Winners Conference: Adapted Screenplay

Philomena

Q. Congratulations. Gents, this is not your first BAFTA rodeo, but where does this one compare? How does it compare to the other ones you have won in the past?

STEVE COOGAN: Jeff has also got a couple. Must not forget those. What are yours for? Tell them again.

JEFF POPE: I have got a couple for television, but this is definitely the -- the most -- I feel this is the greatest achievement.

STEVE COOGAN: Are you going to faint?

JEFF POPE: I do put this at the top point of my career to date, winning that. It is fantastic.

STEVE COOGAN: Good job you are not me, ain't it? Compared with the other BAFTA, well, this is the first I have won for a film and I have got a few for telly, which I am very proud of. But this is -- this is really -- this is the most exciting BAFTA I have ever won, because it's -- yeah, because it is the --

JEFF POPE: Of the many you have.

STEVE COOGAN: Because it is something different I was trying to do and something I was trying to do, which is an exercise in sincerity. So I am very pleased.

Q. What about the screen writing process with the two of them? How did that work? Were you in the same room together, and how did it take to adapt this book?

JEFF POPE: I will kick off. We don't have a story of fights and arguments. We got on really well together. I think we felt that we fitted. I was the keyboard nazi; Steve was the pacer. Because Steve is such a brilliant mimic, it was like being in the room with all the characters at the same time. He would be his character of Martin, or Philomena, or a nun, or a barman and I had all the voices in the room and it was a privilege.

STEVE COOGAN: Hmm, yeah. It was -- well, he answered it.

Q. But you never wanted to wrestle control of the keyboard?

JEFF POPE: You almost did not want to see, did you, you --

STEVE COOGAN: I often wouldn't look at the scripts on the page. I would like to stand away and have Jeff read to me out loud because I wanted to hear what it sounded like rather than look at it on the page.

NEW SPEAKER: A real labour of love for you, Steve, because you produced it, you directed, you were in it --
STEVE COOGAN: I didn't direct it. That was Stephen Frears.

NEW SPEAKER: How does it feel to be rewarded for all those aspects of film making?

STEVE COOGAN: It is very, very gratifying, because this was -- although, when you are successful in one field, as I was, although that is very enjoyable and empowers you in some ways, it also restricts you because you get put in a box and it is very difficult to get out of that box. And even if you want to try, sort of -- people sort of say: you are good at this, just stick at that and ... So for me, it was a vindication, because I -- no-one advised me to do this. I read an article, I found it moving, I wanted to tell the story. And I thought: I wonder if I can turn this into a film. And so I went with my gut instincts, and so it feels very nice to win this because of that. Yeah.

JEFF POPE: He deserves all of that praise, really, because -- it well, it would not have happened without Philomena of course, but Steve spotted it, Steve built it from the ground up. Steve got the producers involved, and ultimately --

STEVE COOGAN: It was a labour of love. Even to the extent that me and Jeff talked to Philomena, we talked to Martin at length, and that was -- I mean, most of the scripts came from those conversations. And just the act of learning about people and writing about them is a real privilege, especially when you feel like -- when you feel that you have to honour someone, it confers on you a big responsibility so you don't want to screw it up, because you are dealing with someone's real life.

NEW SPEAKER: Just following on from that, you have had the involvement of Philomena and Martin, and I wonder, you know, taking this journey with them and having them react to the film, I wonder how that has felt and whether you feel like you have lived up to that sense of responsibility?

JEFF POPE: You go.

STEVE COOGAN: I was going to say, it is important that we know -- there was artistic licence, insofar as with Philomena -- although Judi's character is probably closer to Philomena than mine is to Martin.

JEFF POPE: That is fair.

STEVE COOGAN: I used Martin, if you like, as a springboard for my own thoughts on Catholicism, for example. But Martin was incredibly accepting of that and supportive of the fact that I was, if you like, sort of attaching onto him certain aspects of my personality. But he knew that that would help the narrative and help the tension between Philomena and Martin. So -- because, of course, in reality Philomena and Martin weren't always at each other's throats as we portrayed them in the film, but yeah. I hope that answers your question.

NEW SPEAKER: You said there that part of this for you was an attempt to get out of the box that people quite often want to keep you in. Is there any indication that it has worked? Are you now talking to people in a different way about new projects? Have you got things that will enable you to do more adventurous things than you have in ...?
STEVE COOGAN: Well, when you get recognition, official recognition, yes, of course it helps. And ... (Laughs) Yes, of course it helps, because you are -- it acts as a kind of calling card, I guess. People have to show that it is not just a vanity project. Sometimes people say: I want to do something different. It can just ring hollow. But when you get endorsed by your peers, then of course it's -- it means people return your calls, I suppose, for a short period.

So -- and we do have other projects, Jeff and I are working on other projects, and this will obviously give some impetus to those things, so yeah. Of course it is different now than it was two years ago, but it is not seismically different. But it is definitely different.

JEFF POPE: But it is not one or the other, either, though with you, is it, Steve? It is very much both. It is not as if you are going to spend all your time working in this area and not in --

STEVE COOGAN: I did the Alan Partridge film after I did Philomena, so I did my grown-up, deep, serious film with some jokes and then I went on and did a very silly film that I thoroughly enjoyed making.

JEFF POPE: Of course there was a lot of comedy in Philomena as well, so the process of creating comedy and creating drama is extremely close, you know? And the attention, the cadence, the rhythm of the line, the dialogue, one, to provide a dramatic effect, the other for a life laugh, but the process is very similar.

STEVE COOGAN: To me, it was really liberating to be able to think about some -- because when you write comedy of course you want there to be a bit of subtext and all the rest of it, but when you write comedy it is quite brutal. You have to make sure people are laughing so many laughs per page, got to be laughing, got to keep people laughing. That kind of subsumes everything else. What was nice about this was we could think about -- I was allowed to think about other things and other ways people act with each other and pathos and poignancy, and all that sort of stuff, so ...

NEW SPEAKER: Steve and Jeff, you have been nominated for an Oscar. Are you going to go there with renewed hopes in your hearts? I mean, this is amazing.

STEVE COOGAN: Go on, you answer.

JEFF POPE: I am going to do that when I am sitting in the audience, because you have been up for about three or four other awards and just before our names are mentioned, I have buttoned and lost. Today I thought: I am just going to leave it open and we won. (Laughs)

I -- it is -- it is a surreal -- the whole thing is a surreal experience. I just keep -- I just -- I suppose I go there to experience it, but not to think -- like tonight, I didn't think we would win tonight. Same thing there. It sounds kind of trite, that. I think if you go there allowing yourself to hope, then I think you have just got to keep Kipling in mind. Triumph and disaster.

STEVE COOGAN: We have actually got to a place we didn't think we would be two years ago. So really anything that happens now is all icing on the cake, because being able to sort of have a -- to be able to be in a position where we may be able to tell other stories is -- we are sort of already there. It is great.
JEFF POPE: Yes.

NEW SPEAKER: Steve, you mention it is a very silly film, but you have had two great successes, Philomena here and obviously Alpha Papa. Does this mean, when you talk about moving out of that box, that we are less likely to see a sequel to that film?

STEVE COOGAN: No, I don’t want to abandon Alan Partridge. I just want to show that I can do something else, that I am not a one-trick pony. So I don’t mind -- I quite like the Alan Partridge pony. I quite like riding it occasionally. But I don’t want to -- so I will do something else with Partridge, but I just want to -- you know, I just want to do other things. It is interesting, it is exciting. It is like what gets me out of bed in the morning is to do something that is challenging, and it is also exciting when you try and do something in which you might fail. That is always -- that always is a good motivator.

NEW SPEAKER: The Oscar one has been asked, but I was going to say: you said you are working on new projects together. Can you see a time, Steve, when you might be more behind the scenes?

STEVE COOGAN: Well, some of the projects that we are developing, a couple of them, I don’t think there is anything for me in them.

JEFF POPE: Much as you would like to write them in, but ...

NEW SPEAKER: Can you tell us a little bit about those projects?

JEFF POPE: Go away with –

STEVE COOGAN: They are basically for women. They are good strong roles for women, and I am not a woman, so ...

JEFF POPE: He might be -- he might be.

STEVE COOGAN: Yes, I have done that one.

JEFF POPE: He might be a director, put it that way.

STEVE COOGAN: I might do that, yeah