Winners Conference: Leading Actor

12 Years A Slave

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the winner of the BAFTA for leading actor from 12 Years a Slave, Chiwetel Ejiofor.

NEW SPEAKER: So congratulations. Oh, no mike. Congratulations. I wonder if you could just talk briefly about how much it meant to you to play this part?

A. Well, I'd known Steve for a while, a little while. And a few years, after he'd done -- we had spoken the first time after he'd done Shame and -- no, after he'd done Hunger and I went out to see him in Amsterdam. He invited me over there just to talk about films, about life and the idea of maybe working together on something.

And then several years later, he -- he sent me the script and I thought it was an extraordinary story of an incredible man and an incredible time. I'd never seen a story from inside this experience before, from inside the slave experience.

So in a way, surprisingly, I found that I was intimidated by it, actually, intimidated by that fact and I was concerned, sort of -- I was sort of struck with a sort of self-doubt about it, actually. I didn't want to necessarily be at the centre of something that was so unique and such an opportunity to do something and somehow not to be the right guy for it. I didn't necessarily express that to Steve sort of fully, but he did sense my hesitation about it all, which he was shocked by. And really what turned it around for me, thankfully, was the -- was going back to the book and reading the book, reading Solomon Northup's autobiography and realising that I was kind of thinking with the wrong side of my head and that, actually, it was about really understanding and connecting to Solomon Northup and not worrying about, in a sense, the wider nature of it, of the slave trade, of the geo-political-racial relations or whatever. Really trying to understand Solomon Northup and his experience was a way for me to really tell the story and the rest could kind of be revealed.

NEW SPEAKER: 12 Years a Slave is a film that has done well all around the world. But what has it been like to be recognised by BAFTA tonight?

A. It's -- it's an incredible feeling actually, and you know, I've been obviously acting for a while now and so -- and was here before. I mean, I presented a BAFTA and I was also nominated for a Rising Star Award many years ago and I have always been thrilled and excited by BAFTA and what it means in the film industry and in television, of course. And you know, to be here, in London, to be with so many of my peers and my friends and for them to recognise this film in that way, in this way, and me in this way, is an extraordinary feeling, a great and deep honour.

NEW SPEAKER: And finally, a couple of weeks to the Oscars. Come on, your chances must be pretty good now, Chewie, to get that Oscar as well.

A. Who knows? It has been an extraordinary time, you know, just this period; and a real -- and for me, truthfully, a real celebration of some really great films. And one of the
things I have loved this award season is just the diversity of films, the range of films that are out there for the audiences. I think it is important to have that. All these films are spectacularly different and interesting. So I have just been really thrilled to be a part of it. Of course I am thrilled about this and whatever happens, but it has been remarkable.

NEW SPEAKER: It's remarkable.

A. Thank you.

NEW SPEAKER: Will you win?

A. No, I'm ... I'm not going to go any further than that.