

feel a certain dignity is accorded to the actor. Whereas I would never permit my child to act in a commercial for AT&T or The Gap, or detergent, or some sort of consumer good where they're functioning as a shill. For consumer goods or some sort of corporate entity, that would be for me the obscenity.

*That's great you haven't run into any conflicts.*

No, no, so long as I don't have any trouble with people who read the material and say, "I'm sorry it's not for us," and I say thank you and I respect that decision. The only problem that would happen is if they say, "Yes, we'll do this," and then they get on the set and they change their mind. That's never happened, but that would be the one terrible nightmare that could take place.

*Let's move onto Storytelling and the sex scene in Storytelling, the box covering the teacher and the pupil having sex. Was that an artistic decision?*

It takes on a few meanings here. When I shoot a movie, I don't want to have to alter the way I shoot a scene because of the way I imagine the way the [Motion Picture Association of America] would respond to the material. I shoot them the way I want to shoot them and if the MPAA does not take to it, then I would put it in my contract with the studio, in order to procure an R-rating I would be allowed to incorporate boxes and/or beeps to satisfy the demands. I knew this was unlikely to get an R-rating, just from the script itself. So I negotiated that point, then when the movie was finished and the head of the studio was not pleased to see a big red box, they wanted of course to take scissors and cut things out. If I had cut it out, then the audience would never know and never seen and would've assumed that this is what the director had intended. And, in the context of this scene between the professor and this student on a number of levels that the censorship box, so to speak, added even an extra layer of meaning that I found really a kind of bonus. You could say it's really only in this country, the only country in the world where you get to see the big red box. It's the only studio film ever made with a big red box. I do take pride in that achievement, and I would certainly do it again if it were required of me to get an R-rating, especially knowing that the rest of the world gets to see it without the red box. If you do rent or you buy the DVD, you can press a button and see the family version or press another button and see the Todd version.

*But with the red box, as our human mind has a vivid imagination, do you feel like it has more impact in the scene?*

In some ways, yes, look I have to tell you, I'm a little bit squeamish myself. When we were shooting that scene I had to look away

it was pretty frightening. I hand it to those actors, they really were troopers. All I had to do was say, "uh, let's do it one more time." And, I could then look away.

*During Palindromes pre-production, how much rehearsal was there with the actors?*

Same as on every other movie, meaning, none. Auditions always function as rehearsal. That's when I evaluate the actor before me, the limitations and what the actor can bring as well, that's where I figure it all out. So that, when I see the actor, one, two, three months later on set, it's clear in my head and the actor's head what the aim and what it is I'm looking for.

*It sounds like you have a real strong way of letting go, knowing that you've cast the right person.*

Casting, it's true, casting is everything. If you cast the right actors, they make you look good, they make you look like you know what you're doing.

*Writing Palindromes, or even some of your other scripts, how long does it usually take?*

Thirty years. I don't know. It's just everything takes a lifetime. You use your whole life experience, understanding and reading and so forth to put together these concoctions. The actual writing doesn't take so long. If



Alexander Brickel as Peter Paul and Sharon Wilkins as Aviva in Palindromes. photo by: Macall Polay

you wrote three pages a day for a whole year, you'd have four feature scripts but it just doesn't work that way. So, I have no advice to any writers on how to do this, except you just have to do it. How do you become a better writer? By writing. How do you become a better filmmaker? By actually making movies.

*When you're writing, do you bang it out, or do you ruminate over it, put it in the drawer for a while?*

With each one it's somewhat different,

some I just plow through from beginning to end and others it's a little bit more elliptical to process. I have something now mostly written, but I haven't had a chance to really get to it because these last two months I've just been touring and promoting this movie [Palindromes]. When this is over I hope to be able to finish up this other script.

*How many shooting days were on Palindromes?*

We got about 40, which is a good amount. But I don't know how we could've done it otherwise with all these children and so forth. I have good producers. I don't know how we did this, under a million [dollars] and getting that many days. I don't know, but we did it. You need to work with smart good people, very pleasant people. And it's amazing how much good will you can generate.