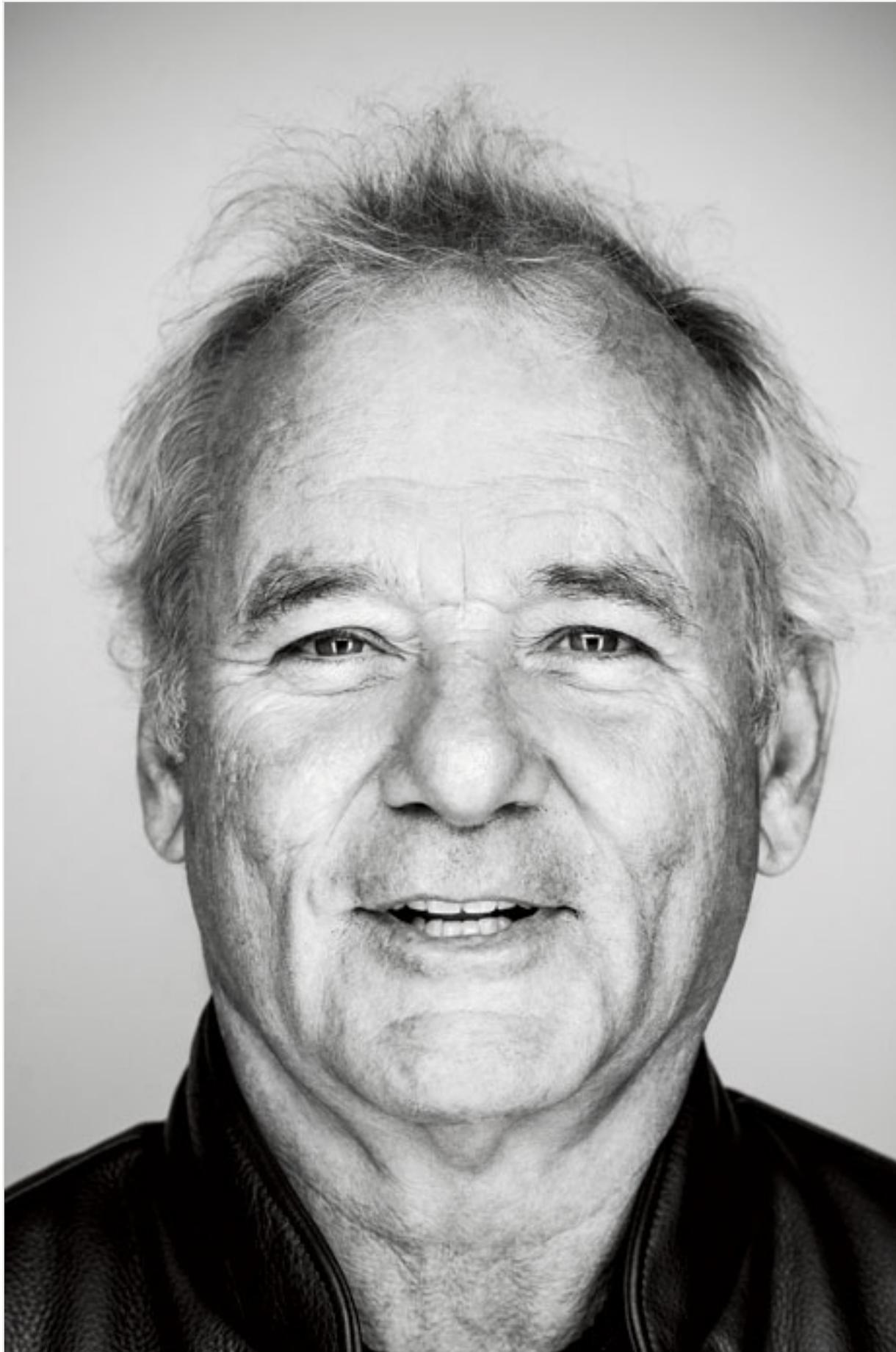


Bill Murray: The ESQ+A



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Friday, early evening in the basement of Murray's house in Charleston, South Carolina. Raab got into town around noon.

SCOTT RAAB: Your name came up once in an interview with Robert Downey Jr. and a hush descended upon him.

BILL MURRAY: Well, people get pretty quiet when they hear his name, too.

SR: Downey told me: "We wanted Bill to consider a role in *Iron Man*, but nobody could find him." Show people are awestruck by your inaccessibility.

BM: I'm not trying to be coy. It's just practical for me. When the phone started ringing too many times, I had to take it back to what I can handle. I take my chances on a job or a person as opposed to a situation. I don't like to have a situation placed over my head.

SR: You want control?

BM: To the degree that I can get the things that want to control me out of the way, then there's less stuff in my field of vision. Then I can work.

SR: A lot of folks worry that if they aren't available or don't say yes, they'll stop getting asked.

BM: If you *keep* saying yes, they'll stop asking you, too. That's a much more likely event. I think we're all sort of imprisoned by — or at least bound to — the choices we make, and I think everyone in the acting business wants to make the right choices. You want to say no at the right time and you want to say yes more sparingly. I came out of the old Second City in Chicago. Chicago actors are more hard-nosed. They're tough on themselves and their fellow actors. They're self-demanding. Saying no was very important. *Integrity* is probably too grand a word, but if you're not the voice of Mr. Kool-Aid, then you're still free. You're not roped in.

SR: Your Second City teacher/mentor Del Close is a guy I've never read enough about. What was it that made him so influential?

BM: Well, he was a guy who had great knowledge of the craft of improvisation. And he lived life in a very rich manner, to excess sometimes. He had a whole lot of brain stuck inside of his skull. Beyond being gifted, he really engaged in life. He earned a lot. He made more of himself than he was given. Came out of Manhattan, Kansas, and ended up hanging out with the Beats. He was incredibly gracious to your talent and always tried to further it. He got people to perform beyond their expectations. He really believed that anyone could do it if they were present and showed respect. There was a whole lot of respect.

SR: Sounds like a great teacher.

BM: He taught lots and lots of people very effectively. He taught people to commit. Like: "Don't walk out there with one hand in your pocket unless there's somethin' in there you're going to bring out." You gotta commit. You've gotta go out there and improvise and you've gotta be completely unafraid to die. You've got to be able to take a chance to die. And you have to die lots. You have to die all the time. You're goin' out there with just a whisper of an idea. The fear will make you clench up. That's the fear of dying. When you start and the first few lines don't grab and people are going like, "What's this? I'm not laughing and I'm not interested," then you just put your arms out like this and open way up and

that allows your stuff to go out. Otherwise it's just stuck inside you.

[The nanny comes downstairs and asks where Murray wants to go for dinner with his sons and Raab.]

BM: I haven't made any plan yet. But we'll need to be more dressed up than we are now. You can get away with it 'cause you're a girl, but you're not going to get away with that [*points to his son*]. And I'm not going to get away with this. He's going to get away with that [*points to Raab*]. Lincoln [*Murray's ten-year-old*], you're going to have to get dressed nicely. And you need a shower. That's an order.

LINCOLN: Yes, sir.

SR: Did you ever want to be a stand-up?

BM: No. I saw them work, and they seemed so unhappy. If an audience didn't like them, they'd get so miserable about it. It looked too miserable. I did it once and it was fun. But I only had to do it once to realize I could do it, but I don't want to do it. I've done it a little bit lately — I'll emcee a concert, something like that.

SR: It's no surprise you can do it. You're Bill Murray.

BM: But you still have to be funny. If you're not funny, then it's "Guess who's not funny?"

SR: Bill Murray.

BM: "Hey, I'll tell you who's not funny. That guy." I don't wanna die at this point.

SR: Is your body of work a source of gratification?

BM: Am I gratified that I got it done? Is it gratifying to have this library, this stack of things that I've worked on? Well, yeah. I like 'em all. Some of them are not as successful as others, but I like 'em all. They're like your kids

SR: You must like some more than others.

BM: The ones I like most are the ones where I connected with great people. The gratification part is: I worked with that son of a bitch. I worked with her. If you get that thing done, you're professional friends for life. There are people who drove me crazy, but they got the job done. And when I see that person again, I nod my head. Respect.

SR: Respect. I think that's also a Chicago thing: Friendship is no substitute for gettin' the job done.

BM: When I work, my first relationship with people is professional. There are people who want to be your friend right away. I say, "We're not gonna be friends until we get this done. If we don't get this done, we're never going to be friends, because if we don't get the job done, then the one thing we did

together that we had to do together we failed." People confuse friendship and relaxation. It's incredibly important to be relaxed — you don't have a chance if you're not relaxed. So I try very hard to relax any kind of tension. But friendship is different. I read a great essay: Thoreau on friendship. I was staying over at my friend's house and there it was on the bedside table, and I'm reading it and I'm thinking it's an essay, so it's gonna be like four pages. Well, it goes on and on and on and on — Thoreau was a guy who lived alone, so he just had to get it all out, you know? He just keeps saying, "You have to love what is best in that other person and only what's best in that other person. That's what you have to love" —

LINCOLN [*from the top of the stairs*]: Dad!

BM: What is it?

LINCOLN: The Cubs are beating the Cardinals 9-0.

BM: Nice.

SR: I hope it's going to be a good season.

BM: They got off to a shaky start. And the columnists went, "Here we go again." They write with vitriol. Game One, the papers were like the last days of Watergate. I think they're trying to make Theo [*Epstein, Chicago Cubs president*] march to their tune. Isn't gonna happen. [*Lincoln comes downstairs.*]

SR: Lookin' good.

BM: Aw, man, doesn't he look good? Except for the bruises on your leg. What are you, in some sort of a weird relationship? Did you wash your hair?

SR: I can smell it. A little Herbal Essence.

LINCOLN: Hey, Dad. Bryan LaHair [*Chicago Cubs first baseman*] hit a grand slam.

BM: You mean today against the Cardinals? He's got a great swing. He was out with a bad back, but he's got a great swing.

SR: How many kids do you have?

BM: Six. All sons.

SR: That's a lot of emergency-room visits.

BM: There's only a couple times when fame is ever helpful. Sometimes you can get into a restaurant where the kitchen is just closing. Sometimes you can avoid a traffic violation. But the only time it really matters is in the emergency room with your kids. That's when you want to be noticed, because it's very easy to get forgotten in an ER. It's the only time when I would ever say, "Thank God. Thank God."

There's no other time.

SR: Any fathering tips?

BM: If you bite on everything they throw at you, they will grind you down. You have to ignore a certain amount of stuff. The thing I keep saying to them lately is: "I have to love you, and I have the right to ignore you." When my kids ask what I want for my birthday or Christmas or whatever, I use the same answer my father did: "Peace and quiet." That was never a satisfactory answer to me as a kid — I wanted an answer like "A pipe." But now I see the wisdom of it: All I want is you at your best — you making this an easier home to live in, you thinking of others.



Murray, Frances McDormand, Edward Norton, and Bruce Willis in *Moonrise Kingdom*.

SR: Are you a tough laugh with your kids?

BM: For many years I was a tough laugh, but lately I've been giving it up. I appreciate when they're trying to be funny, you know? I think they feel like they have to be funny, that I've got some standard of humor that they have to come to. But funny is funny, and there's no denying funny.

SR: Did you and Bruce Willis get along on the set of *Moonrise Kingdom*?

BM: I got along great with Bruce Willis. He's different, though. He's rolled as a movie star for a long time, so it's a little different for him coming into Wes Anderson's world, where no one gets movie-star treatment. Life really does change when you go on one of Wes's films — you gotta sit back and relax. But Bruce absolutely delivered. He was really game. It was like, Let's play. Sometimes you get people that don't want to play — they just want to perform, to act. He's a movie star, I've been a movie star — we don't have to take this so seriously. So we'd play. We'd goof up a take just for the fuck of it. He delivers one of the biggest laughs of any movie I've ever been in. And it really took a movie star to do it. The casting of Bruce was perfect. This movie is really funny. This movie's gonna be big. Big.

SR: Had you met Willis before?

BM: I met him at this Andy Garcia movie I did, *The Lost City*. Willis is there and he'd had a couple drinks. We've all had a few drinks. And he says, "I just want you to know ..." I'm like, "Oh, fuck." He says, "I used to work as a page at NBC, and my job was to refill the M&M bowls and the peanut bowls in the actors' dressing room. And only you and Gilda ever treated me like a human being. You were nice to me." And I thought, Whew, that's good. I felt like, Shit, I did somethin' right, you know?

SR: The last time we talked about Wes Anderson was after what sounded like a horrible experience in Italy for *The Life Aquatic*. You must have a great affinity for him.

BM: Wes is still a young man, but he was just a kid when I met him on *Rushmore*. And he's grown as a person, as a man, as a movie director. His stuff just keeps getting better and better. And he's managed to make the making of movies a real living experience. For *Moonrise Kingdom*, he rented a mansion in Newport, Rhode Island, and we lived in it. The editing rooms were in the mansion. And we had a great cook. You could be relaxed in your own skin, but it also meant that you could work endless, ungodly art-movie hours because there was gonna be a meal prepared for you when you're done.

SR: A savvy move on his part.

BM: It wasn't lost on me.

SR: It's amazing what goes into making a movie.

BM: But nobody cares. It's like talking about the difficulties of fame. Nobody gives a shit. No one could care less. But it's an amazing triumph even to make a bad movie. Even a crap film is really an extraordinary achievement. You're taking a two-dimensional object and making it three-dimensional. The number of people. The number of days. The number of cuts.

SR: How was it working with Mickey Rourke on *Passion Play*?

BM: It's complicated to talk about Mickey Rourke. He had all these things he had to do to get himself into working. He had all kinds of props. However, when it came down to actually doing a scene with him, it was just like with Bruce: Let's just do this. Okay, that was good. Let's do another one. The thing about him is the foibles have been personal, not professional. Like he tried to be a boxer and got his face busted up. He was a beautiful actor.

SR: Gorgeous.

BM: He was a heartthrob. And now, like myself, he's had a second life as an actor. He's never embarrassed himself as an actor. All right, I'm going to go call a restaurant. I gotta call some place and get lucky.

SR: Just mention "Scott Raab." They love me in Charleston.

BM: I'll try.

Saturday morning, in the TV room. Raab has a plane to catch in a little bit.

BM: More coffee, sir?

SR: That would be great.

BM: Wanna go get some breakfast, Lincoln?

LINCOLN: Dad, look what happens in this one.

SR: This is a reality show, *Swamp People*?

BM: Gator hunters, right? They do a lot of huffin' and puffin' in it. Is this an Animal Planet show, Linky?

LINCOLN: History.

BM: Hist'ry. [*To Raab*] Want something to eat?

SR: You know what I had this morning? One of your tangelos. Spectacular. Those are from your place in California?

BM: Those are mine.

SR: You have them sent?

BM: Yeah. We have avocados, too. We don't actually grow the avocados, but they're next door. We all share out there. [*Goes into the kitchen to get a couple of avocados.*] Feel those. Those are all ready to go. People don't know: You put a ripe avocado in the refrigerator and they stop where they are.

SR: These are nice.

BM: Carry some with you. Here's a bag. Take a few. You got to have enough to make guacamole.

SR: Can I swipe a couple tangelos? That tangelo was extraordinary. It freshened me right up. It was waiting for me right at the stair post.

BM: Your hand will lead you to fruit.

SR: How do the tangelos grow?

BM: On a tree.

SR: What are they in relationship to oranges and tangerines?

BM: Part tangerine and part orange.

SR: They peel easy.

BM: And it makes the most amazing juice ever — I always thought Florida orange juice was the best. Tangelo juice is better than Florida orange juice.

SR: It's 10:10.

BM: Yeah, we should go. You got enough of those avocados? You sure?

In the car. Murray's driving Raab to the airport.

SR: Are you off for a while or do you have more work coming up?

BM: I've been sent a few things I didn't really care about. But there's one thing I've gotten phone calls about. The script hasn't come yet. I said: "Don't FedEx it. Send it regular mail. Don't waste your money." But now I'm really wanting it, and it's not here.

Last summer was great. I had an ideal situation. The job was in Newport, so I was able to get up to Martha's Vineyard, bring a couple of my boys up there. And then I was able to go to England and do a real job over there, this movie about Franklin Roosevelt, *Hyde Park on the Hudson*. [*Murray plays FDR.*] That was the first time I've actually had a full-on movie role in several years. I guess I did *Get Low*. But that was not a long job. And then I had *Zombieland* right on top of it. *Zombieland* came out of nowhere. It was like putting on an old coat and finding a couple hundred dollars in it.

SR: That was a wonderful movie.

BM: That was a real delight, that. It's a real *movie* movie. And it's funny. I love that Emma [*Stone*]. Just a doll. And Woody [*Harrelson*] is fantastic to be with. He has great ambition. He's always pushing himself. Woody called me up and said, "Do you want to try this thing?" I'd just left Georgia, and I had really had enough of Georgia. It had been really cold, shooting that *Get Low*. Physical cold is really tiring. Of course, I'm with Duvall, who's, like, seventy-nine or something and he's just a horse. He didn't particularly like the cold either, but he's a tough bird, that boy.

SR: Gene Hackman, Clint Eastwood, those guys —

BM: They keep going. When you're good at it, you can keep going.

SR: Is this hood hooked down? Because I keep looking at the hood and it's shaking.

BM: I've had it looked at, but it does shake on that side. You've got me nervous again. I'm going to go back and tell them all over again. I like this car. I'd hate to give it up. I've been thinking about cars because my boys are always pushing cars in my face.

SR: You seem to have close relationships with your sons.

BM: As much as the divorce was very hard, the fallout of it has been really great. I ended up much closer to my guys than I ever would have been.

SR: I'm not inclined to put a sunny face on everything, but I think that tough times really do wind up making people closer.

BM: I never went much for "It's an ill wind that blows no good" kind of thing.

SR: "Everything happens for a reason."

BM: That drives me nuts. I want to give them five on rye when I hear that. "Everything happens for a reason."

SR: Five on rye?

BM: Five on rye.

SR: A knuckle sandwich.

BM: "Everything happens for a reason" is a kind of self-hypnosis.

SR: "It's God's plan."

BM: Well, it's not God's ideal. It's part of the plan, but if no one acts in the moment of possibility, then it devolves into "Well, then I got hit by a car. Because I was standing in the middle of the road. Well, everything happens for a reason." Someone should make a sketch about it. It's probably a good *Saturday Night Live* sketch.

SR: It makes me think of the Coen brothers' movie *A Serious Man*. The harder you try to look for the plan, the more inexplicable things become.

BM: I really do enjoy the Coen brothers' stuff. You know, I worked with Frances McDormand [*frequent actress in the Coen brothers' movies and wife of Joel Coen*] in *Moonrise Kingdom*. Talk about a no-bullshit actress. No frills. She's just so effortless.

SR: It's hard work to make something appear effortless.

BM: It's easier to watch because you don't get worried. There's the Dreamlifter [*Boeing 747 Large Cargo Freighter*]. Look at that.

SR: I'm amazed that can fly.

BM: It's the biggest plane in the world. Look at that fucker. [*Pulling up to the terminal.*] Here's my

boys over here — the Delta boys.

SR: No NetJets?

BM: I really only need to use it when I'm traveling with the boys. For a two-stopper it saves you, like, eight hours and eight plane tickets. What do you think eight plane tickets would cost?

SR: And that's only the dollars and cents of it. All the stress ...

BM [*to curbside baggage handler*]: How you doin'?

BAGGAGE HANDLER: Heeeeey!