Can you tell us the genesis of the project and what attracted you to it?

Late last year, my agent approached me with this great project that seemed to come from left field. I inquired into the nature of the project and learned that it was somewhat quite different than what I was aiming for. In the past I had been intrigued by the concept of adapting a play to the screen but this was quite different. This being a "one man show" taking place in a rented theater, heightened the level of difficulty. Any other play would require you to bring it out of the theater and set it where ever the play took place. This was not the case. It would have to remain within the confines of the stage. What a great challenge for a filmmaker. I read the play and fell in love with its uncanny sense of humor, its foray into classical themes and its dramaturgy. The humanity of it all struck me deeply. Other than this marvelous play, the idea of working with a maverick producer like Garth Drabinsky was both scary and unavoidable. I met the man and knew right away that we'd have a ball with this amazing project. And then I met the one and only, the legend himself: Mister Christopher Plummer. Need I say more? And in all honesty, could I refuse such an offer?

How did you approach keeping the essence of the play, yet expanding it cinematically for the screen?

The producers had a very definite idea that the film should be as close to the original play as possible, yet, make it as distinct a feature as can be in its own right. Not an easy task. We toyed with the idea of bringing it out of the "theater performance" and setting it up as a real drama taking place in real settings, but discarded that idea early on. We then decided to create a hybrid out of both worlds -- cinema and theater -- by creating an envelope made up of an introduction fashionably setting up the time and place, by beautifully mapping out some of his memories visually, by forging a visceral intermission sequence as well as recreating, for the ending, one of Barrymore's more memorable performances caught on film (His Richard from Henry VI displayed originally at the "Hollywood Review of 1929"), all of which would serve and heighten the play in a cinematic experience.

It was very important for me to accentuate the proximity and the intimacy between Mr. Plummer and the audience thus creating a greater bond with him. The film enabled me to get the audience to participate emotionally with the character on a more personal level bringing them in close most of the time but keeping them away when needed.

Basically keep the essence of the play as faithful to its original inception and create a distinct envelope for it as well as creating visual momentum that would reflect some of the more evocative moments of Barrymore's life while remaining true to its theatrical genesis.

You and Christopher Plummer both have roots in theater and film. Please talk about collaborating with Christopher prior to, and in preparation for, shooting BARRYMORE.

Yes, having been brought up within a "theater family" made me very keen to be involved in this fascinating project. Both my parents were actors and my father directed over 60 plays from Molière to Sophocles to Shakespeare and many other great playwrights so you can imagine the obvious thread connecting me to Barrymore.

When I met Christopher, we discussed at length the overall approach I would take with the film underlining my intentions of trying to alter as little as possible of the original material. I listened closely to Christopher's request about the importance of feeling the audience, of keeping the whole "theatrical" aspect to our piece and of remaining truthful to his interpretation although in a more cinematic way. I then had the luxury of attending most of the rehearsals of the play prior to its run last winter and then was able to attend any of the theater performances while as I was preparing the shooting for the film. We had meetings with Garth when Mister Plummer wasn't busy performing in order to revise the screenplay and adapt it to our mutual vision. It was an astounding creative symbiosis.

The play was extremely successful and critically acclaimed. Did you find it daunting to adapt it to the screen?

Daunting is too meager a word to describe it. I was scared shitless, especially with the idea of making it a hybrid. My basic intention was to remain not necessary faithful but truthful to Bill Luce's amazing words and to the legendary Gene Saks who brilliantly directed the original play as it translates to its cinematic incarnation. I can only hope that the film honestly reflects the integrity of the original work while being a truly original piece of fiction that everyone will respond to. I wished my father was still alive to see it. I'm sure he'd love it.