

VASILIS CHRISTOFILAKIS
"DIRECTOR'S CUT: TAKE TWO"
2018 YPM SUMMER SPOTLIGHT
PHILO4THOUGHT INITIATIVE



Philo4Thought is very honored to be posting this live interview of Vasilis Christofilakis, Actor, Director and Producer of the Greek film *Too Much Info Clouding Over My Head*. The interview was held at the famous Carlyle Hotel in New York City on April 30th following the first Hellenic Film Society hosted by Founder Professor Jimmy DeMetro, Founding Director of the Greek Film Festival initiative of the Hellenic American Chamber of Commerce based in New York. Professor DeMetro recruited our featured young professional at the 2017 Film Festival in Thessaloniki. We are very pleased to be featuring Vasilis this month and to share his story with you today:

P4T: Your film was very successful at the Hellenic Film Society's Spring 2018 Festival. It really spoke to the young professional mindset in so many ways and had the audience enthralled. Please tell us about the inspiration behind the movie.

VC: You know, I think I really wanted to express myself as an artist, as a friend, as a professional. For a while I tried to do a film which turned to a total disaster and I hit rock bottom. And at the time it was either time to do another film or dying and having no career in film making – or dying literally from the stress – and it was the first one, and the big fail, and then something came out of me and I did another film that was a much better experience, which was then the biggest inspiration. Things that I had come to know really came together and I wanted to express that here.

P4T: What was the time gap between the first film and this one?

VC: The first film took four years. To be completed and it was never completed. This film was one year – actually, a bit less than one year, even with the filming and editing.

P4T: WOW! Really?

VC: (Smiling.) Yes, apart from the writing. The writing also took a couple of months, but that was it. But the film is – without giving too much away – about me, and basically my defeats in professional filmmaker and in finding myself and my voice as a filmmaker.

P4T: So, without giving too much away, there was a safety net in the movie that I'd like you to talk about a little. Everybody – many of the supporting characters – were saying something to reassure you that you would be ok because you have this wealth to fall back on "just in case" and... your character just gives it away. What is it that you wanted to convey from that moment in the film?

VC: Yes, the "just in case" and letting it go...this it is maybe the most important decision to make because finally the character knows the thing that he wanted. It's to show that once you know what you want you know to follow your dreams without question. You just need to persevere and also to have – how do you say this in USA? – the mentality like a dog is chasing you. And you have to completely ignore and drop the safety net; if you forget about it then you can persevere. If you don't let go of the safety net you are always caught up in it.

P4T: From the beginning your character talks about instinct but then people keep telling your character that those instincts are wrong, that you're messing up, but your character perseveres. And we're always trying to plan ahead and are pressured to have a solid back-up plan – the Plan B if Plan A doesn't work out – which is a reality for Millennials and the generation right behind them. Young professional entrepreneurs want to find something that makes them happy now, today, but their parents want to see a solid, perhaps traditional plan in place. That totally comes across in your film. I really do think it's a piece that should be made available in every college for the next couple of years – here *and* in Greece.

VC: Yes, it's very easy to understand that concept of the practical plan with an emphasis that you're going to follow what's inside, maybe not because it is what you want but because it is an expectation from the people around you.

P4T: Thank you. And Professor DeMetro said that your film was very popular in Thessaloniki?

VC: Yes, he discovered it and approached me in Thessaloniki as well as Eva Mallis and they liked it *before* it won all the awards. It won three awards within the first few months. The film festival is about a week long – ten days – and my film was playing there and they came by chance to watch a film that was black and white, and loved it. Eva Mallis came to the first screening and Jimmy DeMetro came to the second screening. Later on it won all the awards; it won the Febrezie Award for Best Greek Film, which is a very big award, the most prestigious award in Thessaloniki, then the GFC (Greek Film Center) Best Debut Film and then the New Cinema Award – all these awards in Greece, obviously. And most importantly the audience seemed to like it a lot.

P4T: Yes, it was very impressive and captivating. The interaction and dialogues really capture the audience because it's very raw and honest. The exchanges between the characters are very tic-o-tac, like ping-pong, organic and natural, as you would see in real life.

VC: Yes, it is how I wanted it to be, because this story is about life as it is. I'm a firm believer in that. We speak about life and need to be very grounded.

P4T: And did you choose to make the film in black and white for a symbolic or practical reason?

VC: I really just love working in black and white. It's a classic style that is used by many of the filmmakers I have grown to admire over the years.

P4T: Aha, yes. And since you're here at the Carlyle Hotel today awaiting the start of a live musical performance by Woody Allen show this evening....

VC: (Smiling.) Yes, really one of my biggest inspirations is Woody Allen. One of my favorite movies of all time is *Manhattan* since I was much younger. And I think that is pretty evident if you watch the film – the black and white, that urban setting, the quick repartee, that guy with the neurosis (who I am playing).... But of course I have many other inspirations and it's a sort of eclectic mixture, like cooking. And I'm a firm believer that Directors should be proud of their influences because many times they try to hide them, and to be "original," but there's nothing original in doing that. It's only once you have mixed things up that you can find, you know, your own way, your own style. And, to put it in a broader perspective, my influence is every guy or girl who makes a film. It's as simple as that. People have an image of the director who has the scarf, but you know, this is not the reality. The most interesting films of our time come from guys and girls who are just making films and telling their own stories.

PC: It's true. Can you share a little more about how you got into film and editing? Perhaps as a child or growing up?

VC: This is a lovely question. As a child... I was an only child and growing up my play time was to sit in my room with my toys and construct stories and act them out with my toys. It was a very simple and organic birth of my filmmaking process. And I think that is the best thing about filmmaking – to make a good story – only back then, as a child the camera was just in my eye because I didn't have a camera, but I think that was definitely the beginning. And then later on I felt that if there is a dream you have from your childhood it will manifest and develop. Just trust that God is with you and will direct you correctly.

P4T: That's a beautiful answer. And now it connects a bit more, perhaps, that the quality of the film is very much like we're looking through one person's eyes. The perspective of the film doesn't look like the standard smooth Hollywood glam shots that is so common today. What techniques did you use for this realistic single-take perspective?

VC: I love the single-take method. Also, I was using a long lens, which is more realistic and direct, which is what I wanted, to see the... spaces behind the characters so that everything looked more familiar. It's one of my biggest techniques.

P4T: Thank you. The last question, and this is more about a comment you made at the Q&A of your opening night here in New York: Would you be open to teaching younger people about your first years in filmmaking – that basically you went to school, you had the formal training, but also you have a vast amount of “programming” from all this that you have to let go of before you can make a successful film.

VC: Yes. It's an important question because of the creative process and the process of finding your own voice and thing in film. I'm doing that now – teaching film and directing. And I have to tell the students that I cannot teach them to be like me because that would be the biggest mistake you can make in the cinema in general. They will all take *my* advice and follow *my* way of directing instead of finding their own. So what I do is encourage them to make their own Great Mistake and try to find their own selves through it so they are not miserable later. No regrets. The moment you decide that you want to make a film your life is threatened... big time. It's like unleashing a monster... and there's a lot of stress involved. So I try to give them advice on how to protect themselves, but I also encourage them to dare to make the important mistakes because that is what allows you to move forward and release the creative process, as was the case for the main character in the film.

P4T: I really look forward to seeing the upcoming news and commentaries about this film because it looks like it's going to be a hit from all over the world and continues to go places.

VC: I wish! I think it did go really, really well so far and will be traveling to many places in the months ahead, which is really exciting.

P4T: And will there be a sequel?

VC: It's *going to* be a sequel, yes! I will be doing two other film, but my fourth film will be this. I *want* this to be a sequel, yes.

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Many thanks to Vasilis Christofilakis for taking the time to share his story and creative process with us and to Professor James De Metro for making the introduction and establishing this lovely initiative through which Hellenic Young Professional filmmakers can be discovered and promoted here in the U.S.

MEMBERS ONLY: Part II of our Summer Spotlight article is an exclusive interview with Professor DeMetro about the artist, the first Hellenic Film Society festival and more. Please register online to receive your copy of this summer exclusive.