Jim Carrey, Virginia Madsen and Joel Schumacher Count to The Number 23

By MW Staff — Feb 19, 2007



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The trio talk about their latest thriller

We all know Jim Carrey is all about the comedy, but he's also proven to be all about the drama.

Now, he's all about the thriller in his latest flick, *The Number 23*; in the movie, he plays two different roles. One is the simple Walter Sparrow, a dog catcher, family man, and all-around good guy. The other is Fingerling, a ruthless, obsessive murderer. There's also a role reversal for his co-star, Virginia Madsen; she plays

Walter's wife, Agatha - but also, the sexy vixen Fabrizia.

And it was all up to Joel Schumacher to wrangle everyone and everything together - and that's what he tried to do when we sat down with the trio to talk about *The Number 23*:

Had you ever heard of the phenomenon?{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Virginia Madsen: Yes, because I think all that stuff is really fun, the shows on the Discovery Channel about ghosts and the yeti and UFOs, which I totally believe in. So I'd heard about it but I didn't know how vast it was until really the first day of production; I'd sort of been on line, and I came in and there were these beautiful, beautiful roses from Jim, these enormous - with this romantic note, we're going to have - to my beautiful wife -

Jim Carrey: I just didn't want any trouble.

Virginia Madsen: And you know, I was so gullible I was like, 'Oh, I love him now.' That's all it takes, but then on the table there was this book about this thick with all the fun facts about the number 23, just in case you're a doubter.

Jim Carrey: And then it began, and her son started picking out things; her son was sitting there all day long trying to figure out the phenomenon on the set. And he pointed out that our names together were 23 letters and our names together (Jim's and Schumacher) are 23 letters.

Did weird things happen on the set?{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Joel Schumacher: Well, I hired Danny (Huston) and Virginia; I asked them to participate in the movie, and then the first day of shooting I found out they had been married once.

Virginia Madsen: 23 years ago.

Joel Schumacher: And I asked them if they would have a problem doing a sex scene together?

Jim Carrey: We're trying to keep them apart right now.

Joel Schumacher: I thought that was kind of, as Jim would say, 'oooeeeoooo.'

Which persona for the three of you did you feel more comfortable in? {@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Virginia Madsen: Well, I definitely - Agatha, but I mean, all of us have a dark side and all of us have an even darker side to our sexuality, and it was to tap into that. Everything that I play as an actress is a different aspect of me, being able to unlock that little door and show that; this movie was great because I just got to show a lot of different sides.

Jim Carrey: Hitchcock was wonderful in his approach to things, he would make you look at something normal in a completely way, in The Birds it was like you could never look at birds the same way.

Joel Schumacher: Or the shower.

Jim Carrey: The shower, exactly, it tapped into some kind of weird little bugaboo that everybody has, the fear of what's on the other side of that curtain.

Joel Schumacher: I could never dress up like my mother after that - and that was such a great housedress.

Jim Carrey: I love Walter because he's the family guy; he's the guy who wants to have a normal life. He's most of us who want just things to be stable; we're in a constant state of denial that we live on plates of rock that are floating on molten magma and nothing is stable in the universe, we just want to keep things from moving too much, or changing too much. So I like that character, he was very

loving with his family and he loved his job. But the other character was a little bit different for me to play, so that's exciting for me -

Joel Schumacher: But you fell in love with playing Fingerling.

Jim Carrey: I did like Fingerling, and Jenny (McCarthy) liked it; it's amazing what a tattoo does for a girl.

Joel Schumacher: I don't know if Billy's here, Billy Corso was the make up artist, but Jim and Billy stayed up all one night in the trailer and invented that tattoo.

Virginia Madsen: I was so pleased.

Jim Carrey: That was the reaction it was hilarious, because -

Joel Schumacher: He thought I wouldn't like it; He didn't think I was hip enough to like this tattoo.

Jim Carrey: We didn't know if you could get it, and he just went off for like three weeks he rubbed that one in.

Joel Schumacher: Yes, well, I have done some hip things in my day.

Jim Carrey: I wanted to approach it right, so I came up to Joel and I said, 'I wanted to tell you Joel that I know we're doing the scene with the shirt off today, and I have this tattoo, and Billy and I are used to covering it up so if you don't want to use it that's totally cool, we'll just use it for something else,' and I took my shirt off and he went, 'That can't be real.'

Joel Schumacher: I didn't say that; I said 'I love it.'

Jim Carrey: Yeah, I love it, it's in the film; I said, 'Seriously we can cover it up.' He said, 'It's in the film,' and Virginia was just standing there. She was just standing there looking wistful, so I knew it was working.

Can you talk about the look of the tattoo?{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Jim Carrey: Billy painted it, originally painted it on, and so we like got on the computer and played around with photo shop and did a mock up of it, and then I stood there and he painted in on me. We were there 'til like four or five in the morning downtown in the middle of nowhere, but it was so great. It turned out really cool, and then he worked it out so he came up with the process where he could actually do little pieces of - a decal kind of thing where he could stick it on. It still took awhile, but he's just amazing.

Joel Schumacher: And because a lot of the Fingerling world is so graphic and black and white and red, it was perfect. It was perfect to set up a lot of and Virginia is in the black wig and mostly black underwear I think. Fabrizia doesn't get dressed a lot.

Virginia Madsen: No, I recall one scene where I am just walking out and I just take my coat with the lingerie.

Jim Carrey: And the interesting thing too is our relationship in the two different worlds; it's like, when I kiss her as my wife, as Walter, it's loving and sweet and it's beautiful. And when we are together as Fabrizia and Fingerling it's angry and it's basically -

Joel Schumacher: Blood is exchanged.

Jim Carrey: It's biting and eating, it's consuming the other person; it's pretty interesting.

Virginia Madsen: Yeah.

Is there anything that consumes you like your character?
{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Jim Carrey: The only thing that has ever consumed me is love from time to time - feeling like, 'What is it? How do I get it?' All of those things have consumed my mind from time to time; my spiritual journey has been a good kind of thing I've been on I guess some people would say I'm obsessed with but in a really good way. It's just enjoyable; I don't really have crazy obsessions about things.

Joel Schumacher: I think you are more seeking in that. I think you are a pupil, a student.

Jim Carrey: I think obsessions happen because you're trying to understand something or some urge. Like in the film, I think it's like trying to avoid something.

Joel Schumacher: Well, there are also magnificent obsessions and also more tragic, evil obsessions; obsession can be a great thing or it can also destroy lives.

For Fingerling did you look at any noir characters from the past?
{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Jim Carrey: No, I didn't really; I thought that if I was in that position, if I was that guy how I would see myself and how I would. Basically it would bleed into your hair and into your eyes and into everything about you; the coat, all the choices are choices that somebody makes because what is going on in their spirit. Every choice we make is based on that, the colors we wear - everything; it just bleeds into everything. It starts with a lie the person believes about themselves or the delusion they are living with or the pain that they have kind of accumulated. Things they are not dealing with; it all creeps out in certain ways.

Joel Schumacher: I think it was more original than the noir cop; because when

you see a cop, especially in a black coat like that in a noir setting, you expect them to be the cynical, burnt out, alcoholic.

Jim Carrey: We didn't want him to be a life hater.

Joel Schumacher: But since it is Walter's delusion that has created this. I think the first time you see him is when he meets Fabrizia and you see one side of him. But when he goes and sees the suicide blonde that Lynn Collins plays so brilliantly, there is a real compassion, because of course, in Walter's life his mother committed suicide and it's the same actress who played his mother and the widow Dobkins and all that, because it's all in his consciousness somewhere and subconscious. So, I think you can see him as seeing how much he wants for her to have a better life than what she is giving herself. And I think that's what is different about it. It's not, 'Life is sh*t, everyone is sh*t; I'm on the take.' And I think that's the difference that Jim brought to it, because it had Walter's spirit in it.

Jim, did you play the saxophone at all?{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Jim Carrey: You are so lucky; I just really practiced some rudimentary things that I could do that would match the music, but I didn't learn how to play the sax. I used to play the sax, oddly enough. There are parallels all over the place; my father used to be an accountant, he played the saxophone in a band, he had an orchestra, he played the saxophone. So, there were these parallels; I don't know how many of them were in there.

Joel Schumacher: Tons. Yes, tons.

Jim Carrey: So, there were all these parallels going on anyway; I played in the school band but I forgot how to play it.

Joel Schumacher: I didn't want to stop the movie for saxophone interludes.

Jim Carrey: No, no, nobody wants that.

Joel Schumacher: We had a lot of story to tell and the sax was one tiny little detail.

Jim Carrey: Exactly and I try to stay in decent shape always; I pride myself on staying at least a month away from really good shape.

Joel Schumacher: The only reason I asked Jim to play the Riddler is he was the only person who could have worn that green elastic suit.

Jim Carrey: That was on the thin side, that one.

Joel Schumacher: He did all his own stunts in Batman Forever because there is no one who can do Jim's body language.

Jim Carrey: It's the weirdest thing; there are so many times where I am in positions where we try to double me in things and it can literally be the back of my body or the back of my head. And, 'It just doesn't look like him.' There is something about my posture or something; I have no idea.

Joel Schumacher: It's body language.

Jim Carrey: But, I want to show you also this, because the other day when I came a couple of days ago I was with my assistant and I wanted people to see what I see everyday. So basically I began saying, 'Just get your camera phone out and just start taking pictures whenever see it.' This was the first thing was a tow truck right besides us with the number 23 on the side of it; I didn't photoshop this - I don't know why that is, the number 23 on the side. I guess it's the 23rd truck in its fleet, so I got them to take a picture of that. Then I looked to the car in front of us and that license plate started with the number 23; then I came to the

hotel here and I was in 1223. Then I went out on my balcony and the address adjacent to the hotel is 323 if you want to see it when you leave

Joel Schumacher: A lot of them in the movie are real; there is a website where people for years have been taking photos of the number 23 all over the planet. Why they do this, we don't know, but I mean, you'll see there are a lot of great photos of it - some of them are in the movie. But, the afternoon that Jim called me and said, 'Are you going to do this movie *The Number 23*?' And I said, 'Why?' And he said, 'If you do it, I'll do it.' And I said, 'If you do it, I'll do it.' And that night I was really excited and it was about midnight and I'm brushing my teeth and I'm thinking, 'Boy, I've made a lot of movie. This would be my 20th movie and Jim and I have been wanting to work together [again].' And I thought, 'Gee, I wish it was Number 23' And I'm brushing away and then the other side of my brain goes, 'What about your three television movies; wouldn't this be your 23rd directing job?' And I remember I had a houseguest and I ran across the house and I knocked on the door and I said, 'Ely! Guess what this will be my 23rd film.' And he went, 'Um, yeah, Ok man;' so I couldn't wait for the next morning to tell Jim.

Were all the characters filmed at once or were they mixed up?
{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Joel Schumacher: Sometimes they had to play the both characters on the same day; we had not a lot of money and not a lot of time to make this movie and a lot of complex things. So, as you know, when you are in a setting that's where you have to shoot everything out so you don't have to go back there and rent that again and get licenses, etc. So, those were the hardest days I think, when you have to do both characters. And sometimes Jim was supposed to do three characters; he'd be young Walter in the flashback, the present day Walter and Fingerling all in the same day. I think that was the most difficult for him.

Virginia Madsen: I loved when he was young Walter; he had this bowl hair, it was so cute. And your whole body language would change and you'd be like,

'Hey!' But when he would change into Fingerling, something happens where you just metabolize your role and your whole face would change.

Jim Carrey: It got very craggy.

Virginia Madsen: It's like you got really like dehydrated or something.

Jim Carrey: Something does happen when you take on the role, it's very strange - before I did Man on the Moon.

Joel Schumacher: You would be a different person when you came on the set - you too, Virginia. I saw you change Virginia; at first you were a little hesitant about Virigina because she's so unlike you. But the minute you saw that first clip of her, you thought, 'Oh, I get it.'

Virginia Madsen: But it was interesting what you said the other day, but what I never realized, that when we were Fingerling and Fabrizia we didn't really talked to one another very much. Whereas when we were Agatha and Walter we were always hanging out and we were all telling stories and it was like we were really affectionate, but then we were really separate. But then we'd be like 'Rah, rah, rah.'

Joel Schumacher: You would knit on the set and not talk to many people and Jim would put his earphones on.

Virginia Madsen: But also, many people wouldn't talk to me.

Jim Carrey: I was listening to a lot of Nine Inch Nails.

Virginia Madsen: And I would sort of walk on, it was like I had to give my permission to do that.

Joel Schumacher: Well Fabrizia was a very intimidating person.

Virginia Madsen: Well yeah, all of a sudden, all the women would have something they had to do. And all the men would be like, 'Uhhh?' So after a few hours, I got really lonely when I was her because I was so isolated and I hate that more than anything to be isolated.

How have you grown in your career over the years?{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Jim Carrey: I always have been introspective, since I was a little kid, since I could remember, I was sitting in a closet trying to write out the meaning of the universe. That's been my whole life.

Joel Schumacher: I have never known or worked with anyone who's a comic genius - which I definitely put Jim in that category - that doesn't have the most private, introspective sides. But that's really the basis - if anybody in this room thinks that comics are happy, believe me the degree of their comic brilliance is based on truly being so over sensitive and understanding and seeing everything in life, and dealing with the darkest parts of life with humor. And also, I think that's an old-fashioned concept because I think in old Hollywood they would stick people in a compartment and that's what they did. You were a sex symbol, you were the character actor, you were the funny man, but I think that Woody Allen and Eddie Murphy and Steve Martin and Robin Williams certainly have managed to show many sides of their artistry and the audience has not only embraced it, but I think encouraged it on many levels. And the first movie I ever saw Jim in he was a teenager and he did a movie called *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, where he played a teenage alcoholic in the suburbs, it was a very intense role. I knew him to be an actor before I ever went to see his stand up, which was equally brilliant, and I think it just depended on where your opportunities were.

Jim Carrey: Right, most of the people that you might be talking about if that is true, they may have warmed to me as a person because of the comedy and I

think that. Human beings just innately don't like change; they buck it at every turn, every time something changes, 'I don't know about that.' It's a scary thing for people, so there's always resistance to it, but Dylan went electric and he never looked back. And we bitched and moaned when it happened, but that's not his concern; his concern is be true to himself and then invite you in to see it, and go, 'Hope you like it.'

The film is not set in any particular time period; you did not have any use of cell phones or internet.{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Joel Schumacher: I didn't want to spend the whole film with everybody on computers and cell phones, because it's not about that; it's about these characters. Also, I felt that Walter and Agatha - she has her own business, she's the center of that, and he's chosen a life where there isn't a lot of stress and aggravation from people. They have a very safe life where they don't have a lot of friends. He's had a major catharsis trauma in his life, and even though she doesn't quite know what it is, there's that sense - it's like someone who has come back from the war and seen terrible things or done terrible things, and they just never talk about it in their family, and that family unit is so important to them, and she's the center of her own artistic business, it does well, and man who are in a truck all day like that, they are very much free in certain ways. He's basically dealing with just someone on a phone and animals, and that can be stressful, the animals, but it's not the same as being in an office or in a corporate situation. So I didn't want to make the movie be about technology and I didn't think that they would have to embrace all of that. There are actually people who refuse to have those things in their life, because they want less stress in their life. And I just didn't want the whole movie to be about that, because it's about the people in it and not about those things. Also having done a whole movie in a phone booth with seven thousand phones, and cell phones, I wanted to do actors' acting and not 'Hello, yes,' and then cut to the other person on the phone, 'Damn it, my battery's not working.'

What kind of music did you listen to, to get into character?

{@@@newline@@@}{@@@newline@@@}Jim Carrey: I do use music a lot, I do like it; I found the song in that's in the movie, the theme song of Fabrizia and Fingerling. But, I use music a lot and it was fun too; it's interesting too. I think everybody creates the character, he creates the character, people on the set, the lighting - everything creates the character. So, the sound people on the movie, they were so excited when I came to them and I said, 'For certain scenes, I want an earwig with music blasting in my ear during the scene.' And they go, 'what, what are you talking about?' And I go, 'Seriously, the weirdest things you can possibly find - disturbing sounds, things that are really horrifying that really unnerve you.' And they were like 'Great, man,' and they went away and they came up with the wonderful collection of sound bytes and things like that of different things happening and music. I would use them at certain scenes, and at times I would also - in the scene where I'm kind of going crazy by myself in the hotel room - I would get Joel, I would have that music, and I would get Joel in my ear just messing with me, just trying to screw me up - talk to me at times when I'm trying to concentrate on certain things. I literally ended up at certain times telling him to 'go f*ck himself,' and stuff like that. It would so get in my way that it would be unnerving, but that's what I wanted.

The Number 23 hits theaters February 23rd; it's rated R.

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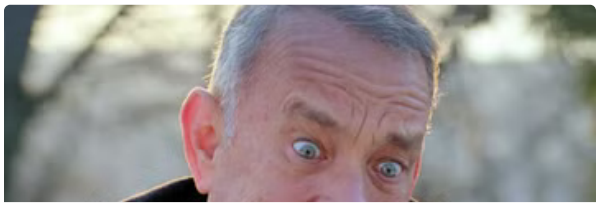


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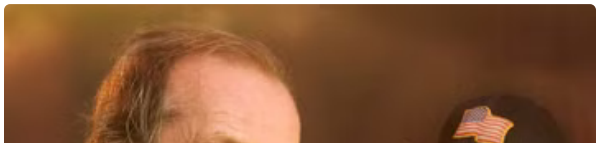


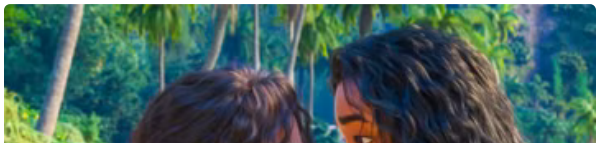
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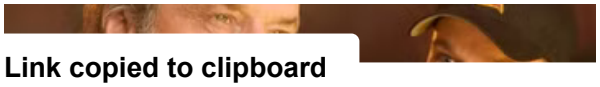
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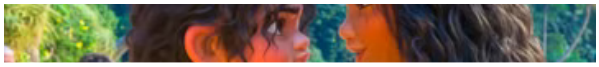
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