

## Interview with The Blacklist Producer Richard Heus

**Leslie Green:** Welcome to Reel Talk with Film DC. This is your host Leslie Green, Senior Communications Manager with the DC Office of Motion Picture and Television Development, also known as the DC Film Office. We're sitting down today with Emmy Award-winning producer and director Richard Heus. He's here today to talk about one of his newest projects, "Blacklist," an upcoming television pilot on NBC.

Richard, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to join us today, we're glad to have you here.

**Richard Heus:** It's a pleasure to be with you.

**Leslie:** Before we get into discussing "Blacklist," which is the reason for your visit to DC, let's talk about some of your previous projects. I know that you've worked on some very successful television projects, including "The Big C" on Showtime, ABC's "Ugly Betty," and the pilot for the new hit series, which filmed in DC late last year, "The Americans." Tell us what it was like to work on some of those projects, and what's been your favorite so far, and why?

**Richard:** I don't know if I have a real favorite, but they were all terrific in many ways. Those three shows that you mentioned, "The Big C," "Ugly Betty," and "The Americans" all shared one element that was exceptional, which was that they all had terrific actors and great casts. They were very different kinds of casts. The "Ugly Betty" cast was predominantly a young cast and was really fun for the completely youthful energy of that project. The outside of the box loopiness of the whole show made it a lot of fun to do. It really straddled the line between comedy and drama, it went back and forth. That was both challenging and stimulating for all of us, creatively.

Whereas "The Big C," with Laura Linney and Oliver Platt, and John Benjamin Hickey and Cynthia Nixon, and Susan Sarandon and various other actors, was a far more seasoned crowd of actors that were great.

We were working on a comedy about cancer. It was, again, not your expected approach to storytelling, or not your normal approach. The cast was terrific with that, and really brought a tremendous amount of authenticity and humor to it, in a really nice way. We could approach things that were very interesting and very difficult at the same time.

"The Americans" was fantastic, because Keri Russell was moving from "Felicity" to an action star, and that was a great transition for her to make. It was really fun to do a period context of 1980s Washington, and that whole show, setting up that environment and that reality was also a really fun project to work on.

We get to play with old cars and various other things. You don't think of the '80s as being that old, until you start going looking for all the pieces, and then realize that there are no computers, no laptops. Phones weigh 10 lbs, things like that.

**Leslie:** That's really interesting. I know that you received an Emmy Award for your work on "Steven Spielberg Presents Taken." What was that project about? What was it like working with Steven Spielberg? He's like a giant in the industry.

**Richard:** He is a titan in the industry, for sure, and it was great. He was very involved in all the creative elements of the project. His ideas and suggestions were part of all the scripts, all the editing, much of the shooting, selection of directors, cast, all those kinds of things, which was great. It was a 20-hour miniseries for the Sci-Fi Channel, but it was a big, sprawling project about alien abduction. He had many, many good ideas, and was extremely helpful. An example of that would be that when we were trying to figure out how we were going to create our aliens, and so on and so forth, he came up with the idea of, instead of hiring an expensive visual effects house, creating our own visual effects department, and going around Hollywood.

Because he knows how Hollywood works in extremely terrific depth, he was just unbelievable. He realized that there was software sitting on the shelves of many of the animation houses that we probably could buy from them for a fraction of its original cost, and use that to do all the animations and create our aliens, do all those things.

We ended up doing that, and while still very expensive, it was massively less than any other approach. Since we were working for television we didn't have that enormous feature budget, and he was very helpful in those kinds of things.

**Leslie:** You're here for the pilot of the new show "Blacklist," that's going to be on NBC. Tell us about that project, and what's the concept of the show?

**Richard:** "The Blacklist" is written by Jon Bokenkamp and starring James Spader and Megan Boone. The idea is it's a meeting between "Homeland" and "Silence of the Lambs." Megan Boone is a young, beginning FBI profiler, and James Spader is number four on the FBI's most-wanted list. A former FBI agent who's been gone rogue for 25 years who comes back with an agenda that we're trying to figure out exactly what it is. Part of it is in apprehending criminals that most of the world is unaware of. It's an adventure, it's an FBI criminal adventure show with a strong psychological component.

**Leslie:** You serve as producer on the show. What's your responsibility as the producer for this project?

**Richard:** My responsibilities essentially are all the physical production. Hiring the crew, getting everyone together, and then figuring out how we're going to shoot it. Handling the finances, and then working with the writers and working with the script, so we can tell a story that we can actually make. Then working closely with the director who's Joe Carnahan. I must go back and say, on all the series I've talked about earlier, as well as this series, the thing that I most appreciate is that there was quality writing on all of those series. [inaudible 06:34] Jenny Bicks, Joe Weisberg, and on this one, Jon Bokenkamp are all terrific writers, and that's what really attracted me to a television series, is the writing. That's a key component to all of it.

**Leslie:** I was going to ask what made you decide to join this particular project? I'm sure you have your pick of projects to work on, with how successful you've been. What was really compelling to you about Blacklist?

**Richard:** It was really just that. I read many scripts this pilot season, and thank you, and I had a couple of choices and that was very nice, and I was very grateful for that. I liked the script very much, and that was the key element. I've learned that television is largely about the writing, and if you don't have the writing you're not going to last. I thought this was a great script.

**Leslie:** It is set in DC, and you're in town this week filming part of the pilot here. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the locations you all selected, and why you chose them?

**Richard:** We chose our locations because they're iconic American locations. We're going to be filming a dialogue scene with James Spader in front of the Lincoln Memorial, with the Washington Monument on the reverse side of that. We'll be filming a little chase sequence near the Mall, where the Capitol will be the anchoring point of that particular situation. We'll be at the Reagan Plaza for a conversation between a couple of our actors, and we'll be over at the brand new museum doing a scene on the roof there, again with the Capitol in the background.

What we really wanted to do was do actual scenes in Washington, as opposed to just doing pretty shots of Washington. We were very fortunate in that with Carol Flaisher, our location manager, we were able to figure out how to do that kind of thing.

**Leslie:** We certainly appreciate that, you taking the time to actually get DC right. Are you planning to come back to DC at all, for any filming?

**Richard:** We're still trying to design exactly how we will do this series, so that's still under discussion, but I think all of us are talking that we would like to be in DC on a semi-regular basis, if possible. The series is set in DC. We'd like to be here as much as you can.

**Leslie:** When can we expect to see the first episode of The Blacklist?

**Richard:** If The Blacklist gets ordered to series, I think you would most likely see it at the end of September.

**Leslie:** Are you working on any other projects currently, that you'd like to share with us in addition to your work on The Blacklist?

**Richard:** No, the only projects I have going simultaneously is we've just finished The Big C, which is airing on Showtime on April 29, our final season. Between the two of them, I've been plenty busy.

**Leslie:** I'm sure. Thank you so much for joining us, taking time out of your schedule, because I know you have a tight schedule while you're here in DC, so we appreciate that.

**Richard:** I do. We're leaving on a location scout as we finish.

**Leslie:** [laughs] Thank you for tuning in to Reel Talk with Film DC. This is your host Leslie Green signing off. Don't forget to check us out on the Web at [film.dc.gov](http://film.dc.gov), like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/filmdc](https://facebook.com/filmdc), and follow us on Twitter at [dcfilmoffice](https://twitter.com/dcfilmoffice). Catch you next time.

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