

---

Kristen Stewart on the 'Insane Gall' of Directors as 'Seberg' Arrives in San Sebastian

---

20/09/2019



On Friday, Kristen Stewart and Benedict Andrews' political thriller "Seberg" plays at the 67th San Sebastian Film Festival, where it opens Perlak, a section dedicated to the Spanish premieres of major international films. The star and her director addressed the media prior to the screening in the festival's first high-profile press conference, held at the seaside Kursaal congress center.

In the film, Stewart plays real life American actress Jean Seberg, who starred in Jean-Luc Godard's "Breathless." Set against a turbulent political backdrop of late-1960s U.S.A., "Seberg" tells a fictionalized version of how the star was targeted by the FBI through an illegal surveillance program, Cointelpro, after voicing her support of the Black Panther Party and her romantic involvement with civil rights activist Hakim Jamal.

Eventually, and under dubious circumstances, the actress took her own life.

"Seberg" has received mixed reviews since premiering at Venice last month, but there's been near unanimous consensus that Stewart has given one of the most assured performances in her still-young career. She gives Andrews a lot of credit for that.

"He would just throw things at me," she joked to a deathly quiet room, her monotone sense of humor lost on the largely Spanish-speaking audience listening to a translation through earpieces.

The relationship between director and actress is touched on in the film, which includes the story about Seberg being bullied and accidentally set on fire by director Otto Preminger. There was none of that on the set of this film however.

"You have to subject yourself to a person and circumstances and set of causes controlled by them," she said, pointing out that as an actress, "it's a risky business, you have to choose well."

"But," she went on, "It's the only way that something truly singular, honest and worthwhile happens. At the end of the day I find the most dangerous, fulfilling and rewarding experiences come from giving yourself fully to the experience which is being controlled by the director."

"For most of my grown-up life I've been a theater director and worked with actors in the laboratory of the rehearsal space," Andrews said. "There you have to create a place where it's safe to be dangerous and go to the limits of human behavior. As a filmmaker I want to get there with actors who will be brave and go to those places. But you must create a space where it's safe to take risks."

Of course, a political film raised political questions as well.

Reaffirming sentiments expressed at Venice, where the film premiered, and Toronto before, Stewart said that while she's not about to climb on a soapbox, "I think it's clear which side of the spectrum I tip onto. If you want to know what my causes are, they are so obvious."

She did emphasize two issues she finds especially pressing however, "Gun control and climate change. I think we are all sitting here shaking in our boots on those subjects."

For his part, Andrews explained a desire to show the harm caused by the Cointelpro program not just to those being surveilled, but to the humans on both sides. It was important to the director to show the adverse effect the program had on young FBI agent Jack Solomon as well, who eventually comes clean to Seberg about the surveillance.

"What I wanted to show with Jack was a young soldier in a dirty war who doesn't realize it. I wanted to show the kind of persuasive and insidious power of an oppressive government machine."

He emphasized that at the heart of the film, there is a story about, "The rubbing of these lives, how they touch... Jack looking at Jean and Jean being looked at by Jack."

Stewart also fielded questions about her own ambitions behind the camera on the previously announced adaptation of Lidia Yuknavitch's memoir "The Chronology of Water."

"The movie I want to make is really confronting. I think (the memoir) is one of the most jarring, honest coming-of-age stories. More than that, it's one of the most honest self-realized female stories I've ever read. It's all true and devastatingly gorgeous," she said.

Speaking about Andrews specifically but directors in general, she hinted at something she must see in herself when she admired, "You have to be somewhat insane to lead the charge of 200 people and lots of money and time. It's a very presumptuous place, and the only way to do it is with insane gall."