

# **TCM** THE PLOT THICKENS

## EPISODE SEVEN: I'M STILL PETER BOGDANOVICH

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Are you wearing the ring that you usually wear?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** This one?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Yeah.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I used to go to summer camp for eight summers I went to summer camp. in Maine. And my parents sent me this ring, a gold signet ring, with PB on it. for my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. And I was very upset because it was backward. So I called my mother and I said, thank you so much for the ring, but you know, they made a mistake 'cause it's backward. And she says, no it's a signet ring. You put it in wax. Look in the mirror over there and you'll see what I mean. So I did and I, oh, I see. And so I've worn it ever since.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Do you wear any other jewelry?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, I have a gold necklace that Dorothy gave me for my birthday, uh, 1980, July 1980.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That would have been your 41<sup>st</sup> birthday.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah. Yeah, I remember when she put it around my neck.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** You wear it every day?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Oh yeah. I never take it off. I don't think I, I think I took it off once by accident since, since she was killed. And these two rings, which Louise gave me both of them. And one is elephants and the other is turquoise. So I have three rings.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Three rings and a necklace. They all mean something to Peter. Mementos of his life and people who matter to him. His mother and father, Dorothy, and another woman who would play a significant role in his life. Dorothy's sister, Louise.

[THEME MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I'm Ben Mankiewicz and this is season one of The Plot Thickens, a podcast from Turner Classic Movies. This is Episode Seven: I'm Still Peter Bogdanovich.

In the years after Dorothy's murder, Peter suffered. He stopped working. There were offers to direct, but he turned them down. What he did was search for some explanation of why Dorothy died.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** After she was killed, I read all those books you're told to read. And I didn't read them until after she died. Like the book about Job or essays by Francis Bacon. Things that are supposed to make you feel better. None of them did.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Sashy, Peter's daughter, remembers how isolated her father became.

**SASHY BOGDANOVICH:** The entourage was gone, everybody was gone. You know, fair weather friends, he didn't have parties anymore. He was devastated. It was like Camelot was exploded and just burned to the ground and it just was heartbreaking.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It's an understatement to say Peter didn't go out much. Really, he stopped participating in the world. But the world continued without him.

**ARCHIVAL NEWS AUDIO:** Dorothy Stratten was planning to marry film director Peter Bogdanovich.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Articles and movies about Dorothy's murder appeared one after the other.

**ARCHIVAL NEWS AUDIO:** Dorothy was only 20 years old when she was murdered.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Many were salacious. To Peter, they all got it wrong.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And nobody knew what she was like because she hadn't met that many people.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter went to a therapist who encouraged him to write a book about Dorothy. He was depressed and the therapist thought writing might help him focus.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** It was sort of a, a long blur. And then I decided to write the book. And then that was it for about three years.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The book became *The Killing of the Unicorn*, a memoir of Peter's romance with Dorothy and an investigation into her death.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** That was the most difficult thing I ever wrote. It used to take me two or three hours to just get myself to sit down and start again. It was very tough, I must say. But I was glad I did it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In the book, Peter blames Hugh Hefner and the Playboy culture for Dorothy's murder. He wrote that Hefner and his empire encouraged the victimization of women. As you might imagine, Hefner was not happy about this. It set off a very public battle between them, one that lasted years, with the two men blaming each other. After the book came out, Hefner held a press conference.

**HUGH HEFNER:** Dorothy's tragic death was motivated...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy's death was not motivated by her association with Playboy, Hefner tells reporters.

**HUGH HEFNER:** Not in any way by her association with Playboy...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It was the breakup of the marriage he says and the affair with Peter Bogdanovich.

**HUGH HEFNER:** But clearly by the breakup of the marriage, and the affair with Peter Bogdanovich.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Two powerful Hollywood men, both grieving and guilt-ridden, fought it out in public.

**ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE:** An angry Hugh M. Hefner denounced director Peter Bogdanovich and the book he wrote about Dorothy Stratten.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Hefner claimed he had a stroke because of the stress brought on by Peter's accusations.

**ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE:** His stroke, I would say was moderately severe.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The media ate it up. Peter and Hugh Hefner never spoke again.

By 1984, Peter hadn't worked in three years.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I was broke, really broke. And they came to me and offered me *Mask*.

**MASKCLIP:** I've got this really strange disease and it makes my face look real unreal.

**MASKTRAILER CLIP:** Universal Pictures presents a Martin Starger production. Peter Bogdanovich's *Mask*.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Actor Eric Stoltz played Rocky, whose face was disfigured from an extremely rare bone disorder. Peter cast the singer and actress Cher as Rocky's protective mother.

**MASKCLIP:** You know it takes time for people to get to like each other. I don't know why you think it should be different for you. But I am different, mom.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Cher is very good in close ups because she had very sad eyes. They seem to be lamenting the whole world. So I did a, more close ups of her than, in that picture than any picture I've ever done.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** At first though, Peter didn't want to direct *Mask*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And then I thought well, I remember just thinking about Dorothy and the Elephant Man.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter's referring to his theory that Dorothy identified so strongly with the Elephant Man because they were both outsiders. Dorothy because of her exceptional beauty. The Elephant Man because of his deformity.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And that's why I did it. It was for her actually.

**MASKCLIP:** I am going to need some additional information. Look Mr. Sims, don't jerk me around I'm not in the mood. I had a real crappy day so far.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Cher and Peter didn't get along while they were making the movie. And it didn't help when Cher didn't take Peter's side over the music in the film.

Bruce Springsteen's album, *Born in the USA*, was released in June 1984, right in the middle of production on *Mask*. It became one of the best-selling albums of all time.

According to Peter, the real Rocky Dennis was a huge fan, so Peter asked Springsteen if he could use some of his songs in *Mask*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He liked *The Last Picture Show* very much. And he liked my pictures. So, he allowed me to use his music. Bruce said use whatever you like except "Born to Run." So, I had about five or six songs in the picture.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter thought it was all settled. He added the Springsteen music and submitted his final cut of *Mask* to Universal Studios. Then he took off to spend the holidays in Europe.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And while we were gone the bastards at Universal took all the Springsteen out and put in another singer. Bob Seger, whom I've never even heard of, and they did it without my knowing. I came back and I was greeted with this. Went through the roof. I sued the studio, which was not a smart move.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter filed a multi-million-dollar lawsuit against Universal. He tried to block the nationwide release of *Mask*, arguing that Universal violated his rights to final cut and damaged the movie. The studio claimed Peter lost his rights when he made a longer movie than they'd agreed to. They also said the music budget couldn't afford Springsteen. Everyone told Peter not to sue. Everyone.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Wouldn't listen to anybody. Just went boom. Just did what I wanted to do. They said don't sue the studio. I sued them anyway. I was not on all cylinders, you know?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Universal released *Mask* with music by Bob Seger. Seger may not have been Bruce Springsteen, but he'd been an enormously popular rock star since the 70s. Even without Springsteen, *Mask* was Peter's biggest hit in over a decade.

**SISKEL & EBERT ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** Peter Bogdanovich's *Mask*, a superb new film.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Critics gave Peter some of the best reviews of his career.

**SISKEL & EBERT ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** This is a wonderful example of a couple of comebacks because both Peter Bogdanovich and Cher...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Audiences liked it, too. It did well at the box office. This should have been a win for Peter, a career highlight. But it didn't feel that way.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** it would have hugely much more successful with Bruce obviously because with without Bruce the picture was depressing, sad and depressing. With Bruce it was sad and uplifting.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Eventually, with no prospect of winning, Peter dropped his lawsuit. Peter went to Cannes to promote *Mask* and even though Cher won best actress, they didn't celebrate together. Peter knew things weren't going well for him, that he was damaging his reputation in Hollywood. So he left for Spain, to get away from it all.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And I stayed overnight somewhere. I can't remember where it was. And I remember lying in bed thinking I am in deep, deep, deep shit.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** At the time, it appeared to many that Peter was trying to sabotage his own career. Count Cher in that group. "It's like he has to fail in such magnitude," she said years later, "that he destroys everything."

At some point in 1984, Peter and Orson Welles started talking again. Only occasionally and briefly, never quite recapturing their old friendship.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I was pretty miserable at that point. The book on Dorothy I think came out in '84. And, um, he never mentioned, he never talked about that to me ever.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Orson knew that the woman Peter loved had been murdered. He didn't call him at the time of Dorothy's death. And he never brought it up in the years after.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** No, never, not a word. He was pissed off at me.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I get that he was pissed off at you, but you, you would, uh, you would be within your rights to be pissed off at him.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well, I wasn't but I don't know.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** What about now?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** No, I love him. I don't hold that against him.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** On one of those calls with Orson, in late September of '85, there was a moment where Peter felt they turned a corner. Maybe they could find their way back to where they once were.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And, um, I said, Jesus Orson, I feel like I made so many mistakes. And he said, well, it does seem to be impossible to go through life without making a great many of them. We sort of understood each other at that moment.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** A week and a half after that phone call with Peter, on October 10, 1985, Orson Welles died at home in the middle of the night. He had a heart attack. He was 70 years old.

The obituaries for Orson were long and colorful, describing a child prodigy, a force of nature in film and theater, and a man of unfulfilled promise. *The New York Times* obit included this passage: "For his failure to realize his dreams, Welles blamed his critics and the financiers of Hollywood. Others blamed what they described as his erratic, egotistical, self-indulgent and self-destructive temperament. But in the end, few denied his genius."

That same obit recited something my grandfather Herman Mankiewicz once said about Orson: "There, but for the grace of God, goes God."

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** You know, when somebody as overwhelming as Orson Welles has an impact on your life, after a few years you, after a few months maybe, you forget the shit and just remember the good stuff. Because he gave me a lot. He taught me a lot. And not just tipping. He taught me how to tip. Give 'em a lot if they're getting in and then reduce it. We had a lot of fun, you know, a lot of laughs.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Many people, myself included, it's hard not to look at your relationships with Welles, with Hawks, with Ford, with Hitchcock and not think that you're searching for some paternal relationship there.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well, Jerry Lewis said that. He was interviewed about me, and he said, I think Peter's looking for his father. And I thought, that was an interesting remark. Maybe he's right. Because my father as I said to you, wasn't very demonstrative. I mean, I know he loved me, and so on, but he wasn't demonstrative. He didn't rave about the movies. He didn't talk to me about sex or any of that stuff. He didn't, we never had that, those kind of conversations. And I did with Orson. And I guess I guess I was looking for a father figure in a way.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Over the years, people have accused Peter of name-dropping, with Orson's name being the most prominent dropped. There's probably some truth to that. Peter was certainly aware of the social capital he got from mentioning his friendship with the great old directors. But the other side

to that is the more human side: both before and after Orson's death, Peter, more than anyone, championed Orson's movies and ideas.

Through Peter's stories, he's kept Orson alive for people. Whether Orson deserved such loyalty is another question. Peter seems to have answered that question for himself long ago.

Unfortunately for Peter, 1985 wasn't over yet. It had one last parting shot to fire. In December, Peter filed for bankruptcy. It stemmed from his decision to buy Dorothy's last picture, *They All Laughed*, back from the studio and release it himself. By the time of the bankruptcy filing, Peter's debt totaled more than \$6.6 million and he had more than 130 creditors, including unpaid bills at hotels, doctor's offices, limousine services and local pharmacies. Peter made a deal with some of the creditors that allowed him to continue living in the Bel Air house for a while. According to the bankruptcy petition, Peter had only \$21.37 in the bank and \$25.79 in his pocket.

Coming up after the break, Dorothy's sister Louise tells us about her relationship with Peter.

#### [AD BREAK]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I've heard Peter say he experienced a form of insanity during the five years after Dorothy's murder. He was taking valium to calm his nerves and sleeping pills to rest. He lost weight. There was the bankruptcy and Orson's death.

One of the things that grounded Peter was his relationship with Dorothy's family. He knew Dorothy's 12-year-old sister Louise because she visited the Bel Air house with her older sister. Peter met Dorothy's mother, Nelly, for the first time at Dorothy's funeral. After that, he treated Nelly and Louise like family. They were still living in Canada, but they would visit Peter in L.A. Louise says Peter did everything he could to try and comfort them.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** He would get his daughters on holidays and we would share the holidays together. He would just take us to Disneyland, we took a trip to Europe, we went to visit my mother's family in Holland. And um, you know, getting through that really dark time, he made it as comfortable as he possibly could.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Louise is in her early 50s now, though she doesn't look it, with her long blond hair and laid-back style. She remembers everything about that time. And says Peter helped support them financially, paying their bills and for her education.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** My sister started to put money aside in a bank account that she opened for me when I was really young for braces on my teeth. And Peter followed through and carried that on and got that completed for me. And that was a big thing when I was young.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Louise says Peter wanted them to be a family, like they would have been if Dorothy were still alive.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** I believed he was going to marry her and have a future with her. So I believe that he just wanted to continue something that he was going to do anyway,

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy's memory hovered over the family long after her death. Nelly struggled to talk about her daughter. Her name was rarely mentioned.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Listen. I know how it is because my mother was like that, she wouldn't talk about my brother who died when he was one, a year and a-half old. When I finally did talk to her about him a year or two before my mother passed away, she could hardly talk. And it had been what 50 years or something. There's just certain things you can't talk about.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So Peter and Louise talked about her, especially while Peter was writing the book, *The Killing of the Unicorn*.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** He would talk to me about certain things about her and memories of her. And within that, I think that we created a closer bond based upon memories and conversations.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And Louise and I were thrown together as sort of in, in mutual misery. And, um, we helped each other get through it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In 1987, seven years after Dorothy's death, Peter and Louise recognized that their feelings for each other had shifted.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Uh, I don't know exactly how to explain it. Louise helped me survive. And I, I think I helped her.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** He was everything to me at that time. I didn't have a father. I'd felt safe with him. I knew that there was a connection with my sister. I really loved him very much.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter and Louise married on December 30, 1988 in Vancouver, Canada. Louise was 20, Peter was 49.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** We never really had a formal wedding, we just got married at the Justice of the Peace and we had, I think, one witness and nobody else knew about it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Including Nelly, who wasn't happy that Louise and Peter didn't tell her about the wedding.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** But, you know, Peter wanted to have my mom involved and I'm the one who didn't want to do it. I just didn't want to deal with anybody telling me that-- giving me their opinion. I just wanted to feel grown up I wanted to feel like I was a woman making my own decisions. You know?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** When Peter and Louise talk about the early days of their relationship in public, it doesn't sound like a romance. They describe a coping mechanism. Peter says it was like a shipwreck and they ended up hanging on to the same piece of driftwood.

The press and the tabloids relished this new development in Peter's life. A *People Magazine* cover headline read "A Tale of Two Sisters." Peter kept most of the bad press away from Louise.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** I really was in a lot of ways protected. I think the only time I really got an idea of it was when I was on the cover of *People Magazine* when we got married. And I think it was a bit overwhelming for me at that moment.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** By that time, Peter had stopped caring about bad press.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I had enough shit hit the fan. A little more isn't going to be, you know, terrible. We, we got married. And I didn't think it was that unusual. I didn't fall in love with Louise because she was like Dorothy, although she is in certain ways, and she's as, as kind and as thoughtful. And as self-effacing, but I just, I just got along with her. And she was funny. And we got along. And I mean we have a common tragedy, you know.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter also doesn't seem a bit self-conscious about the fact that the women he had relationships with, besides his first wife, Polly, were all much younger than he was.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Because my mother was about 20 years younger than my father. Which was not unusual in Europe particularly. In America they tended to get married both at the same age. But in Europe not so. Well, the thing is women get smarter quicker. So, I used to say a girl, a girl of 10 is like a guy of 20. A guy of 10 is like a guy of just born. With men subtract 10 years, and with women add 10 years. That seems to have worked for me in, in my thinking.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Of course, this is not the way we think about relationships between men and women today. But it is the way Peter has thought about them for most of his life.

The decade after *Mask* was a mixed bag for Peter. He made four more films: *Illegally Yours*, *Texasville*, *Noises Off* and *The Thing Called Love*. Despite working non-stop, he wasn't able to recapture the glory of his early career.

Throughout much of the 90s, Peter directed movies for television, something big-time directors rarely did in those days.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I worked just as hard on the TV movies. And they were good. Good scripts, good actors. The only difference was you had to shoot faster.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The television work helped, but it didn't pay the bills. In 1997, Peter filed for bankruptcy for the second time. Looking for a fresh start, he and Louise moved to New York.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** Peter wanted to just go back to New York and get go back to his roots and just to see what that would be like. And we were in New York for a while, living together in a brownstone, and we would take walks together. We went to film festivals. We did many things that couples do.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It was in New York that Louise and Peter began to drift apart.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** I was going through some personal issues, problems and I felt like I was always somebody's someone. You know, Dorothy's sister, Peter's wife. I just felt like I wanted to find myself. And we separated for a while.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In 2001, after twelve years together, Peter and Louise got divorced.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** She wanted the divorce, I didn't. And then she had, she had a relationship with a couple other people.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** We weren't together as a couple anymore, but our foundation was the same.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Even when we got divorced, we were friendly.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** And again, it was Peter and I. It was like through all these years, it's still that same relationship, whatever you want to call it, it's friends, it's family.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I think it's sad when people break up and they lose one thing, they don't have to lose the whole thing.

**LOUISE STRATTEN:** You know, it's very easy to judge from an outside. But you know what, unless you really go through something, you really just don't know what brings people together. You know, people come together for different reasons and love comes in different forms, you know. So if you get what love is, then that's basically what it is. And it's as simple as that.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In the years after Peter's divorce, his career took some interesting turns. For example, he started acting again. In fact, he landed a recurring part on what many consider the best television show of all time, myself included.

Peter got a call from David Chase, creator of HBO's groundbreaking show about a mob family.

**THE SOPRANOSCLIP:** Are you in the Mafia? I'm in the waste management business everyone always assumes you are mobbed up. It's a stereotype and its offensive.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And he says, we're doing a series called *The Sopranos*. It's going into the second year. And I said, yeah, I heard about it. I haven't seen it. Um, well, the, uh, our leading character, Tony Soprano, is having such problems with his therapist, and she's so

harried by him that she needs a therapist. And we wondered if you'd like to play that? And I said, well sure, why not.

**THE SOPRANOSCLIP:** Look I need you as a colleague. To tell me that I did the right thing. You've got to ask yourself why you became a psychiatrist in the first place. If it was only to help people stop smoking or biting their nails then so be it there's nothing wrong with that.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter played Dr. Elliot Kupferberg, the therapist to Dr. Jennifer Melfi, played by Lorriane Bracco.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, she was very good. Although she constantly, she never did the same scene the same way twice. So I didn't quite know exactly how to deal with that. But I just followed my instincts. I don't know how many shows I did, 15 or something. And I directed one too. I loved it. It was really fun. Wonderful writing, the dialogue was great.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And Peter knew what to do with it. Dr. Kupferberg became a memorable *Sopranos* character.

**THE SOPRANOSCLIP:** I only suggested you reevaluate your work with Leadbelly or be prepared to deal with moral or possibly legal consequences. Uh Leadbelly? Who's that come on? The answer is a female Opera singer and gangster.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** During the show's run, a reporter said to Peter: "It's been so long since your last film, a whole generation only knows you as Dr. Melfi's psychiatrist." Peter's response? "As long as they know me."

Here's where I'm about to say something unexpected. In 2006, Peter Bogdanovich went on tour with a rock band. He was shooting what became a four-hour documentary on Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers called *Runnin' Down a Dream*. It all started when a record producer, a friend of Peter's, called him up.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And he says, would you want to do a, uh, do you want to do a documentary on Tom Petty? I said, why? And he says, well I was talking to Tom, Tom wants to do a documentary about the first 30 years of the band, it's going to be 30 years next year. So, and, um, he wants to get a major director. And I said, how about Bogdanovich? And he said, can we get him? And I said, I'll try. And so I'm asking you, can we get you? I said, well, I'd like to meet him and then we'll see. He said, okay, I'll arrange a meeting. Hang up the phone, I turn to Louise and I say, who's Tom Petty? I said, what is he, a country singer? She said, no, no, no, she said, he's one of the premier rock and roll stars in America. I said, oh really. Do you like his stuff? She said, yeah, he's really good. Oh, so I met him at Geoffrey's, down in Malibu.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Did you get some of his music first?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah, I did listen to some of the music, which I liked. Not my normal kind of music that, because Sinatra is much more my kind of thing. But I liked it, some of the

songs. And I had liked the Beatles, so I'm not completely idiotic about rock and roll. And, uh, I thought he was really good and interesting.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter met Tom Petty for lunch, and they talked for hours. A day later, he called Petty up.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I said, okay I'll do it. And he says, how you going to do it? I said, you're going to tell it. And I had him tell the story basically.

**TOM PETTY ARCHIVE AUDIO:** We had become the biggest thing Gainesville had ever seen and we felt like we had to break out of there.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter gathered tons of footage, shadowing the band and interviewing other musicians and producers. At one point, the film was five hours long so Tom Petty asked Peter a legit question.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He says, it's getting a little long, ain't it Pete? I said, yeah, it is a bit long. He said, well we'll cut it down and we got it down to about 4 hours or something. And we won a Grammy: Best Long Form Video. And I thought, I made a joke when I got it, well it sure is a long form video, it's four hours.

**RUNNIN' DOWN A DREAMCLIP:** Wouldn't it be great it just for one moment everything was all right.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Tom Petty died in 2017 of an accidental prescription drug overdose. He was 66. Peter's documentary has become a gift to fans.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I love Tom. I really loved him. I miss him a lot. Jesus, such a great guy. A great man.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** While Peter remained close to most of the women in his life, Cybill, Monika, and Louise, he did not have a close relationship with his first wife, Polly. After their divorce, Polly had continued working as a production designer, she picked up an Oscar nomination for *Terms of Endearment*. She had also become a successful producer, making films like *Say Anything*, *The War of the Roses*, and Wes Anderson's first film, *Bottle Rocket*.

Polly was widely admired in Hollywood for her taste and vision. And for her ability to guide projects she believed in over the finish line. All of the things that Polly was good at, mentoring, connecting people, fueling the energy of a project behind the scenes, these are subtle, but vital contributions that are rarely celebrated in Hollywood history. But they are often what get great movies made.

In 2001, Polly was living in New York with her and Peter's youngest daughter Sashy. Polly was sick. She had ALS. Peter went to visit her.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And I apologized for the pain I'd caused her. She apologized to me for the pain she caused me. We laughed about something, and I went over and messed up her hair a little bit. And she smiled, and that was the last time I saw her.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Three months later, Polly died. She was 72 years old.

Of all the things Peter and I talked about in our fifteen hours of interviews, his relationship with his daughters felt the most "off limits" to me. He never said as much, but I'm a father, and I sensed Peter's discomfort with it. I finally asked him about his girls in our last session together.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Do you have, uh, any regrets about the kind of father you've been?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Oh sure. I wish, I wish we didn't have to put them through that divorce. Not easy for the kids. Never easy for the kids. because the kids are torn. They love us both. And what are they going to take sides and all, it just was a mistake.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** We did talk to Peter's daughters. They were honest but forgiving. Peter's oldest daughter Antonia is a director working in Hollywood. When she looks back now, she recognizes the loneliness of growing up with two parents off making movies.

**ANTONIA BOGDANOVICH:** I would say it wasn't the easiest childhood because my parents weren't around a lot. I didn't get to see my dad as much as I would have liked to. My mom got full custody when they split up because I think thought was just the thing. But I had a great childhood at my dad's house and he was just fun, it was just really fun, you know. Kids are very malleable. They adjust.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Sashy lives in New Jersey with her family and is getting a Master's degree.

**SASHY BOGDANOVICH:** My dad has always been really good at trying to maintain a relationship with me. And, you know, he always calls and he used to call when he'd get on a flight. And he's kept it there.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** She worked in films for a while, and then decided to get out.

**SASHY BOGDANOVICH:** I hate the film business. I hate that they dropped my mom when she turned 60. I hate that, you know, they think some of these movies are the best movies ever made, but my dad can get a job? This business is so hard on old people, you know, and older people. And it's such a disgrace, really, because, you know, my dad was able to learn so much from Orson and John Ford and Howard Hawks and all these people and -- I dunno.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** One could make the argument that Peter's greatest contribution isn't his films. It's all he's done to preserve and champion movie history. Over the years, Peter has written more than ten books.

In 1997, Peter published a book called *Who the Devil Made It?* It's a vital resource: 800 pages of interviews and stories with some of the most important directors in Hollywood history. He followed it up in 2004 with *Who The Hell's In It?*, featuring interviews with actors. These books by Peter have become part of how we understand classic movies.

## MONTAGE OF ARCHIVAL DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Ford, Hawks, Hitchcock, Orson, , they were interesting, they were fascinating. I'd seen their work and it was fascinating to see how much they were like their work or not. And it's all very interesting to me. I learned a lot from that, just that, that knowledge, you know.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** There's a conversation Peter had with Orson Welles back in 1969 that has stuck with me. Peter was only 30 at the time. He likely didn't feel it so acutely. He had his whole career ahead of him. But Orson was 54. Peter mentioned to Orson that directors in their 70s, like John Ford, were having trouble getting work. The next day Orson brought it up again.

**ORSON WELLES:** I was thinking last night. It made me so sick what you told me about it. All these old directors who can't get jobs. And I was thinking of these conductors, you know, Klemperer. Barbirolli, Toscanini. I could name hundreds almost, in the last century who were at the height of their powers after 75. And were conducting at 80. And who says you're over the hill?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I know.

**ORSON WELLES:** It's so awful. I believe that Ford today would give us better pictures than he has ever made.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Orson goes on, because it's only in your 20s and in your 70s and 80s that you do the greatest work. It's youth and old age that the greats are done and we must treasure old age.

**ORSON WELLES:** And give to genius the capacity to, to function in old age.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Orson went on to tell Peter about a movie he wanted to make about an old director in his last days.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Do you want to tell me?

**ORSON WELLES:** I don't want to tell it.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Blow it for you.

**ORSON WELLES:** It will blow it for me. I'll say a few words.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The director is big macho, hairy chested guy - basically John Ford and John Huston with a sprinkle of Hemingway thrown in. He spends his summer in Spain on a boat, with a man who's making a movie about him. And things are coming to an end for the director.

Orson never finished that movie. Peter did. He and Frank Marshall rescued the footage from a vault in Paris and oversaw the editing.

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WIND CLIP:** Mr. Otterfield here wanted to be an actor. And he saw one of my films. He's a rough magician isn't he?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** *The Other Side of the Wind* was released in 2018, thirty-three years after Orson's death.

Now Peter Bogdanovich, at 80 years old, is the elder statesman.

Younger directors like Quentin Tarantino have become friends with Peter. They talk to him about his movies and they champion his work.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Quentin was so important in, in terms of reviving the interest in *They All Laughed*. 'Cause he put it on a list of the ten best movies of all time. That gives you certain encouragement. That the younger generation likes your work. And you know, then you won't feel like an old fart, you know.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Rian Johnson, who directed *The Last Jedi* and *Knives Out*, is a fan as well. Johnson has the movie poster for *At Long Last Love* on one of his walls. Peter has also grown close to directors Wes Anderson and Noah Baumbach.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Wes and Noah call me Pop. Which I allow. And I, I call them my sons.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter says they've offered to help him produce a movie he's wanted to make for a long time.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** This is the one I've been working on for 30 years or more. Called *Wait for Me*. It's a ghost picture. There's six ghosts in it. They're all friendly ghosts, I am quick to say I have friendly ghosts. It's about a filmmaker, uh, who's made, he's been married six times. And has six daughters and six ex-wives. And, um, his last ex-wife, his last wife, she wasn't an ex. She died in a plane crash six years before, before the movie starts. And she died in this plane, a small plane crash with two of his best friends. And it's really a comedy/drama. It's kind of funny, kind of sad. And it's my best picture, I think. It was just very hard to make there's just so many characters.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I mean you weren't married six times. You didn't have six daughters, but--

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I feel like I did.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Um, so is there, is any part of that autobiographical?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Oh yeah, all of it. It's just, it's just changed a bit, you know.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** You still feel vibrant, full of ideas?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well, I have some ideas, yeah. I'd like to make some pictures. I'm better when I'm working. What can I tell you? I should be on a set all the time.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Today Peter lives in a condo in Toluca Lake with Louise and Nelly. Louise suggested he come live there after he broke his leg in France at a film festival. That way she could help him recover.

During one of the last interviews I did with Peter, he talked about how much he likes to sing. And it struck me of all the things I associate with Peter Bogdanovich, singing is not one of them. But it turns out, singing makes him happy. Not long ago, Louise bought him a karaoke machine.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I find that when I'm singing, I find that when I'm doing something creative even singing, it really makes me feel better. I feel better when I'm finished than I did when I started. Which is the whole point.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So now I have this image in my head: Peter Bogdanovich, in this small condo he's sharing with Louise and Nelly, pulling out the karaoke machine, with its handheld mic and small speaker. Maybe he ropes Louise and Nelly into it.

So there they are. These three survivors. Peter checks the mic and, of course, chooses a Sinatra song. It's not that hard to imagine it. Peter doing one of the things he does best, Performing for an audience. Remember, that's how he made his parents happy all those years ago. And now, it seems he's learned how to lift his own spirits. He sings for himself.

### **PETER SINGING "I'LL BE SEEING YOU"**

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I'm Ben Mankiewicz, and you've been listening to The Plot Thickens from Turner Classic Movies. Stay tuned as we'll have some bonus episodes coming soon. Our whole team is so happy you listened.

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