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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm here in Los Angeles, California, and joined by Matthew Belloni, editorial director at the Hollywood Reporter. A former attorney, he was invited to edit a supplement on entertainment law for the magazine in 2006, swapping the courtroom for the newsroom two years later. He quickly rose through the ranks before taking the reins as editorial director in 2017, and now oversees the publication's online, video, print and television operations, along with a new live event business. Founded in 1930, the former daily was Hollywood's first entertainment trade newspaper, and now has an online audience of more than 35 million with offices in Los Angeles, New York, London and Hong Kong.

Matt, thank you for joining me.

No problem!

So, Matt, is your job the kind of glamorous whirlwind of parties and A-list premieres that I imagine it to be?

That is a tough question, because there are elements of it that are that. You know, I do go to the Oscars, I do go to premieres a lot. I spent the weekend doing a round table with Lady Gaga and Nicole Kidman and a bunch of A-list actresses.

Well, we all do that. That's how I spend a normal weekend.

You're waiting for the 'but'! But the nitty-gritty of my job is I am a journalist and editor, and I spend a lot of hours here in the office working with a staff of 150 editorial employees in LA, New York and around the world, and it's a pretty rigorous 24/7 media lifestyle, and then the Hollywood stuff is just kind of fun on top.

So, tell us, what is a typical week then? How do you put an issue together?

It's an interesting one, because I oversee both print and digital. So, in addition to the 24/7 news cycle that we're in these days, and it truly is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-

a-week cycle, we have this behemoth once a week. We have a print magazine that has been growing in the past few years, not shrinking like a lot of outlets. So, a weekly magazine has certain deadlines. For instance, Monday nights is our closing night, and we are here often past midnight making sure everything in the magazine is up-to-date and researched, and looks as good as possible for that weekly magazine, but in big weeks we have deadlines on Friday, deadlines on Thursday. So, we have to meet all these different print deadlines during the week while also staying on a top of a 24/7 news cycle.

Where do you spend most of your time, because a lot of editors that we speak to don't do a lot of editing. It's mainly hiring and firing and lots of strategic stuff. What is the actual nitty-gritty of a week for you?

I'm a little bit more hands-on, I think. I come from our news division. I rose through the ranks there, so I'm involved a little bit more on our news product and what we're publishing on a day-to-day basis. I look at all headlines for our morning rollout, we put together our rollout document at the end of the day to figure out the kinds of things we have prepared for the next day, I look at all the headlines and display for all that. I'm involved with a lot of our more senior writers, editing their stories in a way that I think a lot of editors-in-chief might delegate. I enjoy that part of it, I like doing it. That said, I also am involved in more strategic and hiring and firing, and reviewing pages from print. I read every single story that goes in the print magazine. I don't read every story that goes on our website, but I read everything and all the layouts, and I approve every layout. I approve every photo that goes into the print magazine, and obviously I do the covers with our creative director every week.

What's the best part of the job, and what's the most challenging?

To me, I'm a very competitive guy, and the competitive aspect of journalism in the 21st century is very appealing to me. You get instant feedback on what you do. You get to have a series of wins and losses in a given week, and I like to win, and I think that, on a good day, we have a lot of different wins at the Hollywood Reporter, and there's a lot of different ways to win. You can have a story that nobody else has. You can have a photo that nobody else got. You can get access to a news maker that others are trying to get, and you got it. You can just write a better story than other outlets did that are covering the same subject. You can do a cover treatment that blows everything else out of the water in a given week and gets a lot of attention for that. So, there's a lot of ways to win in this game, and it happens so fast and in such a competitive environment, that really appeals to me.

Tell us how important digital is to you. I know that you've had a 50% year-on-year increase. That's incredible.

Yes. It's really a priority for us. I think Donald Trump probably had something to do with that. I think the fact that the media and the entertainment world has collided with politics in a way that we've never seen in my lifetime had a lot to do with that, and the #MeToo movement has definitely had a lot to do with that. The focus on the behaviour of executives and talent in Hollywood by a mainstream audience had a lot to do with that, but it's a real priority for me as well. I don't understand these editors

who say, “Oh, no, I don’t really pay attention to the website. I’m more of a print guy.” That to me is a foreign concept. I’ve never worked as a professional journalist without the internet. I was an attorney until I was 30 years old, so I don’t know a world where it’s just print. That seems like ancient history to me. And I think that editors in this modern age have to have both skills, because they are different skills. What makes a good print layout and a good print story is often different from what makes a good web story, and you kind of have to know the difference, and you have to be able to execute on different platforms.

Do you have two separate discrete audiences, as it were, in terms of digital and print? I take the print copy regularly, but I also subscribe to all the various email newsletters going to the website. Am I typical?

We have a very interesting audience, because we have this hyper-insider print subscriber, that is usually either an industry insider, someone who either works in Hollywood or is kind of adjacent to Hollywood, and that is the core reader of our print magazine. We’ve expanded that over the years. We do a lot of lifestyle coverage in the print magazine, and we have an aspirational luxury ethos within the magazine, and that’s designed to serve our readers and expand a little bit beyond the core business readers into people that are interested in more lifestyle coverage, but what we do is we translate that access and the insider nature of what we do in print to the website in a way that is more accessible to a broader audience. So, it sort of turns that axis on its head where we’re serving this ultra-elite, hyper-informed audience in print, and we utilise that access to appeal to anyone who is interested in entertainment, and we just do it in a way that is more accessible.

How does that work? Do you kind of repurpose a print article and rewrite it in sections, or a part of it?

Sometimes. Sometimes we will utilise the access that we’ve gotten for a print story to create separate content for our website. Sometimes it’s just the way that stories are presented. You can do it in a headline. You can do it in display. You can do it in photos, in audio. You can change up the way a story is presented and have it reach a broader audience online. Other ways we do it is some of the content that we produce for an insider audience is actually of interest to people in the real world. One of our more signature franchises is our Roundtable series. We’ve been doing this for almost 15 years now, and we started with a very insider-y focus for people in the industry, but what we found is that anybody is interested in six actresses talking amongst themselves about their craft and what issues are that are of concern to them, because you don’t ever see that. When actors and actresses are doing interviews, they’re usually promoting a movie. They’re talking specifically about that movie, or they’re doing a personal story where they’re talking about their own personal lives. You very rarely see actresses in a group talking amongst themselves and asking each other questions and interacting in a way that feels as normal as it can with a camera there. So, we found that that kind of content was really accessible to a wider audience, and we’ve kind of built around that. We know that there’s intense interest in celebrity, intense interest in film and television projects, companies like Netflix. People are interested in how that sausage is made, and we

have that expertise here to deliver it for a sophisticated insider business audience, but also for fans who just care a lot about the media they consume.

You are right, though, because you are a trade industry magazine, but on the other hand, you're not just any old industry. If this was a ceramics manufacturer industry magazine, you would have far fewer readers because, like you say, it's of interest to people, what you call, in the real world.

Yes. We call it 'trade plus' or a 'hybrid trade-luxury' publication, because, in print, the Hollywood Reporter is a very elevated brand. We do a lot of fashion and lifestyle coverage, dining, cars, travel – a lot of the things that people in the entertainment industry really care about. But at the same time, we're doing hard business stories and things that are more analytical that you can't get elsewhere that you need to get in a print magazine tailored for a sophisticated audience, and we are making the entire package look beautiful. That's the goal, and we photograph almost everything we do. We pay as much attention to the visuals as we do to the written word, and the entire package creates an elevated environment.

So, we've discussed the print publication and the website, but you've expanded into kind of video, television operations, and the new live event business. Could you tell us about those, please?

Sure. The events business isn't 100% new – we've had events for a long time. What I think is new there is we're putting more emphasis on elevating our live events to the same level as our print and digital offerings. There are a lot of live events out there, as you know, but we're trying to do it in a way that makes a difference. For instance, I'll give you an example. We have a Women in Entertainment event. A lot of brands have women-oriented events. They're great. They celebrate women. They present up-and-coming women in ways that help them get opportunities. Very few of these events go beyond talk. It's a lot of people talking. What our Women in Entertainment event has become is a platform for a mentorship programme that we launched with Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Los Angeles, and we are raising money throughout the year for scholarships that the participants in this programme get. They sign up through Big Brothers, Big Sisters at inner city schools around Los Angeles, and they are paired with industry women, top-level executives who then form a relationship with these girls, and help them through school, and these relationships last throughout high school and into college, and then at this event, we award scholarships to some of these girls to really help them. So, it moves an event like this beyond just talk and into action, and that's what I'm interested in.

Well, yes, because one of the things that that's clearly doing is opening up networks, because like in any industry, it's often who you know, isn't it? This is a great way for people who don't know anyone to get their first rung on the ladder in the industry.

Absolutely, and it's so important in the entertainment industry. Everyone always asks, "How do I break into Hollywood? How do I get that first job?" It's so difficult, and it's especially difficult if you come from a disadvantaged background where you're not at liberty to take that internship for free and to work as some producer's

assistant for no money for five years. A lot of people just can't do that, and it was a way that people were self-selected out of Hollywood. This programme is selecting them in and giving them the opportunities that will hopefully translate to a more inclusive and diverse community here.

Tell us about the television.

Yes. We've had an interesting success story with our Roundtables, which we adapted as a television show for the Sundance network, and that's been a great partnership. It's a way for us to produce content that serves all of our various outlets. We use them in print. We use them in digital video for our website. We now adapt them as a television show for the Sundance network and it airs 15 episodes during the year of the Roundtables, and then we also... the second run of those are on Hulu, so you can go on Hulu and search 'Close Up With the Hollywood Reporter', and you'll find our Roundtables there. We moved into scripted this past year, where we optioned one of our stories about a very famous figure in Los Angeles named Angelyne, who's famous for being famous. She's on billboards. We are now developing that with Universal Cable Productions and Emmy Rossum, the star of Shameless who will hopefully play Angelyne. So, we're really interested in adapting all of this amazing intellectual property that we're creating at the Hollywood Reporter into other things, whether they're TV shows, movies, or unscripted shows that we could do. That's a big focus for me.

It seems like there's some incredibly exciting opportunities on the horizon.

I hope so, yes. It's an interesting time. You read about doom and gloom scenarios for a lot of legacy media brands. This is a brand that's been around about 90 years. This is the definition of legacy media. We have been here chugging away out of LA, but the internet has created a new opportunity for the formerly smallish trade publications, and in particular, the Hollywood Reporter, because we have done this hybrid of serving our core industry audience while also broadening out to serve a larger audience on the website, and that's really been a nice formula for us, and the important thing for me is to make sure that that core audience is being served, and it's being served through print, and it's being served through our core business reporting. We have a morning newsletter that we're proud of called Today In Entertainment, which is a one-stop shop. If anyone cares about anything in entertainment, you get one email a day, and it'll take you through everything.

I read it every day.

Yes, and it's a good... it's a tip sheet, right?

It's great.

You don't have to read every story that's in there, but at least you know what's going on in Hollywood.

You are right to say, though, that you guys have really embraced the opportunity that the internet has presented? Because the traditional paradigm of local newspapers, and indeed national newspapers, is one of being threatened by the internet, that it's taking readers away, and people not wanting to pay for advertising online, and yet not buying the paper any more.

Yes. We have a luxury in that we're not trying to be a mass market title in print. I think a lot of the publications that have really been hurt is when they had a print magazine that the entire model was based on two million print subscribers, and I just don't think those publications have a strong future, because there's not going to be many things other than maybe The New York Times and three or four publications that are going to be able to sustain that number of print subscribers, but if you can reach a core subscriber group with a premium product that ultra-serves what they're interested in, and you're not trying to get a million subscribers, or even 500,000 subscribers. We're at, depending on our pass-through rate, anywhere between 70,000 and 100,000 readers in print. If you're in that sweet spot where it's large enough to get a robust advertising business and still serving a niche readership, I think that is really the sweet spot for media now, and print. Then the internet is just this vast opportunity of reaching new audiences, and if you have quality content, the playing field has been completely levelled. If we do a great story now, we get as much attention as The New York Times does for that great story, because people want to find great content anywhere, and it can come from any outlet, and we have a particular expertise in this area. No other outlet has as many journalists pursuing the Hollywood beat as we do, and we're able to showcase that journalism on a mass scale online.

It's a great equaliser, isn't it, social media, because you are right. My Apple News app will prioritise a story from you equally over the New York Times or from USA Today if it's about entertainment, because it knows that I often read your articles. Social media, often my colleagues working in entertainment will share articles from you guys, because it's of interest, frankly. And so that kind of shareability is very important.

Yes, and I don't want to downgrade other outlets. The New York Times is obviously amazing, and I read it 10 times a day, but my point is if we do a great story, it can get that same kind of legs as a story in the New York Times, whereas 20 years ago, when the "trades" would do a good story, no one would see unless you subscribed to the trades, and then maybe the New York Times would do that story three days later, and everyone would see it. So that entire world has changed, and it's helped niche publications that do what they do very well.

What's coming up on the radar over the next few years then?

Oh, gosh. I think everybody in Hollywood is obsessed with Netflix. Right? I mean, it's the 800-pound gorilla now. It's gone from nothing to dominating the cultural landscape. They're spending, some estimates, \$13 billion this year on content, and it's completely changed the ecosystem.

It's an insane amount of content. I've got about seven shows just queued up waiting to watch on Netflix.

Yes. Not all of it is great, some of it is stuff that I think even people at Netflix would agree is not great, but it's all there for a reason. It's designed to... they want to have one show for everybody so that everybody in the world cares about their Netflix show, and many people care about multiple Netflix shows. So, any different category of entertainment content, they're going into. Christmas movies, they're going into that. Prestige dramas, they want to win Emmys. They got as many Emmy nominations this year... they got more than HBO, and they tied for wins. They want to appeal to older women, younger men, African American audiences, Latino audiences. They have shows that are designed for each different demo, and the idea is to bring in the biggest possible tent of subscribers they can, and since so much of the growth is going on overseas, you're now seeing that global push for Netflix. They want shows that can appeal worldwide, and they're going into different markets for shows that are specific to those markets. I watched Narcos last night. Narcos is a show that plays very well for them across Spanish-speaking countries, and I watch it here because the narration is in English, and the subtitles are fine, and it's a great show.

I watched Fauda the other the week, which is an Israeli show. They're speaking in Hebrew, and I always watch the dubbed version – I can't stand the subtitles – but again, a fantastic show generated by Netflix.

And they have two more shows with the Fauda guys coming out on Netflix.

And I'll be watching those as well because I'm a huge fan of those guys. Do you think Netflix is going to succeed, and the whole... you know the phrase 'a rising tide lifts all boats', or do you think that it will actually take business away from its competitors? Because at the end of the day you've only got one set of eyeballs. You're only going to be watching one thing, and if you're going to be watching a Netflix show, might you then not be watching HBO's Westworld?

Well, I think what's going on in the consumer side is Netflix is absolutely taking viewers away from traditional television broadcasters because what you're seeing is, the ratings have collapsed. Particularly the cable networks, but also the broadcast networks. The audience is fragmenting. It's not just Netflix, it's Amazon, it's Hulu, it's your DVR. It's video games, it's YouTube, it's everything that's taking audience eyeballs away from the traditional television networks. So on that side, on the consumer side, I do believe now, on the talent side, the side of the equation that makes the content, we are in a boom time. If you are an actor right now and you are not working, it's probably because something's wrong with you. I mean, there are so many shows and there are so many outlets producing original content that is just a... and that is where Netflix is raising all boats. Because Netflix is paying premium dollars to sign all these artists, other networks in an attempt to compete with Netflix are having to pay premiums to keep their talent, or to develop new talent, and then all of the traditional studios are trying to figure out their streaming strategy. So you're seeing the Walt Disney Company launch its own streaming service and that streaming service needs content. So they're producing a whole bunch of new shows

to put on that service. You're seeing Hulu, another competitor, really beef up in what they're doing. Apple is now entering the original content business, and they're trying to get original shows and paying a premium, Amazon, all of these different outlets trying to win the content game, and the result has been extraordinary spending in the industry and a boom time.

But even so-called traditional networks like CBS at launching their online platform, CBS All Access has the Star Trek Discovery show on.

Absolutely. And that was a strategic move by CBS. They had this Star Trek franchise in their library, and they knew that there was a built-in audience of Star Trek fans that will watch a new Star Trek show wherever it is. So they use that as an anchor to get people to pay for a new streaming service from CBS, which is a free over-the-air station. So they're essentially turning a free subscriber into a paid subscriber. And that is a direct-to-consumer business that is not going through a cable system or another distributor like a satellite service. This is a direct-to-consumer relationship that CBS now has with their viewers and they put the premium Star Trek show on that service.

But couldn't all of these providers benefit from that kind of an abundance mentality? Like for example, I'm from the UK and many years ago there was a satellite format war, BSB versus Sky, and you could only pick one really. Whereas now, Netflix is worth £7 a month in the UK, \$10 here. I could have CBS All Access, HBO Go, Netflix. I could subscribe to seven or eight of these really and still not be out of pocket.

Yes, I think that's what people are increasingly are doing. They are selecting what they care about and tailoring their media diet accordingly. The real question I have is at what point will we see a rebundling, so to speak? Meaning the cable bundle was what everybody is subscribed to for many years. That got very expensive because you were essentially paying for a lot of channels you didn't watch. So people started cutting the cord and subscribing to these over the top online services. But now we're seeing so many of those and the content is becoming so fragmented that I think we're headed towards a world where somebody is going to come up with the perfect bundle, or different bundled pricing plans where you get Netflix, HBO Go, Hulu, the ESPN streaming service, the Disney streaming service. All for a flat fee, and that's marketed correctly, and you're going to say, "Okay, maybe I'll subscribe to a content decks company that provides all this to me." And then we're back in the cable bundle just over the internet.

And do you think traditional networks are dead or dying?

I don't know that they're dying. I think the economics are resetting. I don't think NBC or CBS are going to go away, but in five or 10 years they will look different and we're already seeing that with the Fox network. The strategy for the Fox network going forward is going to be, according to them focusing on unscripted formats, cheaper reality shows, sports, award shows, live content, things that are not scripted because they're essentially saying the future of broadcast network is to not try to compete with Netflix and with the cable channels that are going into prestige. They're going to

try to come up with things that people want to watch live on a broadcast network, and that won't be DVR – and that's sports, award shows, live events, reality competitions, things like that, that are cheaper to produce and can produce a bigger tune-in the night that they air. And that's a big change from what we've seen over the past 25 years, which has been a race to create shows, scripted shows that could be hits, and I think you may see that elsewhere at the broadcast networks and that's going to be a big change, but I don't think they're going to go away.

Tell us about your personal journey, if you don't mind. You started off as an attorney. How on earth did you end up editorial director of the Hollywood Reporter?

I do have an odd journey. It's not that odd when you consider I was a journalist before law school, I had been an editor of my college newspaper, and I was always interested in media, but I had a choice to make after college. I decided between going to law school or becoming a journalist, and I went to law school just because I figured if I didn't go out to school I probably would never go, and I could always become a journalist if I wanted to. And I went to law school in Los Angeles because I wanted to practice in the entertainment industry. So I was an entertainment lawyer for about five years. I worked in a litigation firm that handled cases for talent. I did everything from filing lawsuits over... you know, audits of studios and profit participations to getting restraining orders for actresses and threatening media companies and things like that. And then the Hollywood Reporter actually found me. A colleague of mine from law school said, "They're looking to beef up their entertainment law coverage, are you interested in this?" And the more I thought about it, it seemed like a good transition job, I thought, at the time, I figured I'd have to go to New York if I wanted to be a serious journalist, but I could get my foot in the door working for an entertainment publication covering what I knew.

So journalism was actually pulling you back, was it?

Yes, it was. And I liked practicing. I wasn't one of those disgruntled lawyers who was looking for an out. But at some point I realised I didn't want to be a partner at a law firm. That life to me felt pretty... not boring, but just less dynamic. I knew... on a Monday at a law firm you can kind of map out your week, and you know exactly what's coming and how to apportion your time, and all of your time is accounted for via the billing system, and I've found that boring. And what I like about journalism is, I wake up and I have no idea where my day is going to go. I have a rough framework and I have a schedule, but something can drop and blow it up. Even today, when I can delegate a lot of stuff, something happens and it changes your whole day. And it's exciting, and there's things going on, and the next great story is just around the corner. And this is such a dynamic industry. The media and entertainment industry, the personalities are interesting. The issues at play are interesting. It's a culture industry, so it impacts everyone around the world. It's just always been a fascination for me.

And how important is your personal relationship with the kind of the big agents, the big studios, the big actors?

I think it's important. We have a balancing act to do at the Hollywood Reporter. We wanted to do great journalism and interesting compelling stories, but we also wanted to maintain relationships with the people in the industry who are the gatekeepers, who are the kind of people who can get us access to the people we need to do great journalism. So it does involve a level of balancing, and that's often where my job comes in where I'm doing what we need to do to create compelling stories, but also making sure that everyone we write about, we contact, and we know, and they have an idea of what we're doing. We don't want to blindsides anybody. I don't want anyone to feel like they weren't heard. They don't have to like every story we do, and many times they don't, and we've been threatened, and especially around the #MeToo movement, but they at least know what we're doing and they feel like they can participate in a story. If they choose not to, that's their choice. But I want them to at least feel like we have extended an opportunity to participate in whatever we're doing.

We'll come to the #MeToo movement in a second. But when you were answering then, it reminded me a little bit of a political journalist where they have to hold the government and politicians to account, but they also need access, and they don't want to be cut off because that's the source of their news, so they have to have that delicate relationship where they have that journalistic distance and objectivity. But also you've got to make sure that they answer your calls.

Yes. And that is a balancing act. But I also think there's a third element to that, and that's the product itself. If you create a compelling product that people like, and that people see value in participating in the stories, you get a little bit more leeway in terms of the access to people to do good journalism. We don't want to just be a fan magazine or a place where anybody comes to say whatever they want without being questioned. We want to be able to do stories that can sometimes become adversarial because of the topics that we're exploring. And I want our staff to have the freedom to do that. And you get that freedom when you produce a product that is popular and has a good audience and people like and respect. And that's to me, the balancing act that I have to walk every day.

You mentioned the #MeToo movement that just then, tell us how it's changed the industry.

I think it's completely changed the industry. It's been a year now, and there is a 'pre-Harvey Weinstein' Hollywood and a 'post-Harvey Weinstein' Hollywood. The freedom that people feel to come forward with stories that they did not feel the freedom to come forward with before, I think is completely different. The willingness of media outlets to report on these subjects is completely different. We tried to do the Harvey Weinstein story here at the Hollywood Reporter a few years ago. We had a whiteboard up. We had names of women who worked at Miramax and the Weinstein Company. We were calling around. We talked to Rose McGowan. Nobody wanted to come forward on the record. It took a watershed story like that in the New York Times and then the New Yorker to open the floodgates and the floodgates absolutely have opened. There is a feeling within Hollywood that the culture has changed. I don't know if it's one hundred percent, and there's still a lot of work to do, and there

are still a lot of frustrations around town with people explaining that there is still bad behaviour, but there is a different feeling about that behaviour that is not acceptable and that it more likely is going to be exposed, and it has been exposed dozens of times.

And do you think it is just become institutionalised over the generations that this is what powerful, predatory male producers did, is that they exploited actors who were starting out in their career?

I think so to a certain extent, but a lot of this, people ask, "Oh, did you know?" I didn't know that this stuff went on. I didn't... you know, you hear stories, and you hear... it's almost like a running joke. If you watch Entourage, you know that there's a culture of abuse. People are abusive. Men and women are abusive to people that are more junior to them in Hollywood – it was a joke. But the sexual abuse, I was not aware of the extent of the problem, and it's really been eye-opening for me and it's really prompted me to listen a lot for someone in my job who is a white male. I have been listening a lot both to people internally and externally, and I think you have to because you have to listen to these stories. And the problem for so many years was that people didn't really listen.

It's incredible how, until recently, these sexual predators have been able to hide in plain sight as well and have such prolific offending, and everyone has thought that they were the only one, or they thought they were one of a handful.

I know.

For example, in the UK where I'm from, Jimmy Savile presented Jim'll Fix It and it was arguably one of the world's most prolific paedophiles, abusing hundreds upon hundreds of children. One of the most prolific in the world. And yet, what did the BBC do? For decades, he presented the major children's TV show on network television. Many people are saying that he actually created that show just so that he could get access to children. You look back now and you think, "Wow."

It's unbelievable. It's unbelievable. And the Harvey Weinstein thing is the same way. People kind of knew that Harvey Weinstein was a bad guy and that he would sleep around and things like that. But the level of it I think was shocking to a lot of people. And the fact that, I just asked this on this actress roundtable yesterday, that women were not talking to each other. Actresses were not talking to each other in a way that made people feel like they could come forward as a group. And people did talk, but it took a particular moment and a particular story to get these women to come forward. And once they did, there was this safety in numbers, and more people came forward. I mean, look at how many Harvey Weinstein accusers there are – there's over 100. And to think that these women were all suffering in silence, essentially, it's horrifying.

And it seems to have reshaped things like the Hollywood Reporter Power 100 list already.

Yes.

Many people are being removed, frankly.

Oh, absolutely. We do a power list once every year of the 100 most influential people in entertainment, and there were people that have been on for many years that were just not.

Harvey Weinstein, people like that.

Harvey Weinstein, Les Moonves, Roy Price, the head of Amazon, John Lasseter, the head of Disney animation, Brett Ratner, the filmmaker – the list goes on. And in many cases, those people have been replaced by women and by people of colour, and that is a sign of the times. I think it's been a year of sweeping change.

And the studios seem to be increasingly aware of it, not only in terms of preventing it from happening, but also their legal duty of care. Netflix, for example, on their call sheet, has a whistle-blowing hotline now so that you can report any concerns, and there are increasingly more so in terms of sexually intimate scenes. Now there are many more people on set to actually guard against any form of abuse.

Yes. And that's a new thing, and I think that the studios are hypersensitive to this, whether it's out of concern for their people or whether it's out of fear of being exposed, I don't know.

Probably both.

Probably both, but it doesn't really matter why. It just matters that they're doing it. And that's a good thing. I don't know that people would say that it's enough, they have to be really vigilant on these issues. And when I talk to people about how much has changed, there is a sense that there's a fear of backsliding, that this will all blow over and that in three or four years it'll be back to what was normal. I actually don't think that'll be the case. I think that these changes are so profound, and the shock to the industry has been such a wake-up call, that I do think the changes will be permanent, but you never know.

And would it be overly dramatic to say that there's a permanent shift in gender power, as it were?

I'd say shifting. I don't know. Hollywood is still a very male-driven business. It just is, and I think that that is changing, but it's not like you flip a switch, and all of a sudden it's women in positions of power are dominating. That's just not the case.

Do you think we'll see more women directors? Greater diversity on screen? In front and behind the camera?

We are already seeing more women directors. The numbers are not great still, but compared to how abysmal they were, you are seeing women get more opportunities. A lot of the movies in the awards race are directed by women this year. And you're seeing movies that toiled and didn't get made that have female directors, are now getting made. Glenn Close talked about this on this interview I did yesterday, where her film, *The Wife*, was sitting around for 14, 15 years, and finally got made because, she believes, there's been a change and there's more receptivity to female-fronted and female stories. And I think that's true.

Is Hollywood in good health, creatively? Superhero blockbusters seem to be crowding out, certainly to my mind, the more thoughtful, smaller-budget films, quite apart from Glenn Close's new movie.

Yes. In the movie business, I think the creativity level is really suffering, because of the 'franchisification' and the 'Disneyfication', for lack of a better word, of the box office. If you look at the box office, it's way up this year, and movies are doing well in theatres. For all the talk of Netflix and the end of the movie theatre, box office is up. But it's up because people are going in record numbers to the biggest movies. So if you look at the biggest movies of the year, it's *Black Panther*, it's *Avengers*, it's *Mission Impossible*. It's these movies that are pre-branded, and come into the marketplace with a loyal, built-in following. *Halloween* is another one. *The Grinch*. These movies that already have fans before they even spend a dollar of marketing. What is really getting left behind in movies are the smaller movies that once were able to break out and get to a real audience. These days, if you don't have Oscar attention, it's really hard to break out as a smaller, mid-level drama. And a lot of those movies are going to digital. Netflix is in that business. Netflix has had a lot of success this year with romantic comedies, these movies that once lured a younger audience to the theatre. Now they're seeing them on Netflix. And you can argue whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, because those movies are getting made, they're just not going into theatres. Now, on the television side, it's never been a more creatively fertile time in television. Never before. Every single weekend, there's something new to watch. You're seeing big stars like Julia Roberts and Reese Witherspoon, and all of these huge stars doing television, and that's a new thing for the past five years. You just did not see that before. And creatively, these shows are great. If you look at the Emmys, all the shows that were nominated for outstanding drama this past season probably would have won if they had been released ten years ago, and now they're all competing with each other to the point where *The Handmaid's Tale*, a great show, lost this year.

It's incredible, because like you say, even a decade ago an actor doing television would've been seen to be a career backwards step, whereas now, it's not like that at all. It's just a different format.

No. In many ways, it can be seen as a career positive, because a lot of times when these big stars go to television, they can also produce their show, so they get to make more money, they get to have more creative input. They're not just an actor for hire. If you look at *Homecoming*, Julia Roberts' new show for Amazon, she's an executive producer on that show. Reese Witherspoon in *Big Little Lies*, she helped put that entire project together with Nicole Kidman and some others, and there's real

power in that. And it's a great creative endeavour for these actors to get to come in and tell this kind of story in a limited fashion. It's not signing onto a television show for seven years, like you used to have to do. You can come in and do one or two seasons of a show, get a huge audience, make a lot of money, win some Emmys, and you're done.

Now, Matt, you might be able to tell me who I need to complain to about this, because this is one of my pet hates with Hollywood films. I like my action films, and one of the things that's really annoying me is that sequels become less and less violent, and less and less true to the essence of the original. Because if they can go from an R-rated, or an 18 certificate in the UK as it's called, to a PG-13, they get the teenage boys watching it, and they make more money. So you look at, say, Taken. Liam Neeson really kicked ass in the first one. By Taken 3, there was no blood, no swearing, and even when he raises his fist to one of the bad guys, you don't actually see him punch him. Clearly that's driven to increase the audience, but this just seems to be a dilution of the essence creatively of some of these action films.

Yes, I think that's true. You saw it with the Die Hard movies. The sequels were PG-13.

He doesn't even say his catchphrase in Die Hard with a Vengeance.

I know. And it is designed to get the largest possible audience, and you know as a studio head if you green light an R-rated movie, there is a computer model that shows you what the trajectory of the box office is for an R-rated film typically versus a PG-13. But on the other side is on the comedy front, I think you're seeing more people willing to experiment with the R-rated comedies because people, in my opinion... I think people are looking for something as an excuse to go to the theatre, and if something feels a little bit raunchy, it feels a little bit more like an event. "Oh, I can only see that in the theatre. You can't watch that on TV," even though you can on Netflix or HBO. But there's been a lot of success with these R-rated comedies in the last few years, and I think that's the reason.

You get to go to the Oscars, you lucky thing.

It's not that fun, actually.

Is it not? I'll ask you about that in a second, but there have clearly been attempts of late by the Academy to make it more relevant. How do you think it's going, and what do you think they need to do?

Oh, don't get me started on the Oscars! The fact that the Oscars is so boring is a colossal failure, in my opinion, on the Academy's part.

So it's even more boring when you attend?

Well, yes, and it's boring when you watch. First of all, there are 24 categories, most of which the average person does not care about, and they are presented with the

exact same fanfare and the exact same time allotted to each one of them, to the point where it's after midnight on the east coast by the time they get to best picture, and they're just running through it to get it done because they're already late.

It's crazy.

It is crazy.

I've only ever watched the edited highlights the day after, the one-hour version.

And, you know, they have access to all this amazing talent, and there's just been this formula that they've adhered to, and I don't understand. There's so many more fun things they could do other than present 24 awards and show some clip montages.

Why are they so resistant to change then?

Because the governing body of the Academy represents all of the different branches of the Academy, and they've been unwilling to move away from that, and they haven't had to, because until the past three or four years, the ratings have been fine. But over the past few years, the ratings have gotten to a crisis point where ABC, the network that airs the show in the US, has essentially said to them, "Guys, you've got to do something here. This is a show that airs on our network, and it's bad, and nobody's watching." So that's part of the problem. The other part of the problem is that the Academy increasingly has been nominating films that fewer people are seeing. You don't see as many of the Titanic, or even the Gladiator-style movies that win best picture any more. It's smaller films, it's films with niche audiences.

Like Three Billboards, which actually was a good film. I watched that because it won the Oscar.

Oh, yes. They're all good films that win. I can't remember the last time a bad film won. I was not a big fan of The Artist when that won, but other than that...

I didn't like La La Land. I probably shouldn't say that here.

Oh, I liked La La Land. But La La Land made \$500 million worldwide.

It most certainly did.

That was a big hit. But it was up against Moonlight, which made nothing.

And was the real winner of best picture.

Yes, and that was the real winner. That was the only time the Oscars were fun, was the infamous 'envelope-gate'. That was a crazy night. But because the Academy nominates such niche films, there's less of an incentive for people to tune in because they don't feel like they have a horse in the race.

Do you think they'll listen to you then, in terms of you being vocal about the changes that are necessary?

Well, they've tried. They tried this year to do what was called a popular Oscar, which was a complete debacle, because they didn't really articulate what that meant. They just said, "Oh, we're going to have a new category. There's going to be best picture, and then there's going to be the popular Oscar." And everyone kind of said, "Well, wait a second. Isn't best picture the Popular Oscar? It's supposed to be the best movie. What does popular mean? Does that mean not good? The best not good movie?" There was no clarity. They finally abandoned it. They are going to eliminate some of the categories from the show, which I think is a smart move. I don't know that you have to banish them completely. I think what they're going to do is just announce who won, and not have the full fanfare and acceptance speeches for every category. That's a smart move, but we'll see what they actually replace it with. Because if they just make the show shorter and don't actually do anything to make it more entertaining, that doesn't really give people an added lure to tune in. I'm hoping they use the opportunity to do something fun and unique, and creative with the time that they save.

There was the Oscars So White controversy. There's obviously criticism in terms of gender now. There isn't a best female director and a best male director. Why is it like that for actors, and what used to be called actresses, as it were. Do you think the Academy is going to start to listen on things like that?

They've already started to listen on the diversity front. The membership of the Academy has dramatically changed over the past three years. They have invited in a wildly more diverse group of people, and way more people than they typically do, and they've done this explicitly to diversify the group. It was overwhelmingly older white men, and it had been that way since the dawn of the Academy. So by expanding the ranks of the Academy and inviting in more foreign, diverse, and female members, they've succeeded in diversifying a little bit. They released some numbers. Still not great, but they have diversified somewhat. And that's a direct response to the Oscars So White controversy.

Do you consider yourself to have competition? Are you competitive with Variety, for example?

In some respects. I think more on our business side than on the editorial side. I have lots of friends at Variety, and people that used to work here, so I like them. But these days, we're competing with a lot of different outlets. Some that you might not even expect. On the news front, we compete with daily and national newspapers. We compete with every Joe Blow with a blog who is running casting news. We compete with international outlets that are running stories on the world that we cover. Everybody cares about entertainment, so most outlets have an entertainment beat, and they're all trying to have unique stories. On the magazine front, we compete a lot with the monthly magazines for covers. We want the first cover with Angelina Jolie for her new movie. We'll be competing with a Vanity Fair, or a Vogue, or a women's magazine for that, and we really try to enforce an exclusivity window when we do

cover stories like that. For fan news, we compete with Entertainment Weekly and those types of outlets that are more fan oriented. But the format that we have allows us to compete in a lot of different sandboxes without fully categorising ourselves. I like to think that we are our own category of hybrid trade and business and lifestyle publication, and the goal of that is to be able to compete on multiple fronts.

What's on your to-do list at the moment? Not in terms of today and tomorrow, and get the bread and the cereal. In terms of the medium term, where do you want to take the organisation, the brand, the title, and the website?

Right now, I'm focusing a lot on audio. Not just podcasts like this. I think there is a big future in audio journalism. Everybody is now inviting an audio system into their home, whether it's Google or Alexa or one of those, and I think there's going to be a real demand for authoritative information delivered via those sources. And if we can be a player in that, I'd like to do that. I'm excited about our brand in the television space, whether it's the stuff I described like scripted, or creating different versions of what we do for television. I am excited about the live events space. I am excited about different platforms in digital for expanding our journalism, whether it's Apple or whether it's different delivery mechanisms for phones, or for desktop. And I just think a brand like this in a connected world has a lot of growth opportunity, because we're not a localised, niche brand any more. We can be a global brand.

Since you joined, what are the stories or the initiatives that you've been involved in that you've enjoyed the most, that have made you most proud?

I mentioned the scholarship programme, that I'm very proud of the fact that we've done that.

That's making a real societal difference, right?

Yes, and we have plans to grow that as well, that I hopefully will reveal soon. Other things I've been proud of... I've been proud of the growth of our Roundtable franchise.

They're great.

Yes, they're fun, and I've personally been involved in a lot of them. Stephen Galloway, one of our editors, invented that franchise a long time ago, and we've really been able to grow it and expand it to different platforms. But I think we've also moved into the newsletter space, as I've mentioned. We're going to be doing more of that. We're expanding our style vertical to do more in the style space with the newsletter. And I think the overseas opportunities are great for us, too. Creating more... not localised content, but content that's more relevant to different territories around the world, and leveraging the strength of the brand to expand more into those territories.

What makes a good Hollywood Reporter story?

I think that's a good question, because I get asked that a lot, and it is a story that is rooted in the world of entertainment, but touches on issues that are important to everybody. And I'll give you a good example. One of my favourite covers that we have done under my tenure was the first sit-down with Billy Bush after the Donald Trump Access Hollywood...

“Grab ‘em by the pussy,” and all of that.

Yes. That. He hadn't talked, and it was of interest to us because he's a figure from our world, but that was an international story because everybody cared why Billy Bush said what he did, didn't push back on the President, what he'd been up to. And it had a lot of business implications for the industry, too, because everyone is trying to figure out how to act media-wise in the Donald Trump universe. So that was a win for us, because it was a story that was rooted in our world but applied to everybody. There's a bunch of different examples. Our cover this week is the first look at the Dick Cheney movie, Vice, and that's a story that, again, is rooted in the world of entertainment, but anybody who cares about global politics over the last 20 years is going to care about this movie, and is going to care about how the director of The Big Short takes on Dick Cheney. So that's the kind of story I'm looking for, that is something people will share and will talk about, but also has credibility within the industry.

So do you get excited as editor when you know a story is almost going to be bigger than your industry?

Yes. Yes, I think you want stories to travel, and you want them to make noise, so to speak. But I'm equally excited about something that hits that target of an industry story in a way that I know will make an impact. When I hear people talking about things within the industry, and that's... you know, we did a story a couple weeks ago about how talent agencies are moving more into ownership of shows. Very controversial within the industry, and we got a lot of people talking about that issue. That's not a story that the world cares about, but everyone within Hollywood cares very much about that story. And those stories are great, too, and it could be a great Hollywood Reporter story. We broke the news of the President of ESPN stepping down last year, and everyone wondered why he stepped down. And we were able to get a sit-down interview with him where he revealed that he was being blackmailed by a drug dealer. That's a pretty crazy story. It's an executive, so people in the real world outside of the industry may not care that much about it, but the head of ESPN said he stepped down from his job because he was being blackmailed by his drug dealer.

That's big.

That's a wild story! Who would've ever thought that? So stories like that do get me excited. They are the kinds of stories that we can do because we have that savvy expertise, and the access to those news makers.

What advice would you give to someone who, listening to this, wants to be the next editorial director of the Hollywood Reporter? That wants to sit in your chair a decade from now?

Go to law school. No, I'm just kidding! First and foremost, it takes an obsessive personality. You have to really care about it, because you can't fake that. There are generalists who are good journalists, and savvy media people that can go anywhere and be successful, but I think to be in this world, you have to care about it, and you have to obsess over the world, and find it fascinating. And I definitely have, ever since I was a kid I was always interested in this stuff. You just have to immerse yourself really.

Matt, it's been hugely enjoyable to talk to you, thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you.