Press Release: 4 May 2016

SIGOURNEY WEAVER SPEAKS AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION

“When art is instinctive, that’s when it’s true”

On the 4th May 2016 the Cambridge Union Society welcomed actress, film producer and environment activist Sigourney Weaver. The discussion began discovering details about her early life. She majored in English at Stanford University, then not quite sure what she wanted to do auditioned for several drama schools and happened to get into all of them. Weaver headed off to complete a Master of Fine Arts at the Yale University School of Drama. At drama school she was told she had ‘no talent’, and she would not be successful. Indignant she ‘went to the city’ to start her acting career.

Sigourney Weaver first ‘spent a lot of time in off off Broadway’, which is composed of ‘new plays’ and budding actors and actresses starting their career. She thought off off Broadway was a ‘great way to come up’ in the acting scene. After plays and minor film roles it was to Weaver’s ‘great surprise’ she ended up as Ellen Ripley in the movie Alien. Weaver believes what has helped her most in developing her acting skills have been ‘her education’ studying literature. Her English major has enabled her to be able to easily evaluate a script, for its merits and demerits, as only good ‘scripts tend to have a longer life’. She is not interested in just her part when reading the script but holistically what film is about.

When questioned about the nature of her role in the film Working girl, Weaver commented that her part, Katherine Parker, ‘still to me stands out quite strongly, as far as women characters go’. Weaver noted that she didn’t feel her character was bossy, just ‘so sure that she’s right’ and ‘what Katherine does, these days in New York, no one would even blink’. Reflecting on her career, Weaver feels that she can trust the moment more. Because when ‘art is instinctive, that’s when it’s true’.

After one of her latest films, Avatar, Sigourney Weaver was hailed the ‘Queen of Sci-fi’, yet she commented that of the nearly 50 films she has done only a handful have been science fiction. Yet she realised that now she’s doing four move Avatar films she is ‘stuck with the title’. Weaver understood that science fiction movies like Avatar connected real life today and issues such as climate change. She recalled James Cameron’s statement that science fiction is ‘the exploration of what it is to be human’. The genre of movies shows that ‘humans don’t change their character that much’, seen through the actions of ‘big business’ now and as predicted in Avatar.

Weaver believes the Avatar movies are going to ‘have a big environmental message’. But she is worried that ‘people will not get the message in time’, because at the moment in America you cannot presently have ‘a rational discussion based on scientific facts’ about climate change. Weaver recognised that her generation ‘screwed up’ on climate change but ‘we have all the facts now’ and ‘we should be doing more’.

A question from the audience brought up the lack of women directors. Weaver commented that she feels it is the juxtaposition of Hollywood ‘gravitating to more blockbuster movies’, while women being drawn to direct ‘relationship movies’ and the prevalence of ‘male executives’ that have caused the problem. But she sees that ‘very talented women are coming up now’ so a change is coming.
For footage of the event go to https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc

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