

Women In Motion

Katie Holmes

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Elizabeth WAGMEISTER

Welcome back to Kering's Women in Motion Talks. I am Elizabeth Wagmeister, Chief Correspondent at Variety, and up next, we are so excited to sit down and talk to actor-writer-director Katie Holmes.

Last month, Katie released her third directorial effort, the film *Rare Objects*. She has also been in the off-Broadway show, *The Wanderers*. And just this morning, Katie announced an exciting new partnership, where she will be mentoring female film makers around the world.

Without further ado, let's get ready for our conversation with Katie Holmes.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

All right. Everybody is very excited to hear from you today.

Katie Holmes

Wow.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

First of all, welcome the Cannes Film Festival.

Katie Holmes

Thank you so much. What a nice welcome. This is incredible.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

It's incredible. I can take no credit for this. This setting is so beautiful. Now, just earlier today you announced an exciting new partnership where you are going to be mentoring female film makers in Saudi Arabia. Can you tell me how this partnership came about and what the work is that you'll be doing?

Katie Holmes

Yes. Well, it's very new right now. It just came about. And I'm very excited because I'm going to have the opportunity to work with some women in Saudi Arabia and help them craft different projects and can see them to fruition and hopefully get them into, hopefully help them, try to get them into festivals. I'm excited to hear their stories that they want to express and help them make a film about it.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Now why is it important for you to work with women from all over the world and really help them achieve their aspiration?

Katie Holmes

Well, I think it's always exciting for me personally to get to know women from all over. I learn so much, and particularly with these women, I think it's very exciting that there's more opportunities for them and to be a part of... an opening, if you will, of their ability to create and to get their, to help to get their expression into the world on the international level, I think, will be very rewarding and I'm very excited.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

It's pretty incredible, because you've had such an interesting career, with many different parts. You've gone from actor to... You've been on stage, you've been on television, you've been on film. Now, of course, writer and director, and I'm sure that wasn't easy to make your way behind the camera. So, can you tell me about that process? First, what inspired you to want to step behind the camera?

Katie Holmes

Well, I think, I mean, I've been very fortunate to work with a lot of wonderful directors very early on in my career. And obviously there were... I had a lot of wonderful experiences and a lot of support. And I got to a stage, and a friend of mine said, you know, you should start directing. And I... it never really occurred to me. I thought, "Oh OK, maybe I'll try it".

So, I started small, and I did a 30 for 30 on Nadia Comaneci. And I really liked that process. And so, then I tried my first film, and I had support around me. I had a great team.

And I learned so much, particularly... Like my comfort zone is obviously working with actors, but what was a real learning curve for me was the visual and how to tell a story visually, and what you don't need, in terms of dialogue, if you're going to see something instead, and that was actually very freeing to be able to depict things in that way. And I love visual art. And so, it was just it was. That's really fun.

And then just the editing process is a whole other thing because then you know you're putting the puzzle together and there are many different ways to put the puzzle together. And so that's always a challenge.

To me, it's like ballet class you got it on Monday and on Tuesday your foot doesn't work. And you have to figure it out again. But you will. You know, it's just a process: everything comes over time.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

How do you think that your career first as an actor has helped you becoming a director?

Katie Holmes

Definitely. Being on set, first of all, or so long. Being on set to me is a second home. I know what everybody you know. It's just it's... I feel very comfortable there. And so, knowing that when you go in, it's like, OK, I know this, you know this department, uh-oh, they're upset over here. You know, just, you know the dynamics.

And then, I think you know working with actors. Having, you know, being an actor, it's there's also, I know what they're feeling. I think I know what they're feeling. And I hope that they feel more

comfortable because they know I'm them. I'm one of you! You know, we're all together. And I feel like.... Yeah, there is.... There's just a there's a comfort zone there.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

I want to ask, particularly working with female actors on set, being that you started fairly young in this business, and you had a lot of experience, how do you think that your time as a young actor now inspires the way that you mentor and lead on set?

Katie Holmes

Well, I feel like... There's just um, hm... I think, for me. I don't know. For example, like one of the things that I love about, I've always loved, about playing characters and directing is playing like the wardrobe, the costumes. Because that, again, it's a visual thing that can tell so much about a character, then you don't have to do so much work, you know? It's like that, that shirt says all! Or it gives you something to play with.

So, I think like with young actresses, for me it's just really listening and asking them: what are your thoughts? What are your ideas? What do you think? And then really collaborating, like: do you think this is right this this piece of dialogue and or you don't why don't you and let's work on it together.

So, it's a collaboration and they get used to that. So, it's not pleasing me or getting the scene right. I don't – there's no right way to get a scene. It's going to be how they do it and I feel like trying to really like teach them that it's OK, there's no mistakes. And just be free.

That's really important to me because I feel like there's, sometimes, just this... I think it's because of the audition process. You know, "I want to be picked. I want to be good." And then you enter into the set with that and it's, and you're already good. It's not what you did is who you are. And so, we're going to, we're starting there. So, it's really just kind of getting all of the fears out of the way that is important to me.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Did any of your experiences when you were starting out inform the way that you lead? Like how right now you're talking about it's a collaboration and I don't want there to be any fear. Was that your experience when you were coming up, or did you have experiences where you didn't feel like it was as collaborative and supportive?

Katie Holmes

I really felt very.... I felt like I had a lot of really collaborative experiences that impacted me and really empowered me and gave me confidence. Also, I had the experience of doing six years of a television show and that really does for you because there are days that you're just too tired and you're... but you still are doing it. You're working that muscle and you're trying things, right?

And so, I think that experience mixed with, like, I remember one of my favorite experiences was working with Curtis Hanson and I was very... I entered that experience really nervous, and you know, there were amazing actors in it, and I just wanted to do a good job and he really empowered me and gave me a lot of confidence and listened and made me feel so comfortable.

So, I felt like wow, someone like him did that, so that's really important to give to people.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Now obviously we've seen so much progress in the past five years, 10 years with women stepping behind the camera and women being empowered to be put into leadership positions, whether it's

in the executive ranks, whether it's as filmmaker. But in the 90s when you entered this industry, that certainly was not the norm.

Did you ever, in your early days, did you work with women or with female directors in a position of power?

Katie Holmes

No. I really didn't. I mean there were, there was, I think, one or two directors on Dawson's Creek that were women. But that was not the norm.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

And being that you are now a female director, being able to set this example and show other women that, that they can do it, what do you think the benefits are of having women step into the role of a director?

Katie Holmes

I mean, I think that people that are passionate about what they do and the stories that they want to tell, those are the people that you want telling the stories and I think that it's important to give those opportunities to people that deserve it and are working hard.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

We spoke a bit about how you started to step behind the camera, but when you were beginning to say, "I want to now create and go behind the camera and write and direct", was that challenging for you, not in the ways that it's challenging as it is because it's a hard job, but being that statistically, not many women are doing it?

And also, we spoke about the benefits of you being an actor, becoming a director. But do you feel like people perhaps underestimated you saying that she's an actor so she's not a director?

Katie Holmes

I didn't really worry about that. I mean, I really because. I think knowing, having been on set for so long, I knew the job at hand, so it was more, "Can I handle that?" Because you are in charge of... You know there's different... you know, the three different phases of film, of making the film, which is the pre-production, the production and the editing.

And when you're making it and shoot, when you're shooting it, that's a long day and you are watching the actors, you are setting up the shots, you're looking at the set. You're already deciding about music. I mean there's a lot going on every day and so there's that, which is more of like an adrenaline-based experience.

I feel like I never, I wasn't worried about, oh, can I, just because I'm an actor or whatever. I did lean on, actually, a lot of my friends, a lot of women, a lot of men to read – to read the script, and I asked a lot of questions. I have to say the community of film makers in LA and in New York is very welcoming. And I don't really care if like, yes, I know my script isn't going to be perfect so I'm... I mean, of course when you get the call and it's like, well, I think you got to work on this part. It's like, "Oh, I thought it was right!" but after you sort of lick your wounds a little bit, then you get another idea. So, I feel like it is just... I really depend on others to help me.

And so, to answer your question, it's like, yes, there's always fear going into something, but it's like where are the strengths and where... They are there. So, it's just like, OK, what am I really afraid about? OK, I'm afraid about that scene. OK, so let's look at that and let's, let's get back past that. So that's kind of how I approach it.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Are there some female filmmakers in the business that you've really either look to and admired their work or that maybe have first-hand given you advice?

Katie Holmes

Well, I mean, I remember Jodie Foster and *Little Man Tate*, when I was growing up. She directed that and that was one of the first times I saw a female filmmaker. And I had admired her as an actress. And I was like, "oh wow, that's incredible".

Sarah Polley and I worked together on *Go* when we were babies. And I loved how she made her way into becoming a filmmaker, and I love her films and so she, you know, she's very encouraging, we're friends, and very inspiring. So, it's. Yeah, it's.... I'd say those two women have really impacted.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

What do you think is the biggest change – and this might be too big of a question to say one thing – but what is the biggest change that you've witnessed for women in the industry since the time that you started out?

Katie Holmes

I think that... I think that there's many lanes you can now go into as a creative person and they're open and I think that that's really exciting. And I have, you know, you can try a lot of different things now. You don't have to just be an actor, and you don't have to just be a film actor. You can, you know, you can do so many different things, and it's really rewarded. So, I would say that's a big change.

And obviously there's more female film makers. And that's obviously a huge change and it's really exciting. More points of view, it's better.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

So, speaking of being able to channel your creativity into different lanes, you know you spoke about you could be an actor on a film, you could be in any medium. You juggle a lot of roles on all of your projects. Your past two films that you've directed, you've also written, and you've been in them. Is that challenging to wear so many different hats on a project?

Katie Holmes

It is. Yeah, it is. It's also a little bit, in some ways it's easier because you're the one doing it, so if there needs to be changes, then you're going to make them, so you don't have to wait on someone, but I also feel like it's so much fun to collaborate. So, you know, I feel like I'm going to direct a film that I'm just going to direct and that will be really fun, and I think probably we'll feel in some ways easier because I did it a different way before.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Is there anything you can share about the project?

Katie Holmes

Not yet, no. We're still figuring it out. You know, everything's a little bit on pause because of the strike – which was an important strike.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Yeah, right. What are your thoughts on the writers' strike?

Katie Holmes

Well, obviously, I'm for the writers.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

You are a writer.

Katie Holmes

Yeah. And yeah, we need storytellers.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Now I was going to ask you if you whatever, direct something that you weren't in, but you just answered my question. But it seems right now you are very focused on directing. Are you still interested in always continuing to act?

Katie Holmes

Yeah, I love performing. I just did a play for three months and that was so wonderful to be on stage every night and it really gets you into shape. And so that's my... I love it. That's my love. And so, I always wanted to be an actress. I'm going to be doing it when I'm 70.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

What sort of roles, if you're not writing for yourself, what sort of roles are interesting to you right now that you might want to pursue?

Katie Holmes

Yes, I feel like... I would love to do a comedy, actually. I think that people need to laugh right now. Hmm. Also, I love musicals. I can't really sing that well though. Maybe I would direct them. And I just like... to say "complicated characters" is kind of silly because we are all complicated, so how about just real women stories. I like stories with hope, healing, that kind of thing.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Because you are so known now as a director, are people reaching out to you with roles, as an actor, that they want you to be attached to something, or are you still hustling because this is an industry where you're kind of always fighting for yourself, and always advocating for yourself and you hear Oscar winners who are still auditioning and that's part of the process. So, I'm curious how roles are coming to you.

Katie Holmes

Yeah, I mean it is always a hustle. I mean and it's always and I think what's exciting about this business because there's always new directors too that are doing something innovative and then you want to work with that person. And so, yeah, it's kind of a process of.... There are definitely things coming which I'm very hopeful for, and then there's things that you're like reaching for.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

You've been doing a lot of work in the indie space, but you've done a wide range of work throughout your career. You did Batman Begins, which is obviously the biggest scale of a studio

film you can do. Are you interested in returning to the big studio space, either as an actor or a director?

Katie Holmes

I mean, sure, yeah, that was a wonderful experience. I loved working with Chris Nolan. And it was... That was such a huge learning experience, just the scope of it, the sets, the cinematography: everything was quite amazing.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

That film was really credited as bringing these comic book superhero films. They were seen as art at that point.

Katie Holmes

Yeah.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

And now, obviously, there's a lot of discussion about the state of the business and our studios taking enough chances on new ideas. The films that are performing well at the box office and this age of streaming are franchise films and superhero films. What are your thoughts on the state of the industry right now?

Katie Holmes

Well, I mean, yeah, those are doing big business, so I'm sure that more will continue to be made. I mean that is the nature of the business. I feel like there's always going to be room for new ideas and they will take risks, and there's always going to be something coming along, down the pipe, so I look forward to that. I don't know of anything right now.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

But you would be game to return to that world?

Katie Holmes

Yeah, definitely. Yeah, for sure.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Now, it sounds like you had a really wonderful experience on *Dawson's Creek*, your first entry into the business and it was huge, I mean, nobody could have...

Katie Holmes

Well, I actually did the *Ice Storm* before I did *Dawson's Creek*, right?

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Yeah. Yeah, you're right. And then *Dawson's Creek* blew up and became this huge sensation. People still talk about it. I have to ask, because if not, I think that viewers will be upset.

Katie Holmes

Uh-oh, is this going to be like, should she have picked *Dawson*?

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Oh, no, no, I don't want. I'm not going there. I was going to ask, in this age of reboots and reunions, has there ever been a real discussion about returning to the show?

Katie Holmes

There has been. There have been many discussions over the years. And you know, we all loved the experience. And so, it's... There's a protection that comes along with the discussion. And it was...

In many ways, the show was a time capsule. And so, to put it into today's world might tarnish it a bit. I mean it was right before everyone had a phone and social media and all of that. So, there was an innocence that was there between these characters. That was one of the things that I think people liked about the show and so to put it into the setting of today's world, I don't, I don't know, we often talked about it and we kind of go back to like... It was really special how it was, you know, and. And it's right there.

So, for now, we kind of just keep saying like I don't... until there's like a real reason, you know, to do it. It hasn't been something that anyone has said like, you know, this is the take on it where we're all like "oh, right", you know.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Did you go back and watch the show, or do you go back and watch any of your older work?

Katie Holmes

Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes I go back and I'm like... because it's... memories are in every single shot. Like, oh my gosh, I remember that day that was so and so's birthday or that's when it rained, and we had to go and shoot something else. Sometimes I watch old movies to see if they hold up: like if I'm like studying the director's work because when I was doing it, I was just focused on me.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

So, since this is a Women In Motion talk, I wanted to ask: what is your best piece of advice for young women today?

Katie Holmes

Young women today? What is my best piece of advice for young women today? I think it's... I think it's important for young women today to really have a voice in all aspects of their life. And really go after what it is that they're interested in. And not worry if that will get them where they want to go yet. Just trust in the steps. I think we're in a very result-oriented society. And I think like, for women like, just keep moving forward. That's it. And trust yourself. Believe in yourself. Be your biggest advocate. That's important.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

When you started out in the 90s, it was a very different time in Hollywood, particularly for women. There wasn't as much protection over women, certainly young women, and I think now something really positive we're seeing is women embracing their own narrative. And we look back at that time and everybody, I think realizes maybe what they did wrong, whether it's society or the media. When you look at the business today, do you feel more empowered by what you see?

Katie Holmes

I do feel more empowered, definitely. I mean, I think that yeah, women are being rewarded for like you said, owning their narrative. I think that's very important, and I think I want to see that continue.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

What is one piece of advice that you, if you could go back that you would have told yourself, your younger self?

Katie Holmes

Ha! Oh. I think... probably just... I don't know. I think probably take the pressure off a little. Because I was so young when I started and it was: "work, work, work, work, work", and I always wanted to do a good job like I was saying and. And I think that I'm not so sure putting the pressure on yourself really helps you. So, I would say, "ease up", yeah. "Enjoy it".

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Well, clearly, it all worked out.

Katie Holmes

Well, thank you.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

And now we have one question from social media that somebody sent in. So let me pull this up. All right. What are the things that you look for when making a movie?

Katie Holmes

The things that I look for when I'm making a movie, well, I want it to be an experience for the audience.

So, what I look for is something like, I really like to have a very saturated frame. I like color, I like warmth. I feel like that's very inviting to the eye, and it takes you, you know, then you're really invested as the audience, and I want that connection. Actually, doing the play this year was just this – side note – was such a wonderful experience of connecting with the audience, having that pure experience. And it's like it reminded me, yes, when you're making a film, even though you know you're far removed from your audience, you're doing it for them and so creating that palette is important to me and it also gives more space to the actors, right? And so, I look for that visually and really learn, you know, how that camera is moving.

And the motion of the of the film like, you know, my taste right now is more like fluid, not a fixed camera. So, I would say that and then.

I also love like naturalistic stuff, even though that's not necessarily very saturated frame, but like in terms of dialogue, I like a lot of improv. I am huge John Cassavetes fan. So, that's always kind of, in the back of my mind, a goal.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Thank you so much, Katie.

Katie Holmes

Thank you so much.

Elizabeth Wagmeister

Congratulations.

Katie Holmes

Thank you. Thank you all for being here. It's so amazing.