

## A MASTER CINEMATOGRAPHER'S INSIGHTS ON 'RESONANCE'

### **Binger Screen International Interview: Christopher Doyle**

30 September 2011 by Binger Reporter [Matthew Curlewis](#)

An expectant, packed to overflowing audience edge forward in their seats. Indian summer heat fills the **Netherlands Film Festival** Pavilion's main room, but that's not the reason – it's anticipation. Up front, **Screen International** editor and host **Mike Goodridge** looks... apprehensive? No – just a tad uncertain what's going to happen next.

Cue lights, roll film and PUMP UP THE VOLUME. International star cinematographer **Chris Doyle** suddenly charges in and vamps across the stage punching his fist in the air, shouting along (in French) to the music. Then in the room's side shadows he pads back and forth a moment, beer in hand, before swaggering across stage again, bathed in his own gloriously saturated images playing out on three screens.

Eventually, after a barely decipherable shout of "For Wouter!" (deceased founder of **Fortissimo Film Sales**), Chris manages to sit down alongside Mike and the interview stutters into life. Like any good host, Mike attempts a few framing questions, but Chris's energy keeps him bounding out of his seat while first getting a few pronouncements off his chest like, "Don't even think of making a film unless you've got something to say." And, "We all have a voice. The real work is in finding where, and how, that voice resonates."

The audience fasten their seat belts, slightly thrilled that apparently, it's going to be a bumpy ride.

Interviewer and interviewee themselves are framed by, as it happens, highly pertinent banners from the Binger's freshly launched new branding platform. At left: "Wild theories welcome", and right: "Wanted. Foolishly optimistic individuals to pursue impossible dreams". Theories don't come much wilder and dreams seem more impossible than the idea of Chris in his early twenties attaining the VIP, "Keith Richards of film" status that precedes him everywhere today.

At 18, Christopher Doyle departed Sydney, Australia, his place of birth and upbringing, to join the merchant navy. After three years plying the seas on a Norwegian vessel, he came ashore and spent subsequent years living in India, Israel and Thailand. Fate – or more to the point, cheap Chinese language classes – finally took him to Taiwan. While there, a film director asked Chris, then 34, to shoot his film. Even though he'd never handled a camera before, Chris soon proved himself a natural by winning a Best Cinematography award (co-credited with **Hui Kung Chang**), for **Edward Yang's *That Day, on the Beach***.

And judging by his prolific output, Chris has barely put down a camera since. He's shot eight films with **Wong Kar-Wai**, earned widely acknowledged

acclaim for “changing the look of contemporary cinema”, and has worked with such master directors as **Zhang Yimou**, **Pen-ek Ratanaruang**, **Chen Kaige**, **Gus van Sant**, **Jon Favreau**, **Barry Levinson**, **Phillip Noyce**, **M. Night Shyamalan**, **Neil Jordan** and **Jim Jarmusch**, amongst others.

This background information only emerges in snippets during the interview, even though Mike tries his level best to steer Chris in promising directions. At one point when Chris’s ramblings and beer bottle openings are failing to deliver much of coherence however, Mike interjects, prompting:-

Chris: Are you going to shut me up for a while?

Mike: For just a few seconds, yes.

Eventually however, Chris settles into the proceedings and begins sharing insights and stories, interspersed with visual segments like a soft-porn ***Pink Film*** he’s shot in Japan using rules that appear to out-dogma **Dogma**, and his own edit of some of his famously well-known Wong Kar-Wai work.

Some fragments:

“A lot of the journey of being with Kar-Wai is about – it is what you see. It is what it is. It’s about simplicity.”

“The journey in general should be about being an artist, or a storyteller. Then the art or stories will come as part of that journey. They don’t just appear out of nowhere.”

“I played a game of squash with my father and discovered – I could no longer see the ball. That black ball against such absolute white was too much contrast. I had begun seeing like a camera. I am a camera.”

“Most people, when they sign on to work with me, know that I’m insane. They know what to expect. Some directors have made the mistake of thinking I’m controllable – and the lawyers? Oh the lawyers don’t know what to do!”

“After four days of filming ***Psycho***’s shower scene with **Anne Heche**, just me on camera, and **Gus (Van Sant)** on sound, she said, “This is just like making a student film!” We needed to strip it back to that place of rawness, of immediacy, of intimacy.”

“When film councils say they won’t look at a script unless it’s been in development for four years, I say, Fuck that shit! Make your film tomorrow!”

“It’s about cycles, giving and replenishing – you don’t know how much I also receive from you all from being here. Thank you.”

“With film, it’s possible to embrace to unexpected. On set it doesn’t always have to go exactly as in the script.”

“It’s about an exchange of energy. If that is captured, nurtured and received, then it can reach the audience.”

“On Hero, we did what we could, not what we wanted. We had these colour systems, but then had to find the locations, the reasons for those colours.”

“(Kar-Wai) used to ask me this question: “Is that all you can do Chris?” But he didn’t say, “I don’t like it” or “It’s not good enough”, he simply put it on my shoulders – “Is that all you can do?” There were times when I’d dig down, and indeed find something more. And sometimes, at two o’clock in the morning I would say, “Right now, yes, that’s really all I can do!”

And then Chris shows another clip. This, he explains, he shot one morning on a beach in Sydney, with a very small camera. What follows is quietly, staggeringly beautiful. Just bits of seawater and sandstone formations and Chris’s shadow gliding, merging, and dancing, slipping in and out of the colour striations in the rocks. And with the utter simplicity of these images, everything else suddenly fades into insignificance. All of Chris’s posturing, and boozing, and general bad boy behaviour slip away, leaving behind the realization that this man is an artist, in the fullest, truest sense of the word.

Here is a man who can roll out of bed, more than likely hung over, and with the simplest of devices shoot something astounding, bringing to bear all of his years of experience and unique way of seeing the world, in every choice of how he frames his material and captures available light.

Another clip follows, plus a lengthy anecdote that stretches the patience of organizers trying to keep their schedule, and then it’s over and everyone wanders out into the soft Dutch evening light. But what remains are many visual imprints, including a man’s shadow, dancing against coloured sandstone. Wild theories welcome. Chris Doyle has a singular, unique voice, and it most certainly resonates.