

The Dealmaker & The Filmmaker

Craig Darian and Howard Kazanjian, two veterans of Hollywood, discuss their Armenian heritage, and elaborate upon their success in the field of film production and post-production. The tandem is currently spearheading the international distribution arising from a groundbreaking joint venture with Vietnam's Central Government. Darian and Kazanjian unveil the fascinating details about the production of such cinematic classics as *Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Star Wars*.

Text Ani Nazaretyan | Photo Armen Poghosyan



You might be curious to know how such critically acclaimed and commercially successful movies as: *Spider-Man*, *King Kong*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *War of the Worlds*, *Gladiator*, *Meet the Parents*, *Tomb Raider*, *The Hulk*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Mission: Impossible*, and several other world-famous blockbusters are related to the names Craig Darian and Howard Kazanjian.

In fact, this is merely a short list of the more than 100 renowned films in which Darian and Kazanjian have been involved through their company – Tricor Entertainment,

Inc. Founded in 1988 by Darian and Kazanjian, Tricor Entertainment ranks among the most diversified privately held production and international distribution companies in the highly competitive entertainment industry. Darian, a successful entertainment executive, and Kazanjian, a successful film producer, became fast friends when they crossed paths in the early 1980s. It marked the beginning of an enduring friendship and successful partnership, where today, many in Hollywood refer to the duo as “The Dealmaker and The Filmmaker.” ▶

Destination: Hollywood

Kazanjian confessed that he always wanted to be a producer or director. He took the first step in that direction when he entered the Cinema Department at the University of Southern California, where he first met George Lucas. "George was a year behind me. Initially, he was not a cinema major, but like most non-major students he wanted to take one or two classes. Eventually, we became friends and started working together."

Kazanjian received his degree and went into the Directors Guild of America's Director/Producer Training Program to become an assistant director – for which he was selected out of 2,000 people. Two years later, he became an

assistant director and began to work his way up. Thereafter, Kazanjian met up again with George Lucas and became VP of Production of Lucasfilm. During the seven years that Kazanjian was at Lucasfilm, he served as executive producer on the first of the *Indiana Jones* movies, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, which was one of Director Steven Spielberg's highest grossing films of all time. Kazanjian also produced the sequel to *American Graffiti*; and after supervising production on *Star Wars II: The Empire Strikes Back*, Kazanjian produced *Star Wars III: Return Of The Jedi*. Throughout his career, Howard Kazanjian has worked with some of the biggest names in Hollywood: Alfred Hitchcock,

Robert Wise, Sam Peckinpah, Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Clint Eastwood, Billy Wilder, Joshua Logan, Elia Kazan, and many other talented directors and producers. Among his first films were Jack Warner's *Camelot*, Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*, Elia Kazan's *The Arrangement*, Robert Wise's *The Hindenburg*, Billy Wilder's *The Front Page*, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Family Plot*.

Craig Darian entered the world of entertainment at the age of 19. His first job was at Consolidated Film Industries (CFI) – one of the industry's leading film laboratories. While working as a studio projectionist at CFI, as well as at MGM, 20th Century Fox, and Warner Bros, Darian was studying law and business while working on the sets of "M*A*S*H," "Charlie's Angels," "The Love Boat," and other hit TV series of the 1970s and early 80s. Reading *West's Law*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Princeton Law Review*, *Forbes*, and anything he could get his hands on, Darian knew that he wanted to make the transition from technician to management.

An avid lover of softball, Darian co-founded the Hollywood Entertainment Sports League at the age of 23, which included more than 40 studios, networks, production companies and television series. As commissioner of the league, Darian met countless high-level executives and filmmakers who became friends and business colleagues. Less than two years later, Darian went on to become the executive in charge of sales and business affairs for a major post-production sound company, where he spearheaded a successful reorganization that got the attention of industry post production giant, Glen Glenn Studios, and its publicly traded multi-billion dollar parent company, Republic Corporation (NYSE). At the age of 29, Darian became the youngest president of a Republic Corporation division, and at that time was the youngest sound director in the history of the post production industry. While at the helm of Glen Glenn, Darian also ran the Sound Divisions at Paramount, Disney, CBS, and Marvel, and oversaw post production sound services for countless television series, including "Cheers," "Moonlighting," "The A-Team," and "The Bob Newhart Show;" and such features as *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, which received an Academy Award Nomination for Best Sound. Following yet another successful reorganization, Darian sold Glen Glenn to United Artists Communications in 1986, and thereafter shepherded the merger with its subsidiary, Todd-AO.

Kazanjian and "The King of Suspense"

Kazanjian was one among the very few people with whom Sir Alfred Hitchcock would spend hours sharing the details of his singular filmmaking style. Kazanjian and Hitchcock (or "Hitch" as he was called by those closest to him) would meet every morning at 9 a.m. to have coffee (served in fine china). During pre-production and production, they would talk for hours. "Hitch allowed me see as many of his films as possible in his office complex where he had his own projection room," said Kazanjian. "Very often he would say

As the executive producer, Kazanjian found gold in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when he cast Harrison Ford as the treasure-hunting archaeologist Indiana Jones.

in his harsh and slow voice, 'Howard, do you know why I did such a thing in this scene?' Even if I knew the answer I would always say 'tell me' or 'please explain,' and he would start sharing the precise details of his vision. Even the slightest details were vital to him. I remember once we were in one of his favorite restaurants in San Francisco when he asked me, 'Howard, do you remember the color of Kim Novak's dress in that restaurant scene in *Vertigo*?' And I said, 'green.' 'No,' he said, 'Emerald green.' That made a big difference. 'Did you notice that no other person in the restaurant was wearing green, and when she walked toward the camera, no other person would walk in that direction?' Hitchcock had a very unique style of shooting."

Hollywood Today

"Hollywood is community driven by creativity, but filmmaking is a very complex and risky business," said Darian. "All of the major studios are now owned by multinational conglomerates, several of which are publicly traded and accountable to Wall Street. Consider that the average studio feature is a nine-figure endeavor. When you take into account the cost of production, marketing, and distribution on a worldwide basis – and that the primary audience demographic is between 15 and 25 years old – you begin to understand some of the challenges producers and executives face on a daily basis." Kazanjian continues, "Franchise movies, such as *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Indiana Jones*, *Harry Potter*, *Spider-Man*, and *Lord of the Rings* are excellent examples of productions that have spawned sequels, and have also benefited from merchandising, soundtracks, and other forms of ancillary income." Given the target demographic, "Much of the success of blockbuster films is repeat patronage usually derived from younger audiences, who will also buy DVD's and related products," explains Darian. The motion picture industry produces vital exports of great value to the United States, both financially and culturally – even though many more productions are leaving Hollywood and migrating to other states and countries. Kazanjian and Darian both agree that while this trend is nothing new, it has been growing in light of strong tax incentives offered outside of Hollywood, and because vast improvements in technology no longer limit filmmakers to a specific locale. As for Tricolor Entertainment, Darian says, "We're interested in story-driven and character-driven projects that don't necessarily rely upon bombs, babes, hot-rods, and aliens. Howard and I are often drawn to material that isn't overtly commercial, but the integrity of the story and quality of the characters resonates with us in a way that says this is something that merits our involvement." ▶



→
Howard Kazanjian

Kazanjian and Darian are currently working with acclaimed director Randal Kleiser (*Grease*, *Blue Lagoon*, *White Fang*) to develop such projects as *The Laughing Man* by Victor Hugo, which will most likely be shot in Europe. They also have two television series in development.

The ChinaAmerica Project

Through its wholly owned, affiliated company, ChinaAmerica, Ltd., Tricor Entertainment developed an unprecedented joint venture with Vietnam's Central Government in 1996, which allowed for the importation and exhibition of major studio films. They had the first monopoly in the country under which they controlled more than 19 movie theatres, distributed more than 100 major studio films, and employed a staff of 126 people. Tricor's offices are in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and their managing partner in the region is part of a family that owns the controlling shareholder interest in a Taiwan-based shipping and airline conglomerate. Only after Vietnam became part of the World Trade Organization did competition begin to quickly emerge, largely from South Korean companies that have since opened a number of cinemas in Vietnam. According to Darian, "We take great pride in knowing that we took the

necessary steps to open up this market, and to facilitate dealings between Vietnam's Central Government and the MPA whereby importation guidelines were developed allowing for the lawful distribution of Hollywood movies that are now available to 80 million people."

Recognizing Merits

Having worked as an assistant director and a producer with some of the biggest names in Hollywood, Kazanjian added his mark to the creation of a number of famous movie scenes in such films as *Return of the Jedi* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* – two of the highest-grossing films of all time. Kazanjian was also the Producer of a documentary film, *Making of Raiders of the Lost Ark*, full of amazing behind-the-scenes material, for which he won an Emmy award in 1981.

In *Return of the Jedi*, for example, Darth Vader was never to appear as a ghost figure in the last scene of the movie with Yoda and Obi Wan. Kazanjian suggested that idea to George Lucas only two days before they shot the scene, and Lucas called him the next day asking him to shoot Darth Vader with Yoda and Obi Wan. This became one of the most memorable scenes of the entire saga.

Kazanjian also came up with the name *Blue Harvest* as a

means to disguise the actual project during pre-production and principal photography.

Perhaps Kazanjian's most valuable contribution to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is tied to the casting of the treasure-hunting archaeologist, Indiana Jones. Today, it is hard to picture anyone other than Harrison Ford playing the legendary part of Indiana Jones. That character seemed to be created with Ford in mind – but it was not. It is no secret that Harrison Ford was not among the first candidates for the title role; however, what the world should certainly know is that the person responsible for suggesting and pushing for Harrison Ford was Howard Kazanjian. In addition to George Lucas and Steven Spielberg who ultimately agreed upon Harrison Ford, Kazanjian simply says, "I am proud of the enduring role I played in many aspects of this production, which contributed to its profound success and have had a positive effect on all of its sequels."

I met with Darian and Kazanjian in the Hollywood Offices of Occidental Entertainment. Group Holdings – one of the largest independent production facilities in the Entertainment Industry. In addition to being Co-Chairman & CEO of Tricor Entertainment, Darian holds the same position at Occidental Entertainment Group – a separate company founded in 1983 by Darian's other partner, real estate magnate, Albert Sweet.

According to Darian, "My positions and interests in both companies are truly complementary. Where Tricor is involved in motion picture and television production, international distribution, and theatrical exhibition, Occidental owns and operates a dozen sound stages, three dozen commercial office buildings, a lighting and grip company, and a prop company – all of which provide support services to countless studios, networks, and production companies in the entertainment industry." The three of us entered Darian's eclectically designed office, the walls of which were decorated with the framed movie posters of his and Kazanjian's mutual work. As we sat around the coffee table to start our conversation, I was offered traditional Armenian baklava. No matter how much of the Hollywood atmosphere prevailed in the office, this simple pastry immediately carried Armenian spirit into the room. So before we had turned to the questions about the rich potpourri of projects launched by Darian and Kazanjian, I asked them about their Armenian heritage.

"One of the main lessons of my Armenian upbringing is rooted in the idea that family comes first. This is one of the major characteristics of my Armenian heritage," said Kazanjian. Kazanjian's mother was born in Pasadena and his father's family was from Tigranakert, Armenia. His father, Harry, was only five years old when his family left Armenia and headed to France. Eight years later, at the age of 13, young Harry journeyed by himself across the Atlantic to America traveling first to Massachusetts, where at the age of eighteen he started his first business. He later moved to New York where his brother joined him in business; and

Craig Darian and Howard Kazanjian have formed that rare friendship in Hollywood, one that is entailed with business, family, ideology, creativity – and movies.

thereafter moved to California where he met his future wife. "Culturally, my roots are in my Armenian heritage. Loyalty, integrity, and the importance of family are lessons I learned primarily from observing the life of my grandparents, although these lessons were reinforced by my parents," said Darian, who was born in Glendale. His grandparents had emigrated from Western Armenia and both of his parents are second generation Armenians. Darian's father, Charles, is a practicing lawyer in the Glendale community; his mother, Gloria, is a sales and marketing executive at a residential care facility in the San Fernando Valley. "I am proud to say that I am Armenian, and I am proud to say that I am an American. I do not, however, consider myself an 'Armenian-American.' These are two aspects of who I am that are separate, yet complementary. My cultural and religious orientation is grounded in my Armenian roots – while my commitment to America is in my national roots," said Darian.

In the course of our conversation the word "family" was mentioned multiple times by both Kazanjian and Darian. Preserving family values is especially important for these two showbiz executives. Both Kazanjian and Darian pride themselves not only on their long marriages, but also on their effort to preserve traditions – be it with respect for family relations, or enjoyment of traditional Armenian cuisine.

"My grandmother was the one to tell different family stories and also kept the tradition of making Armenian food," said Kazanjian. "She would cook almost all the Armenian dishes – dolma, sarma, shish kebab, baklava, etc. My wife now continues this tradition." Armenian food is also an integral part of the Darian family. "My wife isn't Armenian, but amazingly, she is the best Armenian cook in the family," said Darian. "My grandmother used to refer to her as 'Nanny's Girl.' Even my son has learned from my wife how to cook Armenian food."

Darian and Kazanjian both live in San Marino and have been neighbors for the past 25 years. Darian has been married to his childhood sweetheart, Kimberly, for the past 35 years. They have three adult children – Jordan, Jessica, and Kali – one granddaughter, Zoe, and another granddaughter due in June. Kazanjian has been married to his wife, Carol, for the past 40 years. They have three adult sons – Peter, Noah, and Andrew.

"I have an expression that I am fond of using," Darian says. "We build our ego in good times and our character in bad.' This applies perfectly to the character of Armenians who suffered through great adversity, yet emerged as enterprising and honorable people." ■



→
Craig Darian