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John gets promoted

Krasinski goes from being *The Office*'s resident wiseacre to director of indie flick



Kevin
Williamson
AT SUNDANCE

PARK CITY, Utah — Before he was a director-screenwriter, *The Office*'s John Krasinski was just another, far less desirable hyphenate: Waiter-struggling actor.

So how did the Boston native, then only 23 years old, convince anyone to hand him the rights to *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, a best-selling collection of vignettes by the late literary great David Foster Wallace?

Even now Krasinski seems a bit baffled by his success. "I wouldn't have given *me* the rights. If I had been his agent, I would have said, 'Absolutely not.'"

Actually, that's exactly what Wallace's agent did at first. Krasinski, though, persisted.

"I can only imagine for an author of that calibre, who is that good, it would be like a mother letting her kid go to college. So I said I'd do my due diligence with this material. I won't have any car chases or explosions or explicit sex in it. I think it really resonated with her that it would be taken care of."

Besides, he adds, "There was doubt in our minds that it would even happen."

Six years later, the movie had its premiere this week at the Sundance film festival. For Krasinski, admittedly "psyched" to be at the prestigious indie showcase, just the fact it's finished is no small triumph.

"The majority of the movie was shot two years ago and then I did a reshoot, and then another recently," says the



INSET PHOTO BY KEVIN WILLIAMSON/SUN MEDIA

John Krasinski stars as Jim in *The Office*, above, a gig he says he'd never leave. Krasinski was in Sundance, inset, to promote his directorial debut *Brief Interview with Hideous Men*, based on the best-selling series of vignettes by David Foster Wallace.

actor who, in the time since he started the project, landed his star-making gig of *The Office*'s affable Jim Halpert. "I actually ran into somebody who was, like, 'You're still working on this? I thought you'd given up.' That was a nice boost of confidence."

Yet given the scale of the commitment, it raises the question: What was it about *Brief Interviews* — a cynical exploration of repellent male behaviour — that inspired such passion and purpose?

"The material, for me, went way beyond relationships into human connectivity and how we deal with each other as

a whole. I think what David does is he creates these wonderful characters and then systematically removes all these layers and allows them to be vulnerable and insecure. What it forces you to do is see everything from another perspective."

Krasinski first encountered *Brief Interviews* while he was attending Brown University, where he participated in a reading of the material. Only after moving to New York later on did he decide to try to adapt it. The resulting production follows a jilted graduate student (Julianne Nicholson, in a role he created for

the movie) as she conducts a series of interviews in the hopes of illuminating the darkest corners of the male psyche. The cast includes Timothy Hutton, Will Arnett, Christopher Meloni, Bobby Cannavale, Josh Charles and Dominic Cooper.

"Any idea I had as a writer was a moot point until we got the cast," Krasinski says. "I had a very good idea who I wanted because while I was waiting tables for short amount of time, it was sometimes hard to find inspiration, so I kept going to plays and going to independent movies and I was always remembering these perform-

ances ... I knew these people would be great because I had seen them before."

With *Brief Interviews* complete, Krasinski now returns his attention to *The Office*. He insists he has no further plans to direct — or, he adds, exit his series. "I'll be there as long as they'll have me," he says. "*The Office* has never been one of those things you want to move away from. Why would I want to be like, 'I want to spread my wings now?' You want to hold on. I'd never shy away from *The Office*. I always say it's like an independent movie but it's on television — it's well-written, it takes chances and asks you

to think. It will be the beginning and the end of everything that's good about this career. But it's always fun as an actor to do something different."

Thus in June he'll be seen in *Away We Go*, a comedic drama from *Revolutionary Road* director Sam Mendes.

"After working with Sam Mendes, if nothing else, that's the guy who will force you to never direct again, after you see how good it could be. You realize you never could be as good as he ... Hopefully, if I direct again, I'll steal everything from his playbook."

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