



E! Online – Q & A in 1997

Give us the Sean Penn philosophy of love.

Love is a mess, at best, and I figure it can be very real in spite of all the things people try to attach to it. I don't subscribe to the talk-show mentality of abuse and dysfunction, healthy and non-healthy. That's just a lot of stuff to fuck people up. The bottom line is, you love your wife, you do your best with that.

There have been some rough patches in your relationship with Robin over the years. Does that factor into your work together?

I guess when you're trying to work as two actors, that's always useful. But I don't know to what degree you want to analyze how something like that comes into play. Whether it's helpful or not depends on what the film is about.

Well, *She's So Lovely* is about an especially difficult love, one that's driven by your character's instability.

I don't see Eddie as mentally ill. I think it's a totally mentally ill society. That's what I love about [John Cassavetes](#)' work. All you have to do is play something simple, like you love your wife, and you seem crazy. The thing I always responded to in this guy was he didn't let anybody tell him that what he felt was not right.

You could say the same thing about your attitude toward Hollywood.

Yeah, I had actually tried to stop acting before I made [Dead Man Walking](#). It has nothing to do with the emotional demands of a role; I've done comedies that are as draining to me as any drama. It's just my own approach to acting, which always makes it less than a comfortable experience.

But it's hard to believe anyone could do the quality work you do and not get some sort of satisfaction out of it.

I have a work ethic, ya know? That's my secret. You try to do your best at what you're getting paid for. But I'm never again going to do a movie as an actor where I'm enjoying myself. It's not fun, and it doesn't have to be.

One of your contemporaries once suggested to me that you've figured out a good way to market yourself: Say you're never going to act again, then give a spectacular performance, and everyone will be so grateful they'll nominate you for an Oscar.

[Laughs.] I would imagine that was said by somebody who was projecting their own career scheminess onto me.

How did it feel to win best actor at Cannes?

Well, most of the people in that room are people who have stood up for their work, so there is something meaningful about that award.

I take it you don't feel that way about other prestigious awards for which you've been nominated?

If you imagine yourself standing up [at the Oscars] and you look out at the audience, you're not going to see too many people who even know how to find their butt with their hands. So, what does their opinion mean? It don't mean anything.

Doesn't sound like you have much respect for your colleagues?

Well, look at all of these summer blockbusters. You can't help but laugh a little, because you've already seen a lot of these movies 482 times. I blame the actors and the directors for making them. If a guy needs a job, he should take the job--and more power to him.

But other than that, movies are too important. So, if you're an artist who is in it just for the money, I would be against you. I'm expecting something more. If there's anything disgusting in the movie business, it is the whoredom of my peers.

Yet you've just made a movie with John Travolta, who may not have asked for \$20 million to do *She's So Lovely* but is unapologetic about getting as much money as he can for a lot of the work he does.

Well, working with him was great. He's such a sweet and talented guy. I can't imagine somebody who'd be better than him in this role. He gets it, too. He's very bright. He's a movie star, yeah, but he's also a very resourceful actor, very versatile.

There have been reports that, as one of the film's executive producers, you made a few creative decisions that didn't sit too well with director [Nick Cassavetes](#), John's son. Oh, I'm a big-mouth. I said a lot of things. On any movie I'm involved with, I say what I think. Being a producer on this one, that had its place.