

MH TAKE MY ADVICE

Straight talking from Richard E Grant

INTERVIEW BY PAUL MCNALLY

Richard E Grant is one of the few actors who'll make you want to watch a movie simply because he's in it. Like a Willis or a Cruise, he thumbscrews his personality into every film he's in. But instead of action, he lurches from a back-catalogue ranging from the iconic *Withnail & I* to the Oscar-winning *Gosford Park* – he's a man who's always been an icon for the intellectuals, while still not fearing the odd masturbation joke. At 49, this man, who grew up in Swaziland and trained in Cape Town, is wise, self-deprecating and has just directed his first film, *Wah-Wah*. Here, he tells you how getting perspective on your life can let you cope with the past, do what you enjoy and take criticism on the chin.

ON GETTING HELP

I hit the wall, as it were, at 42. I couldn't get out of bed. I felt the road maps in my head were all messed up. It seems to me, especially as a male, you motor along in your twenties and thirties. You get the career. You fill your big ambitions. And then have to take stock of your emotional life. So my wife called up Steve Martin – we've been great friends since *LA Story*. He gave my wife the number of a shrink in London. I went to see him and got my mind rerouted. You can't get away from the stuff in your past. By dealing with it and asking for help, I feel that I've been mentally saved. Now I have a route to navigate; we all need one... or two. But what do I know? I'm just an old swine really.

ON GAINING STATUS

If you're born 1.9m with a long tombstone face and a torso that looks like a plank with two raisins, you're not going to be muscling into Mel Gibson land. You have to rely on luck and being true to yourself. You've got to play to your strengths. I pretty much knew what I wanted to do when I was a teenager and had a puppet theatre. You know, I was relentlessly teased for those puppets; people said, "Oh you great big old wuss playing with dolls." But you have to get over the macho badgering – you're doomed unless you stop worrying about what people think. Then you can plough your own path that you have for your life.

ON CRITICISM

I think that old cliché is the wrong way around: sticks and stones literally break your bones but words always harm you. You can recover from physical injury but it's the stuff someone says to you – like what your teacher said when you were 14 or what your girlfriend said about your teeth or your breath – that sticks forever. What I say to my daughter is everything is personal, but you have to learn how to take it impersonally. That's the challenge. Criticism is never good and you never get used to it, but you have to learn to detach yourself from it and don't let it turn to self-doubt.

ON DOING WHAT YOU ENJOY

I never watch anything that I'm in. So I haven't actually seen *Spice World The Movie*, or *Hudson Hawk* for that matter. It's like listening to yourself on a tape recorder – you think, *Oh my God is that what I sound like?* It's the doing that I enjoy, not the watching. And the same goes for people: you can't try and be like someone else. You might want to be but you are what you are and you have to make the best of what you've got.

ON GAUGING SUCCESS

I judge my success on how good I feel about myself. I have a 24-year-old marriage and a close relationship with my 17-year-old daughter. Those are the most important things I've done in my life. Fame and fortune are generally what you think people are judging you by (and a lot of them are) but if you can get out of bed in the morning feeling happy in your own skin and feel that you're leading a worthwhile life, then that's far more important than all this other stuff.

ON PRIDE

I take small roles. The important thing is to do jobs that interest me rather than take a lead in a project that isn't up to much. I'll rather play a smaller role if I get to work with Martin Scorsese. And there's no need to humour me – I have *Spice World The Movie* on my CV, so I can't take any moral high ground. It's only normal to break your own life rules, don't beat yourself up about it. I tend to accept roles on impulse. Sometimes it works and sometimes it's a disaster. Such is life.

“YOU HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF WHAT YOU'VE GOT”

MH

Richard's Remedies

1. Know you're good enough, without being smug about it.
2. Stanley Kubrick said: "Keep asking the question until you get the answer that you want to hear." In other words: never give up.
3. I run six kilometres a day. While making a film I run away from a problem, think about it and then run back to solve it.



Acting Richard E Grant trusts his instinct.
So should you

on Impulse