



Conversations with John Schlesinger

By Ian Buruma

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“I like the surprise of the curtain going up, revealing what’s behind it.”
–John Schlesinger

The British director John Schlesinger was one of the cinema’s most dynamic and influential artists. Now, in *Conversations with John Schlesinger*, acclaimed writer Ian Buruma, Schlesinger’s nephew, reveals the director’s private world in a series of in-depth interviews conducted in the later years of the director’s life.

Here they discuss the impact of Schlesinger’s personal life on his art. As his films so readily demonstrate, Schlesinger is a wonderful storyteller, and he serves up fascinating and provocative recollections of growing up in a Jewish family during World War II, his sexual coming-of-age as a gay man in conformist 1950s England, his emergence as an artist in the “Swinging 60s,” and the roller-coaster ride of his career as one of the most prominent Hollywood directors of his time.

Schlesinger also discusses his artistic philosophy and approach to filmmaking, recounting stories from the sets of his masterpieces, including *Midnight Cowboy*; *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*; *Marathon Man*; and *The Day of the Locust*. He shares what it was like to direct such stars as Dustin Hoffman, John Voight, Sean Penn, Madonna, and Julie Christie (whom Schlesinger is credited with discovering) and offers his thoughts on the fickle nature of fame and success in Hollywood.

Packed with wit and keen insight into the artistic mind, *Conversations with John Schlesinger* is not just the candid story of a dynamic and eventful life but the true measure of an extraordinary person.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

How does an accomplished historian of Asia (*Inventing Japan*) come to write about an Oscar-winning director? Buruma, it turns out, is Schlesinger's nephew—as a small child, he even had a brief cameo in one of his uncle's earliest short productions. Their personal rapport creates a leisurely pace, so it isn't until a third of the way through that the conversation turns to Schlesinger's first major directing effort, 1962's *A Kind of Loving*. The veteran director has amusing behind-the-scenes anecdotes about actors like Jon Voight and Laurence Olivier, but a debilitating stroke (Schlesinger died in 2003) ended the talks before he could discuss his final films, including the Madonna vehicle *The Next Best Thing* (not, Buruma suggests, that he would have had anything good to say about the experience). Schlesinger feels his limitations keenly—"I've never been a critics' darling," he admits—but offers perceptive insights into the reception of his frank treatment of controversial subjects. In fact, he believed, his most famous film, *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), couldn't get made in today's Hollywood, its treatment of homosexuality and male hustling too raw for skittish studios. A fuller consideration of Schlesinger's work is still needed, but these informal dialogues will do until then. Photos. (On sale Jan. 10)

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From [Booklist](#)

John Schlesinger was the critically acclaimed director of *A Kind of Loving*, *Billy Liar*, *Darling*, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Marathon Man*, *The Falcon and the Snowman* and *The Day of the Locust*, starring such acclaimed actors as Alan Bates, Julie Christie, Peter Finch, Glenda Jackson, Dustin Hoffman, Jon Voight, and Laurence Olivier. Buruma, his nephew, talked with him about the movies, growing up Jewish in World War II Europe, and being a gay artist in 1950s London. He asks penetrating, thoughtful questions and is notably good at getting Schlesinger to open up. The book's six sections are respectively concerned with childhood, getting started, breaking in, Schlesinger's British films, liberation, and the director's Hollywood years. In one particularly insightful exchange, Schlesinger contrasts Hoffman's and Olivier's acting styles--Hoffman's physicality versus Olivier's studiousness. A stroke silenced Schlesinger before the final conversations planned could be recorded, and Buruma's last few pages discuss the final poignant moments he shared with his famous uncle. A must for the movie shelves. *June Sawyers*

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About the Author

Ian Buruma is the Henry R. Luce Professor of Democracy, Human Rights, and Journalism at Bard College. His many books include "Anglomania" (Random House), "Inventing Japan" (Modern Library), and "Murder in Amsterdam" (Penguin), which won a "Los Angeles Times" Book Award. He is a regular contributor to many publications, including the "New York Review of Books", the "New Yorker", the "Guardian", and the "Financial Times".

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