

Article

**Abhishek Talukder**

## **Robert Redford And the American New Wave**



Players have to deal with the most indefinable and transeunt medium possible - human emotion. The 'human' question every so often leaves them with a puzzled countenance. However, history has seen some potent players bursting on the scene with their force and echt novelty, embodying a new era at the double. Robert Redford is a reminder of an era, which is losing its brilliance with celerity, when Hollywood's creativity was unimpeded yet mirrored the real extent of tradition. He has graced the silver screen with his magnetism and ability unto become the actual person he is portraying. Needless to say, his is not a typical product of the cine-merchants' dream-factory; on the contrary, he holds the courage.

Engage himself actively in the American New Wave, which I shall come to later.

In this text, I shan't make any effort to compare him to other Hollywood stars. I shall leave, untouched or merely glance at questions about his work and the legacy he leaves for posterity. It's often said, "Since the beginning of history, artists have been inspired by some muse with that certain something about them". Although never a method actor, Redford has seen the film industry changing its course over almost six decades. However, it is but the boards that recognise his acting flair.

Born in 1936 as Charles Robert Redford, he grew up in Los Angeles. After being expelled from the University of Colorado, he studied acting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. After playing a series of small parts on TV, stage and film, he began to make headway in the early 60s, being nominated for a best supporting actor Emmy in 1962 for The

Voice of Charlie Pont and winning a lead role in the original 1963 Broadway production of Neil Simon's hit play *Barefoot in the Park*. Redford's early breakthrough in film was in 1965 when he played a bisexual film star in *Inside Daisy Clover* (1965), opposite Natalie Wood, which earned him a Golden Globe nomination.

After a series of good Hollywood films, including *The Chase* (1966), featuring also Marlon Brando, and a screen adaptation of *Barefoot in the Park*, Redford had a huge hit with the outlaw western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), in which he starred opposite another stellar Paul Newman and Katharine Ross. It was worth mentioning that the film was nominated for seven Oscars; however, none were for the players.

### ***All The President's Men* (1976)**



Redford's face odyssey continues with some more films, which I am not mentioning by name, save two. The glow of imminent stardom flickers like Saturn's rings around Redford, who joins hands with Dustin Hoffman in the film *All The President's Men*. Redford completely aligns himself with the character of the Washington Post journalist. It is a symbol of masculine cool and a sartorial chameleon, able to make any aesthetic trend shine with effortless authenticity. It feels like

we are watching live news action rather than fiction. Redford is brilliant in depicting the character's transformation from a committed young investigative journalist to a melancholy woman, owing to the impending crisis. Even at that nascent phase of his career, he greets every emotional contour of the character with his brilliance and plays with hardihood. The same could be said about *Out of Africa* (1985) - where we see a mature Redford finding accord with the iconic Meryl Streep. His iconic roles often portray characters who are self-sufficient, observant, and operate within their own space, which is but a reflection of his natural style as an actor.

In his later years, he would come to understand that there are certain inevitabilities to living. Life could be painful, unfair, and completely unpredictable, which might have turned him into an activist. Using his acting knowledge to guide other actors and gain more creative control, he moves to directing as an evolution from acting. He is no method actor. His approach is more about channelling his own energy and focus into a role, using a non-negotiable purpose for scenes. Being the edificial talent that Redford is, a national recognition of his contribution to this form of art is ineluctable.

### **Director Robert Redford**

In 1980, Redford made his directorial debut with *Ordinary People*, a family drama that won four Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director. What more could you say? He champions Independent filmmaking - the result of which is the Sundance Institute. Redford's directing style

could be defined by an emphasis on authentic performances, rich storytelling, and social commentary, frequently exploring themes of morality, redemption, etc. Although he doesn't fall in the ranks of David Lynch or Stanley Kubrick, his primary focus was on visual storytelling and meticulous detail, removing glamour to reveal raw human emotion. Redford's works are masterful and selective retellings of one, bridging the popular and arcane strands in his oeuvre with fluidity and assurance. The sense of being suspended in a perpetual present, even as time rolls on.

### ***Sundance Institute***

Here, I wish not to spend my words, but rather present an excerpt of an interview he gave Charlie Rose (available on YouTube, link pasted at the end).

*Charlie: Let me just start with this. When you began this, I mean, it really began. How? And what did you hope to accomplish? And what do you think you have as you look back after 20 years and come to New York to take note?*

*Robert Redford:*

*What I hoped to accomplish was to create a mechanism for continuity among new voices in art, particularly relating to film, but it was going to include theatre. And the hope was that that mechanism would succeed so that there would be a home for filmmakers to come and know that it was a home where there were going to be free of the pressures of money that the studio system gives you very early on and competition, which sometimes can alter how people behave. It was to be as free as possible a workplace, as free as possible from those*

*elements. Second that if it were to succeed not only creating a voice there was something a little bit more personal for me and that was to create around it a sense of community ... that community was important that there was no community for filmmakers to work as people do in the theater and basically because I started in the theater and I think my heart goes to that... it was to create a process similar to the theater workshop. If it were to succeed, there would be an opportunity for the new filmmakers to know that they not only had a place to work, but perhaps it could go beyond that. I didn't know what it would be. It was an evolutionary thing that as Sundance grew, so did the opportunities that we seized, which led to the festival, and it led to the channel and so forth. But that was the initial idea. It was fairly altruistic in that I was looking to put something back into the business, and I thought that putting something back into an area that I thought was in danger would help. I had no idea whether it was going to work or not.*

*CR:*

*Just for definitional purposes, Sundance Institute, Sundance Festival, and Sundance Labs give us a sense as we start this conversation about the differences that are here and what you begin with and what you have added to.*

*Robert Redford:*

*Well, first of all, the result of what the idea was, I think, can best be seen in the work that's come from it, like Kimberly's and Stanley's, but I mean, and they can speak to that. For me, that is the reward. It's a nonprofit organisation. I mean, it was started*

*nonprofit to keep it pure, and we did that and also made it just a killer to raise money for.*

CR:

*Yeah. My point here is this, Bobby, is that a lot of people think of the Sundance festival. I think that's what the Sundance Institute is about, and it's about a lot more because that's what gets the attention.*

*Robert Redford*

*To me, it is to me that the meat of Sundance is really the lab process because that's the process that allows artists to come and fail, make mistakes, learn.. and that to me is the most important part of the other is very result oriented and also it attracts all the stuff that can threaten the point of it all such as fashion and media and so forth. So, but that's okay. Okay. I mean, if that helps the filmmakers, that's part of the deal, too.*

CR:

*Yeah. There was a point when you might have been more upset about it than you've come to accept it as part of the deal.*

*Robert Redford*

*I have. Yeah. I was upset in the beginning. I was worried about us being able to survive because everybody was against me doing it. Business people that I'm involved with were against it. They thought I was insane. And um, I saw it as a second step opportunity for*

*filmmakers to have a place to showcase their work. So, at least they could see each other. It'd be like a giant green room of camaraderie and sharing each other's work and so forth, where there's none that existed. So it started there and then as new opportunity came into being of it being a two-way street meaning for audiences well the demographics of Utah would be a nice taste and so when I saw the enthusiasm and the support swelling year after year I realized that there was a two-way street opportunity meaning that you could create something for audiences as well because they were getting starved out there from the kind of product that these guys were going to bring. So diversity was being kept alive, which I think is vital, and opportunities for the filmmakers were being kept alive and now opportunities for the audience, which led to the channel.*

The format of the festival has undergone many changes; however, the remarkable ambition and imagination of Robert Redford, who created something that outlasted his own toilsome career, cannot be gainsaid.

It is rather impossible to write everything about such a giant, sans many reliable witnesses to provide a wide range of viewpoints. But he is much more than a pretty face. The Titanic of his art shall never provide.

Reference: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMdAml\\_eHXo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMdAml_eHXo)

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