

**Transcript of Michael Smerconish Interview
with Ann Calamia, writer/director of Universal Signs
CBS Radio's The Big Talker 1210 AM, WPHT
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Michael Smerconish: Right now I want to welcome Ann Calamia to the program. Hey, Ann how are you?

Ann Calamia: Good morning, how are you?

MS: A Central Bucks West Graduate, when did you graduate?

AC: I graduated in 1992, and I actually think you might have been my graduation speaker.

MS: Wow, was I the source of your inspiration and motivation to go be a filmmaker?

AC: Oh definitely. I think you talked about housing and urban development and that kind of thing.

MS: How invigorating. (both laugh) When I get to the Universal Signs credits, I'll be looking for my name as a point of inspiration.

AC: Oh definitely. Definitely look in there. (laugh)

MS: This is really, this is really a well-done project. And let me explain and call on you to help me explain. Ann is a filmmaker. This is, am I right, your first full-length feature film?

AC: Yes it is!

MS: And it's called Universal Signs, and it is in large part, I mean there is some exceptions, but it is a silent movie. Who makes a silent movie in 2008/2009?

AC: Right, right, Universal Signs is a modern silent film and it is told in American Sign Language with captions in English for the hearing and non-signing audience and I really wanted explore invisible differences like



depression and deafness and how people who need our support, they don't necessarily know how to reach out to us, and you don't know by looking at them that they need us. So, the vehicle for the silent film really explored that depression as way for the audience to feel that same feeling of isolation.

MS: And it has a plot line. I mean most of us, we didn't grow up in an era where there were silent movies and I think that we don't know what that really means, but there is a story told here, with great production values.

AC: Yeah, Universal Signs explores universal themes, that's kind of the universal part of Universal Signs. And it's the themes of love and connection, loss, forgiveness, moving on after tragedy, and it's really a hopeful, uplifting story that I think embodies timeless wisdom. So it's kind of re-looking back at the silent film era and also looking back at some timeless wisdom that we can celebrate basic Judeo-Christian values and that sort of thing.

MS: And captioned for the hearing, I get a kick out of that.

AC: Yeah, it's captioned, so that way the hearing audience who comes and sees the film, its really a film for them too, its a foreign language film for them and a lot of our audience feedback has been that they really feel the message of reclaiming your life after tragedy and self-forgiveness, is something that kind of goes in even deeper because of the fact that they are in a film experience where they can't rely on, you know, looking down into their purse or talking to the person next to them, because they don't have any audio cues, so they must look at the screen. So it's really an interesting experience for the hearing audience and for the Deaf audience, it's a first time that they're seeing a film in their native language up on the screen, so it's kind of fun that it bridges these worlds and cultures and that everyone can laugh together and cry together and really experience a film together.

MS: How hard to direct actors to act in a silent movie?

AC: Well, I had some very fantastic interpreters on set. I know a little bit of sign language, but not nearly enough, it takes years and years of study, so I didn't know nearly enough to talk about deep themes with my actors, but my interpreters, we worked really closely together to discuss these themes with them. Also I had fantastic ASL consultant, his name is Robert DeMayo, and he is a Deaf actor and Deaf performing artist, and what he did was, I wrote,



basically my script was the captions and he took that script and changed it, its called transliteration, into American Sign Language, and sometimes we would sit and talk for an hour about a certain line.

MS: Ann, let me get to the most important part. Your movie is being screened at the Keswick, this Saturday at one o'clock. Keswick Theatre, this Saturday, thanks for being here. I loved it. I'm giving it 3 and ½ stars out of 4. How's that?

AC: Awesome thank you.

MS: Ok, I'll talk to you again.

AC: We'd love to see everyone out there.

MS: Thank you.