

MPTD Interview with Arch Campbell

Leslie Green: Welcome to Reel Talk with Film DC. This is your host, Leslie Green, senior communications manager with the DC office of Motion Picture and Television Development, also known as the DC Film Office. We have a veteran movie critic and entertainment reporter, Arch Campbell, with us today. He's also the host of WJLA and NewsChannel 8's the "Arch Campbell Show." He's here with us today.

Arch Campbell: Now does veteran mean old? Because I guess I'm old.

Leslie: No, veteran doesn't mean old. It doesn't mean old.

Arch: Maybe veteran means survivor.

Leslie: That's right.

Arch: I have survived a long time. I came to Washington 40 years ago to work for channel four and I worked over there 32 years. Then I've been over here almost eight. The time flies when you're going to the movies.

Leslie: Right, it certainly does. You're here today to talk with us about the film and TV industry right here in the District. Thank you for joining us. We're happy to have you with us today.

Arch: Glad to be here.

Leslie: Thank you. Tell us a little bit about how you got started as a movie critic and an entertainment reporter right here in DC.

Arch: I started as a radio announcer down in Texas, where I grew up. At that time, radio and television stations were owned by the same companies, and the television news side was expanding. I managed to jump from radio into television, and I was sort of a feature reporter. One day, the news director walked into the newsroom and we were all young and misbehaving. He would walk in every morning to scream at us, anyway. "Get to work! Get me some stories! Get off your behinds!" He comes in one day, he screams, "I want a movie reviewer! Who wants to do it!?" and the place just went silent, and everybody looked down, and I raised my hand. I said, "I'll do it!"

I went to see "American Graffiti." [laughs] Then I had to send away for some film clips, because it was so long ago. I went on the air and reviewed it and they liked it. They were looking for different segments. It was so long ago, television newscasts were making things up as they went along. I got added to the mix doing features and movie reviews.

One of the anchors that I worked with moved to Los Angeles and had some friends at NBC, and they hired me for WRC. I came up here and for years, I did features only. Then there was a big turnover at channel four and I kept saying, "I used to review movies. Let me do it again." They gave me a try.

My first movie review, I was sitting next to Jim Vance, and Vance liked it. I got the blessing from Vance and I wound up doing movie reviews there for 25 years.

I think that a lot of people who write about movies and who review movies will tell you a similar story. They were working in a newsroom, somebody came in. They said, "We want somebody to write about movies, to talk about movies, to do movie reviews," and they point and it's you and that's it. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

[laughter]

Leslie: Tell us, what do you believe is a recipe for a great movie, or is that even a good question to ask? Is that something that you can tell us?

Arch: No, it is a good question. I think that that question is coming up again this summer, because you're beginning to hear a lot about blockbuster fatigue which is to say that people are turning away from movies they thought would be big because they're delivering the same old thing. They have a formula and the global nature of the movies has made that formula more intense than it used to be. You're seeing less creative stuff and more superheroes fighting villains with a big blowout at the end. The recipe for a good movie, number one, I think it has to deliver what it promises you to get in there in the first place. Number two, I think it needs to surprise you and do something that you don't expect. I think it needs to be worth the 8 bucks or 10 bucks or 12 bucks or 20 bucks or whatever it costs to get into a film now.

It needs to be worth your time, and at the bottom of the whole thing, you need to walk away feeling entertained. That's a broad answer, because there's not one answer. Last week or a couple of weeks ago, the Adam Sandler movie "Grown Ups 2" was the number one movie in America. Of course, it got terrible...I think it was probably the worst reviewed movie of the year.

But for what it was, and considering Sandler and his fans, the people who went to see it walked out entertained. I think you can't discount that. It's a mix of things. But I really do think a really, really good movie has an element of surprise and of creativity. You leave feeling up and entertained.

Leslie: That's great. We have a growing filmmaker base here in DC. I think that's helpful for people out there who are making films and want to know what it takes to really make a great movie.

Arch: One of the things that's happened in all the years I've been watching movies is the development of technology and the ease of technology, and, of course, the ease of computers and digital cameras. Now the ability to make a really good-looking movie is available to a wide, wide, wide array of people. You don't have to have a professional Hollywood crew to make a really good movie. But what you do have to have is a really interesting, entertaining story that's not the same old thing. It's story. It's about story. It's about the writing. It's not about, this looks great. It's about, what does it do?

Leslie: What is your favorite DC-based movie of all time, and why?

Arch: I love the movie "Being There," with Peter Sellers. I don't know if you've ever seen it.

Leslie: That's an old one. [laughs]

Arch: It is an old one. It was shot in 1979. Actually, Jim Vance and I went to see it together at the premiere. This is the one where we meet Peter Sellers and he's sort of an idiot. He's challenged. He's a simple soul. His protector dies, and so he's thrown into the world. By the end of the movie, this simple soul, who only wanted to grow flowers in the garden, is being touted as the next President of the United States. Now, a lot of it, some of it was shot in Washington. A lot of it was shot down in Ashville, North Carolina at one of the mansions called Biltmore. When you talk about movies in Washington, there are movies set in Washington, and there are a lot of them. Then there are movies that were actually shot in Washington, [laughs] and there's not as many of those, because they let other cities stand in for us. I'm sure the DC Office of Film doesn't like that.

Leslie: We don't.

Arch: We like them when they're shot here.

Leslie: We don't. We want them to come here and get that authenticity. We're working on that.

Arch: We do. We really do. There's a beautiful shot at the beginning of the movie "No Way Out" that begins with a pan shot of DC and then it goes in closer and closer and closer and it keys on a house in Arlington. You love that when you see it. What you don't like is in the same movie, Kevin Costner is running along the K Street expressway and jumps off and he's in Georgetown and runs into a metro stop.

Leslie: Which we know doesn't exist, right?

Arch: Exactly.

Leslie: Did you get a chance to see "Talk to Me"? That was filmed in DC.

Arch: Was that the one about Petey Greene?

Leslie: Yes, about Petey Greene, exactly.

Arch: Oh, yeah. Of course, I saw that. I loved it.

Leslie: Do you think that movie accurately depicted DC?

Arch: Yes, particularly of the time. I knew a lot of people that worked with Petey Greene. They really did capture something special about DC at that time, which was the '70s and early '80s. Pardon me, I did see Talk to Me. In fact, who's the guy that wrote the story? That used to own the radio station. Dewey Hughes. I knew Dewey at channel four. Dewey owned the radio station that Petey was on. Then Petey got onto channel 20 and Dewey was back for the premiere. It was great to see him doing so well.

But he did capture a real slice of DC. Not just a slice, not just the way the city looks, but he captured a time. I've really enjoyed those documentaries that WETA has done, "Washington in

the '60s," "Washington in the '70s." People need to see those and see how different our city is now.

Leslie: That's right. Speaking of TV, there seems to be a lot of DC-based TV shows on right now. You've got "Homeland," "Scandal," "House of Cards," all of those shows. What's your favorite...?

Arch: "The Americans."

Leslie: What's your favorite right now and why?

Arch: Right now, I'm a big, big, big fan of The Americans. I think it's the best thing on television. I love The Americans, as far as a DC show. I've started watching "The Bridge" on FX, which is about Juarez and El Paso. I know you're rolling your eyes thinking, "He's way off the subject." [laughs] But I think it, because I grew up in south Texas, I think it does capture that pretty good. But right now, I really like The Americans. I didn't miss a single episode of The Americans.

Leslie: What did you like best about it?

Arch: I'm going to get the DVD of House of Cards, because everybody is talking about it. I don't stream through Netflix because I just haven't figured out how to, I need to find a 12-year-old kid to show me how to do it. Then I'll start streaming Netflix.

Leslie: Yeah. That's something you definitely have to take a look at. House of Cards is a wonderful, wonderful TV series.

Arch: Everything I've heard about House of Cards, is every shot in it is not just a shot, but it's like beautiful and perfect.

Leslie: Yes, it is, and particularly the opening sequence.

Arch: Right.

Leslie: Why do you think DC is such a great setting for a movie or a TV show storyline?

Arch: Number one, you've got the iconic monuments and the capital and all of that stuff. It's right here. You can't replicate that in a studio. Secondly, though, Washington is a lot more than just the capital building, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. We're a city where people live and work and love and die. There are things that go on here that go on in every city. There's the iconic part, and then there's the rest of the city. It's that rest of the city that I really like.

Leslie: What are some of your favorite places here that you think should be in a movie or a TV show that haven't been?

Arch: Let's see. I like the little...There's not too many funky places left, but I'd like to see Anacostia as it really is show up in a movie. I'd like to see the Langston golf course show up. I like Rock Creek, I like Rock Creek Park, I like Rock Creek parkway. I like the Rock Creek golf

course. There are so many things in this town that are... I come to work and I cross through town on the Rock Creek parkway, when I come to [inaudible 14:10] I come over here. It's just the most beautiful drive in the world. There are a lot of things that are gone. Sheryl's on Capitol Hill, Schwartz's Drug Store that used to be on DuPont Circle. We need to catch those unique things in Washington while they're still around.

Leslie: Absolutely. Is there any DC-based film that you believe deserved to win an Academy Award? This is at any time, any DC-based film.

Arch: I would've liked to have seen Talk to Me get some nominations. I thought it might, but turns out it didn't.

Leslie: Right. It was a great movie. You may have already mentioned this with the No Way Out reference, but what is the biggest gaffe you've seen in a DC-based movie or TV show? [laughs]

Arch: No Way Out, when he gets on the subway in Georgetown, on the metro, people literally started throwing things at the screen. By the way, I was really offended by "White House Down," especially, and "Olympus Has Fallen." I don't like to see movies where they blow up the White House. I don't want to see that. A giant gaffe, I think, was they had drones in White House Down flying down K Street, and then making a left turn on 16th. [inaudible 15:42] to go and blow up the White House. I don't like those. I don't like those. It's interesting to me that White House Down, although I'm sure the city loved getting the business. But it sort of bombed number one, because again, it's the same old thing. Secondly, I just, I don't like seeing our city destroyed.

Leslie: Yeah, well apparently a lot of people like seeing it destroyed. It's a big blockbuster film, a lot of people have gone to see it. I feel the same way. I'm a native Washingtonian. It's a little disconcerting to see your city blown up. It's entertaining for some people.

Arch: Oh, I guess. That's just me. I don't like that.

Leslie: Yeah, I hear you. The last question for you, you've been in DC a long time, more than three decades, it sounds like. Is there any DC-based storyline you believe hasn't been told yet? Is there one that you think would be a great storyline for a movie, or a TV show?

Arch: I like movies where DC is just sort of peripheral. There was a movie with Burt Reynolds and Goldie Hawn way back when, I can't remember the name of it. But they just happened to be living in Washington. They would shop and go to restaurants. I think they went to Clyde's at Georgetown Mall. I just like to see a movie... I'll tell you another one is "Broadcast News." That kind of used the city well, but it wasn't necessarily about the monuments and stuff. It's more about broadcasting. In fact, in Broadcast News, James L. Brooks spent a couple of weeks at NBC.

At that time, at channel four, our playback machine, when they edited the stories, was down in the basement. We would edit them up on the second floor. Every day, people would be literally running like in a marathon to get their story down there in time for it to play on the news.

In Broadcast News, there's a long segment of John Cusack running with a tape, jumping over people. James L. Brooks actually saw that at channel four. Anything that rings true, I think are good. A storyline, I'll think of a storyline about Washington.

Leslie: Yeah, help us out with that. Maybe we can give it to one of our talented filmmakers and they can put something together. [laughs]

Arch: Here's the storyline, actually. I'm a very big supporter of "Fruitvale Station," and I'd like to see stories about kids trying to straighten up their lives and get on with their lives and come up from any adversity they have had growing up. Or I'd like to see the story of single mothers and DC and what they go through and how their kids go on from them. There are a lot of good stories out there that can come from Washington without taking place at the US capital or on the mall.

Leslie: Absolutely, I agree. There are tons of stories out there like that.

Arch: Yeah.

Leslie: Thank you, Arch, so much for joining us on Reel Talk with Film DC. I thank our listeners for tuning in. This is your host Leslie Green signing off. Don't forget to check us out on the web at film.DC.gov, like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/FilmDC](https://www.facebook.com/FilmDC), and follow us on Twitter @DCFilmOffice. Catch you next time.