a rage. I wasn't sure how Peter felt about what Kael had written, but I was worried about it.

So, this is what's in my head, eight years ago when I'm in Toronto getting ready to host a screening of Peter's most famous film, "*The Last Picture Show*."

I had to meet him the night before in the hotel bar. I walked in and looked around. He was easy to spot. I mean... he looked just like Peter Bogdanovich. Dark hair, oversized glasses and a bandana tied around his neck. Most people would call it an ascot -- as you'll hear, it's not. I walked over, palms sweaty, and I introduced myself. He turned and....sneezed. Then he apologized. "Peter Bogdanovich," he said. "Nice to finally meet you, Ben. I have a terrible cold."

Rarely had someone else's illness given me such joy. PETER BOGDANOVICH had a cold. He's just like me. I get colds. This was good!

[PHONE RINGS]

Peter's phone rang. He fumbled as he tried to answer it. "Hello..." then a pause "Oh, I'm ok...thanks for checking." He put his hand over the phone and looked at me -- "It's Cybill," he said.

Wait....Cybill Shepherd? ...Peter cast Cybill in *Last Picture Show*. He fell in love with her and left his wife for her. They eventually broke up, but now she's calling – fifty years later - to see if he's drinking enough tea? What is going on?

Well that night, and every time I've met with Peter in the years since....I'll just say this...it's never not interesting to me. That night in Toronto was the beginning of a friendship...

Not long ago, I asked Peter to tell us his story. So we sat down in a little studio in Burbank and started talking.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Are we rolling by the way?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** We met for hours at a time, five times in all, as he walked me through 80 years of life and movies. Peter showed up for every session wearing black jeans and a black jean jacket, walking with a cane -- he broke his leg last year in France at a film festival that was honoring him.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, I still use this, but I call it a staff. 'Cause I don't like the sound of cane.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And of course, he was wearing that bandana on, his signature, tied around his neck.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Um, the bandana came from Picture Show, 'cause everybody it was a Texas thing. I started wearing a bandana 'cause it seemed like a nice thing to do. Also it felt good, a little cozy. They think they're ascots. Some people give me ascots. This is not an ascot. It's a bandana. Ascots are silk and then you tie them differently.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Yeah.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I wouldn't wear anything that pretentious.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Pretentious was a label Hollywood gave Peter in the 70s. But no one paying attention would call Peter pretentious now -- he drank lemonade during our talks -- lots of it -- and was quite fond of chocolate chip cookies from Vons, the grocery store chain.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** it's hard for me to stop

[MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter was born in New York City in 1939. His mother was an Austrian Jew and his father was Serbian. They fled from the Nazis and emigrated to the U.S. the year Peter was born.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** My father was Borislav Bogdanovich and he was a brilliant painter. And, also happened to be a brilliant pianist but nobody ever heard him play because he was too shy to play in front of anybody except his family.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter's mother was Herma Robinson. Borislav and Herma met in what was then Yugoslavia. Herma's father was a wealthy business owner in Belgrade and he hired Borislav to teach his daughter how to play the piano.

[PIANO MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Herma was 13. Borislav was 32. They married when Herma was 18. Herma's father wasn't thrilled, mostly because Borislav was poor and a painter. Once they arrived in New York, they lived in a two-room apartment on West 67th.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** When I was a young, a very young, I was probably 3 years old or something. Um, my father would tell me stories in the morning before breakfast. I'd come into his bed...And he would tell me stories about Donald Duck. Because I'd seen Donald Duck in the comics and so on. And they were completely fraudulent stories. I mean the one I remember the best the Donald selling, uh, a dozen eggs. But he, he'd put a hole in each of the eggs and sucked out all the of it, so all that was left was the shell. [laugh] But he was a selling a dozen shells. Egg shells. I thought that was very funny. That's the one I remember. But he used to tell me Donald Duck. Donald.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Until Peter was seven, he thought he was his parents' first and only child.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I was sitting in my father's studio, which was actually the living room of the apartment where we were. And I, and I saw a drawing of a young kid with the blond hair, and I said, who's that? And he said, that's your brother. I said, my brother? He said, yes, he was killed.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Herma and Borislav's first child was a boy named Antony. He was born in Yugoslavia and died when he was only a year and a half old.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Uh, he was reaching for some boiling soup on the, on the kitchen stove, yeah. And, uh, my mother ran to stop him from doing it. And knocked it over by accident.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And so he got burned.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And and it killed him, the shock killed him.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In front of your mother.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Jesus.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And she never got over it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Did she talk about it?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** No. Once, when I asked her. And she couldn't get though it without crying. So I was conceived in tragedy. So, while the tragedy was going on.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Did things start to make a little more sense then. I imagine this is a tragedy that hung over the home.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, it did. But I didn't know it. They couldn't talk about it. I can understand that.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Were your parents' sad people?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I think so. Up to a degree, because they had a great sense of humor. I think that's why I always became funny. Because I, I tried to cheer them up.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter's father didn't show much emotion, and he was eccentric. He didn't use shampoo to wash his hair.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He, he used Listerine.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The mouth wash.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In his hair?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** His hair probably smelled great.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I didn't smell it, but... (laugh).

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The Listerine made Borislav's hair stiff, and it grew upward. When he sat at his easel in the living room, he wore a straw hat with the top cut off.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And he said, 'cause he needed the ventilation. (laugh) Uh, he was funny

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Borislav had strong opinions. He wouldn't let Peter read any comics except Walt Disney and Warner Bros.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** My father says, it's forbidden, so I said, okay. But why? And he said, they are badly drawn. That's all he said.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So Borislav was a bit of purist. He was uncompromising too...fully devoted to painting. He painted all day while Herma went to work for her father's company. Herma eventually began to help her husband.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I don't know what year it was, I can't tell you. But my mother started to study how to make frames. And she learned how to make frames with gold leaf frames that are...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Picture frames.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, yeah, picture frames you know, for my father's paintings. And she did it brilliantly. And she did it all in her apartment with a saw that she had an electric saw.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So really both of your parents were artists.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, that's what's right.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter admired Borislav's devotion to his painting, and he learned something from that...

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He was really almost like a walking encyclopedia on painting and, and music. And I've done the same thing. I use that as an example for me to learn as much as I could about movies and, and filmmaking....

[FILM REEL SOUNDS]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It was Borislav who introduced Peter to the movies -- taking his son to see the masters of comedy.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He taught me a lot. He took me to see silent movies at the Museum of Modern Art.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** How old were you?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** 5, 6, 7. He grew up with silent pictures.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And he knew all of 'em, you know, and he loved Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. He took me to see the Keaton, Chaplin, and Lloyd pretty much.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** While Borislav was too shy to play the piano in front of an audience, Peter was the opposite. Even when he was a little kid, he was a ham. He wanted to perform....and his parents encouraged it. They took him to the Metropolitan Opera to see Don Giovanni and he left afraid of the idea of going to hell.

Peter spent a lot of time alone growing up. His younger sister Anna wasn't born until he was 13. His mother worked and his father was either painting or out and about. He had plenty of time to be imaginative in that little New York apartment. So somewhere around age 10 or 11... Peter started making stuff.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** The first thing I ever produced and directed was a redo of a couple of radio shows. I loved radio. I grew up with radio. That was the thing you know. [imitates the

add] Suspense, you're always right with All Right. Presents suspense. What I would do is I taped the show, then I, believe it or not, transcribed the entire thing on this small typewriter I had.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter would record the radio broadcasts on a Revere reel to reel tape recorder his parents got him for Christmas.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Transcribe the whole fucking thing. On my typewriter, when I think about it now I don't know how I did that. And I typed it on a little typewriter. And then I would redo the entire show. Play all the parts.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** For myself. I was recording. I taped myself doing it. And I put in new music. My uncle had a collection of a lot of classical music. I used, I remember I used Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** How many parts were there?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Oh, about 6 or 7.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Any women?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** You'd play them too?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yes, I did. [does female voice]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ** [laugh]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** As he got a little bit older, Peter starting WRITING about movies. He'd go see a movie, come home and type out his thoughts on 4x6 notecards, kind of like mini reviews. He still has all of those cards, and we got hold of a few of them, like this one, which Peter wrote when he was about 12 and a half.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** 1952, uh, a whacking little comedy about some crazy youth potion experiments, well directed and acted particularly by Cary Grant. Monkey Business.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Monkey Business, yeah.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's 1952. So it's one of the first.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, one of the first, yeah.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Where did you get that one?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Uh, just you know, broke into your house and stole, and stole the card file.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter kept it up and the notecard reviews got better. He was an observant kid and he had the language to convey why he liked or didn't like something.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And then listen to your review from '55. So 3 years later, you've been doing it for, for, since you were 12-1/2 so now you're 16. You've been doing more than 3 years. Uh, exceptional, superbly directed and photographed, brilliantly acted and written western epic about the first cross country cattle drive up the Chisholm Trail.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well, that was Red River. That was one of my favorite movies.

*Red River* Clip: Take him to Missouri, Mitt. YEEHAW

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter went to a fancy private high school called Collegiate. He has no idea how his parents paid for it. He told an Esquire reporter many years later that he doesn't think they did pay for it. "They just ended up owing a lot of money," Peter said. Anyway, Peter says one of his high school teachers, a man named Henry Adams, helped him learn how to write.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He said to me, he said to the class, begin with a bang and end with a snap. And I still think of that. Begin with a bang and end, it's very good advice.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** After the break, young Peter goes toe to toe with a young Archie Bunker.

[BREAK FOR AD]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** When Anna, Peter's sister, was born, the family moved to Long Island and lived with Herma's parents for a year while they looked for a bigger apartment in the city. It was there Peter remembers having a big fight with his mother. One weekend, Herma insisted Peter go see a play - she'd already bought him a ticket. But Peter wanted to go to the movies -- to see the new Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis comedy.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And she said, you're going to the play. I got very angry. I almost, I almost threw my typewriter at her. Anyway she won. And I went to the play. And I saw Henry Fonda in a play called Point of No Return by Paul Osborne. And I don't remember much about the play, but I was enthralled. And it was Henry Fonda for Christ's sake, I'd seen him in movies.

**Henry Fonda clip:** That enough I'm not going to tell you again I want you to get out of here

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And, um, at one point the first act... somebody on stage said, God damn it. And I remember I turned red.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Oh really?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And I looked around at everybody else and nobody was bothered by at all, and I thought, 'cause you didn't swear in movies. And he swore, and I thought...Jesus.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Herma was right. He loved it.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, she won that one. Big time. (laughs)

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter guesses he saw better than 300 plays during those years. Sometimes he took his girlfriend, Susie Tucker. They dated all through high school and talked about getting married.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I don't know if I was in love with Susie Tucker. Or just the whole thing was sort of new to me, kissing and necking and more.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Yeah.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I'd done a little necking, with a 13-year-old when I was 13.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Um, I didn't think we'd be using the word necking today. I'll be honest with you. (laugh)That, uh...

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well, it wasn't sex. It was first.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Yeah, I, yeah, I got you, I know what you're, I know what you're saying. It's just, uh, that's, that's a word that is, uh, falling out of favor with the young people.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** (laugh) Yeah.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Susie and Peter didn't last. She broke up with him when she went off to college. Left him heartbroken. He was so upset, he went to a restaurant called Schraffts, a famous New York chain where, back then, you could get a decanter of wine for 50 cents. Peter, though, he needed the hard stuff.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I had, four screwdrivers. And I thought you were supposed to get drunk when your girl leaves you.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Screwdrivers.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, it was mainly orange juice.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Yeah.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** You couldn't taste the vodka.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter Bogdanovich, who knows more about movies than anyone I've ever met, didn't go to college. All during high school, he acted in summer stock theater. When he was 16, he was

a bit player at the Stratford Shakespeare Theatre in Connecticut. He also started taking classes from acting coach Stella Adler.

**Stella Adler:** The only thing is that you act with your soul you don't act words, you don't act with this, you act with your soul!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Marlon Brando was one of her first students. She also taught Robert DeNiro, Eva Marie Saint, Warren Beatty, Candice Bergin, Harvey Keitel -- you get the idea. Peter loved working with Adler. He lied about his age to start taking her classes. He was only 16 and the rule was you had to be 18, but Peter was tall and got away with it.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And she was great. It was the only thing I ever studied in show business was acting with Stella Adler. I mean she was, of course, the great Stella Adler. She'd run a group theater...And she liked me.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In the fall of 1958, Peter was 19 and sitting in a diner with five guys from Adler's acting class.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** To this day I don't know why I said this. But I looked at the five actors and sitting around drinking coffee. And I said, why don't I direct you guys in a scene. And they said, oh I don't know. What kind of scene? I said, I don't know, some scene with five actors, five characters. And we found a scene like that in a play called The Big Knife.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The Big Knife was written by playwright Clifford Odets. It's set in Hollywood during the studio system, perfect material for Peter. The five young actors agreed and Peter directed them. They performed it in class.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And everybody applauded. And Stella stood up and said, [does adler's voice] brilliant darlings but you've been directed. Who directed you? And they said, they pointed to me. I was in the back of the studio. Peter, she turned to me and she said, bravo darling, brilliant. And I thought, shit, maybe I should direct the whole play.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That was the moment when Peter switched his focus from acting to directing. He wrote to Odets - who he didn't know - and asked for the rights to the Big Knife for an Off-Broadway production. Odets agreed and Peter raised \$15,000 to do it. By the time it all came together in 1959, he was 20 years old, and directing his first play.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Uh, it ran 63 performances. Which is not great, but it's respectable.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter cast a young actor named Carroll O'Connor in the role of a movie mogul...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** 11 years later, Norman Lear cast O'Connor as Archie Bunker in one of TV's groundbreaking sitcoms.

**Archie Bunker clip:** Let me tell you something. You are a meat head

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** During rehearsals for *The Big Knife*, things got tense with O'Connor. That was when Peter found his voice as a director.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He liked to talk with a cigar in his mouth. Which he did throughout all of *Archie Bunker*. And, um, I had a, a, uh, a clipboard with a lot of notes I took after a run through. And so I was looking down at my notes and I said, and Carroll is still talking with the cigar in his mouth. I said it like that. And he said, there's a lot more wrong with this production than the fact that I speak occasionally with the cigar in my mouth. And I thought, now this is a crisis moment. He just, he just argued with me basically. And I said, I can't just let this go by.

So my mind is racing. So I kept my eyes on them on the board and I said, yes, there is a lot wrong with this production besides the fact that you speak with a cigar in your mouth. but I want you to stop doing it. Because this is Clifford Odets and his dialogue is great, and I don't understand what you're saying with the fucking cigar in your mouth. He did the thing, got great reviews. Went to Hollywood and became a star. And years later, not that many years later, but quite a few years later. We were nominated for the Golden Globes he for *All in the Family*, uh, on family and me *The Picture Show*. And he got up to, the acceptance.

And I'm sitting here and he's right there. He says I got started with a young director, an arrogant son of a bitch who is right here, down here Peter Bogdanovich and he gave me a tip to his hat. And I said, I hadn't seen him since.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** 12 years later, 11 years later he thanks you.

[MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In 1961, Peter was hired as the artistic director for a summer season at the Phoenecia Playhouse in upstate New York. He was 22.

Before the season began, a petite blonde with a pixie haircut showed up at Peter's office to see if he needed a costume designer for the summer. Her name was Polly Platt. Peter hired Polly.....and she would turn out to be his most important collaborator, in movies and in life...

**Frank Marshall:** I thought this was the greatest thing ever. You know this this couple was so creative, they worked together great, they lived together. This is what life should be.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** On the next episode of *The Plot Thickens*...Peter gets married

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** My father, my father didn't think I should get married when I was, I was 20. And he said, you are too young to get married. You'll know what you should do, when you're walking down the street next time, you will see a child in a stroller that being pushed by his mother. That could be your wife.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And he almost gets arrested making his first movie...

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Uh, we actually brought a girl onto the freeway, on the freeway. She got out of her car in the story. And we went bang, and she fell, got shot in the back and fell. And that's when the cops came. There, there was a bunch of cops came.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's all coming up on The Plot Thickens. If you like what you've heard, please give us a review on itunes, subscribe wherever you get podcasts, and share The Plot Thickens with a friend.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Angela Carone is our director of podcasts, our story editors are Joanne Faryon and Susan White. Editing by Mike Voulgaris. Thomas Avery of Tunewelders composed our theme music. Mixing by Tim Pelletier and Glenn Matullo. Production support from Yacov Freedman, Susana Zepeda, Julie Bitton, Mario Rials, Heather Geltzer, Phillip Richards, Ben Holst, Dipanker Mazumder, Bailey Tyler, Zara Chowdhary, Jeff Stafford and Millie De Chirico. Our web team is Josh Lubin, Mike McKenzie, and Matthew Ownby. Special thanks to Scott McGee, Steve Denker, and the WarnerMedia Podcast Network. TCM's General Manger is Pola Chagnon.

Our executive producer is Charlie Tabesh, my great friend.... who still owes me money.

Check out our website at [tcm.com backslash the plot thickens](http://tcm.com/backslash/theplotthickens). I'm looking at it right now and it's incredible. It has lists of all the movies we've talked about, info about each episode, tons of great photos...just cool stuff. Again, that's [tcm.com backslash the plot thickens](http://tcm.com/backslash/theplotthickens).

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