

TCM THE PLOT THICKENS

EPISODE FOUR: BABE RUTH JUST BUNTED

BEN MANKIEWICZ : We pick up our story right after shootign wrapped on *The Last Picture Show*. Peter Bogdanovich and Cybill Shepherd ended their affair. As they had planned. Peter returned to his wife, Polly Platt. They took their two daughters to Arizona to spend Christmas with Peter's mother and sister. Everyone was still grieving the death of Peter's father, Borislav. Cybill went home to Memphis for the holidays. So Peter and Cybill were separated by 1,200 miles. Turns out, that wasn't enough.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: We both missed each other. And Christmas was lonely and it was just rough.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: When Peter returned to LA, he started editing the film, which meant he was spending hours watching Cybill on the screen.

CLIP FROM *THE LAST PICTURE SHOW*: I Never thought something Like this would happen.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The separation didn't last. Cybill flew to LA and met Peter at a Holiday Inn in Hollywood. Cybill flew to LA and met Peter at a Holiday Inn in Hollywood. Polly was furious. She threw Peter out of the house. None of this played out as Peter expected.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Nor did I think I would leave Polly. I just couldn't do anything else. I just wanted to be with Cybill.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: For a while Peter and Cybill moved into the Sunset Tower hotel. It's where Howard Hughes and Frank Sinatra once lived. A place that promised privacy to the stars.

Meanwhile, Peter's career was taking off. The head of Warner Bros. saw an early cut of *The Last Picture Show* and was impressed. He struck a deal with Peter. In the spring of 1971, before *Picture Show* was even released, Peter began developing his next movie with Warner Bros., one of the big Hollywood studios.

He was 31, in love, successful, and working out of a bungalow on the Warner's lot in Burbank. The lot where hundreds of movies were shot, from *Casablanca* to *Bullitt*. John Wayne had an office there, so did Clint Eastwood. And now, so did Peter Bogdanovich.

[THEME MUSIC]

BEN MANKIEWICZ: I'm Ben Mankiewicz and this is season one of The Plot Thickens. A new podcast from Turner Classic Movies. This is episode four: Babe Ruth Just Bunted.

[THEME MUSIC]

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter Bogdanovich had been called up to the Hollywood big leagues and the big leagues required a big house, so Peter asked Cybill to go find one.

CYBILL SHEPHERD: And so I found the place on Copa De Oro, which at that time I think it had been originally built for Clark Gable and Kay Spreckels.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Kay Spreckels, by the way, was Gable's last wife. Copa De Oro, the street, was in Bel Air. The kind of neighborhood where every mansion has a pool and there are no sidewalks. Who needs sidewalks when you can walk the dog in your two-acre backyard?

The house, built in 1928, came with a gigantic living room and oversize windows. Peter had an extension built onto the house so his daughters could have their own rooms when they came to visit. At first, Peter and Cybill didn't have any furniture, so they put a mattress on the floor and projected classic movies on the wall. It didn't take long for Peter to create his own personal movie theater in the house.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: I converted the garage into a screening room, of course, and we ran 35mm and 16 and we ran a lot of pictures. I would call the studio and ask them if they had a print of X, Y or Z. And if they did, they'd send it over and I'd run it.

SASHY BOGDANOVICH: On Fridays sometimes I would go and all the cans would be in the front door. You know, front foyer.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Sashy Bogdanovich is Peter's youngest daughter. She remembers this routine from weekends and summers at the Bel Air house.

SASHY BOGDANOVICH: And I would see what we would get to watch because he could get movies from the screen. You know, that were out in the movie theaters, which to me was just so cool. And so we watched *The Merry Widow* a lot with my grandmother. you know, every movie is basically infused for me with family and memory.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter's other daughter Antonia is three years older than Sashy. She says there was no TV at her father's house, so movie nights created a lot of family bonding.

ANTONIA BOGDANOVICH: We would all quote different movies. You know, especially when we were kids, my dad did a lot of quoting. So we would have these like quotes that we would have in the family, especially *The Merry Widow* by Ernst Lubitsch.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Eventually Peter and Cybill started entertaining and hosting parties. But as has always been the case with Peter, he didn't really connect with many of his contemporaries.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Mostly I hung out with the girl I was in love with, which was Cybill at that point.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: It was Cybill who got Peter to smoke pot for the first time.

CYBILL SHEPHERD: You know, that was the thing. I mean, I didn't inhale with the men I wasn't attracted to.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Did you, did you inhale with Peter?

CYBILL SHEPHERD: Yeah, you kiddin' me? I turned him on the first time. I said, you know, this is, you're gonna like this. This is going to be nice. You're gonna like this. He loved it. You know, I mean, we can talk about it now. It's, it's legal.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: I just want to point out that Peter went through the entire 1960s – the 1960s! - without getting high.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Because we didn't smoke grass, neither Polly nor I smoked grass.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter's lack of interest in drugs, or in drinking, nearly cost him the chance to make *The Last Picture Show*. Producers Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider were not like Peter. They were of the times, they smoked weed, sorry, grass.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: And I was at a party or something with Bert and Bob, they passed me a joint, I said, no. And they thought I was so square they didn't know if they should do the movie with me, 'cause I was such a square. I'm the one who left my wife and ran off with Cybill and became a pot head. For a minute or two.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: If you're like me, you're now trying to imagine Peter Bogdanovich high. Enjoy it. Marinate (breathe it in) in it for a minute as we take a quick break -- we'll be right back.

[AD]

WHAT'S UP DOC? MAKING OF FEATURETTE CLIP: Do you remember the great old days of screwball comedies? Well they're Back.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: In August of 1971, Peter began shooting *What's Up Doc?* for Warner Bros. The Studio could afford elaborate behind-the-scenes videos like this one.

WHAT'S UP DOC? MAKING OF FEATURETTE CLIP: Hello, I'm Peter Bogdanovich.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: It featured Peter, 32 years old, in the director's chair.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: This little picture we're making today is called *What's Up Doc?*

BEN MANKIEWICZ: But this was no little picture. *What's Up Doc?* had a big budget and big stars.

WHAT'S UP DOC? MAKING OF FEATURETTE CLIP: This is Ryan O'Neal, you remember him from *Love Story* and this is Barbra Streisand over here, you remember her from *Funny Face*, ah excuse me I mean *Funny Girl*.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Yes, Barbra Streisand, as big a household name as there was in 1972. But what's crazy is that Peter was such a sensation, the focus of the video wasn't Barbra Streisand, it was Peter.

WHAT'S UP DOC? MAKING OF FEATURETTE CLIP: Now this movie fan is a successful director and now he's trying to make a movie like the ones he used to laugh at when he went to the neighborhood picture show.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: There's a moment in the video where Peter and Ryan O'Neal are sitting at a piano – Peter is playing Barbra's part, singing *As Time Goes By* which she does in the film.

WHAT'S UP DOC? MAKING OF FEATURETTE CLIP: Must remember this, C minus 7. A kiss is still a kiss.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: At one-point Peter lies on the piano like a seductive night club singer. Moments later, he leans in to kiss Ryan O'Neal and they fall off the piano bench laughing.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: You can hear the crew laugh too. Everybody was having a blast.

Though Peter and Polly were newly separated, he asked her to join him on *What's Up Doc?* as the production designer and she agreed. You can catch a few glimpses of Polly in the video. Both times she's next to Peter, laughing. Which, I know, seems like madness. Why would Polly agree to work with Peter in the middle of such an awful break up?

Years later, Polly explained that she wanted to get into the union, the Art Director's Guild and doing a Barbra Streisand picture could make it happen. Turns out she was right. She became the first female production designer to get her union card.

But, looking at the way Polly looked at Peter it was likely more than that. Polly believed the affair with Cybill would eventually end, that it was nothing more than a typical indulgence of a big Hollywood director. So, Polly agreed to work on the film with one condition: No Cybill. She couldn't come to the set.

Peter hired Frank Marshall again, giving him more responsibility this time. So Peter needed a new assistant. He hired Neil Canton, a young New Yorker who had never worked in movies before.

[PHONE DIALS]

NEIL CANTON: Hello, this is Neil Canton.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: We called Neil to discuss his time with Peter. Since then, he's become a producer of movies like *Back to the Future*. But on *What's Up Doc?*- his first job in the business - he followed Peter around with the script.

NEIL CANTON: Because in his script he had little notes and little sort of stick figure kind of drawings of how he envisioned the scene to go. And he was always saying, I need my script. Where's my script?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter didn't treat Neil like a gopher. He was kind to him. They talked movies Every morning, Neil showed up at Peter's house in Bel Air and drove him to the set in Burbank.

NEIL CANTON: And so I would have my little Volkswagen. And you know that whenever you hit a bump in the road, the radio conked out.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Soon, the Volkswagen stayed in Peter's driveway and Neil drove them both in Peter's new Rolls Royce. Smoother ride. Sturdier radio. Peter would come out of the house still eating - cottage cheese and yogurt -- and hop in the passenger seat of the Rolls next to Neil. On the drive, Peter would eat and they'd talk about the day's shoot and compare notes. At the end of the day, Neil would drive Peter home.

NEIL CANTON: And then I got to a point where Peter said to me, you know-take the Rolls Royce and just leave your Volkswagen at his house. Then drive the Rolls-Royce home and then come back in the morning with the Rolls Royce. I would say but you know, I don't I don't have a parking garage. I park on the street and I said, you know, maybe it's not the best place to leave this car. And he said, oh, don't worry about it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: But Neil did worry. So much so that the Rolls Royce arrangement didn't last. Neil was just too nervous something might happen to the car.

***WHAT'S UP DOC?* MAKING OF FEATURETTE CLIP:** 467, take three.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: It was Polly's idea to set *What's Up Doc?* in San Francisco, where the hills were perfect for a chase scene Peter had in mind. It's become a famous movie moment with Barbra Streisand and Ryan O'Neal hurtling down a steep hill pedaling one of those rickshaws right through the center of a Chinatown parade.

***WHAT'S UP DOC?* CLIP:** I can't see anything! Well there's not much to see actually because we are inside a Chinese dragon.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Neil, who spent as much time as anyone with Peter, recognized the value of his collaboration with Polly.

NEIL CANTON: There's no question Peter was the director and Polly was the designer but that they spent a lot of time just talking about the movie and talking about the cast and all that.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: *What's Up Doc?* was a box office hit pulling in 66 million, a fortune in 1972.

While Peter and Cybill were making their home in Bel Air, Polly was assembling her version of a family in the Hollywood Hills, where she lived with Antonia and Sashy.

They had plenty of room, so Polly invited Neil Canton and Frank Marshall to move in. They lived with Polly and the girls for the next two years. There were times when Frank and Neil felt stuck in the middle, working for Peter and living with Polly. They saw all the sadness that comes with a slow-motion divorce.

NEIL CANTON: He had fallen in love, you know, and that was hard, and I'm sure he had a certain amount of guilt about it. You know, because he had two young girls.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: During the day, Peter would ask Neil questions about his own daughters.

NEIL CANTON: Whenever he went over, he would read them a story and tuck them in. But, you know, like, what were they doing during the day? Did they seem happy? You know, did they ever mention him, that kind of stuff.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter may have been on creative and professional high, but personally, he suffered. It was painful to be separated from his two young kids.

After the success of *What's Up Doc?*, Peter formed a production company with Francis Ford Coppola and William Friedkin, two directors also on their way up in Hollywood. Coppola was fresh off *The Godfather*, while Friedkin had just won the Best Director Oscar for *The French Connection*. One of the men Friedkin beat that year was Peter. He was nominated for *The Last Picture Show*. The three partnered with Paramount and set up The Directors Company. It was a sweet deal. They could each make any film they wanted with complete creative freedom, as long as the budget came in under \$3 million.

Peter decided to make *Paper Moon*.

PAPER MOON TRAILER CLIP: This is the Peter Bogdanovich production *Paper Moon*, or as PT Barnum put it, there's a sucker born every minute.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The story came from a novel, a bestseller called *Addie Pray*.

PAPER MOON TRAILER CLIP: Kansas, 1936. Out of the darkest days of the depression comes the adventures of two unlikely con artists: Mose Pray and his companion, Addie Logins.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: When Paramount sent Peter the script, he wasn't sold. After 2 hits, was this the right follow up? So he went to someone whose professional advice he could always trust.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: And I said, Polly, read this script and tell me what you think. Why you think I should or shouldn't do it. So she read it. And she says, well, it needs work, the script

needs work. But you got two daughters I think you might be interested in directing a girl. And I know who could play it. Who? Tatum O'Neal. I said really?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Tatum is Ryan O'Neal's daughter, just 8 years old at the time. Peter liked her for the role of Addie. She had a gutsy, fearless quality that fit Addie's street-wise character.

PAPER MOONCLIP: I heard you through the door talking to that man. It's my money you got and I want it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: If Tatum was Addie, then it was an easy jump to have Ryan O'Neal play Mose, the con artist who shows Addie the ropes.

PAPER MOONCLIP: Well I ain't your pa so just get that out of your heard. I don't care what those neighbor ladies said.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: With the two leads cast, Peter focused on the title. At the time it was still called *Addie Prey*. And Peter hated it.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: I'm looking at the list of songs that were popular in the early '30s and one of them was, It's Only A Paper Moon. I liked the sound of Paper Moon. Those two words jumped out at me. I played the song and the song worked. It's only a paper moon. Wait a minute. Whats the line? It's only a canvas sky. It's a great song.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Those lyrics, It's only a Paper Moon, jumped out at him as a perfect solution.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: So I called Orson who was in Rome cutting a picture. And I said, uh, Orson you got a minute? No, I'm cutting, what do you want? I said, um, what do you think of this title, *Paper Moon*? There was a short pause. Then he said, that title is so good, you don't even need to make the picture, just release the title!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter got the title he wanted.

And when *Paper Moon* went into production, Peter brought the team back together. Once again, Polly, his estranged wife, came aboard as the production designer; Frank Marshall returned, this time as an associate producer, and Neil Canton was back as Peter's assistant. At this point, they were making a movie a year.

Just like *The Last Picture Show*, Peter decided to shoot *Paper Moon* in black and white. It felt like it fit the story: con artists selling bibles during the depression. They shot in Kansas and Missouri, and it wasn't easy. *Paper Moon* is a road picture, with the two main characters driving throughout the Midwest running a bible scam. And remember, Tatum O'Neal was an 8-year-old kid making her first movie.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: She had to be directed. Like every gesture had to be directed. But she was good when she did it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Shooting one key scene frayed everyone's nerves. The scene was an argument between Mose, Ryan O'Neal, and Addie, his daughter Tatum.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: A bad fight and then they makeup and they end up stronger together than before the fight started. it's a very important scene. It binds them together.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The scene unfolds as they're driving down a dusty Kansas road in a 1930s convertible.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: I wanted to do it in one shot without a cut. Ryan wasn't driving, they're pulling the car.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Problem was, the only place they could turn around with that big camera rig pulling the car was two miles down a narrow road. So they'd begin shooting, driving down the road, but every time Tatum flubbed a line, even if it came 3 seconds into the shot, they had to drive all the way down the road, two miles, turn around, drive back up, turn around again and start the next take.

Ryan has much more dialogue in the scene, but Tatum had to deliver her lines while doing other things.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Tatum had all the business. She had to put the cigar box down. Open the map. Ryan just had to drive.

PAPER MOONCLIP: Could you blame me for it? If we were running out of bibles you should have told me we were running out of Bibles. Well were running out of bibles. Well then we've got to get new ones. Then let's get new ones, we can pick some up in Greatbend. Greatbend's the other way. Well we've got to have bibles don't we?

PETER BOGDANOVICH: We did it 25 times the first day and didn't get it once. 25 times and we didn't get it. We finally, we came back about two days later, 'cause we had rain. And we did it 15 times, we finally got it. And you know something I think that's why she got the Oscar. Because everybody can see that she's doing it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Tatum O'Neal became the youngest winner in the history of the Academy Awards when she won for Best Supporting Actress in 1974.

TATUM O'NEAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH: All I really want to thank is my director, Peter Bogdanovich, and my father. Thank you.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: At the time, Peter complained in the press that she should have been nominated in the lead actress category, since she was in basically every scene of the movie.

Frank Marshall saw Peter and Polly's relationship hit a new low on the *Paper Moon* shoot. Gone was Polly's sadness about the affair with Cybill. In its place came anger.

FRANK MARSHALL: She grew further and further away from Peter and I think as it set in, that this was not going to go away. She got madder and madder.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter and Polly argued in front of the crew, especially when Peter felt like she challenged his authority. Polly again insisted Cybill couldn't come to set. So when Cybill visited, she stayed with Peter at a separate hotel. Away from the crew.

Peter, meanwhile, had his own grievances with Polly.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Well, she was having an affair with the prop man. I mean, but she didn't tell me that, and I didn't know it until about halfway through.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Polly later married the prop master, Tony Wade.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: And somebody told me that she was having an affair. Which I didn't-- it was perfectly alright for her to have an affair. But it pissed me off that Cybill couldn't come on the set, even while she's having an affair.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Their hurt feelings, their mutual resentment, it all piled up.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: It just deteriorated until I, we couldn't work together anymore. Which is a pity 'cause she was a hell of a good collaborator. Had good ideas and was fun to work with. But that, that just fell apart.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Polly and Peter divorced in 1973, the year *Paper Moon* hit theaters. Polly got custody of their two daughters. They would stay with Peter for summers and on school breaks.

They had been together for nearly 10 years. And had made four pictures together, all good ones.

They never worked together again.

Paper Moon was another box office hit for Peter. Three in a row. Sprinkled among the glowing reviews were just a couple of lackluster ones. To Hollywood, though, Peter Bogdanovich was a bonafide hitmaker. *Paper Moon* cost \$2.4 million to make. It eventually took in more than \$30 million at the box office.

Peter had become a successful Hollywood filmmaker. And a rich one.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: I had 22 percent of the profits. I made quite a lot of money on that one. And I had a piece of *Doc* and a piece of *Paper Moon*. And, um, it was just nice not having to worry about money.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter was generous with his money, especially when it came to Orson Welles.

Orson needed a place to stay when he was in Los Angeles. He was cutting some footage for his film *The Other Side of the Wind*. It was a natural fit -- Peter had built an editing facility at the house in Bel Air, plus Peter was still working on the book about Orson, so on and off for the next 2 years Orson Welles lived with Peter and Cybill.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Um, one of my favorite, uh, images of him is him sort of tiptoeing through my office to get to the TV room as he, as he's going through he says, Dick Van Dyke is on. [LAUGH] He loved Dick Van Dyke.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Orson didn't merely take a spare room. He essentially had his own wing: bedroom, bathroom and TV room.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: And he branched out and used the dining room, 'cause he liked the table. It was so big.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter liked having him there. I mean of course he did! How could a film lover like Peter not enjoy having Orson Welles in his home?

PETER BOGDANOVICH: He had a great sense of humor. You could hear his laugh bouncing off the sky, it was so strong and loud. And also he had a habit of really laughing to such a degree that you, you didn't, if you were sitting opposite of him you don't want to stop laughing. He just goes on and on and on. Jesus, Orson, okay.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Houseguest or not, Orson generally lived by Orson's rules and, as Cybill remembers, moved at Orson's pace.

CYBILL SHEPHERD: I was instructed by Peter, though, that I was never to wake Orson up because, you know, he was watching TV. He liked to watch TV. You know, you never knew when he was going to be awake.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The "don't wake Orson" rule was put to the test one day when Cybill walked past Orson's room and smelled smoke. Peter says she yelled out:

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Orson are you alright? I smell something burning. I would like a little privacy please. But I smell something burning. Privacy please. Turns out he had, was smoking a cigar and he put his, put the cigar in his pocket while it was still lit.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The burning cigar was in the pocket of Orson's bathrobe and he fell asleep.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: And, uh, it caught on fire. So he threw it into the bath, bathtub and he missed the bathtub, and hit the carpet. And some of that burned.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: All of this happened behind closed doors. The housekeeper discovered the charred robe and carpet hours later. The next day, Orson gave Cybill the perfect gift for when you nearly burn down someone's house, a beautiful hardback book on opera.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: And inside he had drawn a picture of a house burning and a ladybug in the foreground screaming. And it said underneath, he had wrote, Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home, your house is on fire and so is your house guest, Love Orson. [LAUGHS] That was that.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Cybill, who's a huge opera fan, still has the book.

Peter's daughters also have memories of Orson living at the house. Peter and Polly named Sashy after Orson, her middle name is Welles. But according to Sashy, that shared name failed to create a bond.

SASHY BOGDANOVICH: He didn't like children. You know, I got that vibe from him.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Sometimes Orson and the girls had the same pursuits, namely Haagen-Dazs ice cream.

SASHY BOGDANOVICH: That was my father's favorite and our favorite. So one day I went in there, all the ice cream is gone. And Orson had eaten it and he was always saying to my dad and the maids, you know, I could hear him like, get the we need more ice cream, we need more.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Sashy decided to file a complaint. She walked outside of Peter's office, gathering her courage.

SASHY BOGDANOVICH: So I went in there and I was like, Dad, you know, there's no more ice cream, Orson, ate all of ice cream. And he said, well, he's a great director. And that was it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: When Peter talks about Orson, you can hear the energy in his voice. He remembers the good times as if they happened last weekend. Like the time they were working together on a movie Orson was making, *The Other Side of the Wind*. Peter plays a young director in the film. Orson hired Frank Marshall to help produce. During the back half of a long day, Frank came to Orson on set.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: He said, Orson, you know, the crew has been here since 7:00, and they're kind of tired. They'd like to have some lunch. Alright, I'm not hungry. But if the crew has to eat, let them go to lunch. I'm not hungry, I'll stay here. I'll stay with yours. I'm not hungry either. Fine, Peter and I will stay here while the crew goes to lunch. Like it was a big deal. So everybody left and we were alone for about 10 minutes. And then Orson turns to me and says, are you hungry? 'Cause I'm absolutely starving. I said, I could eat. So we go into the kitchen. And, uh, and, uh, there was this, a, uh, a big, up, up on the, uh, top of the refrigerator, was this gigantic, really economy size, family size bag of Fritos. Which Orson immediately picked up, ripped off the top of it and poured the contents onto the kitchen table. Sat down, took a big handful, shoved it in his mouth. And sat there chewing. So I did the same thing. And we were both sitting there chewing. And, uh, looking at each other. And we were hungry. And then after a bit he says, you know, you don't gain weight if nobody sees you eating. [LAUGHTER] I broke up.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: These were the good times with Orson, but there are other memories too -- more painful ones that will be harder for Peter to revisit.

[THEME MUSIC]

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter's next film for the Director's Company was an unusual choice.

DAISY MILLER TRAILER CLIP: Last year, Peter Bogdanovich gave you the moon.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: A period piece based on the 19th century novella by Henry James.

DAISY MILLER TRAILER CLIP: Peter Bogdanovich has made a movie in color. *Daisy Miller*, starring Cybill Shepherd. [PETER IN TRAILER] You remember Cybill Shepherd from *The Heartbreak Kid* and *Last Picture Show*. Here we go are you ready? And Action.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: His divorce from Polly final, Peter was eager to work with Cybill again. He'd made two movies since *Last Picture Show* and Cybill wasn't in either of them. She hadn't even been allowed to visit the set. *Daisy Miller* brought Peter's love life and work life together.

CYBILL SHEPHERD: It's one of the greatest adaptations of Henry James work. And it was Orson who told Peter about *Daisy Miller* and said either you or I should direct this, and Peter directed it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Cybill plays the lead, Daisy. A carefree, flirtatious American girl on her first trip abroad.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: It touched me, I thought it was a touching story. And I had come to realize by then that one of the biggest problems in the world was the battle of the sexes. Because men didn't understand women, and women did understand men, but it didn't help them sometimes.

DAISY MILLER CLIP: You're funny. Am I?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Frank Marshall returned to make his fifth movie with Peter in six years. But this time, they were a long way from rural Texas and the middle of Kansas. *Daisy Miller* shot in Rome.

FRANK MARSHALL: Yeah, I loved, I loved *Daisy Miller*. I went over and I hired an entire Italian crew, DP, production designer and it was incredible. The costume designer was very famous and did all those wonderful costumes.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: *Daisy Miller* is ultimately a quality film. It's beautiful. Lavish sets and costumes. It's hard to imagine, in today's world of massive budgets, but it cost just \$2.2 million.

DAISY MILLER CLIP: You know the English lady in the garden?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The dialogue in the Henry James' book is dense and the movie reflects that. In fact, the screenplay lifts full passages of dialogue right out of the novel. It was, in every way, a period piece coming a few years before modern audiences started embracing them.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: The Merchant Ivory pictures that came out later had not come out yet. So nobody was ready for this sudden departure, me going into the 19th century.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Among those not ready for Peter's sudden thematic shift was Frank Yablans, head of Paramount studios. After an early screening of *Daisy Miller*, Peter went up to Yablans.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: I said, how'd you like the picture? He said, it's alright. I said, that's it, that's all you got to say? And he said, what do you want me to say, you're Babe Ruth and you just bunted.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: *Daisy Miller* was a tough sell with audiences.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: it wasn't a picture that they ran to see. And then that threw me a bit. And that is what gave the studios pause, because I had a flop.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: This was Peter's first flop after 3 huge hits in a row. It didn't feel good. Though it bombed at the box office, *Daisy Miller* got some good reviews, including from the New York Times. Other critics were tougher. And some used the film's failure to take a bite out of Hollywood's It couple.

Peter and Cybill were on the May 13th cover of *People* magazine. "So Happy Together." That was the headline. Nine days later, *Daisy Miller* opened in New York. Cybill took the brunt of the critical wrath. When she and I talked, she mentioned a single phrase from one review in particular.

CYBILL SHEPHERD : *Daisy Miller* came out and I wish I remembered the name of the critic, he said, Cybill, back to your blue jeans.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: It stung. Clearly. It implied that Cybill couldn't run in sophisticated circles. Peter's circles. Of course, critics have always been tough -- but reading the *Daisy Miller* reviews now, there was a meanness, an edge, to some of the criticism. And it was the beginning of a trend from critics and from inside Hollywood. Peter and Cybill were fair game.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Well, you know, it's funny. It was impossible to open a newspaper or a magazine in the mid-'70s without reading something nasty about Cybill and me.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The issue of *People* magazine broke new ground. On the cover were these words in quotes "marriage is a chilling thought."

CYBILL SHEPHERD: Peter and I, we were the first unmarried couple on the cover of *People* magazine. Oh, horrors.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: They hated us. And I've seen some photographs of us and I can see why. We both looked very attractive, and we were not shy.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The photo spread inside shows them in front of their home. Cybill playfully hugging Peter from behind. There's another shot of them singing at their piano and on the set of *Daisy Miller*. The story generated the exact opposite of admiration.

FRANK MARSHALL: People hated them.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Frank Marshall doesn't mince words.

FRANK MARSHALL: Yeah, I mean you know, here's this instant success and they were having a great time. You know, and they had a beautiful house in Bel Air and I think people just were jealous of them. And when that starts to happen, they knock you off the top of the mountain pretty quickly.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Shortly after the *People* magazine spread, Peter got a call from his friend, Cary Grant.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Says, [CARY GRANT IMPRESSION] Peter will you for Christ's sakes stop telling people you're happy. And stop telling them you're in love. Why Cary? Because they're not happy, and they're not in love. I thought all the world loves a lover. No, don't you believe it. Let me tell you something Peter. People do not like beautiful people. Well, that was a staggering remark.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Um, do you think, it sounds like you do. That some of the disdain for you two you brought on yourself?

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Oh yeah, we did, we did. We weren't modest. Um-hmm. Yeah, I think we did, yeah.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: After *Daisy Miller*, The Director's Company dissolved and Peter moved on to his next project. For Christmas, Cybill gave Peter a book of songs by Cole Porter, the composer and songwriter. Peter was inspired to try something even riskier and more ambitious than *Daisy Miller*. He decided to make a musical a tribute to the movie musicals of the 1930s. Peter wrote the script alone. That was a first for him. He used Cole Porter songs to create a story about the romantic adventures of two high society couples. He called it *At Long Last Love*, after one of Porter's songs.

AT LONG LAST LOVE CLIP: Is it the ivy you touch with a glove? Or is it one last love.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: As if making an ol' fashioned musical in the mid 70s wasn't hard enough, Peter then made another bold choice. He decided to record the actors singing Porter's songs live. That's how musicals were produced early in Hollywood's golden age. Hitting the right song notes while doing the business of acting for the camera is obviously extremely challenging, even for professional singers and dancers. But that's not who Peter cast. Madeline Kahn, who was in both *What's Up Doc* and *Paper*

Moon, had some Broadway experience, but the leads in *At Long Last Love* were Cybill Shepherd and Burt Reynolds.

Burt was a huge star at the time, and he knew a little something about regrettable magazine covers. Two years before Peter and Cybill graced the cover of *People*, Burt was *Cosmopolitan's* first ever male centerfold. He was nude, his left arm strategically covering what needed to be covered. In 1974, Burt, was eager to fulfill a dream and make a musical. Problem was he wasn't much of a singer. But the former Florida St. halfback still gave it the ole' college try. This is Burt singing "You're the Top."

AT LONG LAST LOVE CLIP: I'm a lazy lout that just about to pop! But if baby I'm the bottom you're the top!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Cybill, on the other hand, always hoped she'd become a singer, and Peter thought *At Long Last Love* would launch her career.

AT LONG LAST LOVE CLIP: Well, be that as it may, you're the top, you're Mahatma Gandhi, you're the top, you're Napoleon Brandy.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Filming started in August of '74. The live recording required take after take, straining the actors' vocal chords.

Peter and his set decorator fought about the art deco sets. This was Peter's second movie without Polly, and he was struggling to develop a creative language with someone new.

But for Peter's daughters, the shoot was exciting. Sashy, who was only 4 at the time, remembers feeling special on set.

SASHY BOGDANOVICH: So we always got to sit in his chairs. And, you know, he was like, oh, my daughters are here. He would say things about us. And my dad, I think for me was, you know, the star. He's always been very funny. And so on set, he is like a standup comedian, basically. It's like he had this sort of like sun shining on him, you know, and everybody loved him. And he always wore weird stuff on set, you know, like John Ford did, so he wore pajama bottoms and a straw hat.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Antonia was seven and remembers Peter casting her and Sashy to be in a scene at the end of *At Long Last Love*. They were part of the chorus.

ANTONIA BOGDANOVICH: The most exciting part for me was we got to wear these like cute little costumes. Oh, my God, I get to play dress up. and got to wear, you know, patent leather shoes or whatever. And then we're in the background singing. That was super fun. And of course, there's a shot of me picking my nose. I think watch me because everybody would make fun of me. They're like, oh, you were picking your nose. And then, you know, like that was a running joke for a couple years. Like, that was the cut he used [LAUGHS].

BEN MANKIEWICZ: *At Long Last Love* came out in March of 1975. Peter says the studio, 20th Century Fox, rushed the release.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: A musical is very hard, because you have to find out the balance between dialogue scenes and music is the trick. And it's difficult to find that out unless you preview it. We had two previews and then we opened. And it was worse than that. We had a preview that was disastrous. Everybody left.

CYBILL SHEPHERD: *At Long Last Love* came out and I think it was Jean Charlot, came on *The Today Show* holding the sign that said, Bomb. I don't know if he was the one that said Cybill Shepherd can't walk or talk, much less sing.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The reviews for *At Long Last Love* are some of the worst in modern film history. Frank Rich in the *New York Times* called it "the most perverse movie musical ever made." *The Village Voice* headline was "At Long Last Turkey." That's not even clever.

Later, Peter told a biographer it was the most personal film he'd made at that point. He described it as a musical about his divorce, and the difficulty of choosing between two women, one who makes you laugh and the other who's romantic.

Frank Marshall thought Peter could have benefited from more input from others, in particular, one person.

FRANK MARSHALL: You know, looking back now on it I do think I miss Polly. I do think there was, whatever the magic sauce was, that was there and it's hard to quantify. But I think there was a missing component. And we were we were on this trajectory that, that was different. And I mean the idea for *At Long Last Love* was a good one, you know, tell a story with ten or twelve Cole Porter songs as a musical. That's a good idea. I think the mistake was having normal people sing and dance. That element, that theory did not work.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: *At Long Last Love* closed after a few weeks, taking in roughly \$2 million at the box office. It didn't even recover the advertising costs.

A new version of the film exists today. The movie had been recut, without Peter's input, by a Fox studio editor who was a Cole Porter fan. And it was better. Even Peter thought so. For maybe the first time in Hollywood history, a director liked the recut more than his own version.

As a result, the movie is being re-evaluated. In 2018, *The New Yorker* called *At Long Last Love* a "blazingly original masterwork." But in 1975, it was Peter's second consecutive flop and his second flop with Cybill Shepherd in a leading role. He would have a difficult time selling her as his leading lady going forward.

Peter was 36 years old and sensing that his career was spiraling downward. It left him bewildered.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: When all was said and done, I compromised. It wasn't exactly the way I wanted, I was, I knew it wasn't quite right, but I didn't know what to do to fix it.

NICKELODEONCLIP: The time of the Nickelodeon is over. A new day has dawned.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: On paper, Peter's next film, *Nickelodeon*, was ideal material for him. It was a story about the early days of Hollywood. But if there was writing on the wall, Peter misread it. He completely rewrote the script, adding a leading role for Cybill as a silent movie star. This time the studio wasn't having it.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: They said, we don't want Cybill. Because we'd had two flops, you know. And they thought that she destroyed me is what they thought. And so we had written the thing for Cybill to play it. And she suggested Jane Hitchcock who was a model that she had worked with. And Jane was very good. She was a very silent movie girl, but she had no threat. She wasn't dangerous. Cybill was dangerous.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: David Begelman, who ran Columbia Pictures, nixed Peter's other casting choices as well. And he wouldn't let Peter shoot in black and white either.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: He said, no way. I'd only had two hits in the '70s in black and white. And he still said, no way. It's too expensive to be in black and white. What a stupid remark. So Orson told me not to make the picture. He said, don't make it if it can't be in black and white. He said, just don't do it. He was right.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter ignored Orson's advice and made the movie anyway. But the burden of two straight failures was intensifying. Neil Canton worked on *Nickelodeon*, once again as Peter's assistant.

NEIL CANTON: I think Peter was always confident in his ability. But I could see where there was a certain pressure. He had lost some of that Hollywood power. And I could feel that he wanted this movie to be to take him back to where he was.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter was tense during the shoot. He argued with one of his leads, Burt Reynolds, and yelled at the crew for playing loud music at lunch.

Some of *Nickelodeon* was shot in Northern California. And that is where Peter did something he'd never done before. He directed from horseback.

NEIL CANTON: It was like, oh wow, Peter's riding a horse. When did that happen?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Forget when that happened. How did that work?

NEIL CANTON: Well, I think he would get off the horse when he actually had to direct, he could give the set up from on the horse and then he would go for a ride, gallop around and then, yeah, the crew would be putting everything together and he'd come back and they'd bring the actors out.

NICKELODEONCLIP: I hate Horses. How come we didn't come out here in a damn truck? Because it couldn't cross this pass.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Peter would then get off the horse and direct the actor's performances face to face. Directing from horseback made Neil Canton's job different.

NEIL CANTON: Obviously, I couldn't follow him around with the screenplay when he was on a horse. I had to wait for him to dismount.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Um, did he, uh, did you ride on a horse in that movie, direct from the horseback?

PETER BOGDANOVICH: [LAUGH] Yeah. Yeah, I did actually for a little while. Uh, it irritated the actors enormously, which is one of the reasons I did it. 'Cause it wasn't the right cast. That was part of the problem. I wanted John Ritter and, uh, Jeff Bridges to play the leads. And it was Burt Reynolds and Ryan O'Neal. They were big stars and that's why they got the job. I didn't really, they were good, but I didn't want to use them. I wanted to use a younger cast.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The *Nickelodeon* budget ballooned, and the overages were deducted from Peter's salary.

While Hollywood was waiting to see if he would redeem himself or continue to crash and burn, Peter worked long hours editing the film. All of it under intense pressure.

Nickelodeon did not change Peter's fortunes. Audiences stayed away and the critics? They sharpened their knives for another serving. A *New York Times* headline read: Is This Bogdanovich's Last Picture Show?

It's an understatement to call this an awful time for Peter and Cybill. They saw what was happening. They saw the pleasure people were taking in their downfall. Billy Wilder, one of the finest filmmakers to emerge out of Hollywood's golden age, the writer/director of *Double Indemnity*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and *The Apartment*, summed up the mood in town about this turn of events in Peter's life:

"There is a canard that Hollywood is full of bitterness and dissention, envy and hostility." Said Wilder "It's just not true. I've lived here for 40 years and I can tell you that it took one simple event to bring all the factions together – a flop by Peter Bogdanovich. Champagne corks were popping, flags were waving. The guru had laid an egg, and Hollywood was delighted."

PETER BOGDANOVICH: [Sigh] what a prick.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: In an effort to escape, Peter and Cybill left town for long stretches of time. They traveled the world and Peter turned down every script that came his way. After a while, it seemed easier, being at the bottom instead of the top. I asked him about it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: You said in an interview a few years later. Success is much harder to deal with than failure. You can cuddle up to failure. Success is deadly. What does that mean?

PETER BOGDANOVICH: Well, you know, the vibe when you're successful is rather rough around town. They suck up to you, but at the same time they hate you. It's very weird. Hollywood is a very weird place.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: On the next episode of *The Plot Thickens*, Peter tries to figure out what went wrong, and Orson betrays him in front of a late-night television audience.

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

ORSON WELLES FROM *THE TONIGHT SHOW*: That's right 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.

PETER BOGDANOVICH: I think Orson didn't know what to say. I don't think he wanted to attack me, it just sort of happened. I think he, I felt like he thought, oh my God, he might be watching.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: I'm your host Ben Mankiewicz. Thanks for Listening.

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 music. Mixing by Tim Pelletier and Glenn Matullo. Production support from Yacov Freedman, Susana Zepeda, Julie Bitton, Mario Rials, Heather Geltser, Philip 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, who owes his bookie so much money that Charlie Tabesh is his alias.

Check out our website at tcm.com/theplotthickens. It has lists of all the movies we've talked about, info about each episode, tons of great photos a lot of cool stuff. Again, that's tcm.com/theplotthickens.

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