

Hollywood Unscripted Ep 006 – Blinded By the Light

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Scott Tallal: Welcome to Hollywood UNSCRIPTED. I'm your host, Scott Tallal from Malibu Film Society. Today, we're talking about Blinded by the Light with producer, director, screenwriter Gurinder Chadha. Welcome to the show.

Gurinder Chadha: Nice to be here.

Scott Tallal: I personally found Blinded by the Light, really delightful. I was surprised by how much I cared emotionally and was so totally invested by the end of the movie. But it's a fun ride all the way through. It has great music by Bruce Springsteen and a lot of music from the 90s.

Gurinder Chadha: It's music from 1987, specifically 87, 88, 89.

Scott Tallal: Now, I know that you originally came across the book by Sarfraz Manzoor.

Gurinder Chadha: Yeah.

Scott Tallal: Who is the real life journalist That this all happened to. Talk to us about the development process.

Gurinder Chadha: So I was a big Bruce fan. Still am. Ever since I was at school, I used to have a job in Harrods in the record department. And while I was there, this English chap said to me one day said, Have you heard of Bruce Springsteen? And I said, No, I'm not a rocker. And he pulled out Born to Run, the album and opened it up. And I was shocked by the cover because the cover shows this white dude and this black dude being really pally and friendly together. And that was a very rare sight at that time. And the only band that I knew that had mixed people in it was KC and the Sunshine Band. So I was intrigued by that cover and took the album home. And that was it. I loved the saxophone. I loved the lyrics. I loved the energy. And so I became a Springsteen fan from then. And then years later, I saw an article in a newspaper written by an Asian guy, a Pakistani guy about Bruce Springsteen and what a big fan he was. And I was like, oh,

my God, there's another Asian person who likes Bruce Springsteen in the United Kingdom. And I got in touch. That's how Sarfraz and I became friends and overall friendship. You know, we would spend a lot of time sitting, talking about the River and the Ghost of Tom Joad, which was one of my favorite albums. And then one day he said, I'm going to write a memoir. And he did. And he gave me the galleys and I read it and said, this is amazing. I know how to turn this into a great movie. But without Bruce Springsteen, there's nothing. We need Bruce Springsteen's permission to use his music. Otherwise, you know, we don't have a film.

Scott Tallal: So how did that come about?

Gurinder Chadha: Two years later, we had the premiere of *The Promise* in England. And Bruce was coming and I got invited to the premiere. It was at the BFI, the British Film Institute. And I took Sarfraz as my plus one. And we both stood on the red carpet excited about Bruce coming as fans. We both had our cameras and we were on either side of the red carpet waiting for Bruce to pass so that we could film each other with him in the same frame. And then as we were waiting, Sarfraz caught Bruce's eye and Bruce looked at him and walked over to him. And I came over myself and Bruce said, Hey, man, I read your book. It's really beautiful. And Sarfraz sort of freaked out for a moment. I was like, oh, my God, oh, my God, how did you read it, where did you get it from? And then I realized I had like three seconds to do a movie deal with Bruce right then and there. And with him was John Landau and Barbara Karr and Tracy Nurse, his team. And they were trying to push him along. And while Sarfraz, you know, was having this sort of hyperventilating fit, I just butted in and said, Bruce, I'm so glad you like the book. I'm Gurinder Chadha. I made *Bend It Like Beckham*. I really want to make a film, but we need your support there. Will you support us? Now, I said that in a very casual way. On the day I was standing this close to Bruce and it actually came out more like, hi, I'm Gurinder Chadha. I made *Bend it like Beckham*. My God, I hear you liked the book. Can you help us? So it's a bit more like that. And then Bruce sort of looked at me and he looked at Sarfraz and he went, Sounds good. Talk to Jon. Well, then he walked away and we were like, what? what just happened? And then Jon Landau said what are you talking about? What book? And then Sarfraz had a copy with him, gave Jon the book, and that's how we met Bruce and got him to do a movie,.

Scott Tallal: That whole experience. It must have been almost an out-of-body experience.

Gurinder Chadha: Well, it was absolutely thrilling. On the one hand, but also completely anxiety driven on the other, because what we now have to do is write a script that Bruce was going to like. And so that's what we proceeded to do. And Sarfraz had to go first because it was his story. And although he was a screenplay writer, he was a journalist and he wanted to try and write his story. And I gave him a tutorial on the Robert McKee three act structure. And I broke down Bend it like Beckham for him into that three act structure. And then he went off. At some point I took over. You know, it started taking shape, and for me, I sort of went at the songs very forensically. I knew that the words were the important part of this whole process, to.

Scott Tallal: The lyrics Of the song's.

Gurinder Chadha: Lyrics yeah of the songs. So I started breaking down the songs in terms of the lyrical content. And then I started adding the lyrics like they were dialogue into a scene. And so you were having sort of a three way dialogue scene, except that Bruce was saying his dialogue in lyrics and singing it as opposed to it being a jukebox musical where, you know, we just had songs in the background. That wasn't what we were doing. You know, we were absolutely showing how the words and lyrics of Bruce Springsteen and what he was writing about in the seventies, about his own life and himself, how that was relating to this 16 year old Pakistani kid in Luton a decade later. And that was the conceit to show that he might have been 3000 miles away, but his experiences were the same as this kid.

Scott Tallal: Now, there was a point of departure where the story was inspired by Sarfraz's story, but you decided to take it as inspiration as opposed to gospel.

Yeah. Because Sarfraz's real story is very boring. And it wouldn't have made a good film because he never spoke back to his dad. He never had a girlfriend he never did anything. Never rebelled. Just sat in his room listening to Bruce writing poetry. So who wants to watch that for two hours. But with all films, you know, they're based on a reality. You know, what we do as filmmakers. We take a story, you know, over a period. We reduce it, reduce it to its bare bones in terms of drama, in terms of emotion. And

then you work out what your big idea is, what you're trying to say, what you want to convey to the audience, and then you start adding meat to the bones. And that's what I started doing. It was very hard. I said to Sarfraz, you know, it very hard for you to do this because it's not you. You've got to move it away from you. And it's interesting because that isn't him in the film. But after the film came out, he sort of believes it is him. It's funny on Twitter and everything.

Scott Tallal: It's the him he wanted to be.

Gurinder Chadha: It's the him he wanted to be. And it's the conversation he wished he'd had with his dad, but never did.

Scott Tallal: Now I understand you wrote this with your husband.

Gurinder Chadha: yes

Scott Tallal: And you have been writing together Since you met on What's Cooking.

Gurinder Chadha: That's right. My husband's from L.A. And so.

Scott Tallal: Let's give a shout out to Paul.

Gurinder Chadha: Paul Berger's from Redondo Beach. Further down the coast, he went to Santa Cruz and there he studied writing and film and theater. And I met him at the Toronto Film Festival. He was in the audience for my first film, Bhaji on the Beach. And at that time, he was running a film festival in San Francisco. It was the National Asian-American Film Festival. And he said, would you bring your film there? I said, absolutely. And so that's how we met. And then, you know, he had always wanted to write movies. And then he moved to England to be with me. And so it felt like the right thing to do would be to write, you know. And so we started writing together and we're still writing together many scripts later.

Scott Tallal: Sounds like the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Gurinder Chadha: Well, it's 23 years of it Now so.. Well, but it is good writing with your partner because you are able to recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses. And so when we write together, we don't sit side by side and write. You know, we each have a pass. So it's like we're having two passes of the script. So I'll write something or maybe not the whole script scenes and stuff. And then he'll come in and look at them and he'll comment on whether he believes them or not. And then there are times when I'll be writing something and then I'll say, okay, I got to stop here because we need this to be funny and Paul's very good at writing funny things. In Bend it like Beckham. He actually wrote some of the funniest lines, like when Kiera Knightly's mum really doesn't like her daughter playing football. And she says there's a reason why sports is biased to anyone without a fella. You know, that was Paul. And he knows India really very well. Being married to me for so long. So he's able to jump into different cultures. He's Japanese American. So we both share the idea of valuing the perspective of the diaspora. That's where we come together. And ironically, my first film is called I'm British But and I made it in 1988. And you can see it on my website, actually, which is Benditnetworks.com. And I'm British But is the first film about being second generation British Asian and it's about identity. And Paul's first film that he made is called En Ryo Identity, which is about being Japanese American. And when you see both films side by side, then you understand why we're married, even though we look like we're from completely different parts of the world. You know, he features his grandma in it as a samurai warrior, wandering around her garden in Gardena with a samurai sword and her little dogs running around. But he uses humor, same as me, and it's very heartfelt. So we both have that sense of emotion and we both share the same politics and we both have the same kind of view of humanity and the kind of work we should be doing. And I think that's the reason why it's worked for 23 years.

Scott Tallal: How does it impact on the marriage?

Gurinder Chadha: Well, it just means you're a partnership in so many ways. There are times sometimes when I'll be on the computer and I'll just keep going. And he's like, leave it now. Come to bed. Or he'll be up early in the morning and be on a script and I'll be pleased he's up because I'm snoring away. I think it's wonderful because it's like having your best friend that you work with. And let me tell you, when you have kids in a marriage, I don't care what anyone says, love, romance, goes out the window because all you're doing is juggling constantly. And so when you also write together, it's hard

sometimes when you're self-employed and you write, it's hard to say, ok I'm going to stop at 6:00 and I'm going to stop. But what we're able to do is if we are working on something together is I'm able to say its five o'clock, I'm going to go down and cook for the kids and go and do all that stuff. And he might carry on. And then I'll say, well, what if he does? What did you write? And after dinner, I'll go and look at his scenes. It's a tag team. It's part of our marriage. We always read things or see things or watch things and go. That would be a good idea for something. That's a great idea for a movie. So I don't know if we could ever be non-creative now. That's what we are.

Scott Tallal: As an observer of what's happening in film and television right now, there are a couple of trends. One is the bi cultural and emergence of many first and second generation Asian voices. These are voices that are finally being heard. And at the same time you have a track of music driven features. We have Bohemian Rhapsody, we have Rocket Man , Yesterday. And your film is at the crossroads of both.

Gurinder Chadha: Yeah. What are you trying to say? I think I've been telling these stories for a long time. I mean, I made Bhaji on the Beach in 1994, so that was kind of one of the first films of that nature, what I like to call diaspora films, films that tell our experience in a mainstream sort of way. So I've been really doing nothing but that. But it is good to see those experiences being put out there on the big screen and the little screen because it's important for people to be visible. And that's one of the most moving things about Blinded by the Light is when you read all the comments on social media far and wide, the way people come out of the film crying buckets. Everyone says they cry. That's the first thing on social media. Everyone's like, I cried and I don't even know why I'm crying. Some people say but I really cried. There was one guy wrote that said, I just started crying and I couldn't stop. And now I'm writing to you, he said on Twitter, and I'm crying again. This is an American guy, a Caucasian. And I wrote back to him and I said, Oh, I think you're crying because you just want the world to be a better place. And then he wrote back and now I'm crying again. It's very emotional, the film in that sense. It gets you somewhere, especially if you do want the world to be a better place. But I think that a lot of the other comments have been, thank you for making me visible. Thank you for making me seen. So for me telling those stories is important to tell them in a way where they're accessible to everybody and so bringing Bruce Springsteen into that story was the way I felt to tell our stories, but through someone that the world would know and recognize. And so I had no idea about Yesterday. I didn't know that was being

made. I knew Bohemian Rhapsody was being made. And I kind of remembered Rocket Man was being made, but I didn't know that they were going to happen at the same time, more or less. Well, although Bohemian Rhapsody was way earlier. Yeah, that was kind of not good timing, I think on any of our paths.

Scott Tallal: Or maybe it's building.

Gurinder Chadha: Or maybe it's building. Yeah.

Scott Tallal: Now, you started off in radio, you got into documentaries. There weren't any British Indian female filmmakers at that time. What made you decide to be the pioneer?

Gurinder Chadha: I just fell into it. When I was at university, I taken a gap year and I went to India. I was working on a feminist magazine. The magazine was called Manushi. And there I read an article by a professor Nira Jaci. And the article was about images of women in India's media. And I was like, What the heck is this? And I read every word and a light bulb went off in my hand. And this is before media studies and all that. And I just realized the power, the power of the camera to record and validate your existence and your stories. I realized that people like me were either absent from the screen or on the margins of the screen. And I said, okay, I need to change this. And the way for me to change this is to get behind the scenes. And I originally thought that journalism was the way to do it. To be in the newsroom. And that's why I trained as a news reporter and I worked with the BBC for a while. And being a journalist has been incredible. I mean, I still feel that I'm a journalist. If I was ever anywhere where a story broke or something was happening, my first impulse is always called a newsroom and say, this has happened and I'm here. You never lose that. But being a journalist, I think has really helped to my filmmaking. Also, by giving me clarity of what I'm trying to say in a film and in a script and finding the best way to convey what I'm trying to say without always being on the nose about it, but also being a journalist, you need a lot of discipline because you only have a few words to say what you're trying to say. So you have to be able to say what you're trying to say very eloquently and efficiently. Being a journalist allows me to go into scenes and be very efficient with what they're supposed to be about.

Scott Tallal: In terms of your dialogue,.

Gurinder Chadha: In terms of dialogue, in terms of the point of the scene. What is the point of the scene? If there is no point to the scene, it shouldn't be there. And then also it's true of editing when you're in the edit room. I think being a journalist makes me quite ruthless about what I keep in and what I take out. Because if it doesn't serve the central story, I'll be the first one to say this. Take it out, even if it's a beautiful Steadicam shot. You know, that captures the sunlight in a particular way and the actors got a great performance in it. And even if it's a beautiful shot, sometimes if it doesn't serve the story and it gets in the way of the story, I'll be the first to take you out. And editors will be trying to keep things in and I'm no, it's going to go eventually. You might as well take it out now.

Scott Tallal: in some ways, I feel a bit uncomfortable in describing your role, in your position in the industry on the basis of gender, on the basis of national identity. But it's been so present in every film that you've made, whether it was What's Cooking or Bride and Prejudice or Its a Wonderful Afterlife or Viceroy's House which I know didn't play particularly well here in the United States, but was such an important story.

Gurinder Chadha: Yeah, it was bought by IFC and I think it's on their channel. But Viceroy's House was a very important film for me, it was why I became a film maker in many ways was to tell that story. And that's the story of the last days of the British in India and during which time India was partitioned and a new country, Pakistan was created from what was my homeland. The part of Punjab that my ancestors are from and my family suffered like many others, as refugees who had to sort of flee with their lives to come over to the other side. And I knew that I always needed to tell that story. And so when I did get to make it, it was wonderful. But a lot of films who had told that story before me focused on the violence that took place. And there was terrible violence. But I felt from my position that I didn't want to tell that story about the violence. It was present and we talk about it. But I didn't want to shoot it. I didn't want to shoot Hindus and Sikhs killing each other as I was making it, you know my children were quite young and I felt increasingly that I was making this film as a mother. So it is about a very traumatic time in history. But I was absolutely making it as a mother. And a mother's role when there's a conflict is often to quell that conflict and get whoever's involved to apologize and to see a better way forward in harmony together rather than

keep the conflict going. And so India and Pakistan have had three wars, so much tension between the two countries because of this partition. I felt that my role as a woman and as a mother was to make a film that somehow helped us move to a different place, you know. And it was a very important film, too, that my kids were there when I was shooting. And we have this scene in the refugee camp. There's like a thousand extras in that scene. I mean, it's big. And I was walking down the set one day. My son was with me and he was only about six or seven. And he said, Mom, can we go home? It's so dirty, smelly and hot. And I don't want to be here. I want to go home. And I said, son, I'm here because I have to tell this story, because it's about my grandparents and your great grandparents. And if I don't tell this story the way I need to tell it, no one will ever know their story. And that's why we're here and that's why I'm telling the story. And he turned around and he went "good for you, Mom. Good for you." and he gave me a big kiss and a big thumbs up. And you know, the funny in a funny way, that was the lesson of that film for me was that little moment with my little boy walking through the set and him realizing the value.

Scott Tallal: Were you at all intimidated? I mean, you were working with some very big names. You had Hugh Bonneville from Downton Abbey. You had Gillian Anderson, you had Michael Gambon.

Gurinder Chadha: No, I was I'm not I'm not that sort of person that gets intimidated. I like to do my homework. I like to do my research. I like to come prepared. And as a director, you can't be intimidated. You're the captain of the ship. And you've got to have all the answers and you've got to be the one who does know. Everyone else can be intimidated by, not you. I think that's a reason that I've sort of stayed working as a director for so many years in the sense of being able to make a living from it. And part of that is because I'm quite fearless. But that's because of a Sikh. You see, and Sikhs are warriors. You know, I stand on the shoulders of people who have fought for all kinds of truth and justice. And sometimes I look at what I'm doing and I'm going, oh, my God, you really have to go back into battle on this one. You know, because every time you choose to make a film with a person of color in it, you have lots of crosses against you because suddenly you feel small. Suddenly it's not commercial. Suddenly the majority of the orders won't want to come and see it. So you're told by the powers that be. So in order to keep doing that, you have to fortify yourself. Luckily for me, I have my ancestry.

Promo: Hey, this is Chris and Jenny from When Last I Left another Curtco Media podcast and we have some awesome news for you. Super exciting. If you're anything like me gift giving can be kind of difficult this time of year. I'm not like you. No, you're not. I'm really great at giving gifts. Much better giving. You want to know why? Why? I go to Vicesreserve.com, Vicesreserve.com. It's the perfect place to get unique curated gifts that don't suck like cocktail kits. Cool gadgets. Yes. Really great liquor. They don't stop there, though. They don't. If you use the code podcastVIP, you get an extra 15 percent off everything in the store. Everything is 15 percent off with the code podcastVIP, everything at VicesReserve.com. That's insane. You should go now. I'm going to go as soon as I finish listening to this episode. Go buy me something. I will.

Scott Tallal: As a producer, director, screenwriter, you're in a position to generate your own stories.

Gurinder Chadha: Absolutely. That's why I do it. I never intended to. I wasn't even supposed to be a film director and I became one. I wasn't supposed to be a writer. I became one. I was supposed to be a producer. But along the way, it was getting hard. It's hard to make films with people of color. And I just found myself slipping into all those roles because first the scripts weren't there. So I had to create scripts. And luckily I married Paul. And so we were able to do that together. And then when the scripts are there, people are, oh, it can't be done. No one wants to see a film about a girl, who plays football. It will never work. Especially an Indian girl. No, not commercial. And so then you get involved with trying to raise the money because everyone says it will never work. And so everything I've done has been out of necessity, really not like a burning desire to be a producer or anything. It's just getting those stories out. And like I said, we were always on the margins. And my job was to put it on centerstage.

Scott Tallal: And on Blinded by the Light you brought in Levantine Films.

Gurinder Chadha: Yes. Well, what happened was I was doing a pass on my script and Levantine had sent me a script and I was just putting together the finance. We'd had some pre-sales and I was talking to various people and I had a meeting with Levantine and of course, in London, your nine o'clock is five o'clock in the afternoon for us. So it was evening in England. I'd been working on my script all day, on Blinded by the Light. And then I had this conference call set with Levantine in morning L.A. time, evening

there. And the script wasn't very good, but I kind of felt I had to jump out of my script to get back into that one, to give notes. And I said to them, forgive me, because I've had my head in this script all day and I'll just jump into yours. And I gave them my notes and I said, where I thought the weaknesses were and they agreed with me. And then René went, she said. So what are you working on? And I pitched them *Blinded by the Light* and told them what I was doing. And she said, Well, let's forget about our script. Let's finance yours. That's how they came in and financed the film.

Scott Tallal: Because they had such an amazing track record starting off with *Beasts of No Nation*.

Gurinder Chadha: Yeah. and *Hidden Figures*. Absolutely.

Scott Tallal: It must have been a good fit.

Gurinder Chadha: It was great. And they just jumped in. So I didn't have to go round shopping it. But, you know, at that point, the film had been passed on by Channel 4 and the BBC. I thought it was a no brainer. A film about Bruce Springsteen's music with an Asian lead having made *Bend It Like Beckham*. But yeah, I was sitting on two rejections right there. Filmmaking is not for wimps.

Scott Tallal: As you were making it, and you're totally immersed day to day. What were some of the challenges that surprised you? To the point that you had to regroup and redirect and refocus?

Gurinder Chadha: Well, the one thing about filming in England that you need to know is that the weather is never constant. You can never rely on the weather. And that's the hardest thing. So you can do one scene in bright sunshine or one take and then the next one is pouring with rain, you know. So you see all these English DPs wandering round with, going Wait, wait. Let's wait for the sun. And then you'll see there are whole crews waiting for a big cloud to pass and get a little pocket of sun up here quick. We've got about 30 seconds. All right, everyone. Quick, quick, quick turnover. That's filmmaking in England. I remember my first film *Bahji on The Beach*. There's a big master scene on the beach itself in Blackpool. And it was pivotal, this scene. And we shot the master in sun. And then the sun went in and it started raining. So we were

there for two weeks at that location. And whenever it was sunny, we would all run on the beach and do another part of the scene that run back again. And I think that with shooting in Britain, you get used to that and you plan for that as much as you can. But the opening of the film with a little boy writing in his diary the day we had planned to shoot that and we had to get a lot of permissions because where it was and it was near the motorway. Well, the freeway, as you say, the day we wanted to shoot, that was absolutely pouring with rain. And I just said, we can't I'm not doing this in the rain because there's about three scenes up there and they will be horrible. And so we were able to shift it to another day. But like, if it was raining that day, I had no choice but to do it. I got lucky on that day. And then another time when we were doing driving shots, it was miserable. It was cloudy as anything, the windows kept steaming up. But, you know, we just had to shoot it. You can't tell now. But most films shot in Britain you will notice that the color temperature changes a lot within scenes.

Scott Tallal: What was the easiest or best part of the shoot?

Gurinder Chadha: Oh, the best part of the shoot was all the Bruce songs, you know, shooting Born to Run and playing it really loudly and all of us singing at the top of our voices and just bringing Bruce alive in a setting in Luton, which really is the worst town in England voted by the people of Luton, Yeah, And the Bruce stuff was great, but also realizing, you know, where we were shooting some of the stuff with the racist, you know, the rallies and stuff, you know, that was very real for a lot of people. And it brought back terrible memories of the eighties and what we and our parents had gone through. You know, that was tough. Then there were other things. There are scenes in the film where you see swastikas on walls and sort of racist graffiti. And my English stand-by art director on the day he just was. I'm sorry. I can't put a swastika up. I just can't do it. So the team said they can't be racist. They can't put it up. So I was like, well, give me the can. I'll do it. So I was sort of putting up racist graffiti and stuff with Kulvinder the actor who plays the dad. So the two of us put up swastikas. That was kind of funny. And then there's a big scene with the National Front, which is the right wing party. And we did a big master shot of them. And it was great. And it was very scary. And they were great extras. We did a couple and then I got a call to say, can you come down? Because there's a problem? And I went down to where the extras were and they just said, we don't want to do this anymore. We don't want to be racists. We don't like the way people are shouting at us. And it feels horrible. And they were genuinely upset. And I had to

give them a pep talk. And then I was like, come on, let's do some racist chanting. I was doing the racist chanting like they used to do at the time. So some people were videoing that and they were like really bad Gurinder, really bad but I need the shots. You know, I need the reality. This was the truth at the time. We're getting to the truth. So that was interesting. But again, it's always about the truth. You've got to search for the truth. The truth of the experience, the truth of your characters and the truth of why you as the filmmaker is making this film. What is it? What are you trying to do? And if you're searching for the truth and you're trying to show the truth, you'll go to all kinds of lengths to make sure that you tell the truth. But you also protect the truth. If it's being compromised.

Scott Tallal: You had so many people contacting you in social media to share just how emotional they got at the end of the film. Did you know when you had finished the final draft that it was gonna have that kind of punch?

Gurinder Chadha: Yeah. I don't want to minimize your experience, but for me that is the thing that I like to do and that I've worked out how to do that now as a director. You know, I go for the emotion and I push and push and carve and create my stories using everything. Words, pictures, music to get you to a point where I really want you to care, because these are people that you probably think you have nothing in common with on the screen. And my point is to say, see how alike we all are. See, you're upset now, aren't you? But wait a minute. I'm going to make you laugh. Give me a minute. And I'm gonna make you laugh. And then I'll come back and say, oh, got you right there. Didn't I. And I do that because I want you to be involved in the film and I want you to have that emotional experience, which is what I always look for. Those are the films I respect and love is the ones that I get emotionally engaged in. You know, those are the ones that I love.

Scott Tallal: To me, one of the things that really helps make that happen is the music. And while you have the music of Bruce Springsteen, you also have the score in this film by A.R. Rahman.

Gurinder Chadha: Yeah, well, A.R. is the king of emotion. His score for Viceroy's House, I think is just masterful. If you watch that movie and just watch it for the score alone, it's an incredible piece of work. So A.R. did not that much to do on this film

because so much of the music was Bruce and of the 80s tracks. But what little he did, he pulled out the emotions, which is what scoring does. He sent me a message yesterday saying the Billboards picked out his one song as one of the songs to watch for the original song category. So he was very happy about that.

Scott Tallal: Ah outstanding. And then you have Ben Smithard from Downton Abbey and others as cinematographer.

Gurinder Chadha: Ben shot Viceroy's House as well. And yeah, he's a grumpy old English bloke. And his crews often complain about the fact that he's grumpy. But for me, oh, my God, I get on with him like anything. And he was very excited making *Blinded by the Light* just precisely because it was the opposite of *Downton Abbey*, it is the opposite of that kind of plush English period costume drama. You know, it was a gritty looking film about Britain in the 80s. But what we went for was amazing, sort of like graphic look, because that was what the 80s was about. So there are lots of lines, lots of horizontal lines, vertical lines in all the shots. You know, whether we're shooting a shopfront or shooting the estate where Javid lives or buildings, you know, there's a lot of graphic imagery in the film.

Scott Tallal: What does that convey?

Gurinder Chadha: Well, that shows the harshness of the period. It's very 80s mainly. It's the hard lines, concrete lines, factories, blue collar architecture, as opposed to plush, beautiful Victorian or whatever period English that often you get.

Scott Tallal: I mean this in the best possible way. Does it help to be a control freak to do what you do?

Gurinder Chadha: I don't think good directors are control freaks. If you're a control freak, I don't think you can get the best out of your team. I think what you have to be to be a good director is to be a good communicator and actually have some humility with what your team is going through, what your actors are trying to achieve, what your heads of departments are trying to achieve, what your crew is trying to achieve for you. And then your job is to help them do their best work for you. Everyone's there for you. You shouting at people is just going to totally undermine the process and lose respect.

And then also controlling to the point where you're not listening to their input, I think undermines the process because, you know, as people say, that film is a collaboration and everybody's creative inputs are important. If you're fighting is because you haven't communicated enough during prep,.

Scott Tallal: That might not have been the best choice of descriptives then, especially when you are producing and directing and writing, it's all yours.

Gurinder Chadha: It's true.

Scott Tallal: There is that singular vision that comes through.

Gurinder Chadha: Yes. But that doesn't mean that you don't appreciate other people's work in helping you achieve that singular vision. Some people find it quite hard when I jump from different roles, but people who've worked with me understand that I do it and I'm quite good at it. When I'm the writer, I am the writer and I will write as a writer. And then suddenly when I'm the director, I will look at that script and go, Who wrote that scene it is dreadful. Paul, will say you wrote that scene. Well, it's not good. Can you change it? And he goes, well, you wrote it and I'll go. Yeah, but you're the writer. So like I'm able to put different hats on. And then the same as a producer. So when money is tight, well, we can't do something that we need to do as a director. I'll fight for it. And the line producer will say, well, it's going to come out of your production fee. You know, you're hurting yourself and I'll go. I don't care. As the director, I need that. But then as a producer, when something goes wrong on a film set, that's where I jump into producer mode. When we're shooting. Not before that. Before that, I help get all the money in. I secure the big finance because of my relationships. And then I have other people that come and work with me to sort of take it to the next level. When I become a director, but when things go wrong, that's when I have to jump in and that's when I become a producer, director and all of it all at once. Mother, psychotherapist, you name it, doctor.

Scott Tallal: The films that you've made, although they originate from a common place, are all very, very different stories. At the end of the day, you finish a project and you reflect back on it. Do you find that you are finding some sort of different completeness after each one?

Gurinder Chadha: Well, they're all gonna come from the same place because they will come from me and what I'm about. And it's true. I think directors make the same film over and over again. The themes that they're obsessed with at the beginning, stay with you. But I think the wonderful part of being a director is that you can do films in different genres and in different ways that allow you to use your directing skills, but you're still kind of saying the same thing. And my starting point, the reason I got involved in the media was to combat racism and make us visible. And I continue to do that with every film I make. I just do it in different ways, in different genres. But you can always reduce every film on my back to that one thing.

Scott Tallal: At the end of this one, at the end of the day, what's your take away on this film?

Gurinder Chadha: My takeaway on the end of *Blinded by the Light* is that I really enjoy working with music and that I know how to use music in a good way in terms of storytelling. And that also I can be emotional. I can touch an audience in a very human way, and that is what I bring actually, is I bring emotion to projects. For sure.

Scott Tallal: Well, we'd like to thank you so much for coming and joining us, for Hollywood UNSCRIPTED.

Gurinder Chadha: It's not often that one gets the opportunity to open up and talk about the combination of your inner thoughts, what you think is the meaning of life and the purpose of life and combine it with your craft. And I think all those things are definitely connected. And I've got to a point now in my career where I just feel very empowered by the fact that I've learned to not measure myself or what I do against the standards of the industry that I'm in and take my successes and my values through other means. And I think that's been a very liberating thing for me, actually. So thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about that.

Scott Tallal: Well, thank you for joining us. The producer, director, screenwriter of *Blinded by the Light*, Gurinder Chadha, out now on home video.

Gurinder Chadha: Thank you for having me.

Announcer: Hollywood UNSCRIPTED is created by CurtCo Media and presented in cooperation with the Malibu Film Society. This episode was hosted by Scott Tallal with guest Gurinder Chadha, produced and edited by Jenny Curtis. Sound Engineering by Michael Kennedy, the executive producer of Hollywood UNSCRIPTED is Stuart Halperin. The Hollywood unscripted theme song is by Celeste and Erik Dick. Please rate review and subscribe to this podcast for more conversations with top industry professionals discussing the movies you love.

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