

# Casey Affleck on 'Our Friend,' 'The World to Come' and the aftermath of winning an Oscar [Complete Interview Transcript]

Casey Affleck on real-life role in 'Our Friend' and developing 'The World to Come'

Casey Affleck chats with Gold Derby's Riley Chow about his real-life role in 'Our Friend' and developing 'The World to Come.'

[Casey Affleck](#) stars in the new film "[Our Friend](#)" as Matt Teague. He also produced and has a role in another film, "[The World to Come](#)," which premiered at the Venice Film Festival.

Affleck recently spoke with Gold Derby contributing editor **Riley Chow** about his role in "Our Friend," his development of "The World to Come" and his interesting career trajectory after earning recognition from the Oscars. Watch the exclusive interview above and read the complete transcript below.

**Gold Derby: Starting with "Our Friend," you portray a real-life person named Matt Teague. So how would you describe your character and what you had to play in that movie?**

Casey Affleck: Well, Matt Teague was a dad and a husband and a journalist, and it's a true story, and he lost his wife to cancer and he wrote an article about it in Esquire magazine and that article was received pretty well by people and Matt decided he wanted it to be made into a movie. **Brad Ingelsby** came on to write the screenplay and somewhere along the line, the character that was written, the personality wasn't really exactly like Matt. Someone made the decision that the intention of the movie was to capture

the uplifting spirit of the story and not to try to do something to have the characters be portrayed in ways that felt like impersonations or that resembled the people who they were based on exactly. So I didn't get to know Matt until I showed up on set and he was there and he's a very nice guy but I didn't really base my performance on him. I did it just in collaboration with **Gabriela Cowperthwaite**, the director, and she had some pretty specific ideas as all directors do and she had a vision for what she wanted and what she cared about and the performances and that's how we did that. But Matt was somebody who... I think that he cares a lot about being seen. I think he wrote the article because he wanted that experience to be seen. He wanted the movie to find a wider audience than the article and be seen. In the article, it was a very kind of warts and all depiction of his marriage and his wife's struggle with cancer. So he wanted that to be seen. I think that's the kind of thing that matters to Matt and that was one of the things then that I sort of took on the responsibility of in playing him.

**GD: I was watching a lot of other interviews that you've done for this film, and you did one with the Black Girl Nerds YouTube channel, and she was asking about how you crafted your onscreen chemistry with Jason Segel and then without a hint of sarcasm or a twinkle in your eye, you talked about how he's he's got some years on you, he's about 50 years old. I'm wondering if that was a mistake on your part or if you're intentionally adding about 10 years to his age.**

CA: I was intentionally adding as many years as I could believably get away with onto his age just to make fun. Maybe you didn't see the twinkle in my eye or the hint of sarcasm because I was too dry in my delivery or maybe just because it was on Zoom.

**GD: Yeah, I just like that it wasn't called out in the comments or anything.**

CA: (Laughs.) Jason is not 50. He's younger than I am. He looks it. He feels it. So I have to knock him down a peg sometimes when I can.

**GD: I'm going to jump over to "The World to Come," which you had been developing for many years. Then finally, you cast it and you get to shooting and "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" comes out, then you're in post-production and "Ammonite" with Kate Winslet comes out and it seems like we have this whole sub-genre of turn of the 19th century, mid 19th century, lesbian period romance. So I'm wondering, what do you think as a producer, as an actor, when you see this happening?**

CA: There's two ways in answering that question. One is sort of the practical response of like, "Well, are their movies coming out and people are going to see those first and then not have an appetite for something similar like ours? Will it interfere with the success of the movie?" I mean, there's so many things that can interfere with the success of a movie, but none more so than how well the people making the movie make it. So if you want your movies to succeed, you can't worry too much about what other people are doing in the world. You have to just make a good movie and people will find it. These days, the opening weekend doesn't matter really quite as much as it used to. So if you've made a good movie, they'll find it in 2020 and 2025 as well and rediscover it and it'll stick around and have a life. The movies that I like, I just watch them over and over again. I can't even tell you what year they opened or what else opened that year. I remember when **Gus Van Sant** was making "Good Will Hunting" and there was a movie called "Powder" that was opening up that was before "Good Will Hunting" and everybody was worried because it was about a young man who was a genius and that was what people knew about it and most people haven't seen that movie or they don't remember it very well and "Good Will Hunting" has got a life of its own. So I don't worry too much about that.

The other way of looking at that question is, every year you'll have five movies that will be love stories that will open and some of them will be period movies or they'll be contemporary settings and no one says, "Well, what are you going to do? There's another heterosexual love story opening. Will people have an appetite for this?" And I don't think it's quite fair to call

this just a, the term people have used has been lesbian love story or an LGBTQ story or those kinds of things, and it seems to pigeonhole it. I hope that there will be a time when it's just a love story. It doesn't matter, really, if it's two men or two women or a man and a woman or two couples. That isn't really what this movie was about. The first movie I did was "To Die For" with Gus Van Sant and he was sort of a pioneer in the late '80s, early '90s in independent cinema and one of the first people to make independent movies mainstream or to find mainstream appreciation anyway, and back then when he made "My Own Private Idaho," which is just a love story between two young guys, it was considered a gay love story and there weren't very many of them that weren't treated sort of cartoonishly. There weren't many gay characters that were depicted not in a sort of cartoonish or cliched stereotype way. But now, you have one year with three movies coming out and they all handle the subject matter, I think, with dignity. And those other two movies are great, both of them. So I think it's something to celebrate and not to bemoan the crowded field of gay love stories.

**GD: This is your second produced by credit and you've got your production company now, so you're making a lot more of these. I'm wondering, what did you learn from your first experience about 11 years ago and how did you do things differently this time?**

CA: Well, I started this company about five years ago maybe and hired a woman named **Whitaker Lader** who was just in business school, hadn't made any movies, but wanted to be in the movie business and instead of hiring people who had been to AFI or had come out of an agency and wanted to be in the movie business as producers in a more traditional way, our intention was to defy those sorts of conventions, to make movies in a way that has now of late become more feasible, which was, for one thing, you can shoot a movie on your iPhone. 10 years ago, you needed a gigantic operation and now you don't. That's simple and obvious, but it should change everything completely and we wanted to see what we could do in that spirit, what kind of movies could we end up making.

We didn't end up making anything on iPhones and we still ended up working with writers and developing scripts and there's no other way to do it. You have an idea, you find a writer or vice versa, and then you're off and running. So we're not breaking the mold there. But we were thinking that instead of trying to think about what are people seeing, what typically do people like to see, just plow ahead with the stories that we liked. I like "The World to Come," and I had been developing it for eight years or so, seven years or something and everyone said at the time, in 2015 or whatever, 2014, people were like, "Oh, you'll never get that movie made. It's too expensive. It's just about two women falling in love and it's period. It's never going to happen." And we just kept pushing ahead thinking, "We can just make it on an iPhone if we have to," and then ultimately we ended up not having to do that.

But that's the spirit of the company and 11 years ago, that wasn't really an effort to make a production with any sense of actually being a boss or a producer or putting anything together. It was just having some handheld cameras at home and sort of going around and doing a kind of pranky, "Borat" kind of movie. I love those "Borat" movies, don't get me wrong, but we were in way over our heads, and this time around, I was also more careful to align myself with who I was working with and find people that I liked, I trusted and I respected and it turned out much, much better. **Mona Fastvold** did a great job. **Katherine [Waterston], Vanessa [Kirby]** obviously are incredible. It was Whitaker's first movie. She got to be on the set. She did a great job. We partnered up with Killer Films at the last minute because **Christine Vachon's** got such a long history with making these little movies and doing well. So I was more careful about the company that I was keeping and I guess those are all the things I've done differently.

**GD: A few years ago, you gave probably the most critically acclaimed performance in film of the decade. You won about 40 awards for "Manchester by the Sea," which is basically more awards than anybody's ever won for any achievement in film. You went on to win an Oscar. At Gold Derby, we're always very curious about the value of an**

**Oscar. We like to think that it means the world, but it's often a springboard for people's career. For you, though, instead, it had people kind of looking backward instead of forward to the point where you didn't attend the Oscars the next year. I'm wondering how you see the value of your Oscar and what it's done for your career.**

CA: Yeah, it's a fair question, except that it might be worth looking at... I was nominated for an Oscar for a movie called "The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford" in 2008 or something and at the time, I think being nominated for an Oscar was more than I'd ever dreamed would happen, truly not even the kind of thing where most actors go to bed at night and every now and again they'll imagine themselves giving an acceptance speech. I really didn't think that way. I hadn't really planned on being an actor. I had sort of started doing it as a way of paying for school. I really loved it coming out of having spent so much time doing theater and dance as a young person. But one year always just turned into the next and I didn't really think, "This is where I want to be at 60." So I definitely didn't have ideas of winning or being nominated for awards and things. When that happened, you would think that those things that you would describe would have happened, too, but that didn't happen then either, and I've just never been the kind of person that people have said, "That kid's a movie star." The industry, less so now, but for a long time has been very gatekeeper-y. There are people who decide who's going to be a big star. It's not really based on the work that they do.

For so long, this is a cynical answer, but it had a lot to do with how they presented as a person, how they did lunch, that kind of stuff, and I wasn't like that. I didn't do lunch. I didn't do it very well and I didn't sort of present as someone who was a teen matinee idol or whatever. So any success that I had was considered a sort of one-off or something. So back then, it didn't really have much of an impact. And as my friend **Andrew Dominik** likes to say, "I snatched defeat from the jaws of victory," and it was sort of like instead of getting springboarded, as you say, into a trajectory that goes high

into the clouds of success where people tend to overwork, find themselves just taking gigantic paychecks because that's what suddenly is offered to them — it's more money they've ever made and it's incredibly hard to turn down, especially if you have a family and stuff like that — that never happened.

So I sort of stayed where I was at and I stayed doing smaller movies. There are pitfalls there, too. Those pitfalls are that, you work in independent movies, very often you're making the union minimums so that all the money can go into the budget like on "The World to Come." It probably cost me money to go over there, to be there, to do it all more than I actually earned. So eventually you have to take a job just for a paycheck. So if you find yourself on a career path where you're making a fortune and you're a big, giant star and all that stuff, you'll find yourself probably in some bad movies because they're hard to turn down. If you find yourself on a path where you're making more experimental things, smaller stuff, arthouse movies, you will also find yourself in some bad movies from time to time, doing things you don't love because you're broke and you have to go take a job because all those jobs you did love, they didn't pay you anything. So both of those paths, it's just pick your poison, I guess. Mine happened to be so far, this path here and winning an Oscar in 2016 didn't really change that much.

Also, the whole industry has been in a total turmoil of change, which ultimately will result in positive change. It's really, really good and I think even the streaming, I don't really see how but I think even that huge shift out of the old-fashioned model of exhibition of everyone going to a movie theater, then you wait six months and it's on TV, better or worse, I don't know, but different for sure and different models just create different opportunities. I think that one of those opportunities is that the industry will be less gatekeeper-y now and there will be people who can just sort of make things on their own and find a place on TV for their show. So you'll end up getting stories that don't get run through the mill of the studio, every decision is made by a committee of 10 people in an office room, and you'll get more

diverse kind of content, ideas, stories, artistic, oddball stuff, and that's great.

**GD: Well, Casey, thanks very much for taking the time to chat. Keep up this very interesting work. And finally, I'll say, I was rewatching "Manchester by the Sea" a few days ago and I was very happy to see Gardein products in the freezer.**

CA: Oh, yeah! Good eye, you spotted that.