

From Reviewing Movies to Winning an Oscar with Movie Producer, Axel Kuschevatzky

Owen Shapiro 00:04

Welcome to Kino Society with Owen Shapiro. In today's episode we have Axel Kuschevatzky an Argentine film journalist, screenwriter and film producer. Among his greatest successes is the film *The Secret of Their Eyes* by Juan José Campanella, movie that won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film at the 82nd Academy Awards in which he participated as associate producer. Welcome to Kino Society Axel.

Axel Kuschevatzky 00:35

Hi, Pleasure to meet you. Finally

Owen Shapiro 00:38

Would you mind telling us a bit about your background and what attracted you to movies?

Axel Kuschevatzky 00:42

Oh, so you have like three hours? No I'm kidding. Okay. I grew up in what Osiris and Tina I fell in love with film when I was a kid. And I dreamt drunk for four years, I thought being a movie maker was my decision. But you know, life is kind of has mysterious ways. And I ended up working on TV, first, as a TV reporter specializing movies, and then I was part of the programming, you know, group that was responsible for the Argentinian biggest TV network, which is in effect, and I was there for many years. I also have a sideshow, which is I'm a TV host. And I was hired by TNT, who handles the Oscars for Latin America. So I was working, you know, I'm programming on this huge TV network. I'm also doing interviews on red carpets for TNT, Latin America, when many years ago, one Corsican banana, which is a very well known as a young director came to me and said, Hey, have you ever thought of producing films? And I said, Sure. That's the dream of me. Thank you say, Well, I think you could be a good sound producer. So we started working, we started working on the project that came in secret arise, and as you said before, was did win the Oscar for Best Foreign Film 10 years ago. So that was, that's, that's how I can into be a film producer. So you'd say your first experience as a producer was pretty successful. Yeah, my first my first great film, I think it's a rather unique story, because you know, you have her a lot of people don't, you know, talking about their struggles, in order to, you know, to do the job, they have been breeding off for many years. But in my case, he was just like that, you know, it was like, I don't know, I don't think I can imagine anybody else in the world having an experience of mine, which is rather, the first movie experience that you remember, you know, there's there's a family law that says that I saw my first film when I was like three months old. And it wasn't a rubian arthouse movie, of course, I don't remember the thing of that. But I do remember myself watching, you know, films on TV when I was, like five years old, and my parents and grandparents taking me to the movies. And my dad used to have this, this is going to sound like kind of alien to you. But there was something called Super eight millimeter projectors. But the thing is, my dad used to have one of those. And he used to rent super eight millimeter films. And he used we used to have movie nights way before you know, VHS or DVD or even, you know, watching movies on VOD, so I grew up, it's not that I have a

single one memory of a particular movie. I can remember every single movie I've seen not ask me why. I don't remember my parents read that. But I do remember every single movie I've seen.

Owen Shapiro 03:45

It's quite the accomplishment. I think separate is still around for mostly student films nowadays, like students at universities have to make their films to separate kind of as older motomachi thing.

Axel Kuschevatzky 03:57

Yeah, I know. They're, they're not going to come back off, you know, all those film formats in the last couple of years. But But then, you know, in the 70s, mid 70s, and I'd say like, yeah, early 80s. Given that was the only way you have to capture your family somehow. I mean, there wasn't any other way. Besides, you know, the can pictures or taping the voices to do anything. There were no video cameras. But so that's the reason why my my dad both, you know, a super eight camera and then a separate project.

Owen Shapiro 04:32

So what was it like going from watching movies and talking about movies to making movies?

Axel Kuschevatzky 04:37

It was a ride. That was a hell of a ride. It wasn't a roller coaster? Well, you know, before becoming a producer, I wrote some sitcoms and TV shows in the country. So I had some experience, you know, how, you know, a comedy or a drama was straightforward. You know, I knew how to structure a narrative and how whichever Elements Do you need in order to set up a TV show or a TV series or a movie? So I it wasn't, it wasn't a big surprise in the sense that it wasn't completely different from the things that I was doing previously. Yet, the whole experience of knowing that two years of your life, which is a huge investment in one single project are going to end in the big screen, that was something completely different, you know, I wasn't prepared for the kind of reception of the movie hat.

Owen Shapiro 05:29

So do you think that your production experience changed your perspective as journalists?

Axel Kuschevatzky 05:33

Well, you know, for me, it's kind of hard to separate both things. When you're interviewing people, as you're doing now, you're learning you keep learning a lot. So the moment I became a producer, all that knowledge that I got from interviews was completely useful. And also, you know, becoming a producer, I became also a better, you know, interviewer because I knew the process from the creative process from inside. So I don't think I just think you know, that both things are they work together at the same time, it's almost the same thing.

Owen Shapiro 06:04

What's your specific role on a set?

Axel Kuschevatzky 06:06

Well, I seldom go to set my shop, it's much more about creating the product, getting financing, packaging, the whole idea of getting every single element that eventually will come with movie, if I go to set is this basically, because I'm busy, I have nothing to do on set, you know, I am not a flipper, I am not a film producer. It's that's not my job. I do a lot of things before the movie starts shooting. And I do a lot of things while in other places while the movie is being shot. And also, I do a lot of things after the show ends, I don't have a lot of things to do on set, I do feel kind of an intruder each time I go there. And it's like a whole you know, everybody looks at you like you're mean evil guy, even though I have no, I have nothing to do.

Owen Shapiro 06:51

So they, you've produced mostly Argentinian movies, right?

Axel Kuschevatzky 06:55

I would say that, you know, out of the four movies, I've been involved, like, I would say like 70 were either Argentinian or coproductions. between Argentina and some of the countries that I have made movies in Chile, I made movies in vain allowed. I made movies in Canada, I made movies, let me see in Mexico, and Bolivia. And yeah, I've been working a lot of places. But most of the films I'm involved with used to be years and years that that was before I became, you know, for many years, I used to work for companies. So when I used to work for companies, it was a completely different game than the moment I decided to go to fly solo and created my own production company, you know, so now I'm working on shows, TV shows and movies in England a lot. I'm mostly working on England, basically now.

Owen Shapiro 07:45

So are there any differences between producing an urgency, you know, and in Europe,

Axel Kuschevatzky 07:50

inflation rates, that's, you know, in countries in countries are are going through and the terminal crisis like Argentina, you don't know exactly how inflation rates will affect you, you don't know exactly how much I don't know. Diet soda will cost in a year. And that affects the way you're prepping the way you're planning the way you're thinking about the costs and how to finance a movie to be made in a town to where the currency loss keep losing its value, like every single day. So that's that's the main big, big difference. Yeah, that's, that's something that it's really well, I guess, you know, a little bit of a convener, and it's a country where last year inflation, the annual inflation rate was 47%. You can imagine living in a country where things at the end of the year basically are Ducasse, two times that they used to cost like 12 months before, it's almost impossible to set up a movie in a country like that. And that's why I keep you know, kept making films that are coproductions regeneration teen and some other countries, that's the only way to put to put together a movie without the strain the financial strains of movie that has such a huge inflation rate.

Owen Shapiro 08:59

So you'd say it's much calmer experience to film something in a country with less of an inflation rate

Axel Kuschevatzky 09:05

for me making films outside Argentina. It's basically like taking vacation. That is a huge difference. At the same time that prepare me for everything. So you know, living in a country like like I used to live I used to live in Cyrus I moved into LA, a year, almost a year ago. Yeah, a year ago, you know, when I was living there, I became, you know, my skin grow thicker. That's something that happens when you're leaving the controller controller.

Owen Shapiro 09:31

So what makes you interested in betting on a project? It's it's just intuition.

Axel Kuschevatzky 09:35

Well, you know, I would say that the first thing you ask yourself is, would I pay a ticket for this movie? It's a movie I would like to watch. It's to see it's a movie that will affect me emotionally, somehow. It's a narrative. I just think it's compelling. It is. I know how do I connect with the material? Do I connect with the people who's making the film? Do I admire the people behind the idea behind The story, it's an issue that I think I would like to address somehow. Yeah, there are a lot of questions that make you decide why a movie, it's something that you want to pursue. And I want you to remember this making a film takes like two years, at least, you know, it's a huge commitment, you're going to spend two years and even more than that, thinking about one single idea about when this you know, a project that is going to you know, hijacked your life somehow. So it's a huge commitment, you have to you have to be completely aware of the stuff that you're doing, you have to know, you have to have a clear motivation in order to have this kind of commitment.

Owen Shapiro 10:36

So what do you think is the highlights of your career so far?

Axel Kuschevatzky 10:39

Let me see. There are a lot of movies as our I'm really proud of some of those films where I have been involved with having huge successes in either my country or similar countries, or, you know, like the secret arise, which was a movie that made me a producer and I certainly before winning, to winning the Oscar whitetails, which is another movie was part of that was nominated for an Oscar, there was a movie that I enjoyed a lot. There was a, there was a great experience. Besides that I there's some a lot of films that are not so well known outside Argentina that are I do feel I own somehow, yeah, that's a good way you you in order to embrace a person, you have to feel that you're you own the brush. It's not in real terms, it's not that you really own the movie, you have to feel that you own the movie, you know. So I would say that a movie like Galena lobata, which is a movie that I that was my idea. And then when the Cannes Film Festival, there was a movie that I was I'm really proud of that that's that's that's a highlight. And of course, there's you know, after creating my own production company with with my great partners, tingling, and Cindy temperament, we created the show in the UK, which is called stage that we can watch the show on full Polo, starring David Tennant. Michael Sheen, with with guest stars as Whoopi Goldberg, he won McGregor cable and shed some sharks and she lives I mean, that's, that's a show that we created, you know, in lockdown, and that that was broadcast in the UK by BBC, and I'm really proud of that, I think that we we made a good show in a very stressful month for you know, mankind, which was, you know, COVID-19 lockdown, some still, and I'm really happy. That's that's one of the latest projects that I'm really proud of.

Owen Shapiro 12:26

So is there any conflicts between the decisions of the producer and the director that often occur?

Axel Kuschevatzky 12:33

No, I'm always but you know, actually, you need conflict in order to have creativity. I mean, it's like the idea that you can create without any constraint, that means it's not real. I mean, you're always dealing with real life while you are creating something. And that means that from time to time directors and producers, we don't, we don't have to agree on everything. We don't have to agree on everything. It's like, yeah, we have discussions we but that's, that's part of the creative process. I mean, it's not you know, that there's a whole idea in the world that creativity has to have something to do with art and actually, the creative process has nothing to do with art and you have you have you can have quite a creative creative process applied to everything. I mean, you can be a highly creative car driver, you can be a highly creative, you know, whatever, whatever you want to do, you can find new ways of doing things, because creativity is actually the way you are facing conflict

Owen Shapiro 13:25

Since 2004, you have been the host of the pre show of the delivery of the Oscars for TNT in a transmission that is seen by more than 120 million people what does this mean to you and why do you think awards are important

Axel Kuschevatzky 13:39

Well that's a lot. Well, you know, the best thing about Movie Awards and and TV service awards that you are those those award ceremonies are basically a way to raise the profile of project make people you know, I'm curious about a movie or a TV show and that's that's something that actually quite good a lot of TV shows I give you an example. I seen shits Creek, but you know about the show, okay, the goods with the show. It's really good. It was made in Canada. He was a Canadian show. Nobody cared about he became a sensation after getting some nominations for I think was the Golden Gloves or the ads. But this before Daddy, he was a hit in Canada, but nobody knew about the show. And now the show is being broadcast all around the world. And you can watch kids scream anywhere, you know, from Latin America, to Eastern Europe to Asia, and that's because you have awards. So I would say that our award ceremonies are amplifying and that's a really good thing. For me, you know, being on the red carpet, interviewing people. It's, it's really I tell you, I have a lot of fun. I have a lot of fun and to meet people that I been following for years, you know, as a movie fan, not only as a producer, but also one thing that happens. One thing that happens a lot to me is I have friends that are being nominated. Like every single Oscar, you know ceremony or every single Amy or Golden Globes award. So when you have your friends being nominated, it's lovely. It's great. It's great to meet these people on the red carpet. And you know, hug them and say something like a break a leg is going to be your night. I love you. I'm really proud of you, my friend. Yeah, it's I love this I love I love to tell people why that watching films and watching you know, a TV show is a great thing to do. And that's a really nice platform to do that. It's a beautiful launching pad for that.

Owen Shapiro 15:31

So you mentioned that it awards can sometimes bring light to things that aren't very well known. But what about the other side, which a lot of people tend to have problems with where instead of nominating things that are lesser known and more creative, they tend to like the term Oscar bait exists because there are a lot of things that are feel as if they're made to appeal directly to the awards.

Axel Kuschevatzky 15:52

Well, you know, based on my experience, there is no such thing as Oscar night, there is no way to create a movie that is that you know, it's going to win an Oscar, I'll give you an example. These year 90, I think it was 92 or 93. movies from all around the world are participating in the, you know, international film feature category for years. It's forming formerly known as misfiring field, they change the name like a couple three years ago. So that's 92 movies. And out of the those 92 at the end, you will have five candidates for the Oscar. I mean, there's no way that you can create a movie with a single purpose of winning an Oscar because the process is so complex. And it takes so much time that if you even try to create movie, a movie for you know, in order to win an award, voters will notice that I don't think there's any chance to create a movie with that single purpose. I'll give you an example on VCR there was a lot of buzz about the film called hillbilly what was the title? hillbilly elegy? Yeah. Have you heard about that?

Owen Shapiro 16:54

Yeah. There was there was he I heard actually really bad things about that one.

Axel Kuschevatzky 16:57

Well, you know, the movie was I heard that when the movie was before it was released. A lot of people said something like, this is a survey they're aiming for your skirts and knees. You can you can smell it, you can smell and smell Oscar is Oscar with an Oliver rate. And you know what happened? In the end in God, only two nominations, best makeup and Best Supporting arch proclaimed clothes. And that's it. So that's that's the can the I mean, this movie, I mean, feels that notion of you know, Oscar date, I don't think that you can create the movie with a single purpose purpose of winning an award.

Owen Shapiro 17:31

So definitely, a lot of people often say it's, you have to do a period piece, or you have to do it. So it's a different argument each time.

Axel Kuschevatzky 17:39

I mean, if there is a recipe for that, I want it. I'll give you my email, please send that to me. Well tell that to the guys. That made pericyte

Owen Shapiro 17:49

Yeah, that was definitely a unique choice that I definitely liked. That was my favorite movie that year. So yeah,

Axel Kuschevatzky 17:54

Well, yeah. But you know, we can if we look back to the last three years of the Oscars, well, I would say you don't have a lot of period pieces there. I mean, no, I mean, you have a movie. I have some movies

here and there. But there's a lot of movies that aren't period piece, you know. So there are no rules, no rules. It's it has much more to do with the sheer quality of the project, how the product connects with the audience, and I would say how the project interacts with content, how a project commends the world around us that makes a movie worthwhile for the Oscar.

Owen Shapiro 18:27

Well, earlier this year, very recently, actually, the Golden Globes nominated a movie called music for Best Comedy, which was, I saw a while back, I think like a day after the Golden Globes. And that was absolutely horrible. Everyone was pretty right about that. I and people were very, very confused. Same thing with the A American movie getting Nominated Best Foreign, which everyone was confused about it.

Axel Kuschvatzky 18:55

Let's go one by one. In the case of music, I haven't seen the movie. I have no idea exactly why the movie was so insulting. For so many people. You must remember that Golden Globes are not the Oscars. There's a huge difference. I mean, the Golden Globes are being held by an organization called the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which is roughly 80 members from different countries that are leaving and working on the US sorry, in LA. So it doesn't represent what the industry thinks of itself doesn't represent how filmmakers see their peers. It's not it's so it's a different complete different game than the Oscars. And the other movie you mentioned was minari, which is a Korean South Korean film so rather your nice, nice film I really like it, the thing wouldn't marry it's that Golden Globes, The Golden Girls have had I have an itinerary which is called Best Foreign Language Film. And that doesn't mean that the movie that the movie has to be from a foreign country. It means that in the movie, it's not an English in qualifies.

Owen Shapiro 19:59

I think I think that's pretty ridiculous.

Axel Kuschvatzky 20:01

But Okay, then. I mean, yeah, it could be, but that those are the rules. I mean, if you want to play a game, you're playing by the rules, you know, bottom line, each time somebody is giving away an award, we're talking about subjectivity. It's an opinion and award. It's an opinion that someone thinks that your work stands out. It's not a rule, it doesn't mean that the word movie it's better or worse than the other films, it only means that the people that it's giving away that the word like the movie better than the other. And, you know, that's why I don't discuss a word. I mean, I don't discuss the I mean, not the award as a concept. I don't discuss why the Oscars are giving away an award to I don't know, remove, instead of giving that award to a move that I think it's better because at the end, it's it's a simple matter of taste. I like some some stuff you like some other stuff. I want to fight about movies? I don't think so it's not going to happen.

Owen Shapiro 20:51

Speaking of tastes, you have any favorite movements or directors?

Axel Kuschvatzky 20:54

It's weird, you know, um, I would say that I have many favorite films, and many favorite directors, but that list is so long that it will take us like days and days to you know, mention every single name on that list. You know, it's like, it's not that I have a top 10 films. In fact, I have a top 10 list, but it keeps changing like every two hours. And if you ask me now, which movies your favorite? I don't know, maybe I will say, The Searchers the 1956 movie directed by Tom Ford and starting to wane. But if you call me like three hours, I'll tell you another movie because I keep changing out. So I'll say another way I could change you know, if you love films, and if you really love movies, it's not that you live love a particular film you you love movies in general. And that's what happens to me.

Owen Shapiro 21:39

That's definitely very understandable. So Alright, we're almost out of time. So how can my listeners connect with you?

Axel Kuschevatzky 21:46

You can guys you can follow me on Twitter. You know, actual good shots will let last without the last letter accuracy, and you can also on Instagram and Facebook, I do everything. If you have a new social network, give me a call because I probably I will try and I'm very much into into social media. I enjoy the interaction with people so that you can find it out.

Owen Shapiro 22:11

Alright, that's all for today. Don't forget you can subscribe to Kino Society on iTunes and Spotify.