

Superstar, independent cinema icon, Oscar-winning director, political animal, rebel... **Robert Redford** is the golden boy who's succeeded on his own terms. Which is why he's now filming *Captain America 2*, playing S.H.I.E.L.D. honcho Agent Pierce. **"I'm doing it because it's different,"** he says. **"It could be fun."**

**D**an...? Dan, can you come here for a second?" Robert Redford ambles into a suite at the swanky George V Hotel in Paris that's been designated for our meeting with the American legend. We don't use the term lightly: Redford is one of the last remaining figures for whom that fulsome soubriquet is not just fitting but entirely necessitated, given his standing as the blond superstar who lorded over Hollywood with *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*, *The Way We Were*, *The Sting* and *All The President's Men*; who won the Best Director Oscar with his filmmaking debut, 1980's *Ordinary People*; and who permanently altered the landscape of independent cinema as founder and ongoing figurehead of the Sundance Film Festival. (Renowned for his unshakeable beliefs/stubbornness, he used his stardom to offer alternatives to Hollywood storytelling).

But back to Dan, who we take to be one of the two entourage members sitting in the corner, furiously tapping at Blackberries and iPads – and presumably the one with the XY chromosome. Not realising that *Total Film* has already taken up position, Redford hesitates, apologises ("Oh, I'm sorry") and retreats with 'Dan' in tow, only to emerge minutes later with problem resolved and conversational mode engaged. Grabbing the chair beside us, outfitted in an American-classic ensemble of blue jeans and blue check shirt with elbow patches, he kicks off with chit-chat about

Sundance London, which has just finished. Redford, it must be said, didn't appear all that engaged at its opening press conference and isn't sure how the festival's second (incongruous) appearance at the O2 went. "I know the weather was good," declares the 76-year-old Californian, for whom Sundance tours of duty are more endured than relished these days.

But the lightning rod for today's tête-à-tête is contemplative drama *The Company You Keep* (initially slated for a June release, the film went back to 2014 as *Total Film* went to press). It focuses on ex-members of the Weather Underground, the American dissent group that instigated a bombing campaign to protest the Vietnam War. Redford depicts these once fiery radicals decades down the line, when they've mostly settled into normal lives under assumed identities. Among them are Susan Sarandon, Julie Christie and Redford himself, whose character is forced on the run when a young reporter (Shia LaBeouf) threatens to expose his past. It's Redford's ninth film as a director but only the third in which he also stars: "Directing myself is not comfortable for me."

The blue-eyed golden boy of 1970s Hollywood, Redford fortuitously rose to the top right as the film industry entered a purple-patch of unfettered, auteur-driven creativity and an actor could legitimately forge his career on a one-for-me, one-for-them ethos. Refusing to trade on his looks, his movies came with attitude and political heft. Subsequent decades have proved rockier for Redford, with Sundance swallowing his time and

as many flops to his name as hits (for every *Out Of Africa*, a *Havana*; for every *Indecent Proposal*, an *Up Close & Personal*). Redford's last bona fide success was 2001's *Spy Game*, opposite Brad Pitt, while *The Company You Keep* marks his first acting gig since 2007's *Lions For Lambs* although he's currently making up for lost time with roles in J.C. Chandor's *All Is Lost* and playing the head of S.H.I.E.L.D. in *Captain America: Winter Soldier*.

His face is craggy and lived-in. But close your eyes and you could be listening to Bob Woodward eliciting information from Deep Throat in *All The President's Men*, or even the rich businessman offering Demi Moore \$1m for sex in *Indecent Proposal*. Redford's voice seems hardly to have changed, which makes for a strangely soothing experience as he opens up to *Total Film* about his fabled life and illustrious career.

**Loyalty is a key theme in *The Company You Keep*: loyalty to people, loyalty to beliefs. Is that an important quality to you?**

Yes, it's extremely important to me. It's a wonderful element to work with, too, because sometimes loyalty can go into a dark area. I was not so much interested in making a film about that time; I was interested in those people 30 years later. How do they feel now? What was the cost of going underground? That's what interested me. I was fascinated by the fact that the loyalty they felt in the early 1970s, that united them to each other and to their cause, was the only thing left in some cases. Because when they went underground, they were not able to be completely who they were and over time it's >>

**ROBERT REDFORD**



hard to live that way. It's hard to not be able to stand up and say who you really are, even if you started another life and became a respectable citizen, you became a lawyer or a soccer mom. Some have come to resent the passions of their youth because they're stuck with false identities, whereas others are still radical and committed to doing the same things they did years ago. That's the character Julie Christie plays.

**You've had your share of incredible female co-stars over the years, but it's great to see you on screen with Julie Christie. Did you want to cast someone who, like yourself, could be seen as emblematic of the '70s?**

Not so much on a Redford-Christie basis as much as iconic in the sense of what we both stood for when we were young politically. We were very aligned politically in our younger times. Our careers pretty much started at the same time, we had success at the same time, we became known in our countries about the same time. So I suspect there was something iconic about it. I always liked her quality as an actress. Whatever she did, truth always came out.

**Why did you cast Shia LaBeouf as the journalist?**

Shia's character is the driving force of the film; he's like Inspector Javert in *Les Misérables*. He had two things that I thought were vital for the character: as a human being, he's got a quick mind and a fast tongue. His mouth and his mind are very close together so therefore he has an exceptional mental energy that I thought was really good for the character. I'm very happy with his performance.

**Do have a strong political and social agenda when you direct?**

I don't look at it that sharply. What interests me is story. To let the audience come in, you have to



Looking for thrills: Redford stars and directs in *The Company You Keep*.



**'I was always looking for a character that was caught between two forces. That's always interested me'**

reach for the emotional core of the story you're telling. And for me with this film, the emotional core is with how these characters feel and what my character feels about his daughter. When you strip away the Weather Underground and the violence - I didn't spend a lot of time on that because we've seen that in documentaries, and it's the emotional underpinnings for each character that interest me. Without them, I would not have wanted to tell this story.

**Still, *Lions For Lambs* was strongly against the Iraq War; *The Milagro Beanfield War* took a stand against rampant development; *Quiz Show* was a metaphor for American disillusionment. Including this one, your films tend to convey an overt, left-leaning viewpoint.**

I make films about human beings. If I were to categorise how I would structure a film I'm preparing to make, it's story first, then character, then emotion. I grew up in a lower working-class community where there was not much to do for entertainment, so I read. I read mythology; I was told stories to calm me down. Story is paramount for me. With this film, I could relate to the story because I was there when the Weather Underground were around; I was not part of it but I agreed with the cause, which was that people shouldn't have to sacrifice themselves and others in a war they did not believe in. It was an illicit and immoral war. I was spiritually connected to that movement. But it was 1970: I was starting a career, I had a family, so I was not a part of it.

**Did you also feel disenchanted when that movement embraced violence?**

I could see it was the beginning of the end. When a movement turns to violence, it starts to eat itself and that's exactly what happened. And then I saw a few people that were committed to the cause who went underground and took on false identities to remain free. At the time, I said, "This is fascinating stuff but it's too close to the event to do anything with it." A few years ago, I felt we were far enough removed that it could be told as an American story. The story that I loved most as a child was *Les Misérables* and the hunter and the hunted has been thematic in pretty much all the films that I've done.

**When do you think you first developed your political consciousness?**

There's an irony in me playing a teacher in *Lions For Lambs* in that, since I was kicked out of college, I never completed school. I was never a good student. I wanted to be out in the world; I wanted to go to other countries to see how other cultures lived. I was anxious to get educated so when I left college, I worked to save the money to go to Europe to study art. I lived on the bum. I had little to no money. I had to be resourceful. I went to art school in Florence for seven months; I was in France, Germany, Switzerland and Spain.

# Five star turns

The best of Bob...



#1

## BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID

1969 ★★★★★

In 1969, Redford excelled as a skier in *Downhill Racer*. Not heard of it? That's because his other movie – buddy western *Butch Cassidy*, with Paul Newman – took more than \$100m domestically and catapulted Redford to worldwide celebrity. The stars and director George Roy Hill would re-team for 1973's con-caper *The Sting*, and, in 1981, Redford named his non-profit institution for independent filmmakers after his character.

I would stay in youth hostels, and I travelled and hitchhiked and met students from other countries who would challenge me politically. Kids my own age in those countries were very politically aware and I was ashamed that I wasn't. So I got interested and by the time I returned to America, I had a much broader view of my country and an intense interest in it.

**Back to loyalty, early in your career, you stuck by the side of particular directors: George Roy Hill with *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*, *The Sting*, *The Great Waldo Pepper*; Michael Ritchie with *Downhill Racer* and *The Candidate*; and Pollack, who directed you seven times...**

With Sydney, we rose to that height together. I was thinking the other day, "How long have I been in this business? Fifty-three years... Jesus!" It seems like yesterday. But Sydney was a dear friend and our careers rose together. We met in 1960, we were both actors then and the first film I ever made was called *War Hunt* [Korean War drama from 1962]. Sydney played my commanding officer in the film and he and I struck up a conversation while we were making that film. I was in the theatre in New York at that time and I'd come out to California and we became friends. We talked about our dreams, our aspirations. He didn't think he had a career as an actor, and was more interested in directing. A few years later, I came back from Germany to the United States to do my first Hollywood film with Natalie Wood [1965's *Inside Daisy Clover*], and then I did a second one with her right after that [1966's *This Property Is Condemned*]. There was no director; a lot of directors had turned it down. Sydney's name was at the bottom of the list and Natalie's going down it and said, "Who's this guy Pollack?" I said, "Oh, he's great! You've got to go with him." I just wanted him because he was a friend. I thought at least I'd have somebody I could talk to. To make a long story short, she met him, he got hired, and he and I collaborated behind the scenes on that film because the script was terrible.

**As your careers progressed, did you bring projects to him or vice versa?**

Both. I went to him with *Jeremiah Johnson* and said, "Why don't we make this film about a man in the wilderness?" We filmed it on my property in Utah. Then he came to me with *The Way We Were*. I said, "This guy is just a male model, he's got nothing to do." So I turned it down. Sydney said, "But I want you to do it." I said, "He's just there because of the way he looks. I don't want to do that. But if he can have a flaw..." Sydney said, "OK, we'll develop a flaw." So I committed to the film but I was really committing to him; I trusted him. And it went on and on: *Three Days Of The Condor*, *The Electric Horseman*, *Out Of Africa*... It was a great friendship and collaborative relationship.

**You've witnessed ample changes in the film industry. At the same time, you have arguably changed the industry yourself. Would you agree?**

I don't mean to be falsely modest but it's hard for me to see that second part. That's been >>



#2

## THE WAY WE WERE 1973 ★★★

Redford was never afraid of saying 'no' (*Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf*, *The Graduate*) and he initially turned down the lead in this romance. His concerns proved authentic – there's too much glossing of political issues as the film tracks Redford and Barbra Streisand from college in the '30s to the break-up of their marriage in the '50s – but *Time Out* noted Redford brought "more weight... than it deserves." One of seven collaborations with director Sydney Pollack.



#3

## THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR 1975 ★★★★★

Pollack and Redford again question American government, the actor this time playing a CIA researcher who returns from lunch to find all his colleagues dead... Soaked in Watergate disillusionment, it combines Hitchcockian thrills with Pakula paranoia. "It's always talked about as one of the most influential paranoid thrillers," said Pollack in 2007, a year before his death. "It's exciting to have anything that you've done that's 30 years old talked about."



#4

## ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN 1976 ★★★★★

A self-proclaimed journalism junkie and a keen political beast (he attributes both to "growing up in a state that had Nixon for senator"), Redford teamed with Dustin Hoffman to dramatise the exposure of the Watergate scandal by journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. A riveting character piece that makes capital use of its locations, it even makes typing exciting – director Alan J. Pakula insisted gunshots and whiplashes were layered over the clacking keys.



#5

## INDECENT PROPOSAL 1993 ★★★

Married couple Demi Moore and Woody Harrelson head to Vegas when the recession hits... and score a jackpot when magnate Redford offers seven figures for a night with Moore. Billionaire John Gage may have landed Bob a Razzie nomination, but the premise percolated into many a watercooler conversation and Redford regarded it as a "piece of fun." He would star in only two more films during the '90s, and made just five screen appearances in '00s.

brought to my attention but it's better for other people to make that judgment. All I know is that I wanted to do something that I felt was needed in 1979, 1980. In the 1970s, I had enjoyed being able to do larger films that I thought were good: *The Way We Were*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Butch Cassidy...* Those were big movies with big budgets but they were also good stories with good characters. At the same time I wanted to tell other stories that were a bit edgier, a bit progressive. And I was allowed to do that. If I were to do, say, *The Way We Were*, they'd let me make *The Candidate*; they'd let me make *Downhill Racer*. If I did *All The President's Men*, then I could do *Jeremiah Johnson*. Those were very low-budget films but they were made by studios. So I was blessed. Then things changed...

**With the birth of the blockbuster: *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *Superman*...**

Hollywood's a business, that's all it ever has been. It was always going to follow the money so when young people started spending money, they started making films for the youth market. That's when you started getting the big blockbusters: Superman... cartoons... big, expensive films filled with special effects and action. Which is fine. But I felt they were going to abandon

film community, which was very small at that time, and said, "Do you have any films?" We had about 25 films the first year. Meanwhile, the advisors I had in my life at that time tried to stop me from doing it. They said, "You've already wasted time with the Sundance Lab." But I told them I was going to take a chance. It took about five or six years for it to survive and then suddenly it started to move and get bigger and bigger. Now there are 4,500 submissions, about 14 theatres in Park City and 60,000 people that come. On one hand, it's a great success because it's achieved its purpose. Is it any fun for me? No. Not like it was in the beginning.

**Why's that?**

It took a lot of time out of my career. Now I'm trying to go back to what I love doing.

**You sound a bit remorseful. Do you have any regrets?**

No, not in my professional life. I've been blessed to do good things the way I wanted to do them. But it has cost me sometimes. The idea of remaining independent and being free from other pressures - corporate pressures - was more important than anything. I've worked hard to maintain that, and I feel good about that. But it's been painful at times.



'The idea of remaining independent was more important than anything, but it's been painful at times'

the other kinds of films. Since change is inevitable, I wanted to make sure that the edgier films, ones more about American life, could be kept alive.

**And so, Sundance was born...**

Initially, we developed a lab and I would ask colleagues of mine - writers, directors, cameramen, editors - to come up to Sundance and work with novices filmmakers who had fresh ideas, to help these new voices develop their skills so at least they can get their films made. Five, six years later, I realised that once we had done that, there was no place for these independent films to go. That led to the original idea of the festival. We went to the neighbouring town, Park City, and asked if we could use its single theatre in January and they said, "Sure." Then we contacted the independent

**Painful in what way?**

Sometimes there would be resentment for me staying outside of the mainstream, and you felt like there was a negative feeling about you that prevented you from being able to do things you wanted to do. It would go away over time, but there would be a period that was difficult. Painful in terms of what I gave up in order to have a life, have a private life... My feeling was simple and maybe old-fashioned: I always said that my craft is the most important thing to me. But you had to give up certain things because you were committed to developing your craft. Somebody would come to you and offer you a lot of money to do a part you didn't really want to do. I'd say, "No, I'd rather do this smaller film." People would say, "You're crazy." Or they'd say, "He's just doing Sundance now.

He lives in the mountains and he doesn't do movies any more." So people stopped offering me parts. Those were some of the painful times. But I survived.

**What do you think about the current state of independent cinema?**

It's difficult. It's always been difficult and it will continue to be difficult. The state of the film business in general is not particularly healthy. Independent film has always had to struggle for a place in the universe. The exhibition arena is better now but overall, mostly due to the economy, it's a difficult time for independent films to get made.

**While big studio films like *The Dark Knight* rely on a metaphorical approach to tackle political discourse, American independents, it appears, are becoming less political. Why do you think that is?**

## Lifeline

**18 August, 1936**  
Born Charles Robert Redford Jr. to Martha and Charles Sr. in Santa Monica, California.



**1962**  
Screen debut in *War Hunt*. Meets Sydney Pollack, stars in seven of his films.



**1969-1973**  
*Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*, *The Way We Were* and *The Sting* strike box office gold.



HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES, ALL STAR, KOBAL, MOVIESTORE, REX



The big con: as grifter Johnny Hooker in 1973's classic *The Sting*.

[All Is Lost] was digital, and one of the reasons I made it is because it gave me the chance to watch and to learn. It's about a man on a boat lost at sea, and I'm the only character in it. People think digital is faster because you don't have to cut, you just keep rolling. But I noticed it was much more difficult; you have cables and wires all over the place and that slows the process down. And the image is sometimes almost too perfect. I had the choice to go with digital on *The Company You Keep*, but I went with film. **Leonardo DiCaprio is apparently curious to know what you make of his take on *Gatsby*. Did you mind when you heard that Baz Luhrmann was remaking it, particularly as he criticised your version for being 'inert'?**

*The Great Gatsby* does not belong to me. I don't own *Gatsby*. It's fine. Leonardo is a very good actor. I like him, I think he's wonderful. I think Carey Mulligan is wonderful. It's a story that is timeless and that can be told again and again. There were versions of *Gatsby* before we did our one. I don't think about it any other way than, "Sure". I'm interested in seeing it, eventually. It's just one of those stories that is timeless.

**You were talking earlier about noticing the industry shift when films like *Superman* arrived on the scene. You're about to join the superhero universe yourself in Marvel's upcoming *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*...**

I've always liked all kinds of pitches. [Laughs] Curveball, fastball, slowball... But it's very simple: I'm only doing it because it's different. It's not a major part. I have other films that I'm going to be doing now too, like *A Walk In The Woods* [an adaptation of Bill Bryson's memoir, in which Redford will play the author for director Richard Linklater]. That'll be Nick Nolte and I as two older guys trying to hike the Appalachian Trail and everything goes wrong. It's a comedy, and I want to do a comedy. This was just a step along the way. I said, "This could be interesting and fun."

**Wouldn't you have been perfect casting for *Captain America* himself 35 years ago? Would you have signed up for that?**

Oh god, no no no. But as a matter of fact, I was always looking to play a character that was caught between two forces, a character who was trying to be a person, be an individual, but who was caught with powers that were beyond his control. That was *Three Days Of The Condor*; that was *All The President's Men*. That's something that has always interested me very much. **TF**

***The Company You Keep* opens in 2014. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* opens on 2 April 2014.**

Commercial films that cost a lot of money shy away from controversy because they're afraid they won't make their money back. *All The President's Men* had a fairly high budget for its time; it cost \$7m in 1975. So the studio was taking a chance on it and it did well but I don't think that film could be made now. We had the time and the money to make it as good as we wanted to make it. I think independent films now are connected to the more humanistic side of reality. They're about the struggle to survive. Big commercial films aren't dealing with those issues.

**About 10 years ago, you were considering a sequel to *The Candidate*. Has that idea been canned?**

At one point I was interested because I thought maybe we could tell a story about this guy 30 years later and what's happened to him. But

I decided against it because everybody knows everything now. There's nothing to reveal. When I made *The Candidate*, you could inform people what was going on behind the scenes, how a candidate who was totally unqualified could be put up for office because of the way he looked; you could show how the machinations behind the scenes worked. Now everything's known, so what's the point?

**How have you changed as a director from your debut film, *Ordinary People*?**

Technically, you just get better each time. Also, there are such violent changes occurring with digital; it's reshaping our industry in drastic ways. Many of them are good, some of them are not so good. I haven't decided yet whether I think digital is better than film. But I know that the film I made with J.C. Chandor



**1981**  
Wins Best Director for *Ordinary People*; the first Sundance festival takes place in Salt Lake City.



**1985**  
Joins Meryl Streep for romantic awards magnet, *Out Of Africa*.



**1993**  
Gives Demi mo(o)re than she bargained for in *Indecent Proposal*.



**2007-**  
Directs *Lions For Lambs*, and *The Company You Keep*; Sundance hits London.