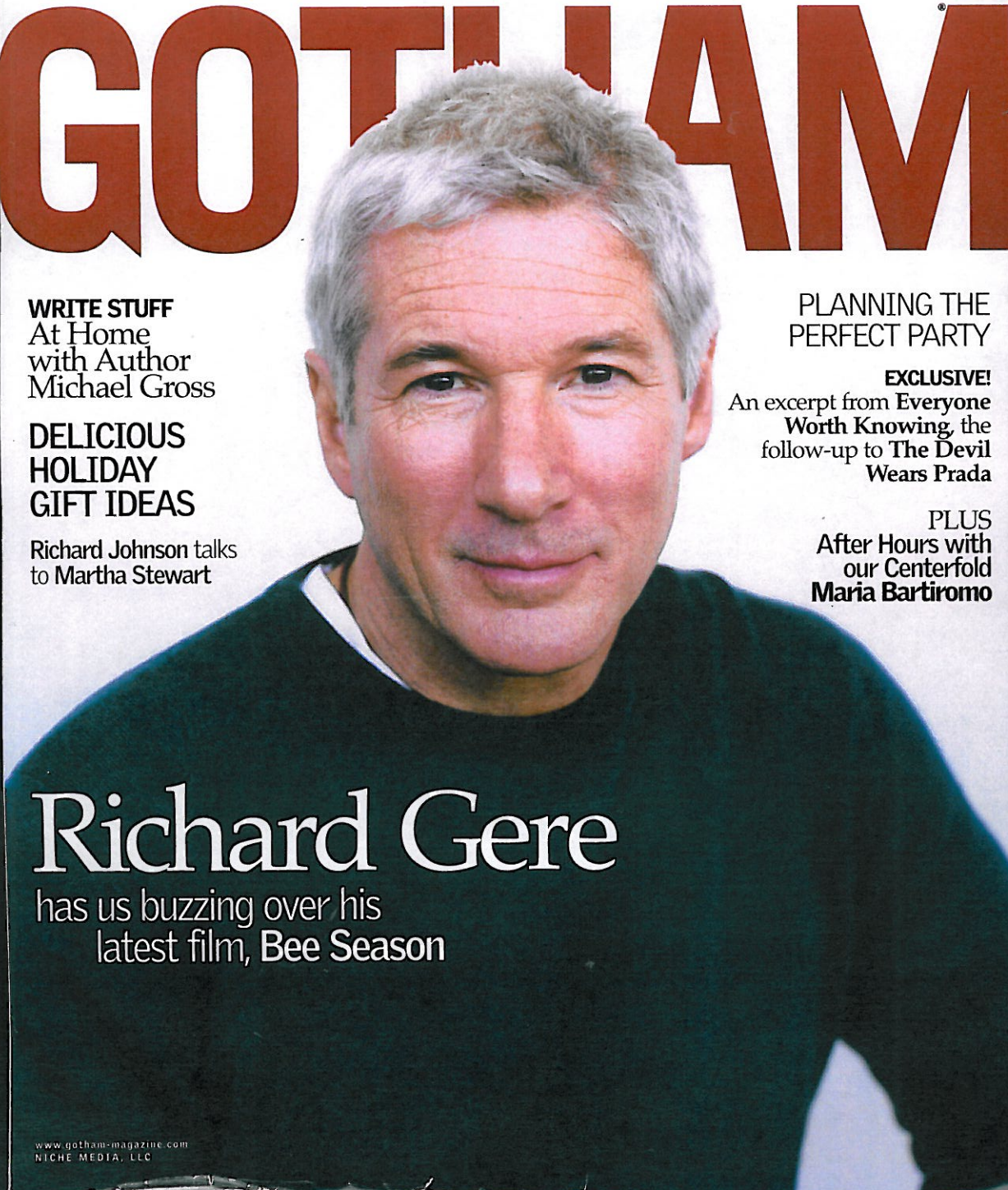


GOTHAM



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with Author
Michael Gross

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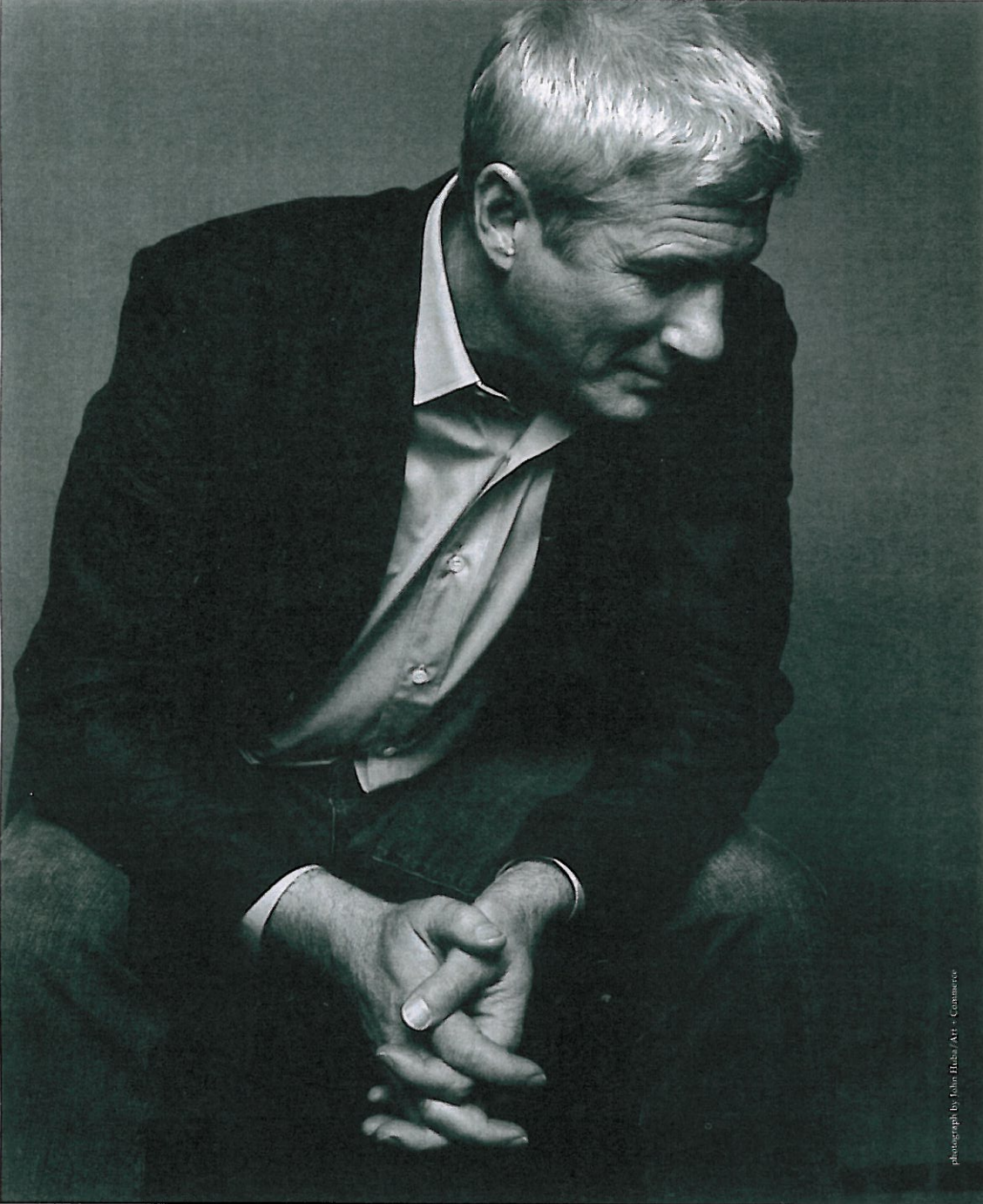
EXCLUSIVE!

An excerpt from **Everyone
Worth Knowing**, the
follow-up to **The Devil
Wears Prada**

PLUS
After Hours with
our Centerfold
Maria Bartiromo

Richard Gere

has us buzzing over his
latest film, **Bee Season**



After tap dancing his way to a Golden Globe win for the film version of *Chicago* and learning to waltz like a pro for *Shall We Dance?*, Richard Gere came face to face with a violin for his latest film, *Bee Season*—and actually encountered one of the few things he couldn't do flawlessly.

Maybe he is just a mere mortal after all.

At 56, Gere—a true Renaissance man who not only acts but also writes songs, plays guitar and piano, and has even published a book of his photography (called *Pilgrim*)—has gotten to a point in his life where he's clearly thriving, professionally and personally. His career has been going steady for 37 years, thanks to swoon-worthy looks that get better with age, paired with his increasing willingness to take risks. He's one of those rare actors who can comfortably negotiate both feel-good romantic comedies and heavier dramatic parts. He's also made a significant mark as a humanitarian, focusing on the AIDS explosion in India and human rights in Tibet. And at home in

Manhattan, Gere relishes being a father to Homer, age four, his son with wife Carey Lowell, and Hannah, Lowell's daughter from a previous marriage.

Gere's latest role, in *Bee Season* (adapted from Myla Goldberg's critically acclaimed novel), examines the dynamics of family and the search for God. It's easy to see why Gere was drawn to the story of Saul, a religious studies professor who becomes increasingly obsessed with his eight-year-old daughter's mystical abilities. An avid Buddhist since his mid 20's (and a student and friend of the Dalai Lama), Gere has been on a spiritual quest of his own. Recently he sat down with *Gotham* to discuss becoming a dad at 52, why he won't quit the screen trade, and what it was like working with Lionel Richie on India's version of *American Idol*.

GOTHAM: You've been acting for 37 years. Do you think you get better with age?

RICHARD GERE: I absolutely think the skills get better, but I don't think the

Gere

AND

Now

With his latest film, *Bee Season*, primed to open, **RICHARD GERE** discusses life in New York, fatherhood, and the many charitable organizations with which he is involved. BY SARA BLISS

essential ability to communicate changes. I think that's some kind of an uncontrolled factor I can't take responsibility for.

G: So, you've been a New Yorker for over 30 years. How did you end up here?

RG: When I was a teenager, I sort of ran away [from Upstate New York] and came to the Village—I can't remember the circumstances now. I didn't even know what it was, but somehow I found myself here. Now I probably live within 10 blocks of the place I originally came to. It just feels right.

G: Is it easy for you to be a celebrity in the city?

RG: For me, yes. I walk around New York and it's not a big deal. I think it's probably the easiest place to do that—no one cares.

G: How has New York changed for you, now that you're a dad?

RG: Schools, and all those clichés. Frankly, I think we'll probably end up outside the city eventually, to give everyone more room to move around. But for now, we're here.

G: You came to fatherhood later in life. Looking back now, was it the right time?

RG: It was absolutely the right time. I pretty much explored the places I wanted to explore. I'm so in love with my kids—desperately so. And I wouldn't give up that for anything.

G: In your new movie, *Bee Season*, what's left unspoken often seems more important than what's said. Is that an acting challenge?

RG: That's when it's fun! If it were just the words, probably anyone could do it, and it wouldn't really matter. Film communication isn't verbal; people write a script and they think it's about the dialogue, but it's not. With film acting, there's this mysterious space where an enormous amount of information is communicated very quickly to an audience just by what's there in the picture. It's rarely in the words.

G: What made you say yes to the role?

RG: I liked the idea of this family: They're smart, they're active, they're curious, they're all looking for God in their own way, but they've all gone in different directions. The central metaphor—that things are broken and have to be fixed—is a very true one for our world, our environment, ourselves.

G: Are there similarities between you and the character?

RG: Well, I understand that, from this guy's point of view, the frustration may be being aware, in an intellectual way, of what the "foundation realities" are, but not having achieved them. And I think I also probably know a lot more than I've actually achieved in terms of spiritual growth.

G: I read that you learned to play violin for the role. What was that experience like?

RG: If this movie is about hubris, that was one demonstration on my part. I thought, *Give me three or four months, I can learn anything, I can tap dance, I can ballroom dance—whatever it is, I can do it. I'm going to actually play my own violin.* And I tried, but it was the most frustrating thing I've ever done in my life. It's impossible! I looked fine doing it, and I could play the tunes, but the tolerance of intonation is so strict, it's maddening.

G: You once thought of pursuing music as a career, and you still write your own songs. Any plans to share them with a broader audience?

RG: You make a movie for three months and it's like, *My God, can't I do something by myself in the woods somewhere?! Why didn't I do music?* So, there's always that aching there. But, by the same token, I'm so happy there are some things in my life that aren't in the marketplace, that no one else has to comment on.

"IT WAS ABSOLUTELY THE RIGHT TIME [TO BECOME A FATHER]. I PRETTY MUCH EXPLORED THE PLACES I WANTED TO EXPLORE. I'M SO IN LOVE WITH MY KIDS—DESPERATELY SO. AND I WOULDN'T GIVE UP THAT FOR ANYTHING."

G: What kinds of projects are you looking for these days?

RG: I don't think what I'm drawn to artistically has changed since I was a kid. I don't want to do stupid things—I want to do things that touch me, where I'm going to grow in the process, and that I can relate to emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically.

G: You've been a Buddhist for more than 30 years. Can you tell us about the Vajrayana Buddhism you now practice?

RG: It's not really appropriate to talk about. It's an esoteric form of Buddhism, extremely complex and, on some levels, dangerous—the same way that, in *Bee Season*, the practice of Abulafia [the study of writings by a famous Kaballah mystic] is potentially dangerous because an enormous amount of energy is released.

G: You've become a very active humanitarian. Would you ever consider leaving acting and pursuing activism full time?

RG: They feed each other. My ability to be effective in that world is in many ways dependent upon my standing as a celebrity. I can get in almost any door once—if I don't do well once I'm in that door, then I don't get invited in again; but it creates access. And it raises money. Clearly, the money I've been able to generate making movies has funded almost everything I do.

G: Your two foundations, Healing the Divide and the Gere Foundation, work on so many issues—cultural preservation in Tibet, human rights, preventing HIV in India. How did you decide what to focus your attention on?

RG: I'm 56 now, and I have a fairly limited number of effective years left to really do something, so a few years ago I looked around and asked myself, *What can I do?* One very powerful area was HIV/AIDS, which I've been working on since the beginning of the epidemic. My longstanding relationship with India made me want to do something very active there—there was nothing really in place, we had to start from scratch. At this point, we've been able to do some miraculous things in terms of media outreach. India is a place that listens to its actors and musicians, and sees them in an almost deified way. When their actors speak to them directly, honestly, sometimes provocatively, they can have an enormous impact. We've put together media groups that have never worked together before. We've embedded HIV messages into soap operas and television shows. We even did some stuff with *Indian Idol* [the Indian version of *American Idol*]. I asked Lionel Richie if he had a song like *We Are the World*, and he did. We changed some lyrics and created a song around HIV and responsibility, and they performed it on the show. It was a radical way to communicate that I think was very powerful. [G]

Bee Season opens on November 11.