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# MEAN

3 COVERS x ∞ IDEAS =  
1 MEAN COLLECTOR'S ISSUE

**EMILE  
HIRSCH**  
VENTURES  
BEYOND *THE WILD*

x  
**EWAN  
MCGREGOR**  
DECONSTRUCTS  
WOODY ALLEN'S  
*DREAM*

x  
**JAVIER  
BARDEM**  
STUNS  
COENS'  
*COUNTRY*

ENTER THE  
**IDEADROME**  
WITH  
PAUL THOMAS  
**ANDERSON**  
FRANCIS FORD  
**COPPOLA**  
TODD  
**HAYNES**  
MARC  
**FORSTER**  
MARJANE  
**SATRAPI**  
BILL  
**HADER**  
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COVER **2** OF 3

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mean magazine VOL. 2 ISSUE 14

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**MARC FORSTER**  
**MARJANE SATRAPI**  
**BILL HADER**  
**JENA MALONE**

The worst thing about some men is that when they are not drunk, they are sober. —William Butler Yeats



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WELL ABOVE



THE **mean**

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR DARKLANDS

The Coen brothers' *No Country For Old Men*—one of several extraordinary films opening this fall, is adapted from a 2005 novel by Cormac McCarthy, but it eerily reflects the mood of the moment. Which is not one of optimism. *No Country* is technically a thriller, but calling it a genre pic is like calling Andy Kaufman eccentric. Yes, there are cops and robbers, a bag of money that goes amiss, and three main protagonists locked in a cat-and-mouse game. But what you'll remember above all is the film's tenor. Its foreboding doom is Biblical in scope and the violence that propels the storytelling is the kind that cannot be rationally accounted for. The sun-scorched desert of western Texas that the Coens survey is not God's country; it's a place where both man and nature are unforgiving, and ruthless to each other.

This season has yielded a bumper crop of great movies, and it's interesting to note their shared sense of unease, across stylistic and narrative divides. If the artist is society's interpreter of maladies and movies are our contemporary myths, the unavoidable conclusion is that we're not exactly thinking happy thoughts right now.

Sean Penn's lovely, amazing *Into the Wild* brings to the screen Christopher McCandless' quest to find himself in the wilderness. All along, we're prompted to wonder, as we follow the protagonist played by Emile Hirsch, whether nature is an inherently benevolent entity and whether abandoning society, with its man-made rules, creeds and structures, is a good thing—or even possible.

From Woody Allen's *Cassandra's Dream*—a Cain-and-Abel parable set in contemporary London—to Paul Thomas Anderson's turn-of-the-20th-century oil men saga *There Will Be Blood*, to Marjane Satrapi's bittersweet ode to her homeland of Iran, *Persepolis*, to Marc Forster's "brotherhood of war" allegory *The Kite Runner*, the tone is dark, probing, self-questioning. Are humans intrinsically good or bad? What is the root of evil and what does it mean to live in the absence of virtue? Can morality truly exist in a time of war? What are the important things that make each of us, us? Is it our devotion to ideas and ideals, to our home and homeland—or simply the sum total of our lives' experiences? Can love transcend space and time? These are just some of the questions raised by the films we're covering in this end-of-the-year issue—our biggest yet. These are stormy times. And yes, like the Bard of New Jersey once said in song, there's darkness on the edge of town. But here's something we can celebrate: the return of the cinema of ideas. The filmmakers' collective impulse to metaphorically mirror the complexity of the world, instead of cranking out mere entertainment, is a precious gift.

"Cinema is really more like poetry than narrative prose, and is most beautiful when it uses metaphor," Francis Ford Coppola says in an exclusive interview featured in these pages. This December also bears the gift of a new film by Coppola, the visionary whose body of work encapsulates the exalted, innovative thrust of '70s American cinema.

One of the particular pleasures of Coppola's latest, *Youth Without Youth*, also afforded by most of the aforementioned new movies, is that the questions they pose and the ideas they contain linger in the viewers' minds long after they've left the theater. Like a good book you are drawn to read again and again, these films bear re-viewing.

As you will undoubtedly note, we elected to feature three exceptional actors on our cover this time around. Emile Hirsch, Javier Bardem and Ewan McGregor each represent three distinct categories of Hollywood leading men, and find themselves at very different stages in their respective careers. The one thing they all have in common is a thirst for adventurous projects—a certain kind of restlessness that sets them apart from their equally successful peers in the field.

Enjoy our collector's issue and remember: The adventure continues.

Sorina Diaconescu  
Editor in Chief

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Curtis Circulation Company, LLC  
(201) 634-7412

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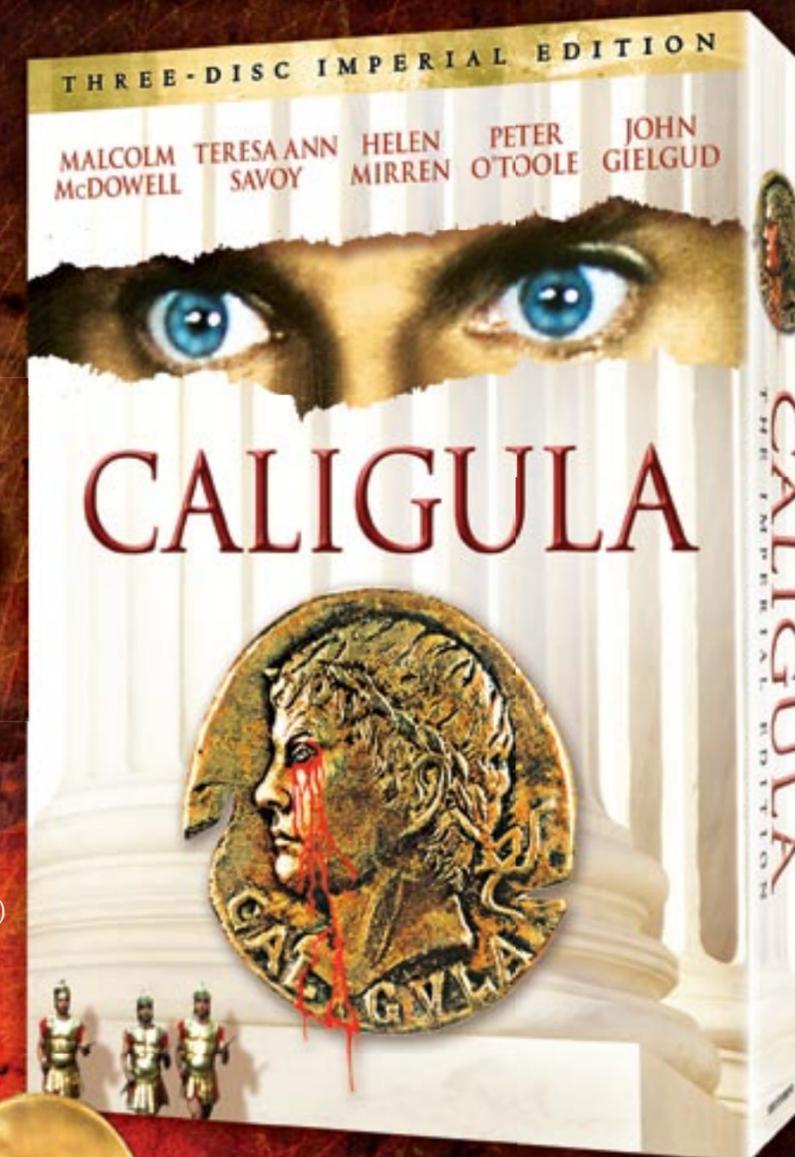
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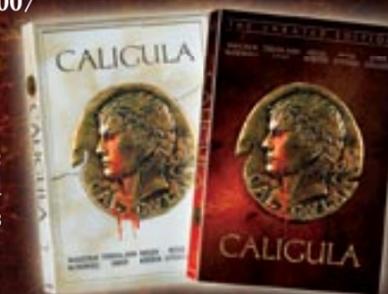
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# ISLAND LIFE

THE EXPLORATIONS OF RACHELL SUMPTER BY VALERIE PALMER

**Artist Rachell Sumpter** likes a good adventure. Living without running water or electricity in a cabin on an island in Puget Sound's San Juan Archipelago, as she currently does, seems to qualify as one. "We actually get our water from a well," she notes matter-of-factly. She also hikes out to a specific spot on her island in order to get a signal on her cell phone or tap into the wireless connection from one of the nearby islands, so if you get an email from her, keep in mind that she might have had to sit on a rock in the rain while pecking at her laptop. "It's sort of like daily entertainment," she says of her attempts to communicate with the outside world.

It wasn't always like this. Sumpter spent most of her 20s in places like the Bay Area, where she grew up, and Los Angeles,

where she studied art. There were some uncertain, wavering years in the interim; years of trial and error. Her initial plan to study neuroscience went awry, and her idea to be a graphic designer lost its luster when she enrolled in art school and found herself surrounded by other arty types for the first time. "I think that was the big thing for me because I didn't know any artists except for my grandma, who gave up making art to be a mother," Sumpter says. "I didn't really know anyone who was making art, so it was kind of hard for me. I didn't want to be Van Gogh, cutting off my ear and going crazy."

Once she realized that desperation and hardship weren't prerequisites for being an artist, Sumpter re-focused her attention on becoming one. After receiving a BFA from

Pasadena's Art Center in 2003, she began showing in Los Angeles galleries and designing book covers to pay the bills. Among her most recent accomplishments: She contributed the cover artwork for Dave Eggers' newest novel, *What Is the What*, and a pictorial of gloomy illustrations, inspired by Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, to the latest issue of *McSweeney's Quarterly*.

Sumpter's current body of work deals exclusively with people living in arctic conditions, whom she defines not as any one particular cultural group, but as an archetype: "People who survive in cold climates or need the cold climates to continue their lifestyle." In Sumpter's fascination with this dying breed there's an implicit awareness that environmental erosion inevitably leads to the demise of peoples and

cultures. "The [need for the] preservation of things—or their lack of being able to preserve things—is intrinsic to my interest in their lifestyle," she says.

After the vernissage of her latest show at Boston's Allston Skirt Gallery in early fall, Sumpter returned back to her little island, where she's now getting ready for winter. Chopping firewood is part of her preparation. "Otherwise, you know, I don't get showers," she says. "Warm showers are really nice and something I don't want to live without."

Clearly, there are some limits to her thirst for adventure. She may paint arctic natives, but she's still a California girl at heart. ■■■

More Rachell Sumpter at [rachellsumpter.com](http://rachellsumpter.com)



# MEANOPTIC BLEK LE RAT & TRAVIS MILLARD ON "WORLD" TOUR

BY JESSICA JARDINE

**These days, urban art** struggles less for display space in tony galleries and respectable museums, but exhibits like the ongoing Scion Installation Art Tour still provide a welcome platform for grassroots artists to showcase their work. On its current, fourth, go-around, the Tour rolls through nine cities, includes a pit stop at Miami's Art Basel art fair this winter, and concludes in Los Angeles next year. Over 150 contemporary artists working in various media (photography, painting, collage) took the show's current theme—"A Beautiful World"—as an inspiration point for their contributions, all of which are to be auctioned off for charity after the tour winds down. We picked two favorite heavy hitters involved in this present round—legendary French painter/stencilist Blek Le Rat and L.A.-based collage/comic-book artist Travis Millard—and blitz-interviewed them.

## BLEK LE RAT

**How did you choose to interpret "A Beautiful World"?**  
"It's a Beautiful World" can be interpreted in two senses: One is that life and nature and people are beautiful. But on the other hand, I wanted to talk, and not in cynical terms, about how sometimes the worst situation in life, for example, in war the death of a little girl can bring a human reaction from a soldier and he cries. In my opinion there is beauty in an image of humanity in the horror of the war.

**You began using stencils as graffiti art in Paris in the early '80s and have gone on to inspire everyone from Shepard Fairey to Banksy.**

You mention Shepard Fairey who, in my humble opinion, is one of the two stencil artists I respect most. Shepard and Banksy both use stencils, but in a very different way, and they have their own eccentricity. Although Banksy's stencils are similar to mine, he has found his proper way to get the message across, while Shepard has generated a very new style aesthetically. His concept of the propaganda of his art is something that I have never seen before, and is a really strong one.

**You've expressed a desire to stencil the Great Wall of China. Has that happened yet?**

Unfortunately, not yet. But I can't wait to make this dream come true. I love to work in places soaked with history, where the stones [retain] the memory of what happened before. For example, last summer I worked in Nevada on the ruins of an ancient silver mine. I pasted three images of a family of pioneers from the 19th century. This kind of work is my favorite action, and as inspiring as the walls of the city.

## TRAVIS MILLARD

**Tell us a bit about your company, Fudge Factory Comics, as well as your new book, *Hey Fudge*.**

Goodness gracious! Well, it's a company alright—let's not mistake that. There's lots of paper-shuffling, staple-clacking, pencil-sharpening, phones doing their thing... a water cooler, many other things. Recently, Narrow Books released *Hey Fudge*, a 240-page book collecting the last few years' worth of my mini-zine comics, photos and drawings.

**There's a lot of talk these days about the vibrant, burgeoning contemporary art scene in Los Angeles, especially in East L.A. and Downtown. As an L.A. artist, what are your thoughts about this?**

My satellite gab scanner has been on the fritz for a few weeks, but the last thing I picked up was something about "the keg running low" and "going out for cheeseburgers." There's been great art coming out of Los Angeles for decades, and it seems like now, more than ever, there are opportunities for artists to get their work on the wall.

**Besides participating in this Scion Installation Art Tour and putting out *Hey Fudge*, what else is on the horizon for you?**

Two hard-boiled eggs. ■■■



# WALTERIA LIVING

HOME SPACE ODDITIES BY VALERIE PALMER

**"It's not like** we're out to change the bottle openers of the world—we're just having fun," Mark Mothersbaugh quips about his latest venture, Walteria Living, a design company run by himself, his wife Anita and designer Kathleen Walsh. The ethos of the line—a blend of humor, high design and kitsch—is evident in curios like Walsh's porcelain Chihuahua nightlight and a series of (otherwise) traditional plates and vases adorned with Mothersbaugh's drawings and manipulated designs. As you'd expect from any project concocted by the Devo frontman, there's a little ironic twist to each piece, a dash of gleeful irreverence—maybe even some mischief.

Mothersbaugh has always had an art habit. "Some people play tennis every day. Some people have a martini every afternoon," he explains. "I draw." So what began as small, postcard-size drawings sent home to friends and family during worldwide Devo tours has been resurrected, postmarks and all, for a "Postcard Diaries" series of designs transferred to plates, vases and even carpets produced under the Walteria Living moniker. "They're called 'postcard diaries' because I used to do them on postcards exclusively," Mothersbaugh says. "I got into it during a time when mail art was a big thing."

Many of his sketches were never intended for public consumption; he simply doodled in response to the world around him. Whether it was the VP of a record company

overfilled with self-importance or some guy raising a fuss in the next aisle on the airplane, Mothersbaugh got it all down on paper. Even now, with two small daughters and a steady stream of film and TV scores to hammer out, he still finds the spare time to scribble something every day.

To the multi-talented artist, creative expression is a given. What renders this project particularly worthwhile, he insists, is the thought of people eating off plates embellished with his diary entries, or the possibility that small children might inadvertently smash the vases he co-designed. "The idea of invading people's homes with your imagery—there's something satisfying about that," Mothersbaugh says. "Everything is art first, function second," his wife Anita chimes in, adding that the images do really drive the product, in keeping with the Walteria Living mantra: "A little bit of art in everything you do."

The kitschy *pièce de résistance* in the current collection is a cuckoo clock, cast in porcelain and adorned with Mothersbaugh's manipulated Black Forest design. He also composed the clock's chime: six seconds of a celeste, pizzicato, cello and electric organ that will remind you every hour on the hour—with a wink and a mischievous grin—that time is indeed passing. ■■■

More cuckoo clocks & other charming curios at [walterialiving.com](http://walterialiving.com)



# MEANCHIC STANDING ON CEREMONY

L.A. ARM OF NYC BOUTIQUE MAKES A SPLASH BY CHLOE POPESCU

OPENING CEREMONY PHOTOGRAPHS BY ISABEL ASHIA-PENZLIEN

**Opening Ceremony** is the kind of store you want to stay a secret forever. But hip Angelenos (the kind who wear Ray-Bans and don't brush their hair) have already ferreted out the tiny gem tucked between a diner and a car wash on L.A.'s La Cienega Boulevard. And by the sight of frantic fashionistas running back and forth collecting plaid shirts and ink-washed skinny jeans, you can tell that stylists have already claimed it as their turf, too.

Housed in a building that used to serve as Charlie Chaplin's dance studio, Opening Ceremony is the West Coast counterpart to the New York boutique Carol Lim and Humberto Leon launched in September 2002. Opened just several months ago, the L.A. space embraces you from the moment you pass through the vintage-looking wood-and-frosted glass door. The space itself feels less like a store and more like a home. Walking through the more than 10 rooms, closets and nooks is akin to strolling through an estate sale where you get to check out both trendy threads and trendy folk. The door knobs and windows in the store

are all original hardware, as are the two huge walk-in safes on the premises.

The front room displays the latest collection of Opening Ceremony's eponymous line, designed in-house. At the back of the boutique one stumbles over a men's area equipped with everything from Cheap Monday and Acne Jeans to tighty-whities hanging on a clothesline. There is also a small book-selling nook, where one can peruse coffee table tomes on Mexican architecture, as well as CDs.

A narrow hallway lined with cases displaying neon-hued vintage sunglasses and antique jewelry leads the visitor to the Brazilian Room—devoted to South American designers—and, farther down, into the Swedish Room. Opening Ceremony also stocks an impressive array of items from Britain's cherished Topshop label: the entire Kate Moss Topshop collection, as well as linen dresses, silk shorts, tote bags, and Celia Birtwell for Topshop lingerie—the latter displayed in a vintage suitcase.

The overall vibe is classic chic/urban urchin—think Anna Karina and Cory Kennedy. Established labels like Peter Jensen, Proenza Schouler and Mayle rub shoulders with upstart hipster faves Alexander Wang, Rodarte and Katy Rodriguez. Further funkying up the scene are legging offerings from Jeremy Scot, and metallic trench coats by L'Wren Scott.

Everything from the music (when this writer visited the store, it was the funky beats of M.I.A.) to the décor feels special and one-of-a-kind. Every year, Opening Ceremony spotlights a different country's underground and high-end designers. In the past, this has meant that Sweden and Japan got their due, but this year, to celebrate the opening of the very first West Coast location, the theme has shifted to highlight an L.A. vs. NYC rivalry. Swing by to see how the Southland-bred lines hold up against (supposedly) more fashion-savvy NYC ones. ■■■

Visit [openingceremony.us](http://openingceremony.us)



## MEANCHIC TO THE MANNERS BORN

ABIGAIL LORICK'S POLITE DEBUT BY ERIN SKRYPEK

**Not just another** model-turned-designer, Abigail Lorick is someone who aims to refine fashion. Sickened by the lack of good manners in today's harried world, Miss Lorick is imposing propriety through her clothes. The looks she proposes might be covered-up and ladylike, but they also fit like a glove, hugging a woman's curves and celebrating the inherent sexiness of her figure. Speaking of gloves, Lorick's making those, too. And while an underlying sense of decorum and well-mannered charm will set any collection of clothes apart these days, what's truly unique about Lorick's eponymous startup label is that it has a starring role in the series *Gossip Girl*—a sort of *Beverly Hills: 90210* for Generation Y debuting on the CW network this fall.

We asked Lorick to give us a behind-the-scenes glimpse at her new venture.

**Describe this new collection of yours.**

It's about a modern-day lady, a Lorick Lady. She has the fabulous jacket, the great scarves and, of course, proper etiquette.

**Spring/Summer 2008 is your debut season, yet Lorick Lady is already pretty famous.**

Well... my clothes are featured in *Gossip Girl*, a new fashion-driven television series that just launched this fall on the CW network. Eric Daman, who also worked on *Sex and the City*, is heading the wardrobe department. There is a character in the show, Eleanor Waldorf, who is a fashion designer and has her line picked up by Henri Bendel. Lorick is the collection behind The Eleanor Waldorf collection—I'm the person who really designs all the clothes. It is pretty exciting that the collection is going to be seen all over the world. They thought it would be funny to put me in the show as Eleanor's assistant. I had fun being on set and playing with the clothes, pretending like I was indeed a fashion assistant. There is one scene where the girls actually steal one of my jackets...

**Where are you from?**

I am originally from Amelia Island, which is the northern part of Florida, just below Georgia. [Over there] we still indulge ourselves with grits, bourbon and hospitality.

**Ah... fabled Southern charm! Where does your knowledge of proper etiquette come from?**  
More from my grandmother than my mother. When I

was younger I found the manners [I had been taught] too constricting, but as I began to travel, I learned that every culture has its own manners and customs, and that this is a beautiful aspect of life. "When a Lorick Lady travels, she knows it is her duty to study local traditions and values; thus she will never make another feel uncomfortable even in foreign lands"—that's one of the written rules of a Lorick Lady.

**What were you doing before you started designing the line?**

I was modeling for many years and then I began designing for a small label known as T.S. Dixin.

**Your future plans for the new line are...?**

I want it to grow and mature from season to season, as our ladies do. I wish for the Lorick collection clothes to become staples in every woman's closet, always accentuating feelings of liveliness by inspiring their owners to dress and feel their best. There are fun pieces that can work for a 20-year-old, as well as more sophisticated pieces that can work for a 32-year-old. We encourage the Lorick Lady to step out of the box and mix and match them. ■■■



## MEANCHIC SEVEN 2.0

AN NYC CONCEPT BOUTIQUE, MOVING FORWARD BY IAN DREW

**As Old Navy** and H&M have increasingly swept aside the Art Nouveau galleries in NYC's SoHo neighborhood, the most recent outpost of the Seven New York boutique nestled itself quietly on Mercer Street in a bid to promote an aesthetic, forward-focused vibe in the area. With the change of locale, the concept store that over the past seven years has been generating its own Factory-esque scene for the island's truest fashionistas, has entered a new growth phase.

"We're a gallery-like machine of fashion, designed to not only sell clothes, but inform the clientele about the most inventive collections," Seven NYC founder and buyer Joseph Quartana says proudly. "Many of our clients spend two hours looking at each piece in the store before trying something on!"

Quartana originally opened shop with college comrades Steve Sang and John Demas in 2000, in the then-emerging Lower East Side. In December of last year, he shifted ground to SoHo and introduced the "hood to the brood of progressive designers Seven routinely stocks, which include Bernard Wilhelm, Raf Simons, Jeremy Scott, Preen and ThreeAsFour.

"We're a home for edgy designers who create new worlds with their collections," Quartana notes. "Of course, there are certain commercial restrictions, but, more importantly, [every line we carry] has to be visionary, consistently strong for at least two or three seasons." Quartana (who carries an economics degree from Rutgers and is unafraid to admit that his passion for pushing the fashion button was triggered by early, life-changing experiences with psychedelic drugs) quickly established Seven as an arbiter of style through a strict selection process.

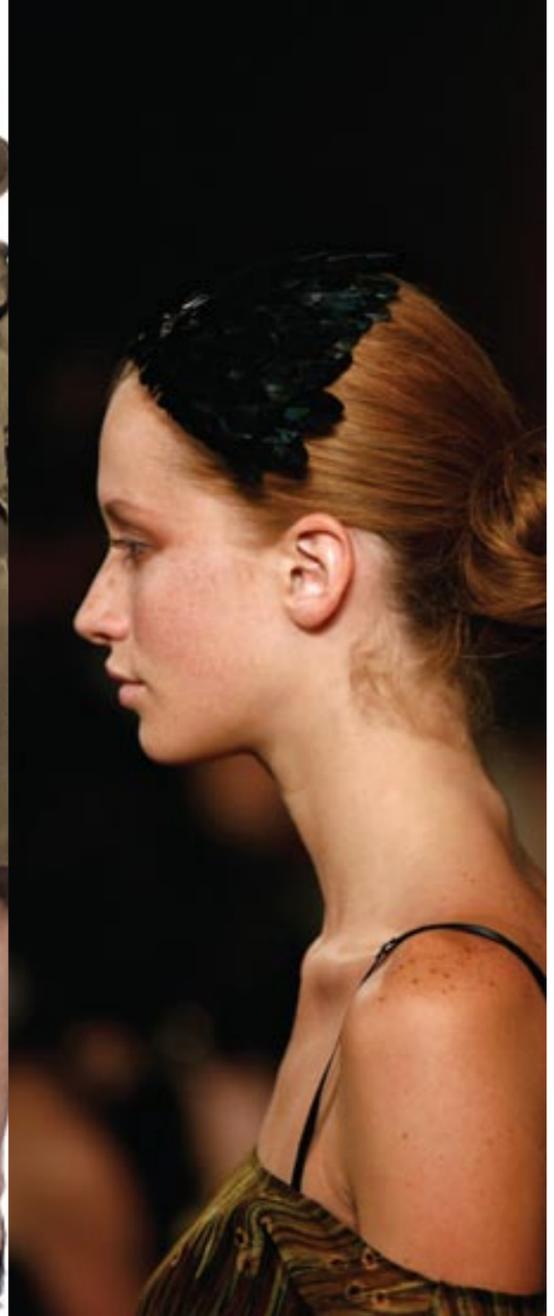
He routinely monitors 20 to 25 designers at a time—fresh new talents whose names are first whispered in his ear by respected editors and other tastemakers in his inner circle. His insistence on spotlighting the crème of avant-garde designer talent has inevitably brought on charges that Seven retails laughably unwearable clothes. Quartana defends his curatorial approach: "A lot of our designers just aren't for everyone. Pieces are misunderstood. But I have to create a story with each designer's world, and it has to extend across each of my designers in the shop, as well. What we have is the best of what's out there and every piece is essential to the whole picture."

Equally essential to the trademark Seven experience is the way the retail space itself is organized—like a mini-museum in which every piece is carefully displayed for maximum effect. The Mercer Street store design is based on a circular, clockwise pattern, in which the clothing is allowed to breathe. Faceless mannequins sport signature looks favored by Seven's elite clientele, which range from West Village pier queens to celebrity trendsetters like Chloë Sevigny, the Olsen twins and Björk. "We wanted to [deliver] a pure experience and eliminate any distraction. The store is an homage to our creative policy," Quartana says.

While it seems natural that a trend architect like he would have a five-year plan firmly locked in place, Quartana insists that he hasn't mapped out any further expansion for his concept boutique. "The way we've grown over the last five years has been organic, so I have no idea what's next. Except that I will continue to make Seven the most interesting fashion retailer on the planet." ■■■

Visit the SoHo outpost of Seven New York at 110 Mercer Street, or check it out online at sevennewyork.com.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE SANG



## MEANCHIC RAD HATTER

MEET MILLINER EXTRAORDINAIRE ALBERTUS SWANEPOEL BY ERIN SKRYPEK

**We live in** a time when, for the most part, only British royalty, quirky movie stars, Japanese women terrified of the sun and any wise person who rides a ski lift dare don a proper hat. Gone are the days of men who never went farther than the front door without flipping on a felt fedora; the quaint age of ladies who wouldn't dream of departing for daily errands without a pillbox hat pinned precisely to their heads. But hats are beginning to make a comeback, especially on the runways, and the man leading the charge is Albertus Swanepoel.

Recently singled out by Style.com as "fashion's new favorite milliner" for his work at the Proenza Schouler Spring/Summer 2008 show, Mr. Swanepoel is swiftly morphing into the American counterpart to famed British milliner Philip Treacy—no small feat, seeing as the United States is a far less hat-centric society than the United Kingdom.

The 48-year-old hatter—a Dutch Afrikaner who moved to Manhattan two decades ago—properly graduated to the world of American couture (if there truly is such a thing) a few years back, crafting head gear for Marc Jacobs, Proenza Schouler, Paul Smith and Tuleh. He recently added Erin Fetherston, Rodarte, Thakoon and Zac Posen to his repertoire; not to mention an exclusive collection of hats under his own name, for Barneys New York.

"He's a hat genius," piped Erin Fetherston after her Spring/Summer 2008 show in September, where Swanepoel created a whimsical array of headpieces that mirrored chunks of snow-white coral or dove wings, and white satin turbans with a little bird peeking out of a rosette of folds in the front. "He made all my millinery dreams come true!"

We asked Swanepoel about his choice of métier,

whom he'd like to hat and what it's like to sit atop the fashion pile.

**How did you become a milliner?**

By chance. I always liked accessories, so when clothing design did not happen for me here in New York, my then-wife and I started a glove company that developed into a hat-making venture during the summer season, when gloves weren't in demand.

**You strike me as an old-school gentleman: well-mannered and soft-spoken. Have the mores and chivalry of past hat-wearing eras infiltrated your life because of what you do?**

I had a very strict upbringing; good manners were of utmost importance. I think wearing a hat is a ladylike, or

ALBERTUS SWANEPOEL PORTRAIT BY SEAN DONNOLA

gentlemanly, thing to do. My father used to wear a hat almost daily and my mom wore one to church on Sundays.

**You collaborate with so many designers: How does that work?**

It works in various ways. Some designers give me a sketch to interpret or realize. Sometimes I have to copy something exactly from a vintage hat or photo. I sort of make it real for them; I give it a form. I have some say in proportion and color, or I make suggestions for materials and [advise them on] technical matters. Some hats are very challenging technically. I hope to reach the stage where I can actually design for a label like Stephen Jones does for Dior.

**If you could collaborate with any designer—alive or not—who would it be?**

Christian Lacroix Couture would top my list. I'm a huge

admirer! Also, Hussein Chalayan and Alexander McQueen. As for the designers who joined the choir invisible: Adrian, Elsa Schiaparelli, Cristobal Balenciaga and Monsieur Dior.

**And if you could collaborate with any artist, who would it be?**

Cecil Beaton, Oliver Messel, Marcel Vertes, Christian Berard, Jean Cocteau... I guess I should have lived in the '30s!

**What is the most fashionable style of hat to wear right now?**

The fedora is the new shape, I think. I'm already seeing a lot of cool girls on the street wearing one.

**Whose head would you most like to see one of your hats on?**

Queen Elizabeth. Also, José Cura—the opera singer; Jose

Manuel Carreño—the ballet dancer; Inès de la Fressange and Charlotte Gainsbourg.

**What's your favorite fabric to work with?**

Duchess satin. I love the richness and structure of the material. I also love straw cloth, which is difficult to find, and silk organza.

**If you weren't making hats, what would you be doing?**

I think I'd be a game ranger in the Serengeti, wearing khaki Prada and driving a vintage Rolls! Or maybe a fashion illustrator. Or an opera singer.

**Have you gone mad yet?**

Mmmm, I don't think so! I have my quirks. I love what I do but my passion sometimes comes in the way of things.



## MEANCHICHELLO, GOOD BUY

ABAETÉ'S LOW-COST HIGH STYLE BY ERIN SKRYPEK

It's a rare occurrence these days when a woman can actually go out and buy a dress she sees highlighted in a fashion mag. The prices of designer duds are sky-high. We can blame inflation, the power of the euro (or the weakness of the dollar, depending on how you look at it) or the designers themselves for supposedly using the most luxurious materials French and Italian mills have to offer. Yet somehow, we remain convinced that swell-looking, well-made clothes that don't skimp on quality or break the bank are not a pipe dream.

That's exactly why we love Laura Poretzky and her line, Abaeté. Poretzky's is truly a designer collection—it even goes down the runway at Bryant Park each season—but owning one of her simple, modern, feminine dresses will only knock you back \$400 at most. And that's a bargain, considering how much style Miss Poretzky—soon to be

Mrs., by the way—pours into each piece she designs.

The attractive, strawberry-blond designer was born in France to a Russian father and a very chic Brazilian mother, who has inspired many an Abaeté look; actually, "Abaeté" is her mother's family name. After graduating from Rhode Island School of Design, Poretzky began her career designing swimwear in 2003. Her bathing suits weren't the typically teeny bikinis you see on the beaches of Rio, though she had become well acquainted with "barely there" swimwear while spending time in her mother's native land. Rather, they were elaborate, Old Hollywood-style bathing garments, the kind you'd imagine Grace Kelly slipping into. The kind you could add a few inches to the bottom of and end up with an Alaïa-like mini-dress.

But when Poretzky transitioned from swimwear to an entire range of ready-to-wear, she did not end up sending

down the runway stretchy, Hervé Léger/Alaïa/Christopher Kane-style looks. While she continues to show her bathing costumes on the runway, the rest of her current collection is entirely Lycra-free. Like the designer herself, the clothes are elegant, but understatedly sexy. Poretzky always seems to be aware of female curves, but never puts them on blatant display. Even her bathing suits are more covered up than you'd expect. And her dresses are prim enough for the office, but whimsical and elegant enough to wear out to dinner, with a quick change of shoes.

Speaking of shoes—Poretzky also designs a shoe and handbag collection for Payless, so you can basically get a pair of Abaeté shoes for about \$20. And who needs to drop \$900 on a pair of Italian stilettos when you can get an equally well-designed version for less than you'd pay for a decent lipstick? ■■■

## MEANBEAT



I CAN'T REMEMBER WHAT THE TUNE WAS, BUT I OBVIOUSLY LIKED IT A LOT



I CAME, I SAW, I WAS HORRIFIED



ABOUT AS USEFUL AS AN ASHTRAY ON A MOTORCYCLE



THIS WAS THE SET LIST FOR THE NIGHT



HE WAS BALD, I WAS PLAYING, SHE HAD A CAMERA...



THEY PUT US UP IN LOVELY ACCOMMODATIONS—VERY "OPEN PLAN"



GOD BLESS ALBUMS RECORDED IN MONO!

## JAMIE T THE VISUAL BROOKLYN DIARIES PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL G. MAZIAR

Jamie T's had a big year. The 21-year-old Wimbledon native saw his debut record, *Panic Prevention*, recognized with a Mercury Prize nomination for the Album of the Year. His incantatory, poetic rhymes set to acoustic guitar hooks and reggae beats place him in an exciting continuum of British singer-storytellers who have been able to fold hip-hop conventions into their own, original brand of songwriting. Think The Streets aka Mike Skinner. Think Plan B. In fact, don't think at all and let Mr. T (né James Treays) do the thinking for you. Revel instead, like we are, in the broken charm of his observant ditties like "Sheila" ("Her lingo went from the cockney to the gringo/Any time she sing a song")—a hit last year in Britain—and his mouthy couplets about the plight of working-class stiffs, drunks and bored young men with no real prospects or direction in life and only the next pub brawl to look forward to. (For the latter, he has one bit of cheeky advice: "Take your problems to United Nations/Tell old Kofi about the situation.")

This fall, the U.S. release of *Panic*, coupled with vigorous stateside touring, is bound to bring yet more recognition for this apple-cheeked bard of the streets. Visiting Brooklyn over the summer, Jamie checked out the hallowed turf of his heroes, the Beastie Boys, giggled about and recorded some impressions exclusively for *Mean* in a mini visual diary. ■■■



## ROBERT WYATT

A MASTER SOUNDSMITH ON THE DIVINE COMEDY OF IMPONDERABLE THINGS  
BY JOHN PAYNE + PHOTOGRAPH BY ALFREDA BENGE

"I have my loyalties, you know. I believe in Charles Mingus. I don't apologize to him or thank him or pray to him for rain. I'm glad he's here, that's all."

Thus spake Robert Wyatt, one of the great creaky rock/jazz/pop/avant whatsits of the English music scene who, like Mingus, is a famously non-genre-bound composer/multi-instrumentalist who smears the tedious old lines between "serious" music and pop effluvia. Wyatt's sweetly crooned and decidedly English voice ('e drops 'is aitches) comes in service of idiosyncratically drawn musical shapes, which can be arcane free-jazz- or bop-splashed or kinda '60s psychedelic or straight-ahead pop or *Nueva Canción*-inspired, though often as not, it's all and none of the above and far the better off for it.

'Tis no small wonder, then, that the speckled likes of Joanna Newsom, Elvis Costello and Alexis Taylor of Hot Chip have all chorused loudly at one time or another in praise of Wyatt's uniquely shaped soundscapes disguised as pop music. They might know of him from his drumming/singing in the late-'60s early-'70s avant-jazz-rock band Soft Machine, or his whimsically modernist jazzy-pop combo Matching Mole (from the French *machine molle*, or "soft machine"), or perhaps recall his numerous plaintive-choirboy appearances on recordings by the cream of the '70s English art-rock crowd such as Henry Cow and Hatfield and the North; most assuredly they'll know Wyatt's wrenchingly beautiful 1974 solo album *Rock Bottom*, written shortly following his spine-shattering fall from a second-story window; although it could be that their lives were changed by Wyatt's subsequent English chart-topper of the '70s—the definitive cover of Neil Diamond's "I'm a Believer."

While the above "career trajectory" of such an artist doesn't make a lot of typical showbiz sense, there's no

doubt that it's uncommonly inspiring, as is just one listen to Wyatt's new *Comicopera* (Domino), whose appeal involves the very ambition of its undertaking in the ADS Year of Our Lord 2007.

Well... an opera? Hold up: Wyatt is anything but grandiose; in fact, he's the very definition of the wrongly self-effacing artist. His "opera," he says, is merely a way of telling stories of everyday life, and about the people he meets. The ancient Athenians had it right, he thinks.

"Greek theater was divided into comic and tragic," he points out, "and comic didn't necessarily mean funny; comedy is much more about human foibles and failures and mischief and madness."

Mischief, slight madness and a touch of melancholy are the key tones of *Comicopera*, in which Wyatt employs several different characters (mostly sung by himself) to tell the story, and ultimately foregoes his native tongue entirely to sing in Spanish and Italian. "Sometimes," he says, "you listen to a singer-songwriter and you think, 'This is just one person crying aloud against the wilderness' or whatever. But some of the people on *Comicopera* are people telling me off; another part is somebody saying how wonderful it is dropping bombs on a sunny day."

Accompanied by a fortuitously assembled group of players and singers such as ex-Roxy Music members Brian Eno and Phil Manzanera, and the wonderfully straight-toned Brazilian chanteuse Monica Vasconcelos, Wyatt's drama set to music is an openly drawn frame that accommodates touching tales of love gone stale (and how to push the reset button), misplaced faith, the uses of nostalgia, white lies, and the dark truth about war's often hazy moral lessons—plus some choice bits about his hunger for a culture other than his own moribund English one.

Unlike the Greeks, Wyatt does not concern himself directly with tragedy as such, or religion and destiny and the big sort of imponderable eternal things. What he does address is "various sorts of strategies that humans employ when life itself needs some kind of dealing with in the head. I have no knowledge of anybody who's got a general answer, but I do know of people who had interesting and rewarding lives exploring different ways of having a mental life co-existent with their daily life."

Wyatt's own scheme is to draw on things and people that have inspired him in the past, such as surrealism, avant-garde jazz, mysticism and revolution. Both the distinctively different symmetry and dryly humored gravitas of Wyatt's new music was inspired in various measure by the assorted likes of Duke Ellington, Ornette Coleman, Federico García Lorca and Che Guevara, all of whom, like Wyatt, felt powerful incentive for change.

"These are all people who were totally exasperated with the trajectory of history," he says. "And they thought, well, one thing we'll do is just completely change art, break the rules, get back to the subconscious; just start again, help the workers—never mind shaving. It's [a view] I've always empathized with. I haven't really seen much of it that gets you out of the morass, but somebody lives in hope."

The humble Wyatt doesn't seem to realize how, for some of us, hearing such specially sculpted music does in fact lift the listener way, way out and above the mire.

"In the end," he says, "I'm not a politician or philosopher; I'm simply a person who makes records. I try and use all the skill I've acquired to make some kind of listenable series of things happen to the ears. For now, that's the challenge, and even if nobody understands a word." ■■■



A small tweak makes  
a big difference.



**The tC has been tweaked for 2008.**

- \_ A redesigned front-end grille
- \_ Projector headlamps and new taillights
- \_ New exterior colors and updated interior fabric
- \_ Standard seat-mounted side airbags and side curtain airbags\*
- \_ Under-cargo subwoofer
- \_ iPod connectivity

\*The tC comes equipped with driver's side front airbag, passenger's side front airbag, seat-mounted side airbags, side curtain airbags, and driver's side knee airbag. iPod® is a registered trademark of Apple Computers, Inc.



2008 SCION tC

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what moves you



### THE MISSHAPES DEDICATED FOLLOWERS OF FASHION BY ADAM SHERRETT

"I totally forgot about this interview," says the soft voice on the phone. "I hope you don't mind that I'm in my pajamas."

Under normal circumstances, such a comment would mean little to an interviewer. However, when it leaks from the lips of one of the three asymmetrically coiffed Misshapes at 6 p.m. on a Saturday, it seems to carry a bit more weight: I suddenly feel overdressed in jeans and a T-shirt.

I sit down with the nonchalantly disheveled Gordon Nicol in his Manhattan apartment's pseudo-courtyard to talk about his DJ trio's fame and their new collection of fashion portraits, *Misshapes* (powerHouse/MTV Press). His getup—all-black combo gym shorts and tank top and bed-head perfect hair—begs for questioning, and I, like a true inquisitor, demand that he define his own sense of style. "I really don't know how anyone can define a style," he retorts. "I mean, I'm wearing gym shorts, a wife-beater, and slip-on Vans that my friends drew on! When I go out, I'm not consciously thinking about what I'm gonna wear; it's a natural thing."

After all, personal style and a Warholian grasp of the Zeitgeist—more so than beat-matching and scratching skills—have powered the meteoric rise of Nicol and his two Misshapes cohorts, Leigh Lezark and Greg Krelenstein. Over the course of only a few years, the twentysomething

threesome have become New York nightlife ringleaders, evolving from underage partiers to underage party hosts to in-demand DJs/fashion icons. Nicol surveys their accomplishments with a sense of fatalism: "We've been really lucky. We've had a lot of opportunities presented to us—putting together a book, soundtrack-ing fashion shows, traveling all over the world. In that sense, our lives have changed a lot." What about the street recognition factor? "I guess there's more of that too. What's funny is when the middle-age *Vogue* readers who have *nothing* to do with the party recognize your face," he adds. "It's not bad—just kind of funny." All the same, *Vogue* editor Sally Singer contributed a foreword to the *Misshapes* book, a gesture sure to further enhance the trio's reputation as style catalysts.

Anyone in the know is by now familiar not just with the *Misshapes*' parties and the hosts' faces, but also with the signature "wall photos" at their weekly events, which have now been collected into a photo album. Like a typical party, the book's stark cover reveals nothing. Oh, and don't even bother looking for a glossary. "It's kind of like a *Where's Waldo*," Nicol says. "A glossary would be almost impossible—and tacky." However, he reassures, "The notables are in here, but you have to go through the book to find them." Inside the tome, images of celebrated hipster icons

(Madonna, Bloc Party, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Chloë Sevigny, etc.) are methodically blended with photographs of party regulars like Sophia Lamar and Jackson Pollis, who've been *Misshapes* devotees since the beginning. Former Dior Homme designer Hedi Slimane, *Visionaire* magazine co-founder Cecilia Dean and photographer Nan Goldin also figure in the lineup. "I started with close to 300,000 photos and got it down to just under 3,000 for the book," Nicol says. "If this book does well, I'm sure there'll be a second."

All sequels aside, lack of confidence has never been an issue with these three trendsetters. And the attendees to their Saturday night extravaganzas at East Village club Don Hill's don't seem too timid either. Like it or not, they're unafraid and completely indifferent to the opinions of the uninitiated. "I think that people on the outside look in and say, 'Look at these assholes trying so hard,'" Nicol says. "But in reality, the people that come to the party are just coming to have fun. What matters most, he adds, is the all-inclusive acceptance of individuals from a myriad backgrounds, looking to have fun in their own way. "I think the word 'Misshapes' means something eclectic," Nicol concludes. "It's all these individual styles coming together [in one place]. That doesn't necessarily mean the *Misshapes* party or New York City—it could be anywhere." ■■■

MEANBEAT



## FIERY FURNACES

SIBLING SECRETS

BY CHARLENE ROGULEWSKI + PORTRAIT BY AMY GIUNTA

There are some things Eleanor and Matt Friedberger, the sister-brother duo Fiery Furnaces, agree on: Bob Dylan. *The Sopranos*. And who played Ouija board with Grandma. But then there are some things they don't exactly see eye to eye on—like whether Eleanor had any game time with Gramps on the old backgammon board, or where the concept of “Restorative Beer,” a track from their new album *Widow City*, came from.

The two talk at the same time and answer questions in one breath. They seem like close, old friends but display typical brother/sister animosity where needed. “We got closer when I started playing music,” Eleanor admits. “I’m sure even during the biggest fight we ever had,” the elder Matt explains, “no one said, ‘I’m sorry.’ That’s a privilege of fighting with a sibling: You don’t really have to make up.”

The one thing they seem to agree on most during our interview is poking fun at my poignant Chicagaaaago accent. The Friedbergers themselves are Chicago natives. And although Matt has shed his long “A” Chicago pronunciations since his move to New York, Eleanor slips from time to time, and blurts forth words like *Indiaaana*. The transplants don’t miss their home. “We go there so much,” Matt acknowledges. “You should always leave,” he advises. “If you don’t leave

where you are from, then you don’t get to go home.”

The siblings recorded most of their latest record, *Widow City*, in and around the Chicagoland area. Their studio sessions were done across Lake Michigan in Benton Harbor, Michigan, and the mixing was accomplished at Chicago’s Soma Studios.

It’s not exactly simple following the elder Friedberger’s thought processes, although Matt begs to differ, and points out it’s a simple task. “I had some fake method involving imaginary Ouijas for myself,” he says of the lyrical inspirations for *Widow City*. In his “imaginary Ouija board” sessions, he would ask the game board what lyrics his sister might want to sing and wait for the board to answer. Imaginary Ouija sessions weren’t the only convoluted methods the duo used. Knick-knacks and mouse-masticated magazines also heavily influenced *Widow City*’s lyrics.

For the most part, the Fiery Furnaces’ music comes from a made-up world. “We just think of it as the real world,” Matt explains. “But we just make up stories about it.”

“I was planning my dream house,” Eleanor tries to explain before Matt chimes in and pokes fun: “Eleanor was *plaaaning her dreaaam house with aaads aaaand pictures from maagazines...*” Yes, she’d cut ideas for her dream

house out of vintage magazines in their beloved Grandma Olga Sarantos’ basement in Forest Park, Illinois, just west of the Chicago skyline. This is the same grandmother who appeared on their 2005 album *Rehearsing My Choir*, and narrated stories about her life over the Friedbergers’ punchy and charmingly manic music. These magazines and sundry other curios contributed to the sibs’ *Widow City*.

*Widow City* is the duo’s first for Chicago label Thrill Jockey. In 2002, the Friedbergers got their break when Rough Trade signed them on for their debut, *Gallowsbird’s Bark*.

“I had moved to New York and I was trying to play music,” Eleanor remembers. “And then Matt moved shortly after, so it just made sense for him to help me.”

The band released two more albums, *Blueberry Boat* and *Rehearsing My Choir* on Rough Trade. In 2006 they put out *Rehearsing My Choir*’s companion album, *Bitter Tea*, on Fat Possum Records before signing on with Thrill Jockey for *Widow City*.

The record takes its name from the “city of disappointed dreams that we all live in,” Matt says.

Not necessarily true for the duo. They have grown from being a small stage act at Brooklyn’s now defunct NorthSix venue to having their name up on the marquee at Radio



## A WINDOW INTO THEIR WIDOW CITY

FIERY FURNACES DOCUMENT THEIR HABITUAL HAUNTS & FAVORITE POINTS OF INSPIRATION IN NEW YORK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELEANOR & MATT FRIEDBERGER

(1ST COLUMN, TOP TO BOTTOM)  
Eleanor: 91-31 Queens Blvd. in Elmhurst, Queens—where I worked in an insurance claims office for 2 years; Eleanor: My favorite park—Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City; Eleanor: Five cop cars in Long Island City; Matt: Stables in Howard Beach

(2ND COLUMN, TOP TO BOTTOM)  
Eleanor: View from my bedroom window; Eleanor: Dancing at Stuyvesant Cove on a Sunday afternoon; Eleanor: Giglio Feast at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Williamsburg, Brooklyn; Matt: P.S. 213 Mini School, Brooklyn

(3RD COLUMN, TOP TO BOTTOM)  
Eleanor: The Greenpoint waterfront (my neighborhood for the past 7 1/2 years), as seen from Stuyvesant Cove; Eleanor: Queens Blvd., Queens; Matt: Stables in Howard Beach; Matt: “The spirit of learning” on Linden Blvd., Brooklyn

(4TH COLUMN, TOP TO BOTTOM)  
Eleanor: More feasting at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Williamsburg; Matt: Kings Co. Hospital, Brooklyn

City Music Hall. But it’s their playful take on their dismal surroundings that has inspired them throughout their humble beginnings.

“There’s this mini school, where I used to live, out by Kennedy Airport,” Matt says. “It’s the most depressing thing you can imagine. I use to work in schools when I was young. I was an aide.”

“I used to work in Elmhurst, Queens at an insurance company. It was not fun,” Eleanor says.

These days, the younger Friedberger spends most of her days walking through Socrates Sculpture Park in Greenpoint. “The Greenpoint skyline is going to look so different 10 years from now,” she imagines.

“In 15 years we’re not going to even believe that it looked the way it does now,” Matt chimes in.

“My neighborhood has already changed a lot,” Eleanor says with a sigh.

“...But that’s nothing like what it’s going to be in 15 years,” Matt proposes.

*Widow City* is cohesive and sometimes chugs along powered by a Tropicalia rhythm. “It was mostly drums and early ‘70s keyboards,” Matt explains. While *Widow*

*City* is more accessible than their previous albums, it still evidences the duo’s trademark dissonance and unfocused methods—Eleanor singing over a different melody than what her brother punches out. “We were going to have the album be this narrative... that we decided not to do,” Eleanor divulges. “It told a story from beginning to end. So we only kept a couple of the songs.”

“Matt’s the music man,” she says. While he contributes most of the instrumentation for their albums, Eleanor is in charge of all singing duties, although she’ll step up to write a two-chord song here and there. “Eleanor wrote ‘Tropical Ice-Land,’” Matt admits, “and that’s our most famous song.” Their back-and-forth is almost as static and quick as their music’s focus. Take “Ex-Guru,” the band’s catchiest tune off the new album. “That song’s based on two people,” Matt explains, “but we can’t say who they are.”

“They’re both top secret,” Eleanor interrupts.

“...And both are very real,” Matt adds.

“We know someone who has a guru,” Eleanor continues. “They go to conventions where the guru is...”

“...It will often be a Doubletree Hotel by an airport,” Matt says, but the actual specifics are a secret that remains between the Friedbergers.





## MATHIEU SCHREYER

L.A. SOUL MAN

BY JENIFER ROSERO + PHOTOGRAPH BY BRENT BOLTHOUSE

**Meeting DJ Mathieu** Schreyer, aka Mr. French—a man who still spins vinyl and carts his own 45s to his weekly DJ residencies at L.A. *boîte* Hyde—is refreshing. Just like Coca-Cola tastes better out of a bottle, listening to him spin tracks from his massive collection of reggae, dub, salsa, samba, Afro-beat, soul, funk and broken beat records, complete with the sound of scratches and little imperfections, feels more wholesome and pleasurable than grooving to a laptop-engineered set.

The French-born Schreyer, who settled in the U.S. in 1995, got his own show on influential Los Angeles radio station KCRW last winter. He's now able to reach more ears and share his gospel—a passion for old-school turntablism and what he calls "soul music from all over the world."

### What led you to the music?

I had been into music from an early age. The first thing I ever bought myself was a tape, when I was 5 or 6. Having lots of siblings, I used to take their records and play them all the time for my friends at after-school parties. When I was a teenager, my sister used to go out with this guy who had a huge record collection, and he turned me on to jazz, soul—the kind of stuff I'm spinning now. It kind of opened my eyes and educated me about all sorts of different music. Then I started buying records, and the next thing you know, a restaurant [in my neighborhood] asked me to DJ, so it kind of all came naturally.

### How did you get your own show on KCRW?

I befriended [KCRW's] DJ Garth Trinidad. We started hanging out and DJing together at Zanzibar in 2002. Last Christmas he came to me and was like, "There may be an opening at the station. Would you like to do a show?" and

I was like, "Fuck yeah!" So he took me there, and I hooked up with Anne Litt, who is also a DJ at the station, and I did one demo. The music was fine and they liked my programming, but I was a bit shy—and that was a problem. So I recorded the demo a second time, and three weeks after that, they [asked me], "Can you start next Friday?" It all happened really fast.

### Your show happens on Friday nights, between midnight and 3 a.m., and it's called *On the Corner*. Why did you pick this moniker?

I really wanted something that was reminiscent of the streets, because all the music I play is so street-oriented—the music of people in the streets just having a good time, whether it's in Cuba, Senegal or Japan. And I was playing this *On the Corner* record that Miles Davis did in 1972. I went to [KCRW general manager Ruth Seymour] with the name and Ruth, who's from New York, said, "On the Corner is very New York. I love it."

### If you had to categorize the kind of music you play, what would you call it?

Soul music, but not as in only Marvin Gaye-type soul music. Soul music from all over the world. When I play Latin music, it's their rendition of soul music. When I play Serge Gainsbourg—that's our soul music from France. If I play A Tribe Called Quest, that's some soulful hip-hop. What I'm looking for in music is a feel. And that feel comes from an artist who is expressing themselves from a purely non-business standpoint. Put it this way: The music I like is not made to be sold. It's people's expression recorded on tape, and eventually someone likes it and they try to sell it. But the way it was made was completely from the soul. Whether

it's soulful electronica, or soulful hip-hop—it's music that touches you. You listen to this music, man, and you don't need to go to church!

### Many DJs use vinyl emulation software, and a Serato setup is *de rigueur* these days, it seems. You're still going at it old-school—you use only vinyl. Why?

I've been buying records for the past 17 years. I want to use them. I don't want my records to sit on a shelf, nor do I want to sell them. It's my passion. I lived for that all my life, and I don't want to let go of it. Serato makes much more sense technologically; it's more practical and all. But I'm taking my time to get into that. I'll get an iPhone before I get a Serato. That way I feel more like an artist as opposed to a robot or another DJ with a laptop.

### What other kinds of things do you do, and what do you ultimately want to do?

I definitely want to help expose more of the music I like to a wider crowd; movies would be a great medium [to accomplish that]. So I want to get into music supervision and soundtracks. I have a couple projects coming up with Michel Gondry, who is a friend of mine. I've been doing production since '99—I just make beats and work with different artists. I've worked with Tricky, N'Dea Davenport of the Brand New Heavies; old-school Motown artists like Syreeta—Stevie Wonder's wife. I worked with Leon Ware, and a bunch of hip-hop artists like Chali 2na from Jurassic 5 and Tre Hardson of the Pharcyde. Who knows, maybe I'll get the opportunity to start a label and get some of these great artists better exposure. I'll just keep going and try to touch as many people as possible. ■■■



## ANDREW BIRD

SOLIDARITY TROUBADOUR

BY A.D. AMOROSI + PHOTOGRAPH BY CAMERON WITTIG

**No one wants** to be alone—it's doubtful that even Greta Garbo truly did. But if you're going to do it, do it with the panache that Andrew Bird sings of in "Imitosis," one of the debonair tracks from his recent record *Armchair Apocrypha*.

At 34, Bird—an instrumentalist known for his splendid prowess on violin and *glockenspiel*—has penned one of the most eloquent songs about the joys of loneliness. "The song was based on a revelation I had when I was 19," Bird reveals. "I understood that no matter how much we surround ourselves with other people, we're still trapped in our own bodies."

Bird's work is sprinkled with eye-openers about wars, animal innards and blissful paranoia, in addition to witty discourses on his distrust of the psychological elite, educational pathways and pop science. He has been recording with the likes of Squirrel Nut Zippers and his own brittle Bowl of Fire since 1996, though he only relatively recently began recording on his own, issuing *Weather Systems* (2003) and *The Mysterious Production of Eggs* (2005). Yet it is only his third effort, *Armchair Apocrypha*, that finally has the heart and the aggressive heft of a record worthy of his name below the title. To say nothing of some damnably grouchy guitars.

"A band is just symbolic really," Bird says. "Even though I held onto the name Bowl of Fire longer than I wanted, I managed to tour all around solo for the longest time." It was just him, his fiddles, his guitars and various looping pedals. "There's something serene about it," he adds. These days, when he collaborates with other musicians, he chooses them based not only on what they can do for him, but also on what he can do with, and for, them. They have his back; he has theirs. "At the end of the night, these are the guys you're leaving with," Bird comments about the symbiotic band-bud connections that fuel his work. Take Martin Dosh—an equally solitary producer, sequencer and lo-fi electronic music-maker. Bird collaborated with Dosh on some of *Armchair Apocrypha*'s spookiest moments (tracks like "Simple X"), and toted him on tour. "I never, ever question his taste and am always totally amused by what he's playing," Bird observes. "Plus, I don't like stock footage in music, ideas by rote. I always trust that he's not ever going to be unengaging."

Bird's evolution from pint-size student of the Suzuki method (a nurturing approach to music-learning for children) to hyperactive, jittery sound-maker with the swingin' Squirrel Nut Zippers reaches full fruition

with *Apocrypha*. Even though his previous solo records displayed a mad eclecticism (German *lieder*, gypsy music, jazz, soul and folk) in tiny doses, his latest work internalizes all of his influences and regurgitates them in a more organic and focused fashion. "Before, I couldn't let all the music I was enamored with seep through. A lot of those other records were more deliberate. If I felt myself [including] inflections from other eras or other genres of music, I would take them away."

Now Bird takes nothing away, and opts instead to play with people who bring their whole record collection to the party—as evidenced by songs like "Spare-Ohs" and "Yawn at the Apocalypse," bright, resonant testimonies to his skill at stripping down the essence of musical genres and rejiggering it into organic new compounds. "I like to think of that playing process as sounding asexual," Bird notes. Yet he can't help but bring a plump lushness to all that he beholds.

While some blame the aggression of its guitars and the wordy whimsy of its lyrics for the fact that *Apocrypha* is turning out to be the most popular album of Bird's career, he himself refuses to puzzle out the mystery.

"There are no answers," he says. "There's just looking at things from different angles." ■■■

MEANBEAT



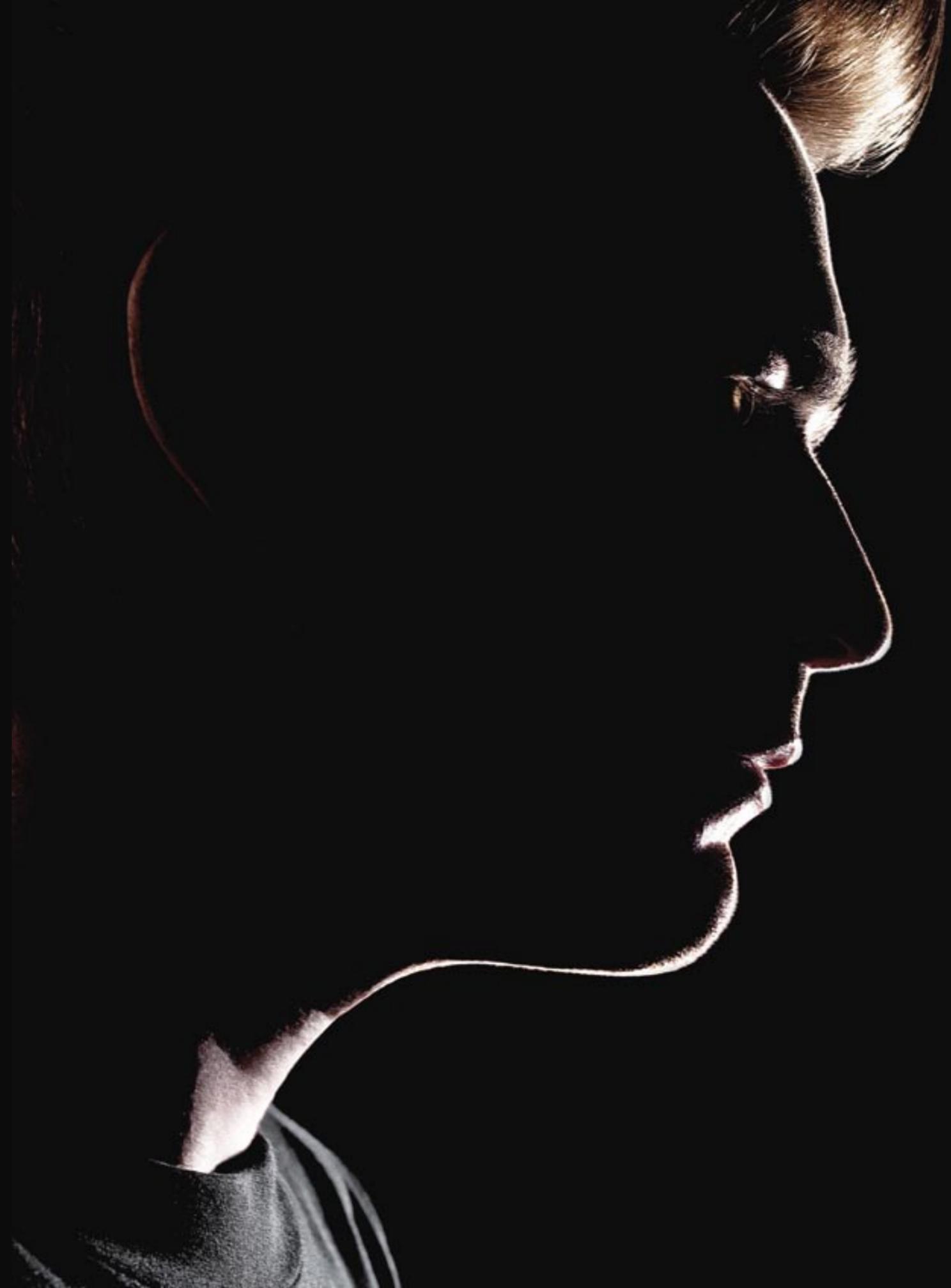
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# THE ROLE LESS TRAVELED

Ewan McGregor Suits Up for as Woody Allen  
BY JOHN PAYNE + PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANKIN



**One of life's** most horrific pleasures in recent times has been replaying in one's head that legendary scene in 1996's *Trainspotting* where the frantic young junkie played by Ewan McGregor evacuates his precious dope suppository into one particularly gruesome public toilet, then dives into the muck after it, whereupon wondrous, liberating fresh vistas are revealed to him and us.

McGregor made it seem fun, even, diving headfirst into a grimy bog. The fact is, his charming on-camera ease and loose-limbed athleticism are the product of a lot of serious dramatic training that has served him well in a rather bizarrely varied film and stage career which has seen him assaying such far-flung roles as the Jedi knight Obi-Wan Kenobi in the *Star Wars* prequels *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack of the Clones*, a lunatic rock star in *Velvet Goldmine*, a song-and-dance man in Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* and London productions of *Othello* and *Guys and Dolls*.

All of which is the merest tip of the polar cap for the prodigiously prolific McGregor, who at age 36 has racked up 30-plus stage, television and film performances, the latest of which is his starring role alongside Colin Farrell in Woody Allen's just-out *Cassandra's Dream*.

And while McGregor enjoys discussing the art of acting, the venerated motivations and inner hells of the characters he plays are, he feels, best left unprobed. By himself, at least.

"I'm not particularly conscious of the methods I use to come up with characters," he tells me by phone from his home in North London. "Somehow I think that it's instinctual. I like to talk about the films, though, except the things I find the most interesting are the things the tabloid press is, of course, least interested in. They want to know what happened last night with Jude Law." He laughs. "It's not as if I'm going to tell them."

It's that plucky fuck-it 'tude combined with a down-to-earth good humor of McGregor's that tends to both lure in and captivate audiences. He combines the earthy rogue appeal of the young Albert Finney in *Tom Jones* with something slightly more high-toned, but only just. Growing up in a small farming town in Scotland, he was addicted at a young age to films, especially black-and-white ones, and felt the acting bug especially when his uncle, the actor Denis Lawson (*Local Hero*), came up from London in his sheepskin waistcoat and no shoes.

"He didn't look like anyone else 'round about me," McGregor says. "We would go and see him in the shows and stuff. Back in the '70s there was something on British television called *Armchair Theater*: half-hour dramas that were like one-act plays, and he was often in those. And it was like an event—everyone would get 'round the telly and sit down and watch Uncle Denis. And so I was like, 'Fuck, I wanna do that.'"

Thus McGregor left school at 16 and

got a job in a repertory theater a few miles from his house, working there for a few months as one of the stage crew. "We'd put up scenery and take down scenery, and then occasionally they'd give me little walk-up parts. I started learning my job then."

As for Uncle Denis, "He's still absolutely my inspiration," McGregor says. "It's embarrassing how much I act like him in some things I do. I phone him up all the time from the set and say, 'Den, I've really done you today in this scene.' And I was thrilled the first time he phoned me up and he went, 'Ewan, I've just done you in a scene.' The *pièce de résistance* will be when we end up sharing the screen in something. I don't know when that will happen, but something fantastic *will* come along that we can act in together."

Following his six-month repertory experience, McGregor did a one-year acting course at Scotland's Perth Repertory Theatre and eventually moved to London, where he attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. "It kind of got me into the industry because, you know, you do the shows at the end of your final year that everyone comes to see, and through that I ended up working."

Still, he thinks it's difficult to teach somebody how to act. "You can't, really," he says. "But what you can do is put people in an environment where they can feel safe to try things out, and you can put them through different classes and ideas about acting techniques—you had people who taught

your method acting classes, and other people who use emotional memory recall and that sort of thing. But it's difficult to say what you learn. I suppose I call on it all the time. I don't know that I do, but I suppose that I must do."

McGregor's role as the strung-out Renton in Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* had come a year after his smash film debut in Boyle's *Shallow Grave*, in which he played a callow young Londoner who plots the dismemberment of his dead drug-dealer flatmate. One might wonder what motivated him to choose these often borderline-crazy or at least, well, intense types of roles that he undertakes with such gleeful abandon.

"A good story," he says—end of story. "I sit down with the script and if I get that feeling like you get when you're reading a good book and you don't want it to end, and if by the end of the script you're seeing yourself when you're imagining the story, then it's something I'll want to do."

As for the refreshingly weird variety in his choice of roles—ultimately his own decisions, though his managers must tear their hair out from time to time—he says, "I think it's exciting that way. I'm quite easily pleased, and as I'm reading something, I can oftentimes see the good film in a script where maybe others don't—and I'm often not right."

In McGregor's view, a film's artistic success has next to nothing to do with whether it's helmed by the best director in the world or is played by the best actors, has the best composer and editor



**“WE HAD ABSOLUTE FREEDOM TO IMPROVISE, BUT WE DIDN'T FEEL THE NEED TO CHANGE ANYTHING. THERE'S A REASON WHY WOODY ALLEN IS CONSIDERED A GREAT WRITER AND I'M NOT.”**



and DP, etc., etc. "If your story is not very interesting," he says, "then your film is not very interesting."

Whereas, he thinks, if a movie depicts a ripping good yarn, that can make up for other things, even if they're simply shot, as is the case with Woody Allen's films.

"They're very pure in the way he shoots," says McGregor. "But because his stories are very good, I think that's one of the great lessons about working with him. The performance is generally enough without 15 takes. I mean, he's completely unique in how little coverage he does. You just shoot a master, a wide shot, and that's it, really. And it's just absolutely lovely, because for the actors the performance is everything, and nothing gets stale or old because you're going through it so quickly."

*Cassandra's Dream* is Allen's latest murder-melodrama concerning two middle-class London brothers, played by McGregor and Farrell, who take part in a high-risk and ultimately soul-destroying scheme to finance their wildly differing aspirations toward a better life. The film boasts a veritable feast of great English, Scottish and Irish actors savoring the chance to bring out the best in Allen's devilishly plotted and immaculately crafted script—or to toss it out the window and improvise if need be.

"We had absolute freedom to do that," McGregor says, admiringly. "He'd start almost every scene and say, 'You know, look, these are just words that I wrote; just say whatever you like, and just as long as you hit the beat, put it in your own words, don't worry about it.' But, I'm sure Colin feels the same way, we didn't really feel the need to change anything because it was so beautifully written. There's a reason why Woody Allen is considered a great writer and I'm not, so why should I change it?"

The affably forthright McGregor recently took on the role of Iago in a London stage production of *Othello*, by some extension a bit similar to the brother he plays in *Cassandra*: a backstabbing figure who must ensure audience empathy by somehow coming off if not entirely sympathetic, then at minimum perversely likable. McGregor handles that tricky job with such fine tuning in *Cassandra* that one might question how much it has to do with superb acting technique versus the equally formidable task of just being yourself in front of a camera.

"Well, Woody was always quite keen that the story was about 'two nice boys,' says McGregor. "He'd say, 'This is a film about two nice boys, and just because of their flaws and their faults and the situation, they end up doing a terrible thing.' But he was always quite adamant that they were good lads; just working guys who were struggling along."

McGregor felt sympathy for his character Ian, the ruthless would-be hotelier brother to Farrell's sweetly loutish mechanic.

"I suppose I could understand Ian," he says, "because bad characters... I don't know how bad they think they are themselves, you know? It's easy to play a kind of two-toned villain, but I don't think people are really like that. People that do terrible things still think they're probably all right." To him, it's not terribly exciting to play someone who's just purely evil. "I mean, there's no shortage of British bad guys in American movies, you know what I mean?"

In *Cassandra*, the bond between McGregor's grasping yuppie fuck and Farrell's heavy-drinking/gambling-addict schlub is played with touching credibility. The two actors come off so believably brotherly, in fact—so completely familiar with each other's tics, vanities and fatal flaws—that it's hard to believe that McGregor and Farrell only became acquainted when both were cast in the film.

"I'd never met Colin," McGregor says. "The process of getting the film together was very quick. Woody was going to shoot a film in Paris and then at the last minute changed his mind. He pulled this script off the shelf and I went and flew over to New York to meet him, and Colin went to New York to meet him. Literally, I met Woody for about 30 to 40 seconds. I'd fallen in love with the script, and then I found out Colin was playing the other brother and I thought, 'This is just great.' So I gave him a call and he came over and met my family—we sat down and had something to eat and just got on immediately well."

McGregor is effusive in his praise for the skills of the feral Farrell. "I just think he's brilliant. There are a few actors around that you hope your paths might cross with one day, and he's certainly somebody I'd hoped for." And he reports that it came as a relief that the pair got on so well. "I don't think you can create chemistry or manufacture a brotherly relationship onscreen. You know you're both playing brothers, so you sort of instinctively relate to each other in a certain fashion."

According to McGregor, Woody Allen's style of quick-shooting his films—usually setting up just one shot and grabbing the scene in two or three takes—is, for actors like Farrell and himself, the only way to go. "It's very often that you're discovering things for the first time as you're saying them and the cameras are rolling, and there's no sense of repetition because you're not trying to re-create anything; it's brand-new. And if it's not the best take, it's generally one of the most exciting."

And, he believes, there's a stake in it. "As Woody would always say, 'You can't fuck this up. You just have to stay in character and keep talking.'" Although, he recalls, if an actor did muff his lines, "You'd see Woody rubbing his hands together, looking delighted, thinking, 'I'm gonna put that in.' And he did. He likes putting in all your flubs and stammers. Human beings flub and



# “WOODY ALLEN SAID TO ME, ‘CRITICS CAN LOVE US OR THEY CAN HATE US. EITHER WAY, IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE.’ AND HE’S RIGHT.”

stammer when they work, know what I mean?”

The image of the Infallibly Great Actor is easier to pull off on-screen, of course, as McGregor found out during a long run of stage performances in *Guys and Dolls* two years ago.

“...There was a moment where I forgot the words in the middle of a song one night,” he says, chortling. “In the middle of a song! And the orchestra keeps going, and there’s nothing you can do. So I was just making shit up.” He starts singing the lyrics he had improvised on the spot: “I like to look at your face. I like it a lot...” That was terrifying. I felt like I’d been in a car accident. And that’s when you realize what live theater is all about. The danger of it is brilliant.”

Yet he requires the pure energy of doing his stuff in front of an audience from time to time. Unlike performing in front of a blue screen for one second-unit director, there’s a full house of people, and they’re watching, and listening.

“It’s exciting, because you’re maneuvering a group of people’s emotions from one place to another, and it’s quite a powerful feeling.”

Apparently, exciting his own imagination is still of primary importance to our

Ewan McGregor, the former party boy who’s now a devoted family man with a wife and three daughters, the youngest of whom is a Mongolian adoptee. You might’ve seen him blow off steam in a 2002 PBS documentary that found him watching polar bears migrate in remote northern Canada, or watched the 2004 Bravo channel series that documented his round-the-world motorbike trek with pal Charley Boorman.

Ultimately, the thing that strikes you about McGregor is his restlessness, which in his case isn’t the desperate, empty, Hollywood-needy searching we hear a little bit too much about, but a healthier, more swashbuckling kind of world-conquering that can inspire even the most jaded film fan to want to heartily slap him on the back and cheer him on. It’s a vicarious thrill sort of thing.

Like the late Klaus Kinski, McGregor just craves the work, and it doesn’t matter whether the critics considered his choice of films high, fine art or something trashy and cheap. True, Kinski needed the money. For McGregor, however, acting is, simply stated, something he just loves to do.

And if it makes critics grumble and

groan on occasion—so be it. “You can’t please them, you know?” McGregor laughs again. “This is something I learned from Woody. He said to me before we went into the screening of *Cassandra’s Dream* in Venice, ‘They can love us or they can hate us. Either way, it doesn’t matter. They’ve loved me in the past. They’ve hated me in the past. It doesn’t make any difference.’ And he’s right.”

Extraordinarily refreshing, isn’t it, to witness the excitement of an excellent actor doing it for thrills and laughs, and who couldn’t give a toss about the hoary old bores of career arc or box office.

“I just don’t care!” McGregor cackles. “I’m happy if people see it and like it, but sometimes it’s quite cool to watch the dog that slipped through the net.”

“I just got this feeling coming home in the car at the end of the night from the film set, feeling like I’ve done my best shot, I’ve given my best work, and feeling I did the best job I could. And I felt satisfied. If you’re looking to be the most famous, you’ll never get there. I love the idea of someone waking up going, ‘That’s it! I’m famous enough! I can be happy now!’” ■■■

STYLING: Alix Waterhouse, [alixwaterhouse.com](http://alixwaterhouse.com)

GROOMING: Liz Martins, [nakedartists.com](http://nakedartists.com), using Origins products

FIRST SPREAD: T-shirt, Folk

SECOND & THIRD SPREAD: T-shirt, H&M; Shirt, C.P. Company; Vest, Paul & Joe; Pants, Create Your Own; Glasses, Ray-Ban Wayfarer

FOURTH SPREAD: T-shirt, H&M; Shirt, Aertex; Jacket, Hardy Amies; Glasses, Ray-Ban Wayfarer

FIFTH SPREAD: T-shirt, H&M; Cardigan, Guess; Jacket, Marc Jacobs; Jeans, Nudie

ON THE COVER: Shirt and jacket, Gucci; Vest, Acne Jeans; Pants, Trovata; Glasses, Ray-Ban Wayfarer



A black and white photograph of actor Emile Hirsch. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a light-colored shirt, and a dark tie. He is leaning on a wooden railing with his right arm extended, holding onto it. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a window with sheer curtains, through which some outdoor foliage is visible. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

# BUCKWILD

Emile Hirsch's  
Rites of Passage

BY PETER RELIC  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PATRICK HOELCK

**There comes a** crucial juncture in the life of every boy when he must make the difficult transition into manhood. Difficult, because we live in an age when a twisted premium is placed on youth, when adult responsibilities loom like a sober yoke to be avoided at all costs. As a result, a state of arrested development often prevails.

Occasionally, the core topic has been addressed in film. In Nicholas Roeg's 1971 classic *Walkabout*, an Aborigine boy experiences both a sexual awakening and a brutal loss of innocence while wandering about the Australian outback. Seldom, however, is the subject seriously examined in American cinema, although this fall, the Sean Penn-directed adaptation of John Krakauer's best-selling book *Into the Wild* cuts into the heart of the matter, leaving viewers imprinted with the emotional equivalent of dark, arterial blood.

The star of *Into the Wild* is 23-year-old Emile Hirsch. Hirsch plays Chris McCandless, a real-life tragic figure who, upon graduating from Emory University in 1990, donated the money from his medical school fund to Oxfam, cut all ties with his family and set off on a two-year walk about around the United States and Mexico that reached its mortal conclusion in the forbidding interior of Alaska. Inspired by the writings of Henry David Thoreau and Jack London, McCandless' mission was to find his own definition of truth by confronting nature's unforgiving extremes. For Hirsch, the role was a twofold crucible. While repeatedly risking his own life reliving the challenges McCandless faced, he assayed the tricky transition from on-screen adolescence to young adulthood.

If all that sounds a tad heavy-handed, the thesis dissolves completely upon meeting Hirsch. Seated poolside at Santa Monica's tony Viceroy Hotel, his 5' 7" frame is dwarfed by a canary yellow high-backed leather chair. He wears baggy camouflage cargo shorts, his dyed-black hair flopping over a face that has yet to shed the last vestiges of baby fat. If anything, he looks like he's still inhabiting the role of prodigal skate-rat Jay Adams from 2005's underrated *Lords of Dogtown*.

As well perhaps he should. Although a box-office flop, *Dogtown* provided the entree to the current phase of Hirsch's career. Sean Penn, who had done the voiceover narration for the original *Dogtown & Z-Boys* documentary, saw the adaptation and, impressed by Hirsch's performance, phoned the young actor.

"I was at a point in my life [after *Dogtown*] where I hadn't worked in a year and was really depressed, just sitting around wishing for an adven-

ture. All of sudden I get a call"—here Hirsch affects a spot-on Marlboro-scorched Sean Penn drawl—"I want to talk to you about something.' So I go meet Sean in Malibu. We're walking around this parking lot barefoot and he starts telling me the synopsis of *Into the Wild*. And it struck me that I had seen the *20/20* episode about McCandless when I was 9 years old. It had made a big impression on me—the spooky, almost magical idea of going by yourself into nature."

Over the course of that summer and fall, Hirsch and Penn got together occasionally for a root beer or something slightly stronger. While Hirsch grooved on getting to hang with one of his heroes, Penn was subtly testing to see whether or not his prospect was worthy of the McCandless role. Meanwhile Hirsch read and re-read Krakauer's gripping account of McCandless' epic journey, and the fuse was lit.

"When Sean first approached me he said, 'In the next four years I'm going to make this film.' So I thought OK, when I'm 25 it'll be something we'll do. Then all of a sudden he called me like, 'I wrote the script. The script's done. The part's yours if you want it. Come up to San Francisco and read it.'"

Hirsch headed to the airport and caught the next flight. His life was about to get wild—literally and figuratively—to a degree he couldn't have predicted.

"The first day of shooting in Alaska, me and Sean get on a snowmobile and head out on this crazy trail. Sean guns it up a hill, the snowmobile flips over and me and Sean both go flying! I was fine, and Sean was like, 'That was good instinct the way you jumped away from the snowmobile.' Then he righted it, said 'Get on!' and we sped away, twice as fast as before."

Thus began a year of living, Hirsch says, "like a traveling band of gypsies." As cast and crew retraced McCandless' risk-riddled journey, Hirsch undertook the challenges of his role head-on, imbuing the film with its disconcerting degree of verisimilitude.

Hirsch's voice rises in a sort of wistful incredulity as he recounts risks taken: kayaking solo through white water rapids in the Grand Canyon; walking around Nevada's Lake Mead on a day when crew members cracked under the heat and quit; working heavy grain-threshing machinery alongside Vince Vaughn, who plays McCandless' temporary employer Wayne Westerberg. None of those outward feats, however, compares to Hirsch's devastating portrayal of the drawn-out process of McCandless' starvation.

This final withering away is responsible for one of the film's rawest scenes,

where McCandless, trapped in the middle of the massive Alaskan wilderness on the wrong side of a thaw-swollen river, stands screaming and shaking his rifle, desperate for game.

"Where's the fuckin' animals now? I'm hungry! I'm fuckin' hungryyyyy!" Hirsch shouts, quoting the scene, much to the consternation of a nearby hotel concierge.

"That scene was all improvised," Emile says, settling down. "It was cool the way Sean shot it. It's such a wide vista and McCandless just looks so small against this huge canvas of nature. He's nothing! It's man versus nature, and man's gonna lose."

Emile Davenport Hirsch grew up in Southern California, the son of a producer father and schoolteacher mother. A Pisces, he rates the stretch of beach from Venice to Temescal as his favorite waterfront. His childhood nicknames, courtesy of friends, were Oatmeal and A-Meal-For-His-Mama.

"I didn't necessarily have Shakespeare giving me nicknames," he says with a grin.

From a young age Hirsch was groomed for—though not pushed into—his profession. He attended Los Angeles' Alexander Hamilton High School Academy of Music, and began playing bits parts on television shows as a kid. He recalls working alongside C. Thomas Howell, the actor who underwent his own coming-of-age on screen in 1983's *The Outsiders*: "When I was about 10 years old, I worked on an episode of a short-lived show called *Kindred: The Embraced*. I'd just started acting, so I'd do my scene the same way every take. C. Thomas nudged up against me and says, 'Do whatever you want!' I didn't understand what he meant—'Do whatever you want'? So I tried to loosen up and follow his lead. Like, unexpectedly, he'd take the paper wrapping off a straw during a take and blow it at somebody. And I was like wow, you can just do what you want!"

Following bit parts on more TV shows (*ER*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*), he snagged the role of a church-serving Southern hellion in *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys*. It was in that darling little indie film that a through-line was laid: Hirsch's crush in *Altar Boys* was played by Jena Malone, who six years later would portray Chris McCandless' younger sister Carine in *Into the Wild*.

"When I first worked with Jena, she seemed older than me. She's a couple months older than me, but she was so mature at the time that she really seemed older than me. So for *Into the Wild* it was great because we were already buddies, but by that time I'd grown up a lot, and suddenly she didn't seem older than me; she

seemed younger than me. And that contrast was strange."

Stranger still was the contrast between two of Hirsch's following roles. In 2004's ribald comedy *The Girl Next Door*, Hirsch played a clean-cut American kid who falls for his dishy blonde neighbor (Elisha Cuthbert)—a reformed porn star. Then Hirsch was directed alongside Justin Timberlake in Nick Cassavetes' young urban gangster tragedy *Alpha Dog*, released earlier this year. When told that *Alpha Dog's* beefcake quotient has made it a favorite among gay men at parties, Hirsch howls with delight, then composes himself: "I hope they can take it seriously, too."

Sandwiched between *Altar Boys* and *Alpha Dog* was *Lords of Dogtown*. Unlike *Alpha Dog*, where he was unable to meet the real-life criminal his character Johnny Truelove was based upon, Hirsch and his *Dogtown* doppelganger Jay Adams hung out and bonded—a closeness that led to Hirsch writing a parole letter in support of Adams when the legendary skateboarder subsequently wound up in prison. By witnessing the interaction between Adams and fellow Dogtown O.G. Tony Alva, Hirsch came to understand the lasting, razor-wire bond shared by certain questing types of bros.

"Alva and Adams were on set one day, and Alva was making fun of Jay because when he was little he had a boil on his foot, and Jay was like, 'Fuck you, dude!' They were going at each other and laughing, bickering about little things from 25 years ago."

The anecdote begs the question then, what does Hirsch believe that Jay Adams and Chris McCandless would have thought of each other if they'd ever met?

"Maybe they would've liked each other. But for guys with convictions that strong it's really easy not to like another person too, if they think that person's convictions are wrong. And Jay and Chris probably would've conflicted!"

Today is Hirsch's first day back in L.A. after some months away. He's been in Berlin, completing filming of *Speed Racer*, the Wachowski siblings' live-action adaptation of the beloved anime. Hirsch, who plays the titular Speed, deems the shoot "über-challenging" and mentions that it took place in Berlin's Studio Babelsberg. "It's an old historical studio where Leni Riefenstahl shot a bunch of propaganda films. It was a little creepy at first, but we made a good film there."

The shoot for *Speed Racer* was diametrically different from that of *Into the Wild*. Most of *Speed's* scenes were filmed against a green screen in preparation of post-production



special effect overlays. Rather than do any actual driving, Hirsch spent long days in a gimble. "It's a robotic chamber that throws you around against the green screen. It's like riding a mechanical bronco."

Polishing off his Coke, Hirsch suddenly begins singing the *Speed Racer* theme song with jaunty, mock-vaudeville aplomb. During the course of the interview, he has variously enthused about the music of Daft Punk, Eminem, Tupac and Elliott Smith's *From a Basement on the Hill*. Now he pauses, and adds Eddie Vedder's original soundtrack for *Into the Wild* to the list.

"I had never really listened to Pearl Jam before, but now I love 'em. The songs Eddie made for *Into the Wild* are such unique songs. There's one piece he does where I'm running up a hill, and the song is almost like a wail. The camera moves back to this plaque that I'm writing and it says, *LOST.. ALONE*. At that moment you really feel like you're out there in the wild.

"When I was shooting *Speed Racer*, Eddie had a show in Venice, Italy, and I went there for the first time. I went to his hotel and we were getting ready to go to the show and there was a freak storm—the stage blew away and someone broke their arm. So the show got cancelled and Eddie and I just hung out all night at the hotel instead, and it was wonderful to talk to him. He's an extraordinary person, smart and warm. He reminded me a lot of Sean actually; he's like his musical alter-ego."

Hirsch drops silent, letting the comparison hang in the air. But it's clear that part of what draws him to certain roles, to certain types of people, is a willingness to take the risks involved with being sincere in an age of prevailing ironic detachment. Then, and only then, can one emerge from the wilderness of youth into the artistic *terra firma* of adulthood. ■■■

(For the record, Emile Hirsch's five favorite films starring Sean Penn are *Dead Man Walking*, *Mystic River*, *Sweet and Lowdown*, *Colors* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.)

STYLING: Ilaria Urbinati, [ilariaurbinati.net](http://ilariaurbinati.net)

GROOMING: Lina Hanson, [magnetla.com](http://magnetla.com)

PRODUCER: Sara Pine

FIRST SPREAD: Suit, Obedient Sons; Shirt, Helmut Lang; Tie, stylist's own

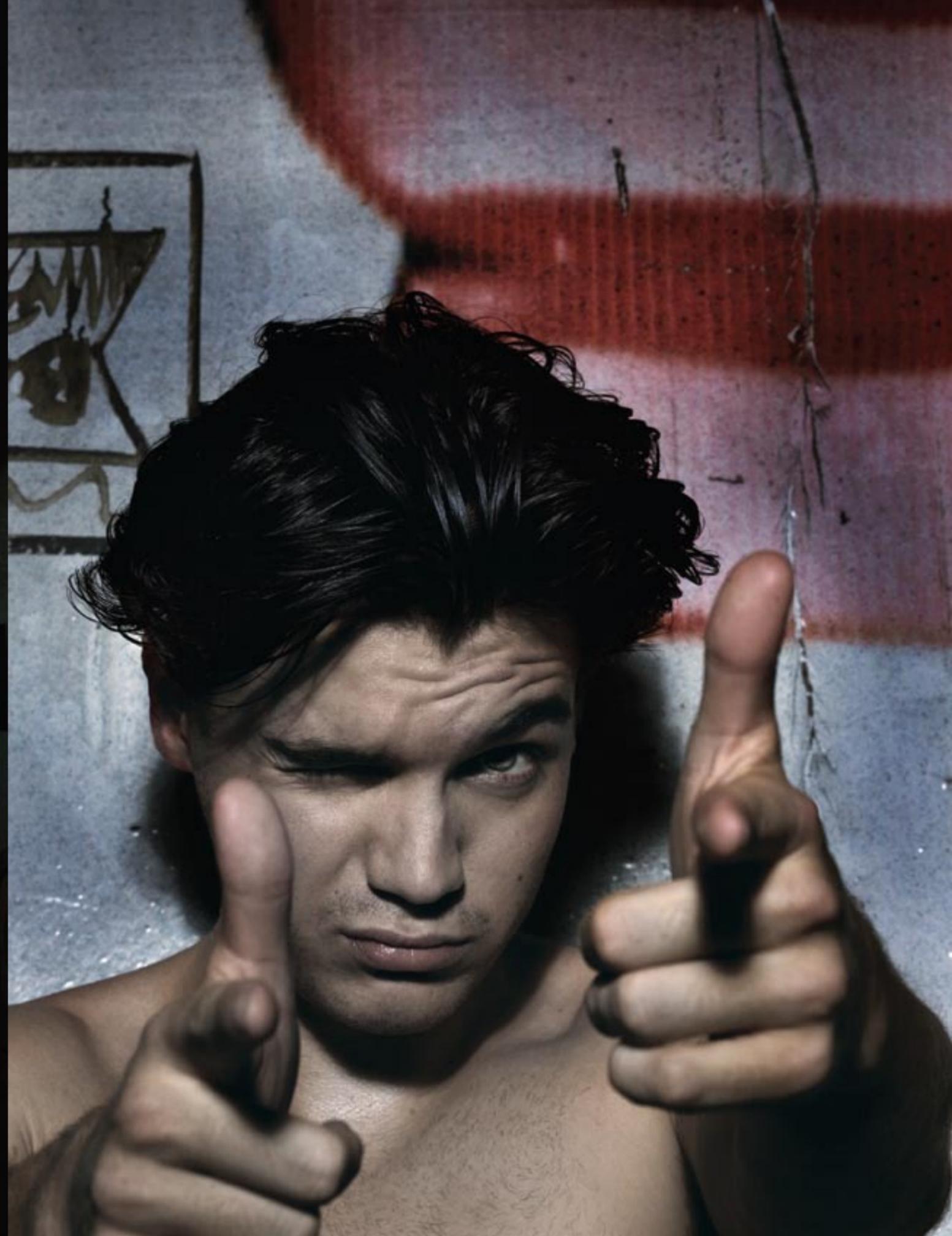
SECOND SPREAD: Jacket, Obedient Sons; T-shirt, Morphine Generation

THIRD SPREAD: Blazer, McQ by Alexander McQueen; Slacks, Modern Amusement; Shoes, stylist's own

FOURTH SPREAD (LEFT): Jacket, Buddhist Punk; T-shirt, Modern Amusement; Jeans, A.P.C.; Shoes, Double Identity

ON THE COVER: Shirt, Ksubi; Jeans, A.P.C.





# OLD SOUL

Javier Bardem's Men  
of Constant Struggle  
BY PAUL CULLUM  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KURT ISWARIENKO



# “JOSH BROLIN, TOMMY LEE JONES AND I FORM A THREE-DIMENSIONAL VIEW OF THE SAME MAN. THE ASPECT I REPRESENT IS VIOLENCE.”

**If we're being honest**, the person most responsible for Javier Bardem's American career is probably Julian Schnabel's wife. Olatz Lopez Garmendia is a half-Spanish beauty (she was once labeled in print “orchidaceous”) who brought a prodigious knowledge of Spanish cinema to her marriage. And by the time her husband was ready to segue from his art-world feature debut, *Basquiat*, to *Before Night Falls*—the story of gay Cuban poet and prisoner Reinaldo Arenas, who survived Castro's prisons only to die of AIDS in New York—he had his casting nailed.

“He took a huge risk getting me for the film,” Bardem says. “Nobody knew who I was, some people felt that I was miscast, I could barely speak any English and the physical resemblance wasn't there. But we jumped off a cliff, both of us, and I will always be grateful.”

Bardem is the youngest member of a famous family of actors and liberal activists—his mother, Pilar Bardem, is a matriarch of the stage and the screen; a brother and a sister are actors, as were his grandparents. And his uncle, Juan

Antonio Bardem, was a filmmaker noted for his outspoken criticism of Franco's regime. After studying as a painter, in 1990 Bardem was first cast by Bigas Luna in *The Ages of Lulu* and subsequently in *Jamon, Jamon, Huevos de Oro* (*Golden Balls*) and *La Teta i la Luna* (*The Tit and the Moon*). He also appeared in Pedro Almodovar's *High Heels* and *Live Flesh* and Alex de la Iglesia's *Perdita Durango*, before receiving an Oscar nomination for *Before Night Falls* in 2001. Since then, his English-language body of work has expanded to include films by John Malkovich (*The Dancer Upstairs*), Michael Mann (*Collateral*) and Milos Forman (*Goya's Ghosts*). Many felt he deserved a second Oscar nomination for his notable lead performance as paralyzed euthanasia advocate Ramon Sampedro in Alejandro Amenabar's *The Sea Inside*. He's currently on display in two new pictures: Coen brothers' *No Country for Old Men*, based on Cormac McCarthy's novel, and Mike Newell's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, an adaptation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's work of the same title.

Bardem spoke to *Mean* from the Toronto Film Festival in early September.

**Your character in *No Country for Old Men*, Anton Chigurh—a contract assassin who dispatches his victims with a pneumatic stun gun designed for use in a slaughterhouse—is a piece of work. Can you describe him in your own words?**

Well, since the author, Cormac McCarthy, didn't describe the character extensively in the book, he was quite open to interpretation, or at least as to how to portray his behavior. And so the Coens and I would talk and decide more or less which way to go.

**In the book he's a Russian hit man. Is that correct?**

The thing is, he could be Russian or he could be from nowhere. The fact that he's a foreigner, and that he doesn't really belong anywhere special, made it possible for me to be in this movie.

**In the film, Tommy Lee Jones plays a Texas sheriff who sees the scourge of drugs as almost an Old Testament kind of plague. And yet your character, more than any of the**

**others in the story, lives by a moral code that is inviolable, and to which he remains resolutely attached.**

What I felt when I read the book and then the script is that they [the three main protagonists] are different sides of the same man. Josh Brolin—the great Josh Brolin, whom I adore, and who is amazing in this movie—is playing one side. He, Tommy Lee Jones and I form a three-dimensional view of the same man. The aspect I represent is violence. The scary thing is that to this guy I'm playing, violence is not personal. He doesn't have wishes or goals or ambitions. He doesn't want to get to any particular place by his actions. He just goes into harm's way, reacts and leaves. And the difficult part was trying to bring something that is human into that. It was as if we were working in a very abstract kind of painting, where nothing is logical or structured; rather, it was more like, “Let's just see where this goes.” In other people's hands, this character could have been a cliché.

**Did you meet Cormac McCarthy while preparing for this role? I know he spends a lot of time at the**

*“When they was havin them dope wars down across the border you could not buy a half quart masonjar nowheres. To put up your preserves and such. Your chow chow. They wasnt none to be had. What it was they was usin them jars to put handgrenades in. If you flew over somebody's house or compound and you dropped grenades on em they'd go off fore they hit the ground. So what they done was they'd pull the pin and stick them down in the jar and screw the lid back on. Then whenever they hit the ground the glassd break and release the spoon. The lever. They would preload cases of them things. Hard to believe that a man would ride around at night in a small plane with a cargo such as that, but they done it.*

*I think if you were Satan and you were settin around tryin to think up something that would just bring the human race to its knees what you would probably come up with is narcotics. Maybe he did.”*

—Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men*





**Santa Fe Institute, which seems like a kind of modern-day Los Alamos for geni without a portfolio.**

We were shooting in Santa Fe for two and a half months, and it so happened that he came to the set once. You know, I'm kind of obsessive about the work, and I would normally have a lot of questions. But with this movie, since it's the Coens, you may not have every answer, but you know that *they* do. There's this feeling that you really have to let yourself go because these guys are going to take care of you.

The same thing happened with Cormac McCarthy. I would have been able to overwhelm him with thousands of questions, except that the thing was flowing already. It was like, don't be too anxious to control the character, because the controls are in someone else's hands. So don't worry. Trust. Like Bruce Lee said: "Be water." Which is a beautiful way to say, "Flow, man."

**I know there's already an Oscar drumbeat for you again for this performance, which is interesting because I always thought there was an undercurrent of violence in many of your previous roles; certainly in *Collateral*, but also in *The Sea Inside*, where I thought there was an enormous amount of violence, or at least frustration, simmering just below the surface.**

Well, what you may call violence, I call struggle. Violence exists all around the world, but so much more so in American movies. It's very difficult to find one where there's not a gun. And so when I decided to do this film, there were two things [that motivated me]. First of all, the Coens are by far my favorite directors. I mean, of course, there are huge names who have created history in movies, whom I admire and would die to work with. But the Coens—something happened to me the first time I saw *Blood Simple*, *Fargo*, *Miller's Crossing*. It was like, "Who the hell are these guys? How are they able to create such unique characters and make them so enjoyable to watch, even when they are the most cruel motherfuckers of all time?"

Secondly, when I read the script, I saw this whole thing going on, this violent character, and I knew that behind it there's a statement: *No Country for Old Men*—"old" meaning the old ethical rules that are missing these days, because we are so lost in this nonsense and unstoppable violence that creates in us a complete numbness, where it's difficult for us to even react because we are so overwhelmed by it.

# “LIKE BRUCE LEE SAID: ‘BE WATER.’ WHICH IS A BEAUTIFUL WAY TO SAY, ‘FLOW, MAN.’”

That’s what I happen to think, too. Plus, I totally trust the Coens. And so I knew this was not going to be an empty movie about guns and blood.

**Right—it’s a movie about civilization coming undone, and the return to a natural world that is utterly unsentimental. But maybe what I’m thinking of is not violence at all; maybe it’s just power, the force of your momentum coming off the screen. I know you were a boxer and on Spain’s national rugby team. Are those experiences automatically part of what you bring to a role?**

Yeah. Actually, when I started out in 1990, I did really physical roles, and then after three years I stopped. I could see this was not the right way to go, because physicality is something that doesn’t last forever and doesn’t work for every role. Body language does, but not physicality. So I have this big bulldog face, this broken nose, and I thought, okay, let me use it to my advantage. If I play against it, then it works like a visa—I can always get back to this place.

So in *The Sea Inside*, for instance, maybe it seems kind of weird that being this big man, I would pull myself onto the bed and make people believe I’d been there for 30 years. Or when I was going to do *Before Night Falls*, a lot of people were saying I was miscast—that this big guy is going to play Reinaldo Arenas, who was this kind of flower. But I said, “No, he wasn’t a flower—he was a tree trunk. Otherwise, he would have died in the first 10 years.” He was a fighter, and that is what you have to portray: a really strong soul—unbreakable. The way you use your body to get there is the less important thing.

**You once said, “I don’t believe in God, I believe in Al Pacino.” When you were preparing for *Before Night Falls*, did you study *Scar-***

***face*? It might seem counterintuitive, except both your Arenas and Pacino’s Tony Montana get spit out of Cuba and wind up in America, where they make something of themselves.**

Not really. But I have to see that film a lot. Once a week is too much, but there was a time when it was almost once a day. I didn’t watch *Scarface* to see how Pacino did a Cuban accent, for example, but there is something in his performances that I find amazing—to see his process, how he takes risks, goes really far out there and gets back again, and always takes the audience with him.

**Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men* couldn’t be farther away on the acting spectrum from your role in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, where you’re playing a paragon of sweetness—an almost Chaplin-esque man who carries a torch for the same woman for 50 years.**

You’ve seen the film? Now I’m shocked. I haven’t seen it yet, but I’m very anxious to.

**You come from a Spanish dynasty of actors. Who would be the equivalent of your mother, Pilar Bardem, in English-language film?**

Maybe Judi Dench. She’s a strong woman, and she’s very well respected in Spain. She has done a lot of theater and also a lot of movies, but more theater than movies, as all my family did. Except my uncle [Juan Antonio Bardem], who was a film director.

**Is it true that he was a premier critic of Franco?**

Yes. He spent, I think, three years in jail. He belonged to the Communist Party, which at the time was forbidden. He was always portraying the regime from different angles, and eventually he got arrested.

But one of the beautiful things—I’m saying this as a joke—that the Franco regime led to in our country,

nowadays, is this division where there are essentially two different Spains. Thank God, things aren’t melting down, and it’s creating a new generation where people relate to each other from different perspectives. But still, there is an extremely violent right wing that reacts in a very unpleasant way to anything that is said against them or the government. This stupid asshole we have, called José María Aznar [the conservative People’s Party President, whose administration lasted from 1996 to 2004]—in the last years of his government, he started to refer to himself and to the government in a way that [was reminiscent of] fascist times. And there was a logical reaction on the part of the people, which included me and my mother and millions of others. One of the outcomes of this was the demonstration we held against the war in Iraq. And from some of the reactions, I realized there are still people who believe that a fascist regime is the only solution. What kind of a world are they living in? Thank God they are few, but they are noisy.

**Spain occupies an odd place in American history, whose progressive politics reached a zenith in the ’30s. Then, the hallmark cause was going off to fight in the Spanish Civil War—the assumption being that if we had stopped Franco in Spain, we never would have had to confront Hitler. Is this widely remembered in your country?**

I can only speak for myself, but I would say that people from my generation know that. Except that it’s totally irrelevant now. What’s been going on in the past 15 years in the White House has had an effect on the rest of the world. I think the good news is that the United States is bigger than the White House, and there are a lot of people in this country who raise their voices against that—which is something we [Europeans] are also

aware of. But, unfortunately, the most noticeable policy in the world is [that of the] White House. That’s the harm this stupid killer named Bush is doing, especially in how the rest of the world appreciates the United States.

**To me, your film *Goya’s Ghosts* was an exact allegory of American politics—of American triumphalism and interventionism around the world. You have Napoleon saying, “They will greet us in the streets with flowers.”**

That movie was written before the invasion of Iraq, and Milos [Forman] always attributed the similarities to the stupidity of the human race. But it demonstrates how some people can accommodate any amount of horror or misery in the name of holding onto power, which you can put into context in any country. People are capable of the most extraordinary evil in order not to lose power.

**They’re also capable of exacting immeasurable damage when they act in the name of God—as the Inquisition did.**

Yes. In the name of good and in the name of God. ■■■

STYLING: Eric Orlando, [seemanagement.com](http://seemanagement.com)

GROOMING: Jamal Hammadi for Hammadi Beauty, [magnetla.com](http://magnetla.com)

FIRST SPREAD: Shirt, Agnès B.

SECOND SPREAD: Suit and shirt, Agnès B.

THIRD AND FOURTH SPREAD: Tuxedo jacket and pants, Agnès B.; Tuxedo shirt and shoes, John Varvatos

ON THE COVER: Vintage Levi’s jacket from What Comes Around Goes Around, New York; Shirt, Calvin Klein; Jeans, Levi’s; Shoes, John Varvatos



Kelly  
Macdonald's  
Series of  
Fortunate  
Events

BY KEVIN O'DONNELL  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDY EATON



**LUCKY SCOT**



**As the Bard** would say, Kelly Macdonald's fortune has kept an upward course. In the mid-'90s the Scottish actress was pouring pints in a pub. When she heard about a casting call for the now-cult movie *Trainspotting*, she lunged forth, unfazed by the previous lack of significant acting work on her résumé. The move paid off: Macdonald nabbed the indelible role of Diane, a sexed-up schoolgirl who screws heroin addict Mark Renton (unforgettably played by Ewan McGregor) and only post-factum reveals she's not yet of legal age and forces him into a relationship. "Serendipity has a lot to do with my career," says the 31-year-old Macdonald in her delicate purr. "After the *Trainspotting* audition, I knew acting was what I wanted to do. And if the film didn't work out, I was going to try for drama school."

A decade later, Macdonald's still getting lucky. Her latest strike is a supporting role in the Coen brothers' dark neo-Western *No Country for Old Men*, adapted for the screen from Cormac McCarthy's book of the same name. Last year, Macdonald was visiting New York and attending the nuptial festivities of two friends, when she was suddenly summoned to try out for the part of Carla Jean Moss in the Coens' film. "Everyone at the wedding was like, 'Good luck! You're brilliant!'" she recalls. "But I didn't thank them for the hangover I had when I first went to see the casting director."

She should thank them now, because she positively shines in *No Country* as an innocent Texan wife whose husband goes on the run from a psychopathic killer. Co-leads Josh Brolin, Tommy Lee Jones and a fantastically creepy Javier Bardem get most of the screen time, but each time Macdonald's Carla Jean slides into narrative focus (particularly during a resigned showdown with Bardem's gun-wielding desperado, Anton Chigurh), she brings a quality of quiet, understated grace to an otherwise über-violent flick. Most admirably, she gets her character's Texas twang down pat. And while naturally endowed with an earthy, rolling Scottish brogue, Macdonald didn't find mastering the foreign dialect all that difficult. "Weirdly, the Texan was quite an easy fit," she says. "It's much easier to do than just a general American accent." Of course, she relied on the help of a dialect coach. But, stranger still, an important part of her character study involved scrutinizing the voices of locals featured in a radio broadcast about drug testing in Texas high schools.

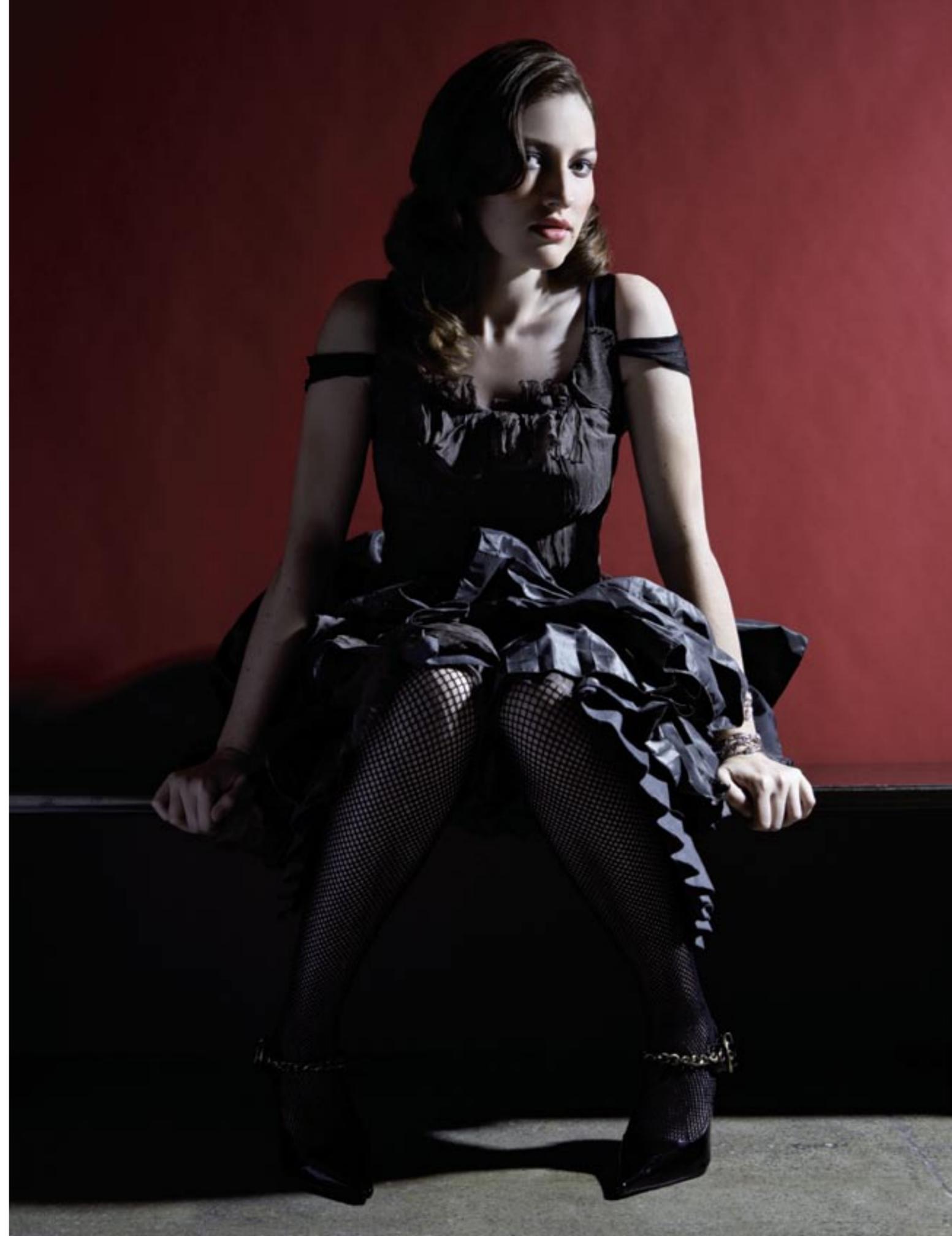
For someone who claims to not actively pursue parts, Macdonald has impressively lucked into collaborations with Robert Altman (*Gosford Park*), Mike Figgis (*The Loss of Sexual Innocence*) and Michael Winterbottom (*Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*). But that doesn't mean she gets whatever

**"I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUCK I WOULD BE DOING IF IT WASN'T FOR TRAINSPOTTING."**

she wants; she still has the occasional audition debacle. Macdonald says she was rejected for the role of black-spandex-wearing heroine Trinity in the Wachowski Brothers' sci-fi juggernaut *The Matrix*. "I was really unprepared for the audition," she says. "I walked into the room and they had a punching bag set up and I thought, 'This is really bad.' I remember it how you remember a really drunk evening, with certain flashes of mortification."

In 2003, the actress married Dougie Payne, bassist for the Brit-pop outfit Travis. They live quietly in London, although they truthfully don't get to spend much time together—she's been busy preparing a new part in the upcoming film adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's *Choke*; he's always touring. Macdonald thinks the arrangement is actually beneficial for their relationship: "We've been apart from the get-go," she says. "It's what we're used to. But when we do get time off, it's proper time off, not just a few nights or weekends."

Overall, Macdonald declares herself quite satisfied with the balance of her career: challenging, high-profile film work coupled with relative anonymity outside the professional arena. "I've been incredibly lucky so far," she says, reiterating a firm belief in her good fortunes. "I don't know what the fuck I would be doing if it wasn't for *Trainspotting*. In 10 years, I hope I get to work with the same people time and time again. It's nice when you get asked back..." ■■■





STYLING: Derek Warburton, [oliverpiro.com](http://oliverpiro.com)

HAIR: Ryan Trygstad, [thewallgroup.com](http://thewallgroup.com)

MAKEUP: Christy Coleman, [thewallgroup.com](http://thewallgroup.com)

LOCATION: Milk Studios, New York,  
[milkstudios.com](http://milkstudios.com)

Photographer assisted by  
Angelo D'Agostino + Joe Delano

FIRST SPREAD: Dress, Naeem Khan

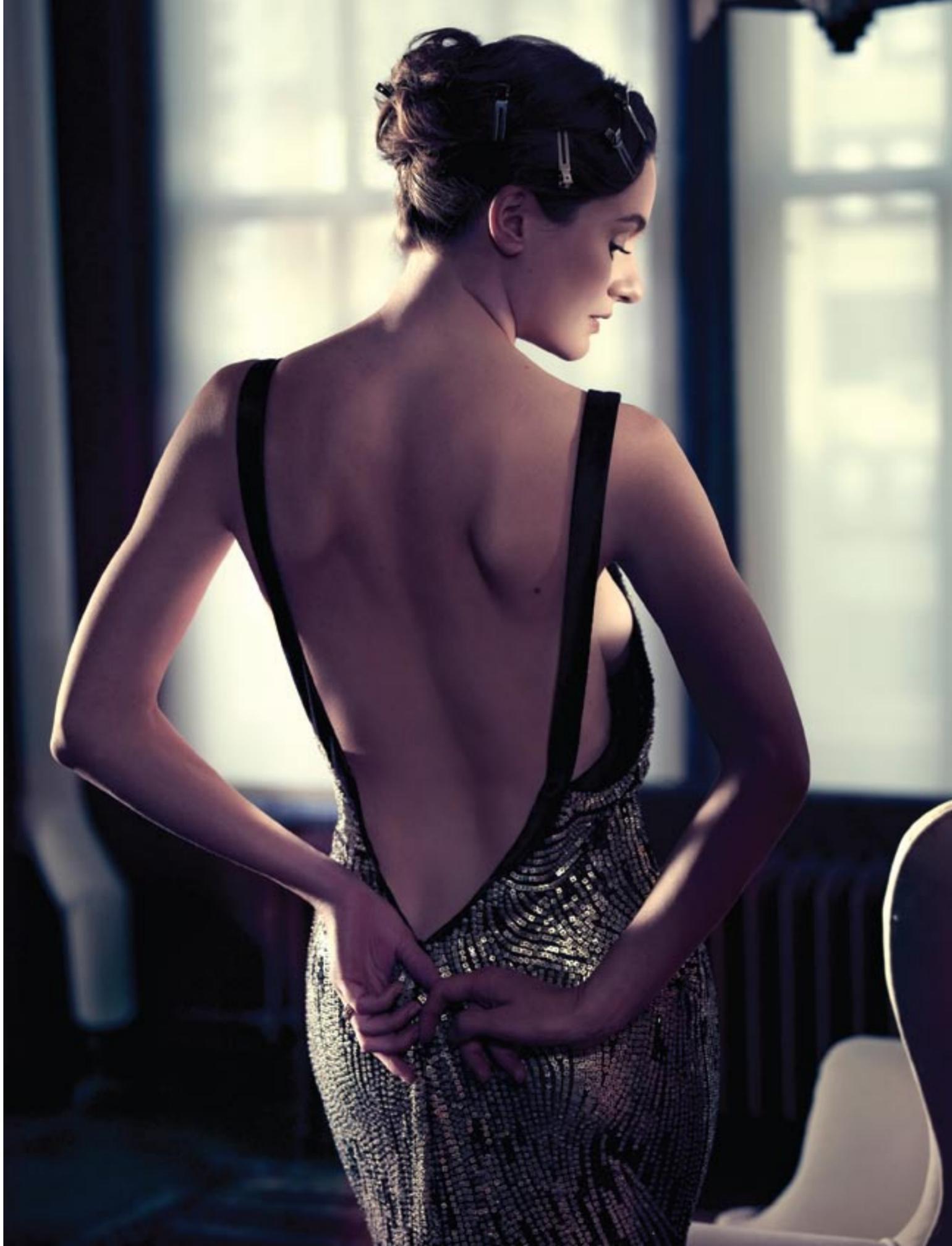
SECOND SPREAD: Dress, Louis Vuitton;  
Fishnet tights, Wolford; Shoes, Lui Chinn

THIRD SPREAD: Dress, Naeem Khan;  
Fishnet tights, Wolford; Shoes, Lui Chinn

**EMILY**  
**EVER**  
**AFTER**

A British Actress  
in Pursuit of the  
Exceptional Life

BY SORINA DIACONESCU  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KURT ISWARIENKO





**Little-known fact** about Emily Mortimer: In 1991, just as she began her studies at Oxford University, she contributed a series of columns to the London newspaper *The Evening Standard* where she chronicled, with trenchant wit, her disenchantment with "the small choice of genuine free spirit" among her peers and bemoaned that her generation was "probably the least interesting to date."

The romantic sweep of her following years, which found her moving to Russia to study theater and eventually arriving in Hollywood to work with the likes of Woody Allen and Wes Craven, proved that she's the opposite of "uninteresting": a dreamer-adventuress destined for a zestful, exciting existence. The daughter of a noted London barrister and author, John Mortimer, she was schooled at the exclusive St. Paul's Girls and went on to study Russian, English and Drama at Oxford. She came to the attention of U.S. audiences playing a neurotic aspiring actress in 2001's *Lovely & Amazing*, in which her character's "Do my arms look flabby?" monologue captured the misery and self-doubt inherent to the métier in excruciating, moving detail. Since then, she's been working steadily and building a résumé that reflects both her prowess in drama (*Dear Frankie*, *Bright Young Things*, *Young Adam*) and her ability to tackle both the silly (*Scream 3*) and the subtle (*Match Point*). Her upcoming projects include David Mamet's *Redbelt*, and a reprise of her role as Nicole, a charmingly clumsy Miss Moneypenny to Steve Martin's Inspector Clouseau in *Pink Panther 2*. This fall she returns to the screen in the curious dramedy *Lars and the Real Girl*, playing the sister-in-law of a shy Midwesterner (the titular Lars) who falls tragically in love with a blow-up doll.

Literate, possessed by a quintessentially British compulsion for jolly self-deprecation and, these days, at 35, afflicted by a touch of elegant world-weariness, Mortimer continues to stand out among her fellow actors. Before she departed for a late-summer vacation in the Hamptons with her American-born husband, Alessandro Nivola, and their 4-year-old son, she chatted with *Mean* about such heady topics as her lifelong infatuation with kitsch; ice-dancing and all things Russian; the script she just completed; and the implications of the "Faustian pact" she made when she decided to pursue a career as an actress.

**You've been working quite a bit**



lately. Not only have you been making movies back to back, but you even had an episodic role on a TV series in the U.S...

I wasn't really part of the cast, but I did three episodes of *30 Rock*. I played Alec Baldwin's demented fiancée. I did *Lars and the Real Girl* last autumn, and then I went to Lithuania to shoot a movie directed by Brad Anderson (*The Machinist*), with Woody Harrelson and Ben Kingsley, called *Transsiberian*, which is sort of a psychological thriller set on the Trans-Siberian railway. Afterward I did a David Mamet movie with Chiwetel Ejiofor. And now I'm just about to start *Pink Panther 2*. I'm going to be the same old complexly inept secretary!

**What did it feel like to act opposite an inanimate object in *Lars and the Real Girl*?**

It was amazing how having that doll in the room—sitting at a table with you or sitting in a car with you or on the sofa opposite you—really added extraordinary feeling to the scene. She somehow animated the movie! And there was something very bizarre about how this extremely inanimate object animated the rest of us.

***Lars and the Real Girl* is a difficult film to take in as a viewer. Even though there is a lot of lighthearted humor in it, this is a picture about mental health and the lasting impact of emotional wounds inflicted in childhood and so on. Was shooting it a heavy experience?**

It wasn't heavy, but it brought up in all of us involved in making it a conversation about family, actually, as much as mental illness. We were all able to draw on relationships we had with family members that aren't as realized as we'd like them to be, or feelings that some sort of neglect has gone on and the relationship hasn't been nurtured the way it should be. We were all thinking about people in our lives, like *Lars*, that we haven't given enough attention to. But this is also a film about the complication of being in a family.

**I somehow get the sense that becoming an actress is something that just sort of happened to you...**

I think so. I was a fairly solitary child—an only child for a long time. I have a sister, but she was born when I was 13. I spent a lot of time in the countryside with my mum and dad, even though I went to school in London. We would go to the country every weekend, and I would sort of

wander around and watch an awful lot of television, which I think was sort of a reaction against this very refined upbringing I had. My dad was a writer, and I went to all of these academic schools—yet I became a television addict from an early age. I would watch absolutely everything: from black-and-white films with people with tri-cornered hats on ships to documentaries on how to build a house in Wales. And what drew me in was always something very kitsch, like ice-dancing. I was obsessed by ice-dancing! I wanted to be an ice-dancer... There was this English ice-dancing duo, Torvill and Dean, who were a phenomenon and won every gold medal, and I was obsessed with them. My husband was singing Ravel's *Bolero* in the taxi going home from dinner the other night, and he said, "What's it that I'm singing?" And I was able to tell him, "It's Ravel's *Bolero*," because that's what Torvill and Dean danced to in their last Olympic performance. And they got a perfect six score from every judge!

And then I loved anything with dancing girls in it. Anyone with feathers in their hair and sequined costumes—I was absolutely besotted by them. There was sort of a tragic beauty to these women, and that to me represented show business. That was definitely where my fantasies lay, and it's what got me into the whole [acting] thing.

**What do you read these days for pleasure?**

I don't have time to read very much at all. I wish I did! I spend most of my time reading bad scripts. I read an essay by Joseph Brodsky when my son was about 2 years old, and it was the first thing I'd read since he was born. And I only read it because it was five pages long. I'm getting back into it. It's hard. One of the sad things about getting older is that you don't have enough time for a fantasy life.

**You studied Russian in college, and then moved to Moscow for a while to take theater classes. I imagine that your infatuation with Russian began when you first read classic Russian authors, like Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky. Is that true?**

Actually, again, it was less high-brow than that. We had a Russian teacher at school, which was a very unusual thing even for a posh London girls' school; hardly any of them had Russian as a subject. But there was

this amazing girl named Irina, who seemed only about five years older than us. She was in her early 20s and she had escaped from St. Petersburg, or Leningrad as it was then, in the hull of a ship. She was extremely glamorous and strange and exotic to me. She wore red stockings and gold teeth, because all of her teeth had fallen out, and had long hair. My interest in Russian really started off as a crush on her. She introduced us to all sorts of literature that wasn't on the syllabus, and she would take us off to strange performances and poetry readings by Russian poets who had managed to get to London. We felt like we had been given a key to this secret world! She really caught my eye and made me think, "I want to know more people like that."

**As a woman and an actress, do you find the reality of being a stranger in a strange land inspiring or difficult?**

I think it is difficult, but it's probably difficult in a good way. One of the great things about being a woman is that you are both somehow on the outside as well as in the middle of things. You're both allowing yourself to be in the thick of things and part of life in a kind of exciting, male way, but also wondering whether or not you should be. And then there is this part of you which has to do with having babies and being a homemaker. So there's a constant feeling of being inside and outside of things, as a girl, and I do like that.

Also, having the type of family and education I had in England can be very defining. You can be so defined by where you grew up and where you went to school and who your parents are. It's something that's very hard to shake off, yet I'm terrified of being defined; somehow it really scares me. This notion that someone could sum me up in a couple of words... That would be tantamount to a dismissal! So I've really sought to, in ways that have been exhausting and sometimes really exciting, put myself in a position that's challenging and scary just in a bid to not be defined and not be able to define myself somehow.

Actually, in the essay I mentioned before, Brodsky was saying, "We're always complaining once we live in exile." Yet it's an incredibly privileged position to be in. It's very wonderful to have this kind of perspective that many people in the world don't have. It's like going into outer space, and being able to look down on the

world from a different viewpoint. And sometimes it can feel lonely, because you can't really work out where home is once you've left.

**You played an aspiring L.A. actress in *Lovely and Amazing*, and it's one of the most moving depictions of what that's really like. At this juncture in your career, do you still feel that there is a level of humiliation inherent to the very process of being an actress in Hollywood?**

Definitely. I'm constantly being told that I've got to dye my hair and get my teeth whitened and that I'm not sexy enough or that I should show my tits more... That I've got good breasts and that I should make them more apparent when I go into meetings. And I would if I thought it would get me jobs! But I don't suit that sort of thing. It doesn't make sense when I dye my hair; I end up looking like a dental hygienist or something. It just doesn't feel like me and I can't carry it off. I would succumb to all this advice if I only thought it would help, but actually it just makes me less attractive than I began.

This is a weird, weird job. In some ways it feels like a Faustian pact. It can be tremendously exciting, as an actor, to get to live out your fantasies, and be a child, and go off and have adventures and meet really fascinating people and get to behave in ways, as other people, that you would never be allowed to in real life. But there is a price one has pay—all fantastic things come with a price. You feel panicked a lot of the time that it's all going to come to an end. If you work too much, your real life suffers; if you don't work at all, your real life suffers. And you do become rather unhealthily interested in your wrinkles—but maybe everyone does; even people that aren't actors.

**What was working with David Mamet and Woody Allen like?**

In both cases, it was very challenging and very exciting to be in the hands of a genius. You feel, of course, extremely intimidated by that. Both of them are very respectful of actors, to the point where you're almost longing for them to be *less* respectful and tell you what the fuck to do! But they don't. And they're very different characters, but I guess they both have an extreme self-assurance that comes with a long career of having produced incredible work.

In both cases, it felt so effortless. On Woody's movie, we were all home

by 3 p.m. We never did more than two takes ever, and we never talked about what we were doing. When we rehearsed it, there was no conversation at all about the job at hand, and it was extremely disconcerting, but also very exciting. Woody was charming and rather relaxed, and you could have a conversation with him, but he's shy as a person.

David Mamet was amazingly affable and charming, and funny and encouraging. He comes from the theater world and on his sets there is this feeling of a troupe of people who are all in it together; he's a real company person. He treats everyone exactly the same way.

I think his film is so beautiful; it kind of feels like a samurai movie. It's set in the jujitsu world. [Mamet] is a jujitsu fanatic, it turns out, and he's all into martial arts. After a lifetime of reading crap, I found his script brilliant and his storytelling immaculate. The plot and the theme are so perfectly married, and this whole notion of what it is to be a hero is played out in every level of the story. I hope the film comes off as it should, because he wrote a really fantastic script.

**You directed a play in college and also wrote a script. Any more of that on the horizon?**

I have written a screenplay, and my friend and I are writing another one, which Jeremy Thomas, who produced *Young Adam*, is producing. I believe David Mackenzie, who directed that film, is going to direct ours.

I don't know why I keep doing these things! It's such torture writing a film script. Have you ever tried it? It's a nightmare. Your brain aches from it. It's like putting a very difficult jigsaw puzzle together. But this last script was really an excuse to just keep in touch with my best friend who lives in England. Our husbands wouldn't be able to complain about the hours that we would spend on the phone together, because we would just tell them it was work. It's taken us about four years to finish it; we've had two children between us during the time it's taken to write the thing. It was in our best interest to draw it out as long as possible, because it meant we were allowed to fly to the other side of the world to see each other.

**Is it finished?**

It's finished, and now they're trying to get the money together for it. Hopefully, if it all works out, they'll



film it at the beginning of next year.

**This year you also played a little part in one of the shorts from *Paris, Je T'aime*, directed by Wes Craven, who made all of the *Scream* movies. How did that come to pass?**

Funnily enough, I came to L.A. to audition for *Scream 3*, which I knew I wasn't going to get in a million years. I was going up for the part of an extremely ambitious actress from Bakersfield, California, and I knew there was no way I was going to get it, but it was just sort of fun to go and audition for this thing... and I bloody got the part. Wes and I made really good friends making that film. I love him! I think he's such a wonderful guy, and when this project came along, he asked me to do it, and I was only too pleased.

**You play a character who travels to Paris mainly because she's obsessed with visiting Oscar Wilde's grave in the Père Lachaise Cemetery. Do you have any pet obsessions like that yourself?**

Part of my kitsch fantasy life is to have a caravan with an awning and a zip-up fringe, that really 1970s kind of thing.

We never had anything like that when I was a child, and that for some reason to me seems exotic and interesting. I've been lobbying my husband to get one of these things and he just won't let me. And every time it's for very good reasons. It's like, "We're just about to leave California for New York. Where the hell are we going to keep it?" So I get very obsessive about things like that, and then I forget about it and then it comes back, or...

**Or you just move on to the next obsession.**

Exactly. ■■■

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[margaretmaldonado.com](http://margaretmaldonado.com)

HAIR: Rebekah Forecast, [thewallgroup.com](http://thewallgroup.com)

MAKEUP: Troy Surratt, [jedroot.com](http://jedroot.com)

Stylist assisted by Jessica Van Niel

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD SPREAD:  
Dress, Naeem Khan

FOURTH SPREAD: Dress, Behnaz Sarafpour

FIFTH SPREAD: Dress, Behnaz Sarafpour;  
Shoes, Fendi



**IN PRESENT  
PAST PERFECT**

Jennifer Jason Leigh:  
A Performer's Progress  
BY KATE KOWSH  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KURT ISWARIENKO





STYLING: David Thomas,  
*luxemgmt.com*

HAIR: Andy Lecompte,  
*soloartists.com*

MAKEUP: Fiona Stiles,  
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MANICURE: Tom Bachick,  
*cloutieragency.com*

Stylist assisted by Dan Musto

FIRST SPREAD: Trench, Prada;  
Boots, Miu Miu

SECOND SPREAD: Vintage  
gown from *The Way We  
Wore*, Los Angeles

THIRD SPREAD: Dress, Prada

**A fierce, accomplished** method actor, Jennifer Jason Leigh has built a formidable career by pushing herself—and audiences—*way* outside familiar comfort zones.

From her first major part alongside Sean Penn in the stoner classic *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* onward, Leigh's proven herself to be a skilled interpreter of both malady and ecstasy. Over the past 25 years, her multilayered performances have skirted the mundane, the seedy, the obsessive and the fantastic facets of human experience. She's played emotionally fragmented prostitutes (*Last Exit to Brooklyn*, *The Machinist*, *Miami Blues*); a jealous, self-defeating sibling (*Georgia*), a soul-sad murderess (*Single White Female*), a willful, reckless videogame designer/adventuress (*eXistenZ*). She's also worked with (and taken notes from) some of cinema's true greats—Robert Altman, Stanley Kubrick, David Cronenberg, the Coen brothers.

The one-time teen thespian who grew into the queen bee of a particularly daring brand of acting was born in Los Angeles to actor Vic Morrow and writer/actor Barbara Turner. She views the capital of make-believe from a vantage point few are afforded: Hollywood is home turf to her—and yet, paradoxically (or perhaps quite logically), over the years she has practiced indifference to the perks of fame and shunned the media glare. Leigh's loyalty lies with her characters.

You won't see her sashaying much on red carpets these days, but you're quite likely to find her films perched on the "employees' picks" rack of a movie rental store and her performances idolized by working Hollywood filmmakers (see Richard Shepard's sidebar). And frankly, that's the way she likes it.

This fall finds Leigh displaying her gifts anew in *Margot at the Wedding*, a dramedy directed by her filmmaker husband, Noah Baumbach. Her character is Pauline, a wounded free spirit trying to reconnect with her sister (the titular Margot, played by Nicole Kidman), who's in town for Pauline's backyard wedding. On the continuum of memorably dysfunctional dames played by Leigh, Pauline rates as a sunnier presence: mildly neurotic and internally splintered, but essentially hopeful. In tandem with Kidman, Leigh brings to the screen the patterns of sibling relationships—rivalry, petulance—with astonishing finesse.

Although she remains guarded when it comes to talking about herself—she's an elliptical speaker who tends to pick her words carefully, scavenging for *le mot juste*—the actress agreed to reveal a few bits





# 2 FROM THE HEART

A filmmaker revisits his favorite pair of J.J.L. performances  
BY RICHARD SHEPARD

In 1990, two movies in which Jennifer Jason Leigh played a prostitute came out within 30 days of each other and promptly nosedived at the box office.

It's a crying cinematic shame, since *Miami Blues* and *Last Exit to Brooklyn*—as different as they are from one another—are equally excellent pieces of work, and Ms. Leigh is heartbreakingly brilliant in both. Of course, Whoopi Goldberg won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar that year for *Ghost*—a commercial mega-hit that has aged as well as a carton of milk—while Leigh did not even get nominated.

Yet to me, she is one of the best actresses of her generation. I proposed reviewing *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and *Miami Blues* for *Mean* before I even knew that Leigh would also be featured in the same issue in conjunction with her latest film, *Margot at the Wedding*. This J.J.L. overload is not a magnificent piece of publicist synergy. It is proof that almost 20 years later, this non-superstar, non-Oscar nominee is still doing some of the best acting in cinema.

*Miami Blues* (the title didn't help the film's box office prospects; I think people expected it to star Philip Michael Thomas and Don what's-his-face) is a colorful, gleeful, sardonically funny thriller directed by the great, unheralded George Armitage. He went on to helm *Grosse Pointe Blank*, and not a whole helluva lot else. Maybe that's because Hollywood seems to hate gifted directors who shake up convention; I guess it makes the hacks nervous.

Leigh wasn't the only one on fire in *Miami Blues*: She co-starred with an extremely thin and sexy Alec Baldwin. His electric psycho-sweetie Frederick J. Frenger Jr. is a showcase for the kind of dangerous acting that comes in short supply these days.

And yet despite Baldwin's and Armitage's stellar work (executive producer/actor Fred Ward is sort of annoying as the cop on Baldwin's tail), the most exciting thing in the film is Leigh's innocent, sweet, sexy and downright giddy hooker. Her Susie Waggoner is a revelation. I remember seeing the film and thinking at the time, "Who the hell is that actress?" Watching it again today, I ask myself the same thing. Leigh commands the screen with a vulnerability that's almost shocking; she looks as if she might genuinely break at any moment. That energy flow feels a performance so on-edge and alive that when you think about other actresses who have tried to play vulnerable, "real" prostitutes (read: Julia Roberts), you just have to shake your head and feel sorry for them.

Of course, Roberts' *Pretty Woman* role made her a huge movie star, something J.J.L. never became. This might be because she followed *Miami Blues* with another prostitute part—and that

performance was too graphic and harrowing to spell anything else except a giant "Fuck You" to any and all saccharine street-walker roles in the Hollywood canon.

There aren't a lot of laughs in *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, an adaptation of Hubert Selby's famous underground novel. It's a pitch-black story of life, love and loneliness set on the strike-ridden docks of Brooklyn in the 1950s. It's about drinking, fucking, repression and anger. And at its center, breaking our hearts in a completely different way than she does in *Miami Blues*, is J.J.L.'s character: a hooker with a heart of Bourbon and a brilliant moniker, Tralala. Like *Barfly*, Barbet Schroeder's ingenious, 150-proof meditation on Charles Bukowski, director Uli Edel's *Last Exit* takes the dank world of drink and drinkers and stirs it into a refreshingly original cocktail. Edel (who made both the "I want to be a heroin addict/I'll never be a heroin addict" junkie masterpiece *Christiane F* and Madonna's fart-bomb thriller *Body of Evidence*) takes an astoundingly difficult piece of material and somehow makes it breathe here. I've never been a fan of gang rapes on or off the screen, but *Last Exit*'s tortured ones somehow work within the flawed lives of its characters. Tralala is so broken, so deeply hurt, so secretly (here's that word again!) vulnerable, that being gang-raped is the only way for her to feel alive.

This is the type of movie that makes you want to take a long shower after seeing it. It's also the type of movie that you won't forget, and might grow to love. And it's in no small part thanks to the fact that in playing Tralala, Leigh almost ascends to a new level of acting.

That the actress could so convincingly embody prostitute characters in two consecutive roles—and render them so different in spirit and tone—is a testament to her incredible abilities, if not her box-office acumen. In the years that followed these twin accomplishments, J.J.L. would act in mainstream hits like *Dolores Claiborne* and *Single White Female*, exploiting her slightly odd mannerisms to fit into the Hollywood studio culture. Maybe her greatest recent work is the film she co-wrote and co-directed with Alan Cumming, *The Anniversary Party*. It's an insanely dead-on take on Hollywood friendships and marriage—and in it, as in the films mentioned above, actor/writer/director Leigh peels back the layers to reveal that elusive thing we always look for in film: Truth. ■■■

*Richard Shepard wrote and directed this fall's The Hunting Party, starring Richard Gere and Terrence Howard, as well as The Mator, with Pierce Brosnan. If opportunity ever struck, he would clearly love to work with Jennifer Jason Leigh.*

and pieces of herself to *Mean* in a recent interview.

**You grew up in Hollywood. Have you ever lived anywhere else?**

Not really. I mean, I traveled as a kid with my parents to different places, but I wouldn't say I really lived anywhere else.

**How long have you been acting?**

A while! Professionally, since I was 18.

**You're famous for your meticulous research process and your full-immersion approach to acting. What does your method entail?**

Well, I like to immerse myself as much as I can in a role. If I really like the role and the script, then I just try and figure out who the person [I'm playing] is. And to do that, I will sometimes meet and research people who seem to me to be somewhat similar to the character. Sometimes I'll look at photographs or paintings, and that will inspire me. [If the character belongs to] a certain period, then I'll be trying to figure out the clothes... It's hard to say, because it's not that cerebral a process for me. It's more, "Um, is this gonna be challenging for me? Is it gonna be exciting? Is there something I want to understand about this person that I don't quite get right off the bat?"

I think more of trying to be true to the character than of doing a performance. What I hope to do is just make a character real. Then you get some kind of intimacy with [the audience] that you wouldn't otherwise. It gets people to have the feeling that they've truly come to know someone.

**You've portrayed some pretty deranged/damaged women over the years... What kind of feedback have you received from moviegoers for those performances?**

It really depends on what the character is. Like, my role in *Single White Female*—people are sometimes freaked out by that—but in a funny way, not seriously.

**If you're playing a particularly troubled person for a long stretch of time, how do you expel that negativity when the shoot wraps?**

You're never really that person. Al-

# "I CAN'T REALLY MAP OUT MY CAREER. I DON'T HAVE THAT MUCH CONTROL OVER IT."

though sometimes it lingers a little bit, but after, like, two weeks, you're kinda back to yourself.

**You've worked with influential directors like Altman, Cronenberg and the Coen brothers. What did you learn from each of them?**

You get different things from different people, obviously. Altman just really loved actors so much and he was so open to what they have to bring. He was also very mischievous and he really could see things in people—like, certain things I didn't even know I was capable of, he could see in me. He had this tremendous belief in people and encouraged a lot of risk-taking. And he was also a lot of fun!

**You worked with female directors Agnieszka Holland on *Washington Square* and Jane Campion on *In the Cut*. What was it like to work with them—as opposed to male filmmakers?**

Every director is different, but I don't think it's so much a sex thing.

**You made your Broadway debut as Sally Bowles in a *Cabaret* revival a few years ago. Did you experience stage fright?**

It's scary the first couple of performances, but then that kind of goes away. I get [more] nervous doing talk shows, because then it's about being yourself and that's more nerve-wracking than being on stage.

**You seem to be adamant about keeping your professional and private lives separate. Do you take the publicity factor—how much exposure promoting a movie will command—into account when you choose a role?**

I don't think about that! I've been doing it so long: You do press for the movie and sometimes I feel that's really why you're getting paid. [Laughs] The acting part of it is really fun and the press is a little harder, if you're a private person or if you're shy or self-conscious. But obviously, the more press you do, the better it is for the movie and it's also good for you and all that stuff, so you just sort of bite the bullet and do it. But it's definitely not the most fun part of the career.

**Your husband, writer/director Noah Braumbach, directed you in *Margot*. Was there an initial period of adjustment involved in working together professionally?**

**In 2001 you co-wrote, co-directed and co-starred in *The Anniversary Party* with Alan Cumming. Since then, the film has become an indie cult classic. Why is that? Is it because it's so keenly perceptive about the business of acting?!**

It's a comedy and we are making fun of it all. But there are definitely some real things in it—or it wouldn't be funny, I guess. If it didn't have some kind of truth to it, it wouldn't be very funny.

**Do you think you'll ever write again?**

I do!

**What do you enjoy about writing screenplays?**

I enjoy creating stories and characters and things like that. I don't actually enjoy the writing part. I like it *before* and I like it *after*. The actual doing is really hard for me. I'm very self-critical, so I can do absolutely nothing for days and weeks and months. I procrastinate so much because I'm afraid that what I'll write won't be good.

**Your mom, Barbara Turner, writes too, right?**

Yeah. She's a really, really wonderful screenwriter. I show her everything I write and she's really helpful.

**Moving on to your latest movie, *Margot at the Wedding*. I've got two sisters, and watching it brought to mind a few memories about growing up with them...**

Oh, perfect!

**Your character in this film, Pauline, is a lot more normal compared to darker, more obsessive kinds of roles you're best-known for. Did playing her pose more of a challenge?**

No! She thinks she's more grounded than she is, which can be true of most of us. But I thought she was really sympathetic. She's very warm. And she really wants everything to work out, because it isn't, like, right from the get-go.

No, it was amazing. I loved it! He's just brilliant and I really trust him, obviously. He knows what I'm capable of, and he knows when I'm not doing what I'm capable of, and he pushes me until I can give it. It's such a luxury for an actor to have that.

**What kind of movies do you like to watch these days?**

I just want to see something that rings true and feels unconventional and exciting to see. Something where I'm not ahead of the story.

**How do you look for roles?**

Usually, my agent sends me stuff.

**Do you find that your taste has changed, in terms of scripts that interest you now, as opposed to years ago?**

I don't know... Probably. I find I like less and less, so I don't know if my taste is changing or if the writing's getting worse.

**Is that because there's a dearth of pithy and interesting roles for an actress at a certain stage in her career?**

I think it's hard to find good roles for *men*, too. I just don't think there's that much good stuff happening. I like the really young filmmakers who are making movies today, like Andy Bujalski and, you know, that movie, *Hannah Takes the Stairs*, is really good. There are these young people making movies with their video cameras... That's exciting.

**Can you visualize how a project will turn out while you're making it?**

No. While you're working on it, sometimes you get a feeling like, "Oh, this is not good!" or, alternately, you know that it has a chance. Sometimes you can have a really good experience [on the set] and then you see the movie and the movie's not very good. And sometimes the opposite is true.

**Are there any specific films that you really believed in while you were making them but that turned out badly?**

I wouldn't want to talk about that. [Laughs]

**Years ago, you starred in a Faith No**

**More video, "Last Cup of Sorrow." How did that come about?**

Oh, they just asked me and I thought it might be fun. It was really just as simple as that.

**What's your taste in music like?**

Pretty eclectic. I like the White Stripes, I like [jazz singer] Ruth Edding. I like a bunch of stuff. I feel so nerdy answering this question because there are so many musicians I love.

**What is it about acting that keeps you coming back to it over and over again?**

I just like how you can lose yourself in it. And you can get to do something that is very naked [and exposed], but it's very private at the same time.

**Do think growing up in Hollywood has molded the way you think about movies and the business?**

Well, I think it made it seem possible to become an actor. It didn't seem like a far-off dream and it made the whole thing a little less romantic for me. I always like coming back to L.A. I'm very comfortable here—which is good, because most people who have to live here aren't comfortable and they don't like it. It's hard if you're used to a big city—because L.A. isn't that, you know? It's very suburban in a way. I just think of it as a bunch of mini-malls spread out, with freeways in between. But I love it that you can hike here and that there's so much nature and so much privacy and quiet. You don't hear horns blaring constantly and things like that.

**Do you have any sense at all of what you'd like to be doing a few years from now?**

I'm not good at that. I can't really map out my career. I don't have that much control over it. I think it probably does work for some people, but... I'm more in the present, sort of... or in the past. [Laughs] I can't really think too much about the future, except like, "Oh, you know, there is some piece of art I'd love to go see," or something like that.

**Any genres you'd like to explore further in the future?**

I'd like to do more comedy, I think. ■■■

# BELLE ON THE BALL

## Marion Cotillard's Rose-Tinted Future

BY MILES MARSHALL LEWIS + PHOTOGRAPH BY BRUNO DAYAN

**If Marion Cotillard** has any jitters over a potential Oscar nod for her outstanding turn in the Edith Piaf biopic *La Vie en Rose*—a *New York Times* critic praised her tour-de-force embodiment of France's iconic singer as “the most astonishing immersion of one performer into the body and soul of another I've ever encountered in a film”—she's maintaining her outward cool. A concierge at the fashionable Hôtel Costes in Paris's first *arrondissement* directs me to an ornate purple-and-gold private room designed in Napoléon III-period style, where a lithe, unassuming Cotillard sits quietly sipping juice through a straw.

Hardly Piaf reincarnated, in person the 32-year-old actress brings to mind her more quotidian roles as the pregnant Joséphine Bloom in director Tim Burton's fantasy drama *Big Fish*, or café owner Fanny Chénal in the Ridley Scott romantic comedy *A Good Year*. A César winner in France for *A Very Long Engagement*, Cotillard may soon add to her trilogy of English-language films (which includes Abel Ferrara's *Mary*) by taking part in an upcoming adaptation of the Fellini-inspired musical *Nine*. Discussing international ambitions, Marion Cotillard allures even in straightforward conversation with her characteristically-coquettish French charm.

**Before starring in *La Vie en Rose*, had you seen any of the other films made about Edith Piaf—for example, 1983's *Edith and Marcel*?**  
No, but I saw all the movies she did as an actress.

**Do you have a favorite among them?**  
Not especially. I have scenes that I really love. Especially when she's drunk, actually; she plays it so well. [Laughs] The last movie she did [*Les Amants de Demain*], she was 44, so it was very close to the end. It was in '59, and it's very interesting, because she's beautiful. She plays a woman desperately in love with her boyfriend, who doesn't love her anymore. The boyfriend goes with other girls. She becomes crazy and tries to kill him. And the guy realizes that someone that is willing to kill you for love is the one you have to be with, but at the time, she is so fed up that she met another guy, and it's quite interesting. She's very good! I think she was a good actress.

**Why did you decide to do American films?**  
Oh, I didn't. It was not a conscious desire. But I think that in a way I wanted to have some American

experiences. When I started watching movies, my favorite movies were all American—*Singin' in the Rain*, *Annie*. I love Charlie Chaplin! Even when I was very young, I never saw a dubbed movie. My parents taught me to [read] subtitles, so it was not a problem to see an American movie. Except for *Singin' in the Rain* and *Joe's*.

**Joe's?!**  
Not *Joe's*... *Sharks*? What is the Spielberg movie?

**Oh, *Jaws*!**  
*Jaws*! I would watch that movie in French. But the directors who were a part of the creation of my dream to be an actress—to do all this—must have been American.

**How did the opportunity to do Tim Burton's *Big Fish* come about?**

Well, he was looking for a French girl, and I had the chance at that time to be in a very successful movie here [*Jeux d'Enfants*], which is called in English *Love Me If You Dare*. So I had the chance to be amongst the girls he would meet. And he was my idol, so talking about doing a movie with him was... The fact that I would meet him was huge for me.

**What is your favorite Burton film?**  
I love *Beetlejuice*. There's some movies [of his] I don't like, but when I love someone and he does something I love less, it's just a human thing, so I love him more.

**You're in talks to star in *Nine* with Sophia Loren, Penélope Cruz and Catherine Zeta-Jones, under Oscar-winning *Chicago* director Rob Marshall. What can you say about the possible project?**  
*Nine* is a very famous musical in the U.S., about a director who is surrounded by all these women. We're in talks, so that's the only thing I can say. But my dream is to do a musical. As I told you before, my favorite movies when I was young were *Singin' in the Rain* and *Annie*. And my dream is to do an American musical, because we don't have musicals here, it's not our culture—except for Jacques Demy, but [he made] a very specific kind of musical. I love Broadway.

**Is the voyeuristic celebrity culture of America strange to you? What do you think of the wall-to-wall coverage of Lindsay Lohan's and Britney Spears' private lives?**

It's sometimes funny. But when I see those girls in those papers, they don't seem to be very upset about all this. [Laughs] But no, I don't care. I care about moving my ass on “Slave 4 U.” I really don't care about Paris Hilton, if that's your next question. One thing that shocked me was to learn that all these very well-known people don't have any rights in America or England. If some photographers take pictures of you with your boyfriend, you can't sue them. Here, we can do that. Each time I'm in those kinds of magazines, and I really do not want to be, we have laws here that you can go to the trial and you will always win. If Vanessa Paradis and Johnny Depp would live in England, they would go out of their house and have all of these bees with cameras everywhere. Fleas! For me, that's a little bit shocking.

**Would you like to balance your career between French and American films?**

The plan is: Tell good stories. That's it. I have an amazingly beautiful project in France at the end of 2008. It's a true story, it takes place in the desert and it's in the early '30s. She's a woman, she flies planes and she goes to Africa by herself because the love of her life has crashed in the desert. There is a French director from Tunisia [attached to the project], Karim Dridi.

**You became a spokesperson for Greenpeace. Why?**

Because I think that my brain is functioning quite well. [Laughs] Really. Respecting people and things is something normal for me, that's normality. Spending money to earn money, spoiling the planet, is something I can't understand.

**What did you think of Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*?**

It's very easy to watch, because it's clear. Everyone can understand what's going on by watching the movie. But what I don't understand is, they did a book of that movie [and] it's not made with recycled paper! That I really don't understand! I had that book and watched everywhere, so maybe I'm wrong, but that paper doesn't look recycled at all. [Laughs] Man! Do all the things. It's a detail I would see because I'm so into it forever. But I really appreciated Al Gore from the beginning, and I think he has something in his hands which is very important. I think he's a very trustable guy. So I will support him, even if his book is not made with recycled paper. ■■■



Late summer here 7, south lake tahoe, northern california 7.26 pm

INTO THE WILD.

typing on an old script about cowboy hunters in nineteen fifty five, about how they want to take over this town, its from a large stack of unwanted scripts i keep for paper.



this was one of the most beautiful and creative collaborations of my career. i am so thankful for sean allowing me to be a part of it for sharon for teaching me where to find sean in a graveyard and for serine for opening up her life and being able to look at it with eyes which were not always her own.

late the wild  
into the wild  
and out of the head that feeds you  
out of the womb that bleeds you  
into the dirt which you knead you  
out of the guilt  
built for your generation knew out of the gull  
into the wooden bed of reduced  
and out of each and every perception of you  
into the wild open bed of redwood  
to learn and unlearn  
my child to learn and unlearn  
the things that were intended for you.  
my child the things that were intended



i got the script in the mail, just like any other. i had read the book in high school in an english class called, initiation: adult into adulthood. night, sean penn wrote it and was going to direct. i read it that night, sean penn wrote it and was going to direct. it. i was blown away and moved to tears. the way it was written, i was blown away and moved to tears. the script reminded me of terrence malicks visual language, but the whole thing felt so personal and intimate, i needed to send sean something. i did an audition piece, just me and a camera in my apartment. i thought of my brothers all older than i, all the dusty dirty things i got up to when i was younger. i thought of chris and his sister who were alive when i was so young still walking around in the same part of the world together, how at that age i had never heard of anyone doing what chris had done, it was crazy to think of him passing through out of the corner of my imagination's eye... i realized how an image of a man walking down a lone highway. when i was very young i was scared of them but also yet enraptured by them, some rare breed of human, walking into the wild. i felt close to him without knowing him, without even finishing the script.

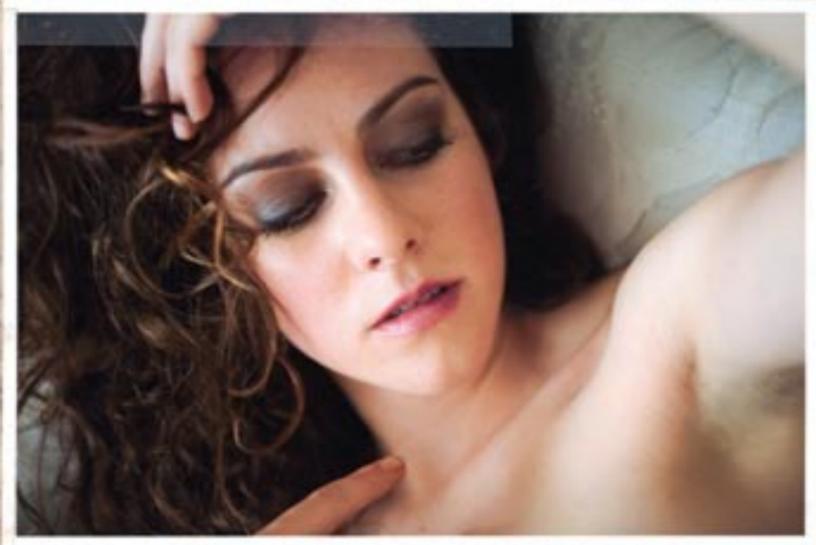
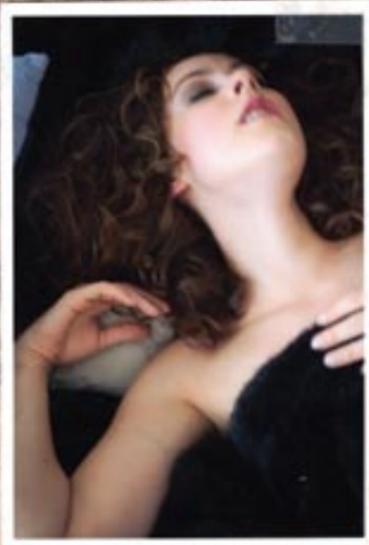


i remember dinners while filming of rich lavish dinners. people creating the meal in front of them. so hungry and so generous being the child of the child of two, rounding the table of relative giants. how inspired i was to feel so tall.

places in the heart. lyrical actress Jena Malone has learned, as she would say, to live between between the lines. on these pages she shares her th

moments of clarity talked about lose something in the retelling.  
 the moment i saw my mom on stage, she was singing. i was 4.  
 other parts of this moment that were not there but felt.  
 i was laying under the piano, she was rehearsing for a play in a casino the sound of her voice,  
 descending me to reconsider my thoughts of her  
 my mother...  
 who is this woman,  
 with a whole different life and breath and clothing  
 i wanted to get to know her better. i wanted to get to know  
 i wanted to get to know her better, both of them.  
 i wanted to be so bold  
 to live one life while the other is still being told.

POSTED



music hijacks my voice and my heart.  
 music hijacks my voice and my heart. there are so many things to learn  
 and to play with.  
 forever a student and forever a vessel.  
 ever a student and forever a vessel. patient to see  
 as patient to see where all this takes us.

smile had changed so much since the last time i had seen him, we were both just past fourteen year  
 he had been working with sean for about two months, he was preparing for the adventure of his life.  
 i could see it in his eyes that he was ready to go there - to the places that he as smile had never  
 gone before... he was full of passion and it was infectious.  
 i was proud of him, in awe of him and he would be going, looking up at him as only  
 a young sibling could. we went our separate ways, knowing that in a few months we would meet up to do  
 our scenes with william hurt and marcia ray harden, our parents in the film, in portland.  
 the whole time i wasn't working i would think of him think of him, was he safe? was he healthy?  
 was he healthy? was he in danger? was he having the time of his life?  
 he spent nine months on the road, from alaska to mexico, while i was in nyc doing a play that would

never end the months on the road,  
 alaska to mexico, while i was in nyc  
 sean pean needs to direct more films  
 smile hirsch needs to be given more  
 challenges needs to be given more  
 people need to see this film about the  
 about the whole  
 whole human soul  
 not just a bio-drama not just the facts  
 of one man  
 not just the facts of one man  
 its about the inner life and outer  
 the facts of one man  
 dreams of us all,  
 its about the inner life and  
 outer dreams of us all.  
 this is the last page  
 this is the last page  
 i swear dear  
 i swear dear  
 i swear dear  
 i swear dear  
 after this i will come to bed...



thoughts and writings about her life, past and future, and her experiences of making, into the wild. photos and assemblage by james gooding

STYLING: David Thomas, luxemgmt.com; HAIR: Miranda Widlund, margaretmalodonado.com; MAKEUP: Dawn Broussard, magnetla.com; LOCATION: The French Connection House, Malibu; Stylist assisted by Dan Musto; FIRST SPREAD (LEFT): Trench, Love Sex Money; Floral corsage from The Way We Wore, Los Angeles; Tights, American Apparel; FIRST SPREAD (RIGHT): Dress, Meghan; Tights, American Apparel; Boots, Jimmy Choo; SECOND SPREAD (LEFT): Dress, Biba; SECOND SPREAD (RIGHT): Tasseled neck piece, Jovovich-Hawk; Jumper, French Connection; Tights, American Apparel

With *There Will Be Blood*, his fourth film and the first one he's directed in five years, Paul Thomas Anderson is taking a creative leap. Abandoning the scarred suburban sprawl of his native San Fernando Valley—the canvas against which he established auteur credentials with *Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia* and *Punch-Drunk Love*, he reaches into the historical past and mines the terrain of turn-of-20th-century California for parables of cutting contemporary relevance. This is also the first time Anderson, nominated twice for Best Original Screenplay Oscars, adapted his script from a book. His source material is *Oil!*—a 1927 novel by prolific agit-lit author Upton Sinclair—which documents, with muckraker gusto, the rise of a ruthless oil magnate during California's black gold rush.

The usually press-shy Anderson invited *Mean* into his home for an exclusive interview in which he discussed his process of adaptation and his collaborative method with *Blood* lead Daniel Day-Lewis—and illuminated a few mysteries of a more lighthearted nature, such as the footwear favored by his late mentor Robert Altman and his entrée of choice at the legendary Art's Delicatessen in Studio City.

# BLOOD FROM OIL

Paul Thomas Anderson's Science of Alchemy  
PHOTOGRAPHS + TEXT BY PATRICK HOELCK

**What chain of events led you to *Oil!*, Upton Sinclair's book that you chose to adapt for the screen as *There Will Be Blood*?**

I found the book in London, and had it for a while but didn't read it. Wait, that's not true: I read the first few chapters and thought they were fantastic, but for whatever reason I didn't keep reading.

I didn't set out to adapt the book. At the time I was struggling to find something to write. I didn't like the things I was writing that were original. And purely as an exercise, I just started adapting pages from the book, and it looked really good. It looked like I didn't write it, which was what I was trying to do. I had been writing things that were vaguely similar in their locales—exterior stories, desert stories—but they weren't very good. Yet there were so many great things in the first 100 pages of *Oil!* and so many good introductions to characters and things that weren't followed through in the rest of the 500 pages of the book, that at a certain point I said, "It would be impossible to adapt this because I couldn't get that much money to make the movie." I thought, "Maybe if you did it as a miniseries, you could do it." I felt comfortable enough keeping some of those characters going and answering some of the questions the author put out there.

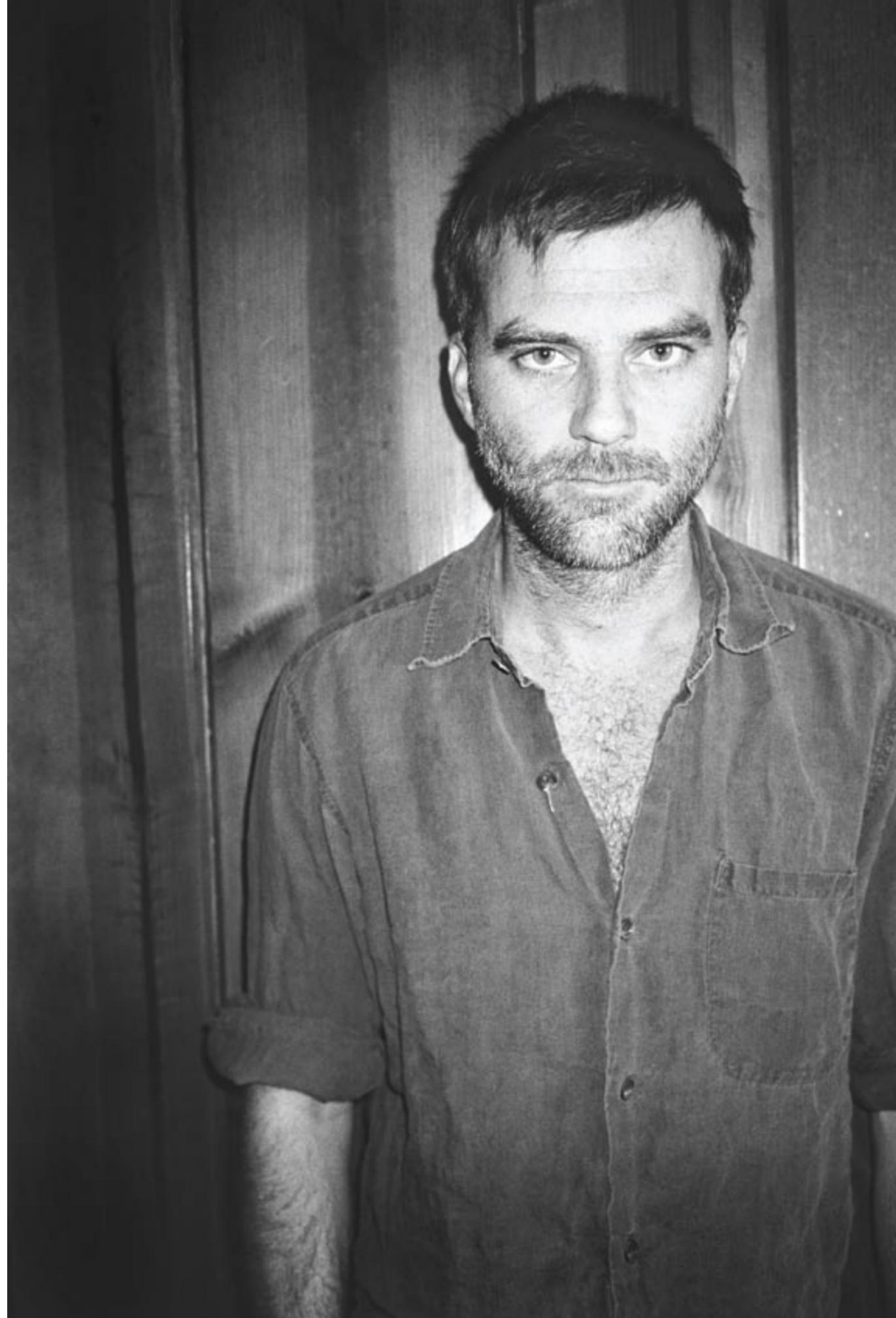
Honestly, I didn't know that much about Upton Sinclair, and it probably helps that he's not alive in

some ways. I didn't feel this feverish dedication to his words. I was playing pretty fast and loose with the story, because I was experimenting. And yet it was nice to have a ready-made scene that was already so well written that I didn't have to do anything to it.

**You have firmly established your own unique style as an auteur. What was it like to adapt someone else's vision—especially the vision of a mythic author like Sinclair?**

Again, I didn't feel too much pressure. I had heard an interesting story about how he had started to write the book, and that kind of informed how I went about it. His wife owned a plot of land down near Long Beach, and there was an oil strike down there. He went down to a homeowners' meeting there and witnessed them arguing, "What are we going to do? There's oil here. Why sit around with vacation homes, when we could get together and sell off our land?" He described what he saw as human greed laid out in front of him—the ugliest of the ugly!

That was enough for him to get started on a certain path and write the book. I think he had a really good journalistic approach to everything: He would really investigate things, and so by the end of it, he really knew how these oil barons worked. It's his remarkable descriptions in the book that



made me think it would be exciting to try to film it. There's the Eli Sunday character [played by Paul Dano] that he based on Aimee Semple McPherson, this famous Pentecostal female preacher who was involved in one scandal after another. I'm not sure, but it seems like he based the main character, the oil baron, on Edward L. Doheny and Harry F. Sinclair, who were these bigger-than-life oil figures that got involved in a lot of scandals in the '20s. Reading about them independently of the book, I started to maybe understand, more and more, what attracted Sinclair himself to the story. Investigating what he investigated was really fun to do.

**How strictly did you adhere to the text, then—since it seems like your goal was not to adapt the book line for line? Did you just take the original material, internalize it, set it aside and then build your script from there?**

There were some times when I wrote down my memory of what a scene was. I would write what I remembered about it. I would look at it, and it would be pretty close, but I would invent a few things, and I would sort of have to ask myself if it was better or different. It was kind of like researching the thing: You could get so stuck in research that you can get nothing done. There's a certain point at which you take it all in, adjust it the best you can, go forward with as much respect for it as you can, but ultimately say, "This has to be a movie and it has to be filmable. It has to be a different thing in some places." There's an opening speech that [protagonist Daniel Plainview] gives that is pretty much word for word how Sinclair wrote it: "Ladies and gentlemen, I've traveled over half of our states..." There was nothing to add to it to make it better. That was probably the biggest hook for me, when I read that. It was just, "Wow! That's pretty good."

**Is *There Will Be Blood* an allegorical film or a topical film? What is it truly about—for you, anyway?**

It's topical, because there is so much talk about oil nowadays. It's historical as well. I don't really know.

**Did you enjoy working on a project that sort of lent itself to a larger scope, at least geographically speaking, than some of the other work you've done?**

Yeah. It's great to work outside—like, 80 percent of [this film takes place] in the outdoors. I think I consciously wanted to make a movie that we could film outside; to try to stay as much away from shooting indoors. When you work with the same people over and over again, you go, "I cannot go into another cramped room next to [cinematographer] Robert Elswit." You need space! You need air.

***There Will Be Blood* is remarkable among your films so far for its out-**

**right absence of comedy. Is that reflective of the times we live in? Is this no time to escape?**

I think it is funny. There's a lot of humor in the story; I hope there is, anyway. It makes me laugh.

**Why did you decide to cast Daniel Day-Lewis as your lead in *Blood*? And, since he works quite seldom these days, why do you think he agreed to make the film with you?**

I wanted to work with him since I first saw him [on-screen]. He's a director's dream. I had written about half of the script and sent it to him to see if he was interested. I did it for two reasons: If he was, it would help me finish it, and if he wasn't, I probably wasn't going to finish it. He was the only actor I wanted that I thought could do it.

**You've always been like that when it comes to casting your films, right?**

Pretty much. But the funny thing is, there are so many supporting parts where I've asked somebody to do it, and they've either politely—or angrily—said no, because they thought it was too small a part or whatever. Yet, inevitably, you always end up with the right people for the movie; it's kind of bizarre how that works. And there is always this moment early on when the studio is sort of wondering what big stars can be in it, and you instinctively try to fight against them because you're just trying to find the right person. Sometimes the Kool-Aid slips in a little bit, and you get ideas that a person is good and you realize they aren't good at all.

**Day-Lewis is also famous for fully immersing himself into his roles and sometimes spending the entire duration of a shoot in character. How did his own process mesh with your direction and how did you two collaborate to create his character, Daniel Plainview?**

We talked a lot. It took two years to get this project up and running. It was not laziness on our part, but there was a baby that came out, Daniel hurt his back, and nobody really wanted to give us the money. So those things added an extra year to the whole thing that really gave us all this time to keep talking about it. At the same time, I never felt like we over-talked about it, so there was something to look forward to during the making of the film. There was still mystery.

It was such a privilege to work with him. It's hard to talk about things you really like or that you don't want to jinx, I guess.

**So, did he stay in character throughout this shoot?**

He did. I think it's so misinterpreted as something bizarre or unnecessary, when really, when you end up seeing him [at work] you can't believe that nobody else would do it that way. You wonder why others don't have the dis-

cipline or the focus. If you had the opportunity to be somebody else for three months and it helped maintain the focus and the dedication that was needed to do it really well, why wouldn't you? It's just concentration—an amazing amount of concentration.

I don't really like working with people who kind of brag about being able to joke with the crew and when [I] call "Action!" they are right there with it. I don't really buy that, or believe it. That kind of acting is usually not very good.

**Music obviously always plays a significant role in your films. What was your approach to the *Blood* soundtrack, given the story's time period and tone? You mentioned Krzysztof Penderecki as a composer you listened to while you were writing the film. Did any of that stuff make it in the final cut?**

It didn't. But we did great by having [Jonny] Greenwood do the score, who besides being in Radiohead, is also the BBC's composer-in-residence. He's amazing. There were two orchestral pieces that I had heard that I really felt would be terrific for the film, which we ended up using on the soundtrack. I was able to sort of put those things in and show the film to him and ask him if he wanted to write any more stuff. He was nervous at first about how big the task was, but came back with all this wonderful music and these wonderful ideas.

**How much better does your writing become when it's handed over to great actors? Is that something you take into account as you're writing? Name some instances when you were amazed and surprised by what actors were able to do with your writing.**

If you have a great actor and you've written something really well, you're very lucky. But when you have a really good actor, and you have something that you've written really poorly, chances are it's your fault. If someone who is really capable of doing verbal curlicues stumbles, it usually means that I haven't written it well. It's embarrassing.

**...If the writing isn't there, not even Daniel Day-Lewis can pull it off!**

It's completely true. I remember when we were doing a minor scene between Ciarán [Hinds] and Daniel, and Daniel says, "How big is this room?" It's simple dialogue back and forth. Originally, it was written as a page and a half, and we were trying every ridiculous idea in the book to stage it: "What if you're standing over here? What if you're standing on your head? What if there is a barrel of oil on fire behind you?" We were trying to make it work and we couldn't. Then Daniel said, "Usually, in situations like this, I've found it's not the staging that's the problem; it's the writing." And it really was the problem. We just stopped and looked

at the scene, and it was very easy to go, "Cut, cut, cut, cut." Instead of 20 lines, it's suddenly five lines.

None of us had the solution, and it was just that bolt of lightning that made it all work: "Maybe it's the writing."

**What are some specific sources of inspiration, other than film, that nurture your own work these days? That's a good question, but I don't have an answer to it.**

**While working in Hollywood, how do you minimize deleterious interference from studio heads and protect your own vision? Did anybody dare give you notes on *There Will Be Blood*? Could working with imposed limitations sometimes be a positive thing for a filmmaker?**

I'm working with people that I've worked with before, so we know each other—which has its own set of dysfunctional dynamics. We fight, but in a good way—or we don't fight when we should.

**How does it feel to be the youngest on set and in charge of a production? Does this affect your approach at all?**

I used to be the youngest on my sets; not any more. I'm a 37-year-old man.

***Magnolia*, *Boogie Nights* and *Sydney* had you working with pretty much the same ensemble casts. Will you resurrect this tradition? Why have you steered away from it on *There Will Be Blood*?**

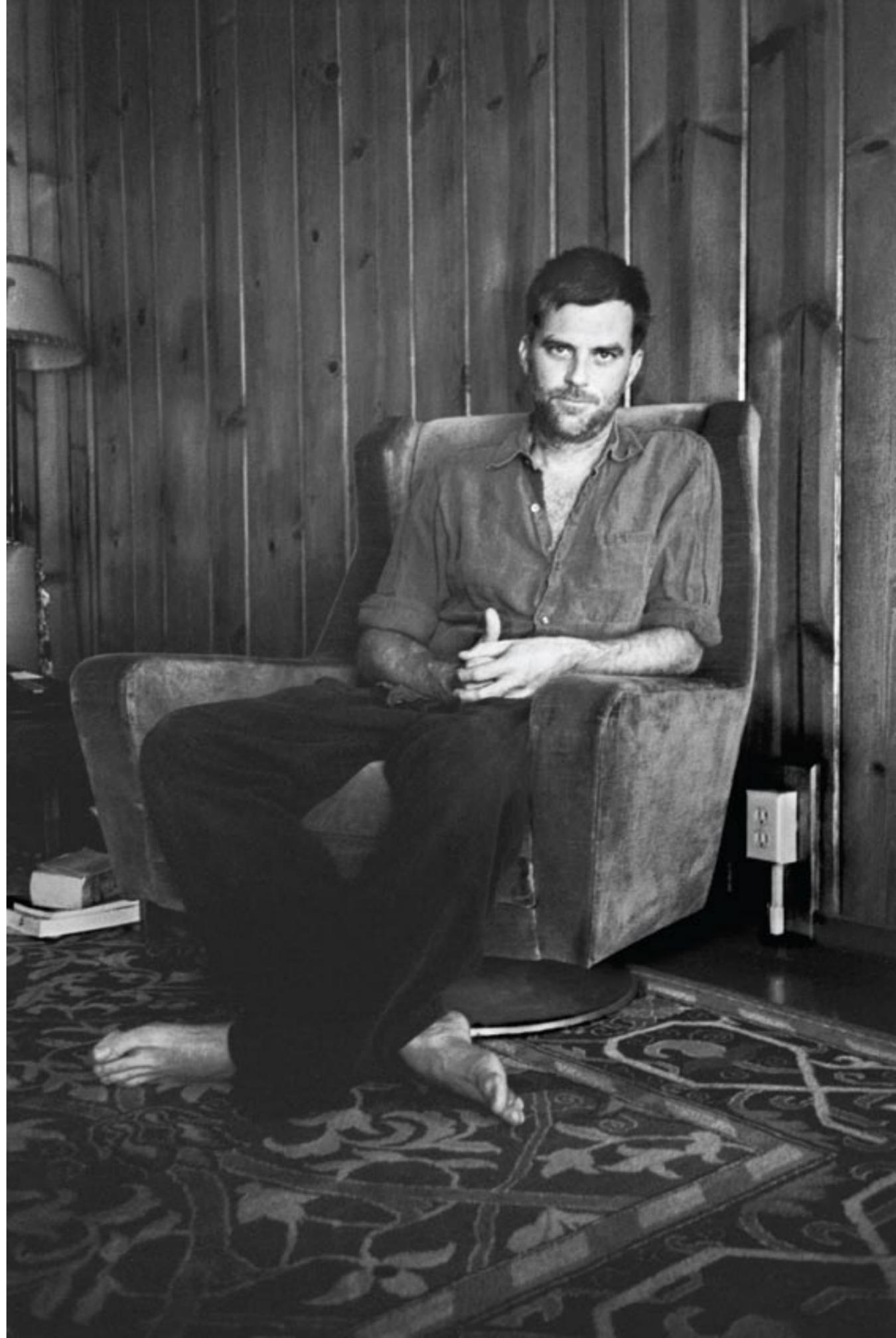
I just couldn't see Luis Guzman running around the desert in 1911 California... It just didn't seem to work out. I think there was a part of me that was nervous that I wouldn't be working with Phil [Seymour Hoffman]. I remember calling him a few different times when we started filming [*Blood*], and it felt a little bit like a kid calling home from college—because it was the first film I had made without him. But it's equally terrific to work with new people.

**How have you dealt with the pressure of being called "the new Orson Welles"? Did the scrutiny and added expectations that came with your early success impact your creativity? I was just starting to feel good about this interview... Let's move on to the next question.**

**What did you think of the Tarantino-Rodriguez *Grindhouse* experiment? Does genre filmmaking hold any appeal to you?**

*Grindhouse* is great, particularly Quentin's half of it. I just loved it. I've been to Quentin's house a few times, and [the film] felt exactly what it's like to go to his house, where he shows you movies and trailers.

**Robert Altman is undoubtedly one of your biggest influences. What was it like working with him on *A Prairie Home Companion*? And**





what are the most important lessons you learned from the man himself and from studying his work?

It was great, obviously. It was a privilege. Bob never stopped making movies and never stopped trying to leapfrog from one thing to the next. I remember telling him that I felt burned out or that I felt tired, and he would not say anything in response. He would just look at me in this way that implied, "What are you fucking talking about? It's a privilege to get to do this. You *have* to do it. Don't get tired."

He seemed so thrilled that he got another film off the ground. I wasn't there back in the old days, but he really had a way of letting everything brush off him. Nothing got to him. He just kept his vision; he moved straight ahead. Even on his last film, there were producers talking behind the scenes, second-guessing, thinking, plotting delicately. He knew it was happening, but he just completely ignored it. He had done this enough to know that he was going to get everything he wanted. There was absolutely no reason for him to holler and scream about it.

You once said—"Magnolia is, for better or worse, the best movie I'll ever make." Do you still feel the same way today?

[Silence]

How do you feel about the possibilities of shooting digital versus shooting on celluloid?

It depends on what you're doing. I don't think we could have done what we did on *[Blood]*, a movie with big daytime exteriors, if we were shooting on film. I like going digital for some things, but I don't really like it very much. I like film.

Name three extraordinary films that you love, but 99 percent of the moviegoing public has most likely never heard of.

I like films that people *have* heard of: *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, *Giant*, *The Big Lebowski*.

I remember that when you told me you liked *Bad Santa*, I thought you were teasing me.

...It's gotten to the point now, where, if *Bad Santa* is on, I have to go into the other room to watch it, because Maya [Rudolph] is so sick of it. She loved it the first five times, but now she just can't do it anymore.

What was it like to write for *Saturday Night Live*? Can you discuss your involvement with the show? What sketch were you most proud of?

There was only one sketch that I did, which finally became a short with Ben Affleck. I was just holding on for dear life, because everybody was being funny and I was completely out of my element and I just had this video camera. It was great! It's like, you shoot it in two hours, you edit it that night and it's on the air in hours. Within 24 hours you've done a short!

When you flew out to Hertfordshire to meet Tom Cruise in preparation for *Magnolia*, he was shooting *Eyes Wide Shut*. Did you notice what kind of shoes Stanley Kubrick had on?

I think he had sneakers on. He also had a big parka on. It was cold. I can't be sure, but I *think* it was sneakers.

What's your shoe of choice?

Practical shoes! Whatever works for very long stretches of time. We all wore boots when we were out in the desert [Ed. Note: *Anderson shot Blood on location in Marfa, Texas*], and that's what everybody pretty much wears out there. You couldn't wear sneakers, because it was too rocky and you would twist your ankle. I wasn't a big boot wearer before, but I got into it because you had to.

What did Altman wear?

He wore Campers. Is that what they're called?

You've been known to befriend and work with people much older than you, i.e. Philip Baker Hall, Robert Altman, Jason Robards. Why is that?

A lot of those guys were the same age my father was. I've always loved that group—Bob Ridgely, too. Philip was younger than Bob and Jason. But Bob, Jason and my dad were all pretty much the same age. That's what it is, really; an affection for that kind of man. There's a sense of humor about those guys that... I was really sad when Bob [Altman] died, for a number of reasons, but above all because he was the last person like that I knew who went. I felt like, "That's it. I don't have any of them left. I don't have anybody left that was in World War II or had that kind of sense."

What's your favorite sandwich at Art's Deli?

The sandwiches are too big there. I get eggs and bacon.

What is the most American thing you've ever done?

I said "arigato" to a Korean man. ■■■

Jake Gaskill contributed to this feature.



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# STILL KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR

Francis Ford Coppola  
Storms the Last Citadel **BY PAUL CULLUM**

From a contemporary vantage point, it's almost impossible to remember the influence Francis Ford Coppola had on filmmaking in the '70s, and how completely he embodied the times and pointed to a future well beyond them. He was the first to bring a film-school curriculum to the working toolbox of studio production; the first to parlay his time at the Roger Corman finishing school into Hollywood success; the very public face of the scruffy hordes of movie brats mobilizing to throw open the studio gates and upend the half-century-old culture of market-driven, mass-produced films. Coppola was in fact a well-read theater director and film aesthete with the symbiotic personalities of showman and visionary. *The Godfather* set the tone for the decade. *The Godfather: Part II* doubled down and gloriously pulled off the bet, even as *The Conversation* remade Antonioni's *Blow-Up* as an art-house thriller, perfectly encapsulating Watergate-era paranoia in the bargain. He spent the next four years on *Apocalypse Now*, vilified by virtually everyone fit to venture an opinion. (The film's co-screenwriter, John Milius, recounts that when 4-year-old Sofia Coppola was asked by a teacher what her father did for a living, she reported, "He makes *Apocalypse Now*.") And yet again, the gamble paid off splendidly. At the first cast-and-crew screening in San Francisco, filmmaker emeritus Billy Wilder, given the first word, rose to declare the film a masterpiece. Coppola was also at the forefront of many technological innovations the film industry eventually adopted, even as his own output throughout the '80s and '90s never again quite matched the intoxicating achievements and implicit danger of the four aforementioned films.

*Youth Without Youth*, based on a 100-page novella written in 1976 by Romanian author and world religion scholar Mircea Eliade, marks Coppola's return to directing after a 10-year hiatus. In the interim, the '70s became codified as the last Golden Age of American cinema and the *Godfather* trilogy entered the cultural pantheon (abetted no doubt by *The Sopranos*, in whose universe, apparently, no other movies exist). Coppola gained the financial independence that his sudden and emphatic enthusiasms had repeatedly denied him. Daughter Sofia received an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay for *Lost in Translation*. And in his 68th year and his 47th in the business, Coppola may have made his most audacious film yet with *Youth Without Youth*. Told as a classical Old World mystery, and shot without moving the

camera, in the style of Yasujiro Ozu, *Youth* represents Coppola's assault not just on a new form of personal filmmaking, accomplished with his own money and without outside interference, but on those ineffable subjects that film itself (or at least American film) has proven incapable of capturing: time, consciousness, ontology—the stuff of literature or philosophy. As he himself notes, it may take 20 years before history renders a verdict.

And yet, Coppola himself appears to revel in the challenge. Currently in Argentina shooting his next feature, *Tetro*, about an extended Italian family of artists reminiscent of his own, Coppola found time to answer 20 questions for *Mean*—and quoted a pithy verse from the poet Robert Browning's "Andrea del Sarto," in which an aging Renaissance painter and Salieri-like craftsman laments his failure to achieve greatness: "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

**Why did you stop directing for a decade? Was the caliber of commercial films you were being offered—*Jack*, *The Rainmaker*—beneath your talents or at odds with your interests?**

I don't feel anything is "beneath" me and have always been interested in versatility, trying many different genres and styles throughout my career. In those 10 years I was focused more on trying to find a way of being a filmmaker who writes original material, as well as building my various companies—so I might have a source of support and finance.

**Did the media sensation surrounding *Apocalypse Now Redux* and other director's cuts/reissues of your films revitalize you, or at least convince you there was an audience out there for your work?**

I think I always knew there was interest in my work, but I did want to find a way to work on more original, personal and innovative projects—projects that required a little more than just a few hours of "entertainment" (though entertainment is important, too), and could support deeper interests, such as when we read great books.

**You often blame your respite from filmmaking on *Megalopolis*, a long-planned epic that seems to have preoccupied you at least since *One From the Heart*—the story of a Manhattan utopia that was reportedly derailed in your mind when 9/11 happened. Is this connected to your long-rumored adaptation of Goethe's**

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLAS GUERIN/CORBIS



*Elective Affinities*, and can you describe it briefly?

No, *Megalopolis* has nothing to do with *Elective Affinities*, but like that project, is an ambitious, personal film. ... "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

You reportedly re-cut *Supernova* in 2000, after Walter Hill bowed out; you re-cut a Thai epic, *The Legend of Suriyothai*; and you produced or executive-produced 26 films or TV series, by my count, since your "retirement" in 1997. Is "retirement" then the wrong word?

As a long-term board member of MGM, I saw the abandoned film *Supernova* and felt it could still be released. So I did help re-cut it so that it could be put into distribution. However, I am often erroneously credited with having more to do with that film than just that. I am a friendly guy and often have been talked into helping out in any number of ways.

Not only the most visibly prolific director of your generation of filmmakers, you were also its most visionary. Have most of the things you predicted come to pass?

It's not particularly useful or popular to see way out into the future; it's better to have those ideas closer to when they are about to be accepted. The iPod, for example, was something that already existed for years, but Apple greatly improved it in function and design.

George Lucas was your protégé: you produced his first two feature films, *THX 1138* and *American Graffiti*. He is now seen as a latter-day Thomas Edison, credited with ushering, in large part, digital filmmaking into Hollywood. He's arguably a billionaire today as a consequence—for pushing ideas he seemingly inherited from you. Did you prosper as well, and is digital filmmaking a boon or a liability to modern filmmaking?

Well, believe it or not—dare I say it?—I am extremely affluent too, although mainly from the aggregate of my other businesses and real estate. I am proud of George and very fond of him, as a younger brother. Digital filmmaking is as natural an evolution of cinema as was color and sound. The two most important aspects of the beauty and luster of photography are the lenses and the eye of the cinematographer.

At the end of *Hearts of Darkness*, you envision a day when some little girl in Iowa can pick up a hand-held camera and be revealed "as the next Mozart." With the rise of YouTube and related technologies, are those days finally upon us?

YouTube is absolutely fascinating. I am waiting for the "next shoe to drop," which is the natural and easy access to audiences: distribution.

Is your success in the wine and resort industries a natural by-product of your reputation as a filmmaker?

er—that is, an outgrowth of your legacy, persona and reputation for quality, if not a kind of nostalgia for you and the sacrifices you have endured for your body of work?

I have a very good imagination, a lot of energy and a love for innovation, so I imagine my success in these other businesses stems from the same source as my success as a filmmaker. No doubt my fame as a filmmaker helped with the other areas I went into.

Could this be extended to the films of your children—specifically Sofia's Oscar win for *Lost in Translation*?

My wife Eleanor and I did a good job raising our kids, and provided a very good education, in a certain sense: The message from a parent can be devastating to a kid... "You'll never amount to anything!" is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We used to say to Sofia when she was 8, "You are Superwoman; you can do anything."

The *Godfather* trilogy has become a part of our cultural heritage, and nowhere is that evidenced more prominently than in the seven-year run of *The Sopranos*. Did you follow the show or note the *Godfather* references throughout?

After making *The Godfather*, I was sick of gangsters. I really didn't want to make a second film. In truth, I have never seen *The Sopranos*, though I know it's very good.

Sony executives are quoted in the press kit for *Youth Without Youth* as saying that this film is like no other in memory. Was that your intention? Are there films or filmmakers that served as touchstones while you were making it? It made me think of Ozu's work; *Vertigo*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, *Altered States*, *The Holy Mountain*... I could go on, but how would you describe the film?

I truly followed the footsteps of Mircea Eliade—and Ozu [was an inspiration] only because I never moved the camera. Yes, I agree that you could characterize *Youth Without Youth* as similar to *Vertigo*—a film I was very impressed with as a teenager—because it wraps a love story in a mystery.

Adrienne Brodeur, editor of your *All-Story* short-story magazine, has been quoted as saying about you, "Neither of us is drawn to very experimental works." That begs the question: Is *Youth Without Youth* an experimental work?

I feel *Youth Without Youth* is told in a very classic way. I tried to make clear, always, when things were happening, to always move forward—except for some memories of when [protagonist] Dominic was a young man and in love in 1894. But I've always felt that movies, too, could be deep and bear re-viewing, just as good books bear re-reading. But they also must be engaging, entertaining and beautiful on the first viewing.

How do you think this may be received by an audience, and what audience do you intend it for?

I would guess that most would say it is "interesting." Beyond that, the reactions will be all over the map, until about 10 or 20 years from now, at which time there will be a consolidated opinion.

Filmmakers successful in Hollywood, like Steven Soderbergh, have made unorthodox pictures like *Schizopolis* to recharge their batteries and reacquire themselves with the joy of filmmaking. Did *Youth Without Youth* have a similarly liberating effect on you, and was it designed to? Well, Steven is a young man—I'm much older—but certainly I did love the chance to work in a personal way. In *Tetro*, now, I can even have the opportunity to write an original screenplay—my own story—and make an even more personal film.

Taking these two latest films together, how are they representative of the current phase of your career? What about them will be carried forward in your subsequent filmmaking?

Freedom of expression.

Are narrative and allegory complementary or mutually exclusive?

Well, you can certainly today make any kind of film, as long as it's got a conventional narrative and, moreover, a story that everyone already knows. It's like telling kids *The Three Bears*, which they love because they already know it. But cinema is really more like poetry than narrative prose, and is most beautiful when it uses metaphor. So yes, narrative and allegory go well together.

In paying for this yourself, presumably one of the things you buy is the lack of ulterior meddling—the studio notes, test screenings, focus groups, etc. Did the distributor or others have any input?

I put up all the money and therefore got to make all the final decisions. That doesn't mean there weren't notes or consultation, but [they were between myself and] my colleagues. Walter Murch had a profound impact on the film; and so did the photographer [Mihai Malaimare Jr.], my old associate Fred Roos and Anahid Nazarian. You know, I can best explain it like this: When I make a film, I go to two people on the set and say to them that they are always free to render an opinion about the shooting and the shots. They are the camera operator and the script supervisor. Why only those two? Because the operator sees the performances right through the lens and therefore has the best opportunity to get the "sensation." The script supervisor—because that is the job they do. So it's not that you don't want notes or opinions, you just don't want too many because the more you get, the more they start to contradict each other.

What is missing from modern filmmaking? If you asked any contemporary, working filmmakers worth their salt this question, they would likely respond that they miss the freedom and excitement that you once personified. What would you say is missing?

The encouragement to experiment, to try to go farther and uncover more. A lack of variety. I understand that one cannot even get support to do a drama today, that that is relegated to cable TV. The understanding that not all films will be an immediate financial hit, that some take longer to accomplish that or may never do that, even though they are very valuable and stimulating. The "M" for movies is really now only an "M" for money. Rarely do I go to the movies without thinking or saying, "I've seen that before." That's why I loved *Punch-Drunk Love*; I had never seen anything like that before.

I remember seeing *The Conversation* in its first commercial release and thinking, "I can tell this is brilliant, but it almost eludes me"—it's so diaphanous, told in wisps and fragments, that I can just barely comprehend all of it as one piece. Today, it's a template of what the modern thriller should be. Does this latest film you made point to a new way—a paradigm shift, if you will—and will it be seen as such 20 years from now?

Probably. You know, recently I was asked how it felt to have made *Godfather*, *Conversation*, *Godfather II* and *Apocalypse Now* straight through in four years... "Were you feeling on top of the world?" In truth I was very frustrated at the time, felt very unappreciated and depressed, which is why the streak didn't continue. No one said to me at the time that this was a rare demonstration of excellence; it was the reverse. I remember when the critic Frank Rich called *Apocalypse* the biggest disaster in Hollywood history. I felt, "Gee, is it really the biggest disaster? Is there nothing worse?"

Orson Welles once lamented that composers were allowed to go on working into their '90s, but filmmakers were put out to pasture in what might be their most productive years. Do you feel the same? To ask the question in another way... Early in *Youth Without Youth*, Bruno Ganz's character describes Tim Roth's Dominic as follows: "The patient is clinically youthful." Does that describe you?

I never felt "put out to pasture"; Hollywood has always been good to me, even affectionate. And I feel the same about them, despite always being posed as very critical of them. I love the Hollywood tradition and history and am proud to be part of it. Yes, I think I am very youthful—just not all the time. ■■■

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## Marc Forster Wrestles with *The Kite Runner*

BY PAUL CULLUM

# STRONGER THAN FICTION

**Director Marc Forster** is a hard man to pin down. Born in the small town of Ulm, Germany and raised across the border in Davos, Switzerland, he was 12 years old before he saw a movie in a proper theater. The picture was *Apocalypse Now*, and it inspired him to pursue the life of a filmmaker. When his family's fortunes took a turn for the worse, a family friend paid for him to enroll in film school at New York University. He eventually made his way to Los Angeles in the mid-'90s, where he directed his \$10,000 debut, *Loungers*, still rendered unavailable by prohibitive music clearances. A little-seen second feature, *Everything Put Together*, starring Radha Mitchell, got him the job to helm the Southern Gothic race reverie *Monster's Ball*, which garnered a Best Actress Oscar for Halle Berry. His body of work built on Johnny Depp's turn as Peter Pan creator J.M. Barrie in *Finding Neverland*, and progressed from the Nicolas Roeg-inflected dreamscapes of *Stay* to the underrated and heartwarming *Stranger Than Fiction*. Most recently, Forster brought the bestselling novel *The Kite Runner* to the screen, in partnership with *Stay* scripter David Benioff. He's currently in pre-production on the next installment of the retooled James Bond franchise, working from a script by Paul Haggis.

You work in a wide variety of genres and it's difficult to find a through-line that connects all your films, except that I always seem to detect a world within a world—or at least, a secret world behind the world of the film. Sometimes it's a fairy tale the characters find themselves inhabiting—literally, in *Finding Neverland* or in *Stranger Than Fiction*, but also in something like *Monster's Ball*, which is ultimately a fable. In *Everything Put Together* or *Stay*, it's the paranoia or altered reality that overtakes the characters, which soon enough dictates its own logic. Even in *Loungers*, your largely unseen debut feature, there's this odd interior world of a kooky family that no one else seems to understand.

I think what's similar [in all of my films] is the sense that, deep inside, they always deal with a main character who is emotionally detached. If you look at Billy Bob's character in *Monster's Ball* or Johnny Depp's character in *Finding Neverland*, it all comes back to this emotionally damaged character who can't connect or truly open up. In *Stranger Than Fiction*, with Will Ferrell, again it's the same thing. In *The Kite Runner* it's a different through-line, but Amir, the lead, is an emotionally repressed character who is hiding this secret within him that enables him to act truthfully. I think that's the connection. Every director, in one way or another, is telling similar stories. I don't want to become too Freudian here, but it's always about your childhood.

You were born in in 1969, in Ulm, Germany—the birthplace of Albert Einstein. Is there something in the water that produces dreamers who eventually find their way to America?

Maybe! But Ulm is a very provincial small town, so I don't know how much dreaming goes on there. Also, my birthday, January 27th, is the same as Mozart's, although I'm reluctant to compare myself. Very early on, we moved to Davos, Switzerland, the home of the World Economic Forum. Growing up as a child in Davos, which was in the mountains, we didn't have TV and I always had to go to a friend's house to see it. But what came out of that was that I had to create my own games and play by myself a lot. We lived up on a hillside, and for any other kids to come and play would have been a bit of a commute. Most of the time I was on my own. I would play in the woods and create these imaginary scenarios—I always had to be creative and figure out different ways to do that.

I know that your brother was diagnosed as schizophrenic and committed suicide. I don't want to be too facile about this because it's the stuff of your life, but I presume that had a big impact on you.

He was five years older than me, and he was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was 20 or 21. So it was rather late. He was a mathematical and physics genius. If you've ever seen the documentary *Crumb*, he was like Crumb's brother [Charles]. He just wasn't able to function in the world. I remember when I was at NYU film school in New York, one day he showed up at my house and he was just sitting there. He basically said that God sent him there, and I had to make a movie about this story that he wrote down and handed to me. And then he went back to Europe. We were very close.

What did your parents do?

My father was a doctor, and my mother was a mother. My father only practiced when he was young. He ran a research laboratory for a company that he took over from my grandfather and eventually sold to Pfizer. He didn't like to work in the corporate structure. Then a stock crash happened, and everything changed. Before that, we had a very comfortable lifestyle and several houses. When that happened, we had nothing. But I still believe to this day that it was the best thing that ever happened to us. Ultimately, the great lesson about life is if you're wealthy and you have everything, everybody caters to you, everybody loves you and all doors are open to you. Yet when you lose everything, you truly understand what life is about. It was the first time the family really understood each other, or looked to each other for support.

Wealth becomes a scrim, a membrane that replaces human interaction.

I don't want to say that wealth is bad, but I think that wealth can distract you from what life is really about. Kids often lose touch with their parents; nannies always leave, so there's automatically an abandonment issue. Coming to Hollywood, it's very similar: All doors are open, and then suddenly people aren't there anymore. I realized it's illusory. Life always changes;

you can't always be successful, and you can't always make movies people love.

Your childhood sounds not dissimilar to the circumstances of the family in *The Kite Runner*.

Absolutely. I could relate to so many things. Khaled [Hosseini, author of the novel] took stories from himself and his family and friends, but you find those stories all over. If you dive into the Afghan community, you quickly figure out that a lot of people have stories that are similar, that they also left the country during that time or were captured by the Russians and tortured. A lot of them were part of the fighting at the time; there's one horror story after another. So obviously, it's a very different culture, but there were a lot of parallels with the immigrant experience, and I was an immigrant here. Losing your wealth, and also how the father dealt with the son, from an emotional perspective. My father died of cancer. And then, I always felt like I had these little secrets in me—not where I would betray anyone, but more secrets about my childhood that I haven't been completely truthful about, and that I'm still trying to resolve in films like that or in characters like that. This was the hardest film I've ever made.

Did you film in Afghanistan, where much of the action is set?

No. Insurance-wise, I wouldn't have been able to do it. It was in China, right across the border, across the mountains there. It was 25 miles from the Pakistani border and 50 miles from the Afghani border, right where they all collide. When I was in Kabul, I felt, "Maybe I should just film here." But the problem is, most of the architecture has been destroyed through all the wars. The town we filmed in, Tashgarkan, has pretty much the same architecture that was in Kabul in the '70s, and it's totally untouched.

Was this the biggest thing that you've done, budget-wise?

No. It was in the \$20 million range, and *Fiction* and *Stay* were both \$40 million.

The character of Assef, a bully and a rapist—in the book he's half-German, and also a Hitler sympathizer. Did your background lead you to change the character?

Afghanistan was always very close to the Germans, and during WWII they were German sympathizers. But in the film, I thought it was cliché to have this blonde, blue-eyed German character—it just didn't feel right. I'm less German than I am culturally Swiss, because I was brought up there, although there's definitely a side of me where if I'm two minutes late, for instance, I'll feel really bad about it. Whereas, Mexican directors like Alejandro Iñárritu will say, "Oh, I want to show you a rough cut," and they show up an hour late. They have no sense of time. And I think to myself, I wish I could do that and just sort of let go. Time is an illusion—it doesn't really mean anything." ■■■

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHIL BRAY/DREAMWORKS PICTURES 2007





***I'm Not There*** is the latest opus from Todd Haynes, the American auteur whose highly respected body of work includes *Safe*, *Velvet Goldmine* and *Far From Heaven*. It explores the life of Bob Dylan with the blessing of the great Jimmy himself, who is notably portrayed here by a number of different performers, ranging from 13-year-old African-American newcomer Marcus Carl Franklin, to stars like Heath Ledger, Christian Bale, Richard Gere and actress Cate Blanchett. Haynes' cool yet somewhat obfuscating approach to the material is sure to yield interesting results and raise many an eyebrow. *Mean* asked the filmmaker to explain his method in piecing together this unconventional cinematic portrait.

**The first question everybody is going to ask about this film is why you cast a bunch of different actors to play Bob Dylan at different times in his life. Indeed, why?**

The idea basically came after a sort of surprise immersion into Dylan's music and work that occurred at the end of the millennium, in 1999, in New York, and took me across the country to Portland, where I was coming to write my script for *Far From Heaven*. I had been a Dylan lover in high school, but I had lost track of what he'd been doing in the '80s and '90s. The return to his music came out of nowhere for me, and it was very charged and very obsessive. I think it was harken-

ing a change in my life I didn't even see coming yet, that would ultimately take me back to the West Coast for good. So, I was listening to bootleg Dylan material I hadn't heard before, and reading biographies I'd never read before. All of the bios seemed to re-echo this recurrent view of Dylan, which was that he was a mercurial figure of almost constitutional change, where he would immerse himself intensely into one phase, and one period, and one area, or one ideology, and produce intensely in that guise. And then, almost out of a sort of internal necessity, he would shed those skins and move in a different direction. It's hard to know how much that's an aspect of him as a person, or a result of the enormous scrutiny he lived under. Maybe he was simply trying to find fresh air to create new work.

hair and kind of slide-y hands and gestures and body movements that were never repeated again in his career. He never looked, sounded, talked, moved, or behaved that way again. So it was an absolutely, singularly defined moment in his career. It happens to be one of the most famous periods for Dylan, so we've seen these photographs [documenting it] over and over again. I really wanted to infuse it with a fresh shock-value that I think people of that time would have felt and which was lost over the years.

**What about the other actors you selected to play Dylan—what kinds of effects were you seeking when you cast them?**

Hence my choice in casting a female to portray him. There's a strange androgyny about Dylan at that time, but it's a different kind of androgyny than the glamorous, fashion-infused idea of male androgyny. This was almost like how a woman is androgynous in a strange way—more of a Patti Smith than a David Bowie model. I just thought that an actress could do something extraordinary with that particular Dylan, and Cate Blanchett certainly did.

# SEEING THE REAL HIM, AT LAST

Todd Haynes on His New Bob Dylan Non-Biopic

BY MYA STARK

ing a change in my life I didn't even see coming yet, that would ultimately take me back to the West Coast for good. So, I was listening to bootleg Dylan material I hadn't heard before, and reading biographies I'd never read before. All of the bios seemed to re-echo this recurrent view of Dylan, which was that he was a mercurial figure of almost constitutional change, where he would immerse himself intensely into one phase, and one period, and one area, or one ideology, and produce intensely in that guise. And then, almost out of a sort of internal necessity, he would shed those skins and move in a different direction. It's hard to know how much that's an aspect of him as a person, or a result of the enormous scrutiny he lived under. Maybe he was simply trying to find fresh air to create new work.

**A lot of people, I think, will be very intrigued that you cast an actress, Cate Blanchett, to play Dylan. Yeah, it was really specific to the time and place, where the "Jude" character [Ed. note: the different depictions of Dylan by each actor are given different character names to distinguish them] exists in the Dylan mythos. In 1966, the story kicks off with our depiction of [the] Newport [Folk Festival], where Cate's character plays plugged-in electric, and starts this whole era of his life. The following year, Dylan went to the UK, Europe and Australia for a notoriously controversial tour with the Band as his backup group. They played extremely loud, extremely violent-sounding music for his audience, and for most pop music listeners at the time. It was a complete challenge to the ethos of antique commercial music-making that defined the folk era. What was so bizarre and amazing about Dylan at that time was how he looked, and how he behaved. His mannerisms and his physical state—that incredibly skinny body and crazy nest of**

young, Woody Guthrie-imitating wannabe, and impressing the people he met in his journeys from Minnesota to New York in the very early '60s with these outrageous tales of his past and his adventures and his carnival upbringing. His claims of playing with blues musicians, and all of these stories which are used verbatim in what my character "Woody" says in the film. People were dumbstruck by Dylan's performance at the time—it seemed completely, patently impossible. But he was so persuasive and so strangely committed to this persona that they went with it and just sort of took it in. So I just made that "Woody" character do all those things he did, except that he literally calls himself "Woody Guthrie," and he's black, and he's 13 years old. But people are all just blatantly ignoring that, just as they did the implausibility of what the real Dylan was doing back then.

Christian Bale's character is closer to the known biography of Dylan and actual events in his life. He is very much engaged in two moral crusades: The first one is being the spokesperson for the folk revival of the early '60s Greenwich Village, taking on that Civil Rights-era mantle as spokesperson and visionary of that time. We learn about him through the guise of a documentary that is looking back on whatever happened to this notable folk figure who left his fame behind when it got too commercial for his own values. But then he is discovered in the '80s, when this imaginary documentary takes place, having construed himself as [a born-again Christian] who became a pastor and settled into a Pentecostal assembly in California. That, of course, is also something that Dylan did. He didn't *literally* become a minister, but he ministered from the microphone and from his recordings—the gospel records he put out in the late '70s-early '80s.

I'm just drawing a line, establishing a sort of moral continuum between these two very different faces [of

Dylan]. Dylan's *work* isn't always defined by that kind of righteous certainty, but at two very critical points in his evolution, he was. Twice he showed similar instincts to provide the answer through troubled times, and was very [militant] about it. So I am drawing a parallel between those two very different sides of him, largely to bring on some understanding of his Christian conversion, which still befuddles a lot of people.

**I can imagine Bale really going to town with that... Let's discuss Heath Ledger as Dylan.**

His name is "Robbie Clark," and he's an actor, a counter-culture actor of the Vietnam era. His story is mostly about the struggle of private life and romantic life and marriage against successful public life, and how hard that is for most artists to juggle. It was true for Dylan as well. Charlotte Gainsbourg plays his love interest and later wife and mother of his kids. She sort of combines aspects of both Dylan's early romance and relationship with Suze Rotolo, who was the early muse, inspiration, and partner on the cover of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. This female figure is a huge and positive influence on Dylan's life, and she also includes Sara Dylan—[also known as] Sara Lownds, who Dylan married in '65 and was the mother of his four kids. He sort of struggled in that marriage, and expressed a lot of ambivalence on records like *Blood on the Tracks*, as the marriage was failing.

**It seems like your film is showing us the way Dylan used the cultural figures who preceded him to construct his identity, and making us think about how we, who came after him, use what he did to construct our own identities.**

Oh, absolutely. I think that's intensely material we draw from: popular culture and peer culture and social culture. I drew myself intensely from my own cues, and the media and entertainment world around [me]—those images, those fantasies—and Dylan did the same thing. Maybe that's truer for creative people, I don't know: that there needs to be a kind of identification process with other figures in the arts, or in the creative spheres, that guide you or pull you out of yourself, out of your origins. That definitely was true for Dylan with Woody Guthrie at the beginning, and maybe with those less identifiable as singular figures after that. In my film, I incorporate one of the characters with that of Arthur Rimbaud and his mystique, and Richard Gere's character relates to Billy the Kid, so I continue that process of melding the artist with his inspirations a few times throughout the stories.

**How did you structure all of this?**

The stories interweave, but they are pretty much grouped in chronological order, in that the youngest stories are interwoven with other younger stories at the beginning of the film. And they move forward toward the last story introduced, which is "Billy"—the Richard Gere story. So you're always interweaving, but the stories are still being introduced to [the audience] in chronological order. And there's a return to the first story from the last at the end of the film that makes you feel like you've come full circle, and these cycles of change don't ever really conclude.



# Marjane Satrapi, at Home in the World

BY MAHSHID HARIRI FEIZ

**Talking to Marjane** Satrapi, author of the graphic novellas *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2*, is an intimidating prospect.

Besides her talents as artist and storyteller, her erudition (Karl Marx was bedtime reading during her childhood in pre-revolutionary Iran), her pedigree (she descends from one of Iran's last emperors), and the breadth and depth of her life experiences, there's her incorrigible outspokenness. This is, above all, a woman who doesn't shy away from telling you what she really thinks. In fact, one can say it's precisely because of her insistence on speaking her mind that she ended up in Paris, an internationally-known artist and newly minted filmmaker.

Recently, Satrapi co-wrote and co-directed an upcoming animated adaptation of her *Persepolis* books, which—literally—illustrate the stations of her journey. The French-language film featuring Satrapi's characteristic black-and-white line drawings and searing wit won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year. An English-dubbed version is slated for a late December release in the U.S., with protagonist Marjane voiced by Chiara Mastroianni and additional voiceovers by Catherine Deneuve, Gena Rowlands, Sean Penn and Iggy Pop.

*Persepolis* begins with Satrapi's childhood in Iran, where she's raised to think independently in a time and place where independent thinkers are severely punished. When her obstinate candor and passion for punk rock get her in trouble, she leaves for Austria, where she experiences the freedom and failures of high school far from the family she left mired

in the nightmare of the Iran-Iraq war. She eventually returns home to confront her own identity—at fundamental odds, she quickly discovers, with the chauvinism and general suppression mandated by the Islamic regime in power.

Seven years after *Persepolis* was published in print and 13 years after she permanently left Iran for France, Satrapi sat down for a late-night transatlantic phone call to discuss her work, her hopes for the future of her homeland and the source of that unquenchable spark of humor that illuminates even the saddest moments of her life's story.

**In your books and in the film, the young Marjane is an idealist who's disappointed over and over again. Are you still an idealist?**

Of course I am! Once in a while people ask me, "Do you really believe that you can change something?" They make me doubt that we can change things. Of course we can change things. I don't pretend that art will change the whole world, but I think it is possible to change the world if we want to. I believe in it. No matter how many more revolutions I will have in my life, I will keep on believing that—or I will die. I don't accept the idea that it is impossible, because if I accept this idea then I will shoot myself in the head, and that would be much easier.

**The Marjane we encounter in your work is an incorrigible rebel. At 6, she dreams of becoming the next prophet. She pipes up and confronts her teachers in school. When everyone else goes along, she simply can't**

**keep her mouth shut. Some people around her interpret that as youthful rebellion. Others say, "She's just a troublemaker." Are you?**

The problem with me is not that I'm provocative or a troublemaker. Provocation is something that is done in order to make you react. I have never done something like that. I have always said what I really think. This is not provocation; it is personal thinking. I hate to lie, so I always say what I think, even though I know that I should not. It's always better to say it. I think it's better to be a troublemaker than to be soft and without any brain.

**Your life and work are inextricably tied to the political movements that shaped recent Iranian history, and of which you are highly critical. Would you characterize yourself as a political cartoonist?**

No, absolutely not. A political cartoonist is someone who raises up his arm and chants slogans. For me, those people are preaching a little bit. I am not a preacher. I have always said it is not so much that I am interested in politics, but that politics is really changing our lives. The decisions that are made have a direct effect on our lives, so whether you want it or not, you have to be interested in politics. I wouldn't say I'm a political cartoonist; I would say, maybe, a humanist?

**Your autobiographical graphic novels and now the movie based on them depict a life full of sadness. There is loss of one's family, betrayal, loneliness, depression and even suicide. And yet *Persepolis* is also an**

**extremely funny film. How do you keep your sense of humor?**

I think humor is about two things: it's about being intelligent and about being polite. First, life is extremely serious, but we can't take it seriously because already it is so serious. Second, I don't think that you have the right to go and vomit on people's heads; you also have to be a little bit polite. You must be able to recognize the pain in life and make people understand it without making it like a bag which you put on their backs and say, "Now you carry it." Talking about being desperate in an extremely polite way—for me, this is humor.

All the human beings in the world, we cry for the same reason—because someone is sick or dead, whatever. But we don't laugh for the same reasons. Laughing with somebody is to understand the spirit of the other person... For crying, you don't need anybody. You just sit in your house and you cry. Laughing is about communication. It's something that you share with someone. For me, somebody who doesn't have a sense of humor is stupid. To be able to laugh [demands] intelligence.

**In your work, you address the concept of living in exile and also the difficulty of assimilation. Is there a fundamentally unbridgeable gap between traditional Eastern cultures and liberal Western ideals? Do you think it's harder for Iranians to assimilate into Western culture than people of other nationalities?** I don't think so. It's what surrounds Iranians that makes it a bit more difficult. Generally, they didn't leave the country for economic reasons. It is not an im-

migration of choice—leaving because you will have a better life. They left for other reasons, so there is always this deep attachment to the culture where they came from, because they left despite themselves. [Ours] is also a very old culture. It has archaeological layers. With the Iranian culture, the more you dig, the more you have to dig. You think that you have understood, but then you see the layer under, and another layer under, and then another layer under. There's 5,000 years of history and it's a heavy thing to carry around. You can't pretend that it doesn't exist, because it's there, like a big piece of jewelry.

***Persepolis* depicts the meddling of the Iranian state in all personal matters—from the imposition of the veil to parties and public displays of affection. There is always somebody watching. Every day we hear reports that the Iranian government is becoming more restrictive, more oppressive, more extremist. What do you see in Iran's future?**

I think there is a big change that has been made in Iran and after this change, you cannot go backward. Most of the population of Iran now can read and write, which was not the case many years ago. The other big change is that two thirds of the Iranian students are girls.

I am convinced that the biggest enemy of democracy and change is a culture and not one person. As much as the father is chief of the family and nobody has the right to say one word above the word of the father, so the dictator is also the father of the nation. It's the same scheme. So for a democracy to be

able to stand we have to have a society in which men and women are equal.

For example, it's true that under the Shah, women could ask for a divorce. But if you have no education, you have never worked, you are not economically independent, you have been married to the same man for 15 years, you have three kids and you want to leave—can you leave? Of course you can't, because you don't have the means to be able to leave.

Today, you don't have the right to ask for a divorce except in some special cases, but at the same time a woman who works can leave the house much more easily. For me, it's like—before, they didn't have any legs and the door was open, and they said, "Run!" How can you run if you don't have any legs? Today we are getting stronger legs, but the door is really closed. However, we can also kick the door open.

I also think that the change that happens in a country has to come from the people inside the country. You cannot just go to a country and say, "This is not the way things should be and we are going to offer you democracy by bombing you." We did that in Afghanistan and Iraq, and it has not worked. [It] will never work. In Iran, the evolutionary change is there. In a society where 65 percent of the students are women, that is a change. They can arrest whoever they want, but that is something they cannot change, and if I think about that, then I can have some hope.

**Under what circumstances would you go back to live in Iran?**

If it were a democracy, of course I would go back to my country. Iran

is the most beautiful country in the world. We have the mountains and the sea. It is cold and warm at the same time. We have the four seasons. The fruits there are the tastiest in the whole world. The food there is the best. I love the people; I love their sense of humor. Do you know any place in the world where all the people who know how to write and read know all the poems of Hafez, Saadi and Ferdowsi [Ed. note: *the great triumvirate of classical Persian poetry*]? Why the hell would I sit in Paris? ...Rainy, gray Paris!

**You co-directed *Persepolis* with Vincent Paronnaud, with whom you'd shared space in a design studio in Paris. What was the experience of transforming your graphic novellas into an animated film?**

It was great. I was a little afraid of working with 100 people the whole time but, at the end, it was a great joy. In the beginning, I wanted to kill everybody. But then you realize that when you have a project like that, when the original idea comes from you and then everybody adds something to it, suddenly your idea goes much farther. Plus, I had the possibility to do exactly what I wanted, so I didn't have to make any compromises.

**Iggy Pop voices your uncle in the English-dubbed version of *Persepolis*. How was that for you, a former punk rocker, to get an icon like Iggy Pop involved?**

I was on my way to collapse when I met him! He is extremely sane; so gentle and cultivated. He was also extremely articulate and he knew about everything. I was pretty amazed. I listened

to his music for more than 20 years, and every day I had to have a little bit. His music would give me the punch I needed to continue my day. So to be able to work with him was really a big deal. I also got to work with Sean Penn, who was a wonderful talent, and Gena Rowlands—another icon of American film. It was a great experience to work with all these people. They were not like, "Oh, this is your first movie." They were real professionals and they were really listening to me as if I had already made 55 movies. They were extremely generous to me.

**What are you doing next?**

The movie has been sold in all the countries around the world, so I have to go to other countries. Until May [of next year], I'm just traveling, carrying the movie all over the world. Afterwards, I would like to make another comic book. And Vincent and I would love to make another movie together.

**You imagine making more films with Vincent?**

Absolutely. That was such a big thing! We worked three years together and we never argued once. He is like a double of myself. When you see the movie, you see what crap it is this talk about East and West, North and South, Muslim and Christian. Whatever! On paper, Vincent and I are the opposite: He is French, I am Iranian. He is a man, I am a woman. Everything should be the opposite, but we are like one soul in two bodies. It was sufficient that we have the same intelligence. It's not because you come from the same place that you understand somebody. ■■■

PERSEPOLIS STILLS; SONEY PICTURES CLASSICS, 2007



(CAPTURING)  
**JENNIFER CARPENTER**

BY JAKE GASKILL + POLAROID BY JENNIFER CARPENTER

**As the titular** devil-child in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), Jennifer Carpenter not only rekindled our collective allegiance to the Prince of Darkness, but also mesmerized with her ferocity and terrifying vulnerability. On the Showtime series *Dexter*, she's currently the witty, sail-or-mouthed sibling of a cop moonlighting as a serial killer. A classically trained thespian, Ms. Carpenter is refreshingly grounded and genuinely good-humored. She's breaking the Hollywood ingénue mold, and, in the most secular way possible, we thank God for it.

**You're shooting the second season of *Dexter* at the moment. How's that going?**

It's really good. We finished the first season, and I had no idea what they were going to do with the second. I'm the writers' biggest fan, because they have just blown us all away, and they're pretty good about keeping the stories a secret. But I kind of like it that way, because it's like life.

**What are a few things I should do while visiting your home state of Kentucky?**  
 I think everyone should go to the Kentucky

Derby at least once before they die. Next, probably visit Bardstown Road in Louisville. And then, my mom and dad's house.

**Didn't your aunt actually get you into acting?**

I was 8 years old, and I think she took my sister and me to [an] audition thinking it would be a good form of free babysitting. I think I made a conscious, committed decision then to do it for the rest of my life.

**Did you initially drift toward drama or comedy?**

I was always such a clown around my family—I'm not sure they always enjoyed it, but I know I did. I always wanted to be invited to do comedy, but for some reason I was always cast in dramas. I still feel like I'm proving myself as a comedian. That's why I'm happy *Dexter* is sort of showcasing that a bit more for me.

**How much of Debra Morgan, the character you play on *Dexter*, is in you, and vice versa?**

We have a lot of parallels in our lives, but I certainly don't go home feeling like her.

**What about Debra's rather foul mouth?**

Now *that* I have taken home with me. My mother came to visit about a week ago, and I found myself apologizing over and over.

**Since you attended Juilliard, I have to ask: Do top-tier art and drama schools force students to don dark, hooded cloaks and participate in Gothic rituals à la the Stonecutters or that part at the end of *Eyes Wide Shut*?**

Ha! You know, I didn't even put in my application [for Juilliard]. My mom did it on the sly, and when I got to Chicago, where they were having auditions [for admission], she made me aware I was going there. And those four minutes in that room decided the course of my life.

**As someone who's never been in a position to win an award, I am curious how it felt to win an MTV Movie Award.**

It was one of the most stressful nights of my life. I'm really uncomfortable going to events like that and having my picture taken. I think a lot of people get into the business to be in that arena, and I am just avoiding it at all costs. I mean—I love my popcorn statue. To have some sort of

reassurance like that feels pretty good. It's actually the hood ornament on my car right now.

**What does your family think about your success?**

Everybody's equally supportive. They're just not impressed though, and I love that about them. Growing up, if I wanted to do something, they never said, "No." They always said, "How?"

**How does it feel to not be the daughter of John Carpenter?**

Actually, one of our producers [on *Dexter*] asked me if I was his daughter maybe three weeks ago, because she read this article online that said I was shy about it, and that is why she never mentioned it to me. I've never pretended to be John Carpenter's daughter. Robert Carpenter is a great father.

**Last question: Are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?**

No.

**Good. That makes things a lot easier.** ■■■



(CAPTURING)  
**ALEXANDRA MARIA LARA**

BY SORINA DIACONESCU + POLAROID BY ALEXANDRA MARIA LARA

**For the female** lead in his first film in nine years, Francis Ford Coppola singled out Romanian-born, German-bred actress Alexandra Maria Lara. For the luminous Lara—a refugee from her native Romania who grew up in West Berlin since the age of 4—the film marks a notable accomplishment. The multilingual actress portrays dual roles in Coppola's *Youth Without Youth*—having also acquitted herself with panache by playing Hitler's secretary in *Downfall*, and collaborated with James Ivory and, respectively, Anton Corbijn on the latter's Joy Division biopic *Control*. We asked Lara to take photographs of her Charlottenburg, West Berlin, habitat—and she complied, shyly identifying a Polaroid of current boyfriend Sam Riley with a little heart symbol. Anyway, Alexandra...

**How did you get cast in Coppola's latest film?**

I think Francis saw the movie *Downfall*, where I play Hitler's secretary, and got in touch with me. It was really unbelievable: I got a letter from him with his script, and then we met in London. And the day we met, he offered me the part and I went

directly to a makeup test. It was the most incredible day an actress can imagine!

**To me *Youth Without Youth* is essentially an exalted film/poem about romantic love—and the two characters you play symbolize a kind of ideal love that knows no bounds and transcends space and time.**

I always had the feeling that my parts were actually a variation of one soul. The movie is based on subjects like time and consciousness and reincarnation—there's a completely different basis of reality throughout it. I was very curious about how we would tell the story. I can say that to work with Francis is extraordinary, because he is the legend he is, and because you can feel that he is a very intense director, a very careful observer, and very passionate about his work. I really enjoyed every day on the set, because every day was different from the one before.

To work with Francis Ford Coppola is probably the dream of every actress on earth. I'm happy, of course, that it happened to me, and that I was the one who was allowed to go through that experience.

**In *Youth Without Youth*, you speak**

English sprinkled with some Romanian, and also Sanskrit, ancient Egyptian and Sumerian. In real life, you're fluent in Romanian, German and English. What language do you dream in?

I think in German. I always continued to speak Romanian with my parents and I'm really happy about that, but German feels like my mother language.

**It seems like you're making a lot of movies with strong underlying political themes—*Downfall*, obviously, and even *Youth Without Youth*. Recently, you were cast in Uli Edel's upcoming film about the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the '70s left-wing guerrilla group. Is that purposeful or accidental?**

I've been lucky to be part of movies where historical background has a big importance, and that's always very interesting for an actor: You're able to learn something; learn about history. I once played Napoleon's lover, Maria Walewska. And I made another movie, *Control*—about Ian Curtis. That was quite fascinating for me, too, because I didn't know anything about Joy Division or the music scene at that time in England.

I've always been careful to choose

things that could be right for me, but I've also been in comedies and romantic movies where the subject is more about feelings. I'm a fan of those, too.

**There's been such a rejuvenation of the arts in Romania, especially in film. Filmmaker Cristian Mungiu won the Palme d'Or in Cannes this year and several Romanian films got a lot of attention abroad and were even released in the U.S. Why is it that all of a sudden such good movies are being made there?**

I think Romanians always made beautiful theater and beautiful films. But the country went through a very difficult time when everything was censored. Everything has its time, and now it's time for people like these filmmakers to answer some questions about what exactly happened there in the recent past, and tell powerful stories. This is not light cinema. When you watch the movies of Cristi Puiu, Razvan Radulescu or the new movie of Cristian Mungiu, it's impossible to go out of the cinema without having to think about the world and life. I'm very happy for them and I think that a lot more stories are to come from all these places in East Europe. ■■■





## A MILLION LITTLE CHOICES

IN PURSUIT OF ENDLESS VIRTUAL FREEDOM **BY JAKE GASKILL**

"The ordinary man believes he is free when he is permitted to act arbitrarily, but in this very arbitrariness lies the fact that he is unfree." —Hegel

**Freedom of choice** is a polarizing topic. It has determined elections, incited violence and ruined many a Mass. There's no question that having too many choices—just like having too few—is almost never a good thing. That's because, to paraphrase French biologist Jean Rostand, the choices reality proposes are generally such as to take away one's appetite for choosing.

Yet in the videogame world, freedom of choice has rapidly become the most unanimously cherished aspect of game design. By providing all the necessary tools, and then, like some cruel deity, allowing us players to decide for ourselves how best to apply them, game developers have been able to tap into our innate love of doing things our own way, man. And even though "sandbox" games (featuring non-linear narratives that take place in free roaming environments) are nothing new, practically every high-profile game, regardless of genre, released over the past few months or set to be released in the near future, is built around one unifying principle: choice.

This past August, 2K's anti-utopian masterpiece *BioShock* stabbed a plasmid syringe into the head of anyone who still believes videogames are a childish and inconsequential pursuit. The game forced players to make choices, both from a combat perspective (gene tonics, plasmids and upgradable weapons...oh my!) and from a morally ambiguous decision-making perspective. You say you wouldn't think twice about ripping a little girl's head off, because she's just a digital character? Well, when you're looking straight into the genetically mutated eyes of a Little Sister while she writhes in your hands and

begs for her life, it just ain't that simple. Games like *BioShock*, of which there are few, draw tremendous strength from their ability to emotionally engage players by offering them the chance to formulate their own experiences, and progress through the narratives in a fashion that best suits their own tastes.

Choice is also the driving force behind such varied titles as Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* (action-adventure), EA's *Medal of Honor: Airborne* (first-person shooter), *Burnout: Paradise* (racing) and BioWare's *Mass Effect* (role-playing game).

*Assassin's Creed* allows players to step into the boots of a nimble 12th-century mercenary. Expansive cities inhabited by dynamic and action-responsive citizens play host to the dirty deeds of main character Altair, and since there are no restrictions on how players get from one point to the next (every building is scalable...*Every. Single. One.*), choice becomes the deciding factor in how players experience the game.

*Burnout: Paradise* takes the blistering-speed racer series to another level by dropping players (and their vehicles) into a completely free-roaming environment. Unlike traditional racing games, which require players to unlock areas over the course of the narrative, *Paradise* lays it all on the table at the starting line. Players can blast around the city and engage in spectacular vehicular acrobatics without ever being involved in an actual race. Of course, in order to unlock better vehicles you have to participate in events, but even the path you pursue in those races is completely up to you.

Now, all the aforementioned titles give players the freedom to explore enormous

virtual worlds, and we love that. *Mass Effect* gives players the chance to engage in a story that spans the *entire* galaxy. BioWare's epic RPG allows you to essentially planet-jump to your heart's content by way of interstellar transportation. But the most important aspect of choice in the game concerns dialogue. The amount of words in this game is just, well, too staggering for words. The outcome of the narrative depends solely on how players navigate morally uncertain situations. During conversations, players choose the lines that their main characters will utter, and every choice shifts the game in different directions, leading to different narrative conclusions.

"What could be driving this choice-centric gaming trend?" you undoubtedly wonder. And if you're the perceptive sort, you might have noticed that our societal obsession with personal prerogatives extends to other popular forms of entertainment and technology. YouTube, TiVo, video on-demand services, news aggregators that allow people to filter types of news according to their preferences: Each of these services caters to our ardent desire to be in control.

In times of increased paranoia and distrust, personal freedoms (like free speech and the right to not have your balls hooked up to a car battery without proper cause) are usually the first to get aborted and are, more often than not, handed over willingly. But after a while we start to feel trapped, limited and under the thumb of some not-so-invisible authority. We naturally gravitate to fantasy and entertainment to help us cope.

The cinema boom during the Great Depression was the direct result of people desperately wanting to escape the horrors of the times by inhabiting, if only for a little while, make-believe worlds better than their own. Today, we favor entertainment tailor-made to fit our whims and schedules. Granted, it would be far nobler to fight for greater control of freedoms that truly matter in reality. But seeking refuge in our minds and finding endless contentment in our ability to avoid commercials is the far more convenient avenue of rebellion.

Videogaming is benefiting tremendously from this state of affairs.

For the same reason we enjoy betting with somebody else's money, we love it that we're able to partake in a variety of personally fashioned experiences at our leisure, without the risk of significant sacrifices. When it comes to games that emphasize choice and experimentation, players are given the opportunity to take chances and flex their creative muscles in ways that traditional, linear narratives would simply not allow. This in turn ensures substantial replay value (as participants adopt new strategies and new characterizations in order to alter the feel and flow of the game) and gives players a sense of personalization that goes a long way toward enriching not only gaming experiences, but the entire medium as well.

So this holiday season, do whatever you want to do, go wherever you want to go and kill, smash, fight, shoot, chat up, race, pursue, entice and annoy whomever you want, whenever you want. Because in the end, the choice is truly yours—in the virtual world, if not the real one. ■■■

# THE COBRASNAKE



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### SONY ACID PRO 6

In the days before GarageBand, Acid was the gold standard for intuitive, user-friendly loop-based music production. Six hits of Acid later, this sequencing program still trips hard. The interface remains perfectly simple, making it easy for neophyte producers to jump in and start making beats. But features like the included Native Instruments Kompakt software synth, 20 VST plug-ins, and unlimited multitrack recording render this a killer app for pros, too. Like GarageBand, Acid comes with a plethora of free loops to get you started—theoretically, you can write songs without recording a note of music. But unlike GarageBand, Acid allows users to dump just about any format of audio samples into the mix.

Mean summoned the spirit of the KLF and laid down snippets from the Apollo 11 lunar landing alongside beats from Reason to produce one choice track. Whether you want to unleash your inner Daft Punk or cobble together license-free background music for your podcasts, Acid fits the bill. \$375; [sonycreativesoftware.com](http://sonycreativesoftware.com)

### SONY SOUND FORGE 9

Even the best tracks don't bang unless they're mastered properly. A track from Acid, for example, will sound much better if it's polished in a high-quality mastering program such as Sound Forge 9.0. As is the case with the afore-profiled Acid software, Sound Forge's interface is so simple that a user with minimal experience could load the program and quickly figure out how to knock out a decent master. Spend more time exploring Forge and you'll discover that the more-than-40 included studio effects, noise reduction tools, and various file format/output options will allow you to put whatever shine you can dream up on music tracks, podcasts and soundtracks. \$300; [sonycreativesoftware.com](http://sonycreativesoftware.com)

### DELL 1800MP PROJECTOR

Earthians in hot pursuit of Mid-Century modern, minimalist, biodegradable, low-carbon footprint, ecotecture-style clean living have launched a new trend—fueled in their homes, no doubt, by wind power or Flatpak rooftop solar panels.

These gentle folk have eschewed the gaudiness of flat-panel HDTV's for the new generation of digital projectors. It's a great idea: Get rid of your ugly box (if you've still got one); liberate yourself from having to figure out how to properly hang a flat-screen on the wall, and use a projector instead. Dell's 1800MP costs only \$729, but it has a 2000:1 contrast ratio and 1024x768 resolution piping out at 2100 lumens—bright enough for viewing with the lights on. A variety of in/out jacks cover all of the A/V bases you'll need to plug the projector into a video source. Play movies off your laptop, watch the TV show you saved on your DVR, or project *Baraka* on the side of the garage where you park your Prius. The 1800MP can handle it. \$729; [dell.com](http://dell.com)

### V.I.O. CAM

Helmet cams are perfect for capturing sports adventures, bike rides through the city and even, um, intimate moments at home.

Most helmet cams (or point-of-view cams, as they're also known) consist of two components: an external lens and a separate digital video recorder (flash drive, DV cam or hard drive). With this type of setup, you connect the lens to the digital video recorder, push "record," and then set about on your merry path with the DVR usually tucked away in your backpack. If you want to see the image you're capturing or make sure that the lens is properly oriented, you have to pause, pull out the DVR and check it. The beauty of the V.I.O. POV.1 helmet lens is that comes with its own DVR—a flash drive about the size of a TV remote that has a small built-in monitor. Better yet, a wireless remote that can be mounted anywhere with the included Velcro straps (like around a shoulder strap on a backpack), lets you start and stop recording and tag clips on the fly.

Various mounting rigs allow you to install the POV.1 on a helmet, handlebar, snowboard binding, or wherever your needs might demand. A USB connection enables you to transfer files directly to your computer. (Although you can also toss the memory card into a card reader.) While most users probably own editing software like Movie Maker or iMovie already, the V.I.O. comes with POV.1 software that works fine for basic edits. This is the future of point-of-view cameras. \$850; [viosport.com](http://viosport.com)

# MEAN GADGETS

BY ANDREW VONTZ



## MEAN WHIPLASH

BY ANDREW VONTZ

### ZERO ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLE

Exploring what would happen in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust was a popular cinematic trope back in the '80s, when nobody doubted that Ronnie Reagan could unleash megatons of decay heat on those goddamn Russians, if he was so inclined. In *Megaforce*, one of the many *Mad Max* knockoffs of the era, a crew of badasses in gold body suits defend the future of the human race in a *G.I. Joe*-meets-*Star Wars* setup. Their secret weapon? The fact that all their vehicles, from helicopters to dune buggies to motorcycles, could run in complete silence.

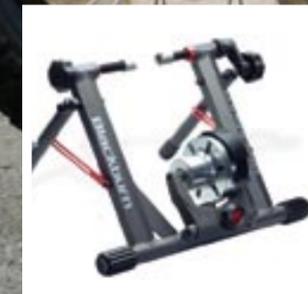
Two decades later, Zero Motorcycles brings the stealth-mode fantasy of *Megaforce* to life with a whisper-quiet electric bike that saves the planet *and* allows its users to sneak up on their godless Communist enemies in complete silence. Too bad the Cold War is over, because the Zero would be the perfect rig for laying down a hardcore citizen-militia assault across the Russian steppe. This zero-emission bike can be set up for street riding or off-road motocross action and programmed with an acceleration curve to suit the abilities of the rider. It gets the equivalent of 300 miles per gallon, hauls ass, and costs less than one cent per mile to operate. Bonus: it also looks great with a replica *Megaforce* gold unitard from American Apparel. \$6,900; [zeromotorcycles.com](http://zeromotorcycles.com)

### VECTRIX ELECTRIC SCOOTER

Italy has long produced the world's most sought-after scooters. Now Vectrix ushers in a new era of environmentally friendly scooting with the MAXI-Scooter, a badass rig with an electric engine capable of reaching 62 miles per hour accelerating from 0-30 in 3.6 seconds. The battery recharges in just two hours at home. On the road, it recovers energy lost during braking. A bidirectional throttle allows the rider to slow down smoothly. Virtually maintenance-free, the MAXI-Scooter is mighty economical, too: Vectrix claims that the energy needed to power the trusty gadget for a 62-mile ride costs less than 50 cents. Look good. Feel good. Scoot. \$11,000; [vectrix.com](http://vectrix.com)

### BLACKBURN TRAKSTAND ULTRA

When you have to work late and autumnal darkness sabotages your good intentions to roll out with the local bike gang, mount your rolling masterpiece in the Blackburn TrakStand Ultra. Its Centriforce resistance unit relies on a centrifugal clutch system to create the closest feeling to riding on the road offered by any trainer Mean has tried. The heavy-duty flywheel provides enough resistance to generate actual rear-wheel coast when you stop pedaling—just like it would out on the pavement. It also provides enough resistance for high-wattage sprint interval workouts. The slate-gray aluminum frame has a tidy industrial look: When you're not riding, it can serve as a tasteful bike stand that will keep your bike upright, out of the way and protected from the exigencies of bipedal movement. And when you are riding, you'll look cooler than those folks in spinning class, dripping with sweat while their instructor barks New Age wisdom at them. \$300; [trakstandultra.com](http://trakstandultra.com)



# stop & BILL HADER IN BOB ZMUDA making sense CONVERSATION

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSICA GELT

**Bob Zmuda** is a comedy legend, known for his partnership/friendship with anarchist artist-slash-comedic god Andy Kaufman and for establishing the massively successful charity organization Comic Relief. Bill Hader is a comedy freshman of sorts who, in just a few short years, has gone from backyard sketch-show obscurity to permanent cast membership on *Saturday Night Live* and co-stars in the latest Seth Rogen/Judd Apatow mega-hit, *Superbad*. When Hader and Zmuda recently came together, *Mean* eavesdropped on their excited banter about the role of serendipity in comedians' careers, the cross-generational appeal of Kaufman's trailblazing work and oh, so much more. —Jake Gaskill

Z: Bill!

H: Bob!

Z: You came in from Canada, right?

H: I was in New York doing *SNL*, and I'm here doing this thing called *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. It's another Judd Apatow production.

Z: That's hot!

H: Do you know Judd at all?

Z: I gave Judd his start. Judd worked as an intern at Comic Relief for two years for free—that's when he was a struggling stand-up comic.

H: The guy owns the town right now!

Z: When did you meet him?

H: I met him during my first season on *SNL*—at his house. I got really nervous. I had to sit in his study while he dealt with his air conditioning guy. The first thing he said to me was, "I don't really like impressions and stuff." He really put me on the spot. He was like, "But I saw you do a thing where you were a guy at a

Target place, and I thought that was good." I just felt 100 feet tall after he said that. ...I had met Seth Rogen on my first thing I did, which was a small part in *You, Me and Dupree*. So I don't know if he said anything to [Apatow], but I remember that within 10 minutes of meeting Seth and Evan Goldberg, Seth's writing partner, Evan goes, "He should be Officer Slater in *Superbad*!" Cut to December, and I'm having this meeting with Judd...

Z: I think [*Superbad*] could really go through the roof. What else are you shooting?

H: I got a small part in this Ben Stiller movie called *Tropic Thunder*; like, this big-budget action/comedy.

Z: Stiller is so fucking hot. Jesus!

H: He's great. This is like an all-star kind of thing. I play an executive, and I have all these scenes with this head of a studio. And I asked, "Who's playing the head of the studio?" And [Stiller] was like, "He'll be at the read-through; don't worry about it." I show up at the read-through, and it's *Tom Cruise*. So I just sat there while he yelled at me, and the fucking room was losing it. The nice thing about being on *SNL* is that you don't get insanely star-struck, so I felt pretty professional. But I was shocked. He's like, "You motherfucker! Get the sand out of your vagina, you fucking pussy!" ...Tom Cruise yelling at me! It was hilarious. And I had asked [*SNL* producer] Lorne [Michaels] about it. I said, "I'm doing this stuff with Tom Cruise. You have any advice?" And he said, [*adopts Michaels' voice*] "Act smaller than him."

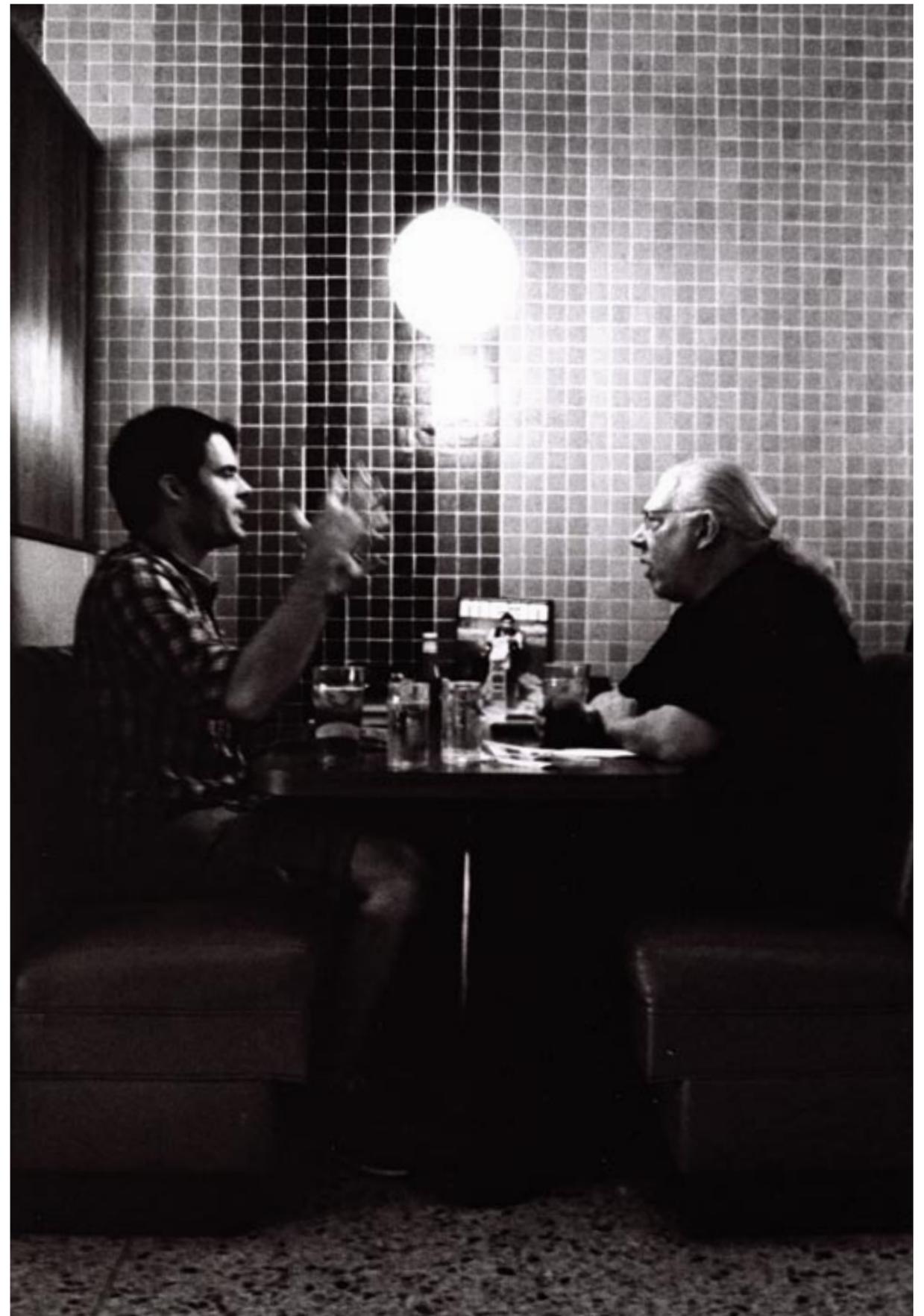
Z: Good advice!

H: *Very* good advice.

Z: You've been on *SNL* how long?

H: Two seasons.

Z: How's that going?



H: Great. I really love it. It's still that feeling of "I can't fucking believe I'm on this show." I started taking comedy seriously in March 2003, when I went to *Second City L.A.* I just lucked out because Megan Mullally saw this sketch show we did called *Animals from the Future*. It was just me and three buddies.

Z: Where was that?

H: We did it in a backyard in Van Nuys. We didn't know the comedy scene. We didn't have the money. We never called agents or managers or any other stuff. We just wanted to have our own thing.

Z: No pressure.

H: No pressure. Just go out there... and after, we'll have a party. So even if the people thought we sucked, we'd get a big crowd and turn it into a party. But that was when I'd go, "Why was this funny? Why wasn't that funny?" You start to question with your friends why things are funny or not funny: "I've seen that shit before. Let's go bigger." We thought we were geniuses! And Megan Mullally saw me in this one sketch and said it was great.

Z: What brought her there?

H: One of the guys in the group was her brother-in-law. So she came to see her brother-in-law's show, and we went to Canter's Deli afterwards. And she said, "I think you're really talented," and I said, "Thanks!" Two months later, I was working as an assistant editor on *Iron Chef*, and the editor was yelling at me. I think he called me a bum. It was right out of a movie. Then my phone rings, and it's like, "We'd like to meet you for the show. You're going to have a meeting with Lorne. When are you available?" I was like, "Whenever you need me. Right now." And then Megan Mullally called me and said, "I had dinner with Lorne, and I told him about you." And I go, "Oh my God! That's crazy." She's the whole reason I have any sort of a career.

Z: So you weren't a stand-up?

H: No.

Z: So where did all the impressions [you do] come from?

H: I honestly figured out that I could kind of do impressions to prepare for my *SNL* audition. I used to imitate kids in my class, teachers, relatives or whatever, but never celebrities. I literally turned on the TV, and I watched Al Pacino giving an acceptance speech or something, and I would go to my wife—my girlfriend then—and be like, "How's this?" I was just learning and fucking up a lot. So I started doing stand-up to work on my *SNL* audition. And I saw these other comedians, like [*Knocked Up's*] Charlyne Yi and other great people doing the kind of stuff that I wanted

to do. Actually, my dad did stand-up in the early '80s in Oklahoma, and he's a big comedy fan.

Z: He must be thrilled.

H: He can't believe it! He's a great guy. I'm really close to my dad. I remember going, "Hey dad: You know this Italian character I got going on? People just don't do stuff like that anymore," and he goes, "You're ripping off [Andy] Kaufman. Shut the fuck up!" The funny thing is the stuff that you guys were doing is so inherent in my generation's subconscious.

Z: It's great that you tip the hat to Kaufman... that he [still] influences people.

H: That's what I loved about you, and the stuff you and Andy Kaufman did. It didn't feel like it was influenced by anything. It seemed like it was its own crazy thing. Like a spontaneous energy that I've never seen before!

Z: We were just buddies fucking around. There was no plan to it...

H: Watching this stuff growing up, I remember going, "He's just trying to make his buddy laugh."

Z: It all came out of the '60s. It came out of guerilla political shit in Chicago, in the streets—fucking with people's heads. It all really came from a nasty, mean place at times; from just wanting to fuck with people and not wanting to be part of the system. It was kind of like the first punk-comedy. Also you had that counter-culture thing going when *SNL* started, going back way before the *Second City* out here. *Second City* Chicago was a big political-minded group at the time. So you had this political hotbed, which was great. Kaufman stayed totally away from there.

H: Why was that?

Z: Andy was always a loner. He would never be a part of a group. Andy was more content to be on the street and fuck with people. He did not like the big Hollywood bullshit. It didn't feel like an art—not that Andy would ever claim to be an artist. But it was that kind of renegade, provocateur thing. That's why I'm so glad that years later he got recognized, because of *Man on the Moon* and everything. And what was amazing about the success that he had was... all of this stuff happens by accident. Look at you...!

H: Did you feel at the time that he got recognized the way he should have been?

Z: No! All of the guys in the industry knew that what Kaufman was doing was so different, so out there, so ahead of its time. That's why even Lorne over at *SNL* would just leave him alone... There were never any notes for Kaufman. Lorne just said, "What are you going to say

to this guy? He's from outer space, or something!"

H: I was telling the guys, "Yeah. I'm going to meet with Bob Zmuda," and they were like, "Tell him 'I'll do anything you want me to do for Comic Relief.'"

Z: That's good to know. It's been a trip. When Andy died, that's when I started Comic Relief. I was destroyed after Kaufman died. He was my best friend. A young guy, 34 years old—and he was also my employer.

H: And they don't know why he died, right? It's a mystery.

Z: It depends. Right around the time Elvis died, there were all those rumors that he had faked his death. Andy called me one night and said, "I have the best idea ever! This is the greatest put-on of all time. It's going to be my crowning achievement. I'm going to fake my death and I want you to help me." I said, "Andy, it's illegal. People fake their deaths all the time to get insurance money. It's a brilliant idea, but if you want to do it, I can't help you. I could be charged for helping you. Besides that, I'm not going to lie to your parents. Your mother would probably have a fucking heart attack. I never want to hear about it again." Six months later, he's dead.

Let's put it this way: If he walked through that door right now, I'd be surprised but I wouldn't be shocked. I believe he's dead. I used to push him around in a fucking wheelchair when he was down to about 80 pounds because of the cancer, and people would come up to him and go, "Andy! You and this dying routine..." He'd laugh at it. He'd say, "They don't really know that I'm dying." And in fact me and [Kaufman manager] George Shapiro couldn't tell you truthfully if he pulled this off or not... He was a totally healthy guy. He never smoked, [was into] holistic medicine, a vegetarian. How does he come down with lung cancer? And [director, producer and Kaufman cohort] John Moffitt will tell you that Andy is alive, because he called Moffitt one night and went over to his house and brought a Bible with him and said, "I'm going to tell you something but you have to swear on a Bible that you will not tell a living soul. I'm planning on faking my death. I want to be gone for many years." And Moffitt said, "Like one or two?" and Andy said, "No. If I was a boy about it, I'd say 10 years. If I was a man about it, it'd be 25 years." The 25th anniversary is coming up in a year and a half! And believe me, Kaufman was *the guy*. He was a purist. And he would say, "This would be the biggest thing in the world."

H: But in the book [Zmuda's *Andy*

*Kaufman Revealed: Best Friend Tells All*, 1999] you talk about going to the funeral...

Z: I was too shattered to go inside the funeral home. But my friend Joe Troiani went in, because he thought we were faking it. And in the Jewish faith there isn't usually an open casket, but there was so much conjecture that he'd faked his death that the family decided to have an open casket. But if you ask Joe today, he'll say, "I couldn't tell you if that was a wax dummy or not. It's a dead body. It's got wax on it, and it's embalmed. How do you know?" Now, this is really bizarre. When we wrote *The Tony Clifton Story*, [Ed. Note: *Tony Clifton was Zmuda's and Kaufman's foul-mouthed lounge singer alter-ego*], and this was about four years before Andy's death—before he even says he's going to fake his death—he comes in one day, and he says, "At a certain point in the movie, Tony Clifton dies, and we have a funeral." And Andy Kaufman in real life supposedly died of lung cancer at the Cedars-Sinai Hospital here in Hollywood. On page 108 of *The Tony Clifton Story*, Kaufman had Tony Clifton die of lung cancer at Cedars-Sinai. So you start putting these things together, and you could start going, "Andy Kaufman faked his fucking death!"

H: The entire time you were talking, all the hair on my neck was standing up. That's the most insane fucking thing I've ever heard! And the thing is, every generation since that happened—every comedy guy—has this conversation. So who are some other guys that you were hanging out with?

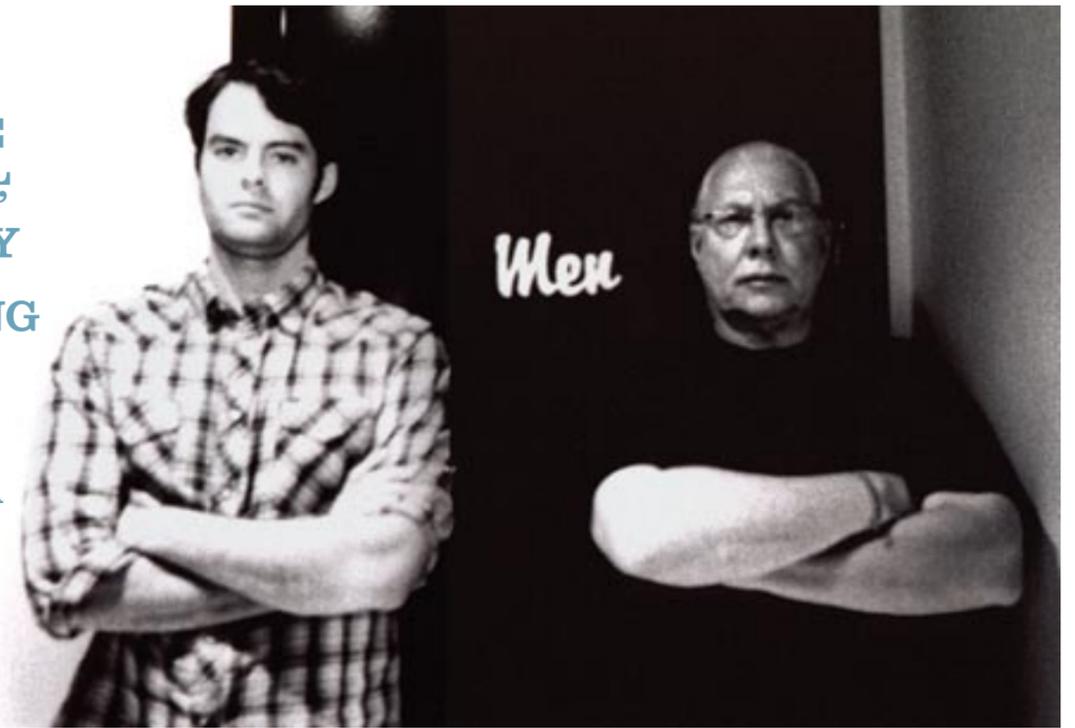
Z: Kaufman never really hung out. Kaufman's whole thing was pussy. He couldn't give a shit about the comedians. The biggest influence on Kaufman was probably professional wrestling, because when he was a little kid, he would go into New York but instead of going to a Broadway show, his first sense of theater was wrestling matches at Madison Square Garden. His sense of performance was not just to play the part, but to really get an audience crazy. So that's when we started wrestling with women and then eventually [with pro wrestler] Jerry Lawler.

The thing with Kaufman always was, "Was that *for real*?" That's the signature of Kaufman. And a lot of times we didn't use actors, because actors would fuck it up. So nobody knew. It was only between Jerry Lawler, myself and Kaufman. We didn't tell anyone.

H: Where did you and Lawler and Kaufman meet to talk about this?

Z: Out of the blue, we got a call

**"I HEARD PEOPLE GOING, 'KILL THE JEW! KILL THE JEW!' AND THEY WERE THROWING THINGS AND YELLING AT ME."  
—BOB ZMUDA**



from a real wrestling promoter in Memphis. Jerry Lawler had been saying, "He's been wrestling women. How about him wrestling a guy?" And Andy said, "I want to do it!" [His manager] George [Shapiro] said, "You're going to break your neck," and Andy said, "George, it's all fake. Believe me. Jerry's a pro. It's all going to work out." That's when we started making those tapes to get everybody riled up—with him going, "Hi! I'm Andy Kaufman, the actor. You might know me. I'm a star in Hollywood. I'm going to be in your neck of the woods. I'm sure you're going to want to come up to me and get my autograph... But I understand that in the south, there's a hygiene problem. We tackled this problem 50 years ago in the north." He made it between the north and the south! We'd be laughing our asses off. So when we go down to Memphis, we show up at the hotel, and the manager says, "You can't stay here. We've gotten nine bomb threats. We don't want you in our hotel." And all through this, for weeks, he'd been trying to call Jerry Lawler, but he won't return the call. We figure that Lawler was going to kill him, because everyone hated Andy in the south.

H: Did he ever get worried about this shit or was he excited?

Z: He got worried the morning of. He kept thinking, "The guy is a pro. He's just playing me. There's got to be that unwritten law that this is so real that even though you and I have never met, we're going to pull this

off." The only time he was going to see Jerry Lawler was at this Saturday morning show the morning of the match. So we show up at this thing, and Andy stands up. "Hi Jerry," and puts his hand out. And Lawler spits on his hand and goes, "I don't like Jews," and Andy said, "Holy... fuck!" So we were all scared shitless. And Andy thought, "We have to call this off." The guy was going to kill him, but everyone hates Andy Kaufman so it's going to be okay. Lawler's going to get away with legal murder. And now Andy says to George Shapiro, "I want out." So George called the promoter and said, "Andy's going to cancel." And the guy says, "What do you mean 'cancel'?" The place is sold out. You write me a check for \$50,000." And \$50,000 back then was like \$400,000 now, and Andy didn't have that much. So Andy said, "Fuck it!"

It was like the boy who cried wolf, and now he was really in trouble. The promoter calls back and says, "Legally, a match has to last one minute." If he could just stay away from Lawler for one fucking minute, then we could say that he quit or run out of the place. So what you see [on tape] is real. That's when Andy puts the double chokehold on him, and that's when Lawler picked him up and knocked him out cold.

H: What did you do when that happened?

Z: When we showed up at the Memphis Coliseum, people were so upset they had the Memphis SWAT

team bring us in. They were throwing so much stuff, and I heard people going, "Kill the Jew! Kill the Jew!" So they take us in, and we're like, "He'll run around for a little bit and then we'll get the fuck out of town." And then Lawler knocks him out, and then he picks him up and does it again. And because it was such a neck injury, they had to put that special stretcher under Kaufman. So George Shapiro gets in the ambulance, [Andy's] girlfriend does, and I do, and the ambulance guy goes, "Only two family members allowed!" and closes the door and leaves. Now that the SWAT team sees that the star is gone, they disperse. So I have to walk back to the dressing room—this whole fucking distance. And the crowd has tasted blood. They are out of their minds. And I have to walk back through the crowd, and they were throwing things and yelling at me, "That's the friend of the Jew!"

H: What did you do?

Z: I looked at the biggest guy there, and I slap him and push him out of the way. This guy could have killed me. But after that, it was such a complete shock to everyone that I was able to get the fuck out of there. And then they did X-rays of Kaufman at the hospital, and he was fine. But this became such an incredible story. It was on front pages all over the country.

Lawler's a pro. He was a big Kaufman fan himself. And he realized, "If you want to take it to the ultimate level, if you want to pull a real put-on, don't even let the other

guy that's supposed to be in on it with you know you're part of it." And that was that unwritten code of the real wrestlers. It's brilliant, because it's like plausible denial.

H: So how did you know he was a good guy?

Z: Because he was concerned, and he called the hospital. And I think because there was so much press, Jerry went, "Hey, this is great. I'm on the front page: *Andy Kaufman: Crippled for Life*." So then we milked it. Andy could have left in an hour from the hospital, but he stayed there a week. And then he had the neck braced that he wore for like, six months.

H: Do you still do any of that stuff? Are you still writing—outside of *Comic Relief*?

Z: There's this crazy documentary I have about... You see, Jim [Carrey] didn't meet Milos Forman until two weeks after principal photography wrapped [on *Man on the Moon*]. For 85 days, Jim was either Andy or Tony [Clifton]. When I saw this I went, "Somebody should really capture this if he's really going to stay in character." We came in with our own crew, so it's not like a "making of" documentary. It's going to come out within the next six months. And then a year and half from now is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of [Andy's] death. So in a year and a half, on May 16<sup>th</sup>, [2009], there's going to be a huge public event. We're taking out ads throughout the world. Also, R.E.M. is going to be closing the show.

H: Holy shit! I have to be there. ■■■

# Books Can't Solve Everything

**BUT THE FUTURE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF B.J. NOVAK, ENTERTAINER OF REAL PEOPLE, JUST MIGHT. WE PROUDLY FEATURE AN EXCERPT**

**BY B.J. NOVAK WITH PAUL BARMAN + ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL KRALL**

**Me and B.J.** Novak drove back east in a mauve 'Lac. When we got to our destination, I got fired and his record came out—we both had a release date. On NBC's *The Office*, B.J. plays a temp who stays verklemmt. In real life, he writes *Office* episodes and performs stand-up, doing more than any temp ever dreamt. William Novak, his dad, wrote about hemp and then became a ghostwriter. B.J.'s upbringing fueled his early success. He asked me, a rapper, to ghostwrite the first chapter of his future autobio. —Paul Barman

## Chapter 1

The first writing that I ever remember feeling a purpose about was writing dirty song parodies for my cousins and other kids in elementary school. That's the first time I saw writing as a form of edutainment or literature—adding something to the world, rather than proving what I've learned to the teacher.

In my home, there was a ton of books and magazines all around. My dad has written a lot of autobiographies as a ghostwriter and a few scattered non-fiction books that reflect his interests: marijuana, single people and Jewish humor. So there were these shelves in my house: the psychedelic drug shelf, the geeky '80s humor shelf; all sorts of weird libraries. It was a sort of Montessori environment for a kid, although it wasn't just Dr. Seuss books.

At one point my mom ran a dating service. At that same time, my dad wrote a book called *The Great American Man Shortage*. He was a working, but struggling, writer without a best-seller, and they thought this would be his big breakthrough. But it didn't go anywhere. I think after that book he became a ghostwriter.

Due to my father's ghostwriting, I met all these incredibly bizarre celebrities when I was a kid. Nancy Reagan, Oliver North, Tip O'Neill, George Stephanopoulos, Earvin "Magic" Johnson—just a really interesting range of people. "The Mayflower Madam," Sydney Biddle Barrows, threw witty darts like



arrows. Claire Sylvia had gotten a heart and lung transplant from a man's man who loved what she couldn't stand. She craved new foods and started to grandstand. We never know how we'll land a new chance.

I read the introduction to my dad's marijuana book and it never occurred to me that he was a marijuana smoker. You have these boundaries, I guess, when you're a kid. Books can't solve everything. There are some things that your mind will or won't take.

I look more like my mom than my dad. We are a relatively similar-looking family. We look similar and have similar interests, too.

My face gets excited about a beard

for the first couple days. Then my face seems to lose interest. Finally, my brain gives up when it sees my face.

I was putting on this variety show at Harvard [Novak went to Harvard] and I invited Bob Saget to perform there. I wrote him a letter because I knew his stand-up persona was so different than his *Full House* persona. He did the show with me and then he asked me to write for his new show, *Raising Dad*—this Warner Brothers sitcom. I was just graduating, about a month away. So I went straight to Los Angeles.

Sometimes people say improvisation is the greatest form of comedy, or the most difficult. There's a pyramid scheme going on where there's actu-

ally money made on these classes, and people signing up and paying to see each other, teach each other this sort of structured form of improv. I guess it's impressive that people come out of it but I don't think it enables a lot of people to do their best work.

I've amassed a lot of stand-up material that feels so irrelevant to me, stuff I wrote a couple years ago. Standing on stage saying that stuff would feel ironic, or something. It wouldn't make any sense. I cycle stuff out, I really don't have that much material. It's kind of a sad secret about me right now. I have a solid 30 minutes but I don't have an hour. If someone wanted to see me two nights in a row, they'd have to see the exact same thing. But it's the same at a Jerry Seinfeld show.

The formulaic story arc—exposition, climax, conclusion—was not written by God. I believe in it, but it's a means to an end. If it feels right to you then it's right. The audience will always want to see some kind of evolution. In order to write dialogue for distinctive characters, it helps to picture them, especially once you know the actors. I guess it's easy for me. Maybe I'm just good!

My father said, "Only say what you think is funny, only keep what they think is funny." I say, always write to entertain real people. It sounds pretentious, but I think a lot of people, from junior high all the way to television, write to impress people they're not friends with. They write to impress teachers. Then the teachers just become studio executives or network executives or critics. They never write for their classmates. They keep writing for teachers so they can get good grades and prove their worth. You should be writing for the kid sitting next to you. You should never be writing for your teachers.

The smaller the scrap of paper I write on, the better the idea tends to be. I don't know why, but if I'm writing on the corner of a piece of paper or a scrap of an index card, I'll fill it to the margins with cool stuff. If it's a legal pad, I have a lot more trouble.



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# Across Political Divides, Our Therapist-Essayist Couches Presidential Hopefuls

MEANSANITY SPECIAL

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2008

BY DAVID HAYES + ILLUSTRATIONS BY DANIEL KRALL

## RUDY GIULIANI

**Rudy Giuliani** has a nice, toothy grin. He seems earnest. He knows what he wants and doesn't like anyone disagreeing with him. According to those who have, he *really* doesn't like it. Rudy, like all of us, has a dark side, which he has for the most part kept in check. But the unconscious mind, with its penchant for blustery psychic hiccups, reliably burps forth. Then—oops!—something we have tried to keep tightly under wraps leaks out.

What is often reported about Giuliani is his egotism. His New York mayoralship was filled with in-the-trenches photo-ops: He was reliably first on the scene of shootings, fires and kitten-in-trees rescue operations. He's a media whore who loves the limelight, a man whose M.O. is suave assuredness when others around him go unnerved. He's also known for being a vicious, untiring rival, with a reputation for defending his political pursuits like a meth-crazed rooster at a cockfight.

If I were to look into his upbringing—something I might do if he were my patient—I would find that he was an only child, considered a “miracle baby” by his parents who had trouble conceiving. Notably, and perhaps not so surprisingly (according to the recent tell-all Giuliani biography *Rudy*), his father did time in Sing Sing correctional facility and was reportedly “hired muscle” for the Mafia. That may explain Rudy's years of impassioned crime-busting in Washington. I could also make interpretations about the opera club he began when he was young, his dalliance with priesthood or his hatred of ferrets. While none of these pieces of his personal history alone construct a clear picture of the man, they may, retroactively, point us toward Rudy Giuliani's self-proclaimed destiny of “miracle politician.”

Alas: like Icarus, whose waxen wings began to melt as he flew gloriously towards the sun, here too, a fall is imminent. The hubris of the narcissist has a fragile foundation, bound to crumble as his true vulnerabilities, and the manic defenses employed to hold them back, seep through. In Rudy's case, such emanations appear in two categories: pre-9/11—during which time he displayed his regular intoler-



ance for difference of opinion; and post-9/11, when his identification with his father's anger has been polarizing his politics into a paranoid re-enactment of pre-emptive aggression.

“Right now, as we sit here enjoying breakfast, they are planning on coming here to kill us,” thus spoke Rudy to an elderly woman's query during a recent campaign stop. While he's probably accurate on a technical level, it goes without saying that brunchers in several Middle Eastern nations are saying the same thing about us. This quote is perhaps better understood as an insight into the nature of Rudy's internal world, where danger looms and dissension is a threat to the core.

“I understand terrorism in a way that is equal to or exceeds anyone else,” Rudy also recently noted. Concretely, he's referring to his 9/11 experience. But the genetic interpretation of his statement points toward an interpre-

tation of “terrorism” in a much more proximal and internal landscape.

Ironically, despite relying on “security” as his campaign buzz word (which for the populace at large invokes collective fear and *insecurity*), during the first presidential debate, he confusingly reframed his rhetoric as a “lead from optimism.”

Rudy's résumé reads pretty well, unless you're a ferret-loving Haitian hanging out at the Brooklyn Museum, or a New York City rescue worker with a bad cough. It's his emotionality and volatility that tend to leave a bad taste. But perhaps this is what politics is really all about: The way people tend to vote, and how they lean in the polls, shows us that *the persona* persuades above all; that the archetypal image of the politician is greater than the sum of his or her deeds.

If, as the Buddhists and many object-relations psychologists believe, the

outside world is merely an illusion—a projection of our inner psychic landscape inhabited by a chorus of “good or evil” characters—then, looking at our politicians as the disowned aspects of our national self, we find a hollow, inauthentic, yet persistently heroic idealization. Rudy Giuliani, and every other narcissistic political idol, rises through the ranks because we are a nation that needs and loves the cowboy hero. We worship the one who's “not going take it any more”; the one who's going to protect the good and punish the bad.

If only it were that simple! Breaking things down into black and white is not only unhelpful; it's pathological—at least for an adult.

As many of you know, therapists generally prefer to explore rather than give advice. As such, I shall not opine on whether Rudy Giuliani is fit or unfit to become our next president. What I'm really coming out strong against, however, is the lack of respect we pay to our own inner bullshit meters—those inner compasses that, when working well, alert us to the lack of caring, to empathic miscue or emotional incongruence.

Our own black and white thinking—and the fantasies and fantastical politicians it creates—is our greater challenge.

## HILLARY CLINTON

**Hillary** is the new J.R. She's powerful, feisty, determined, hated and loved in surprisingly equal measure. But what's not to love, America? She's our first viable shot at a female commander in chief. If that came to pass, it would represent a giant step for us as a nation, but merely the logical conclusion to the ascent of a woman accustomed to being first from the crib.

She was a first-born, the first student to give her college commencement address, the first lady of Arkansas for 12 years, the Arkansas Woman of the Year in 1983, Arkansas Young Mother of the Year in 1984 and twice named one of the top most influential lawyers in America. She was a first lady for eight years and also the *first* first lady to have a postgraduate degree, to be subpoenaed before a grand jury, and

to set up offices in the west wing of the White House.

“I'd play out in the patch of sunlight that broke the density of the elms in front of our house and pretend there were heavenly movie cameras watching my every move,” the young, would-be New York senator once wrote to a male friend. When the latter made their collegiate correspondence public last summer, we got a glimpse of Hillary's earliest fantasy of basking in the warm, fuzzy glow of the spotlight.

What we have here is an ambitious, steely candidate whose resumé reads, at least until 2001, like a liberal manifesto checklist. She sought to bring attention to child advocacy issues, women's and minorities' rights, health care initiatives, hunger, housing reform and worked hard on the campaigns of others who supported these issues.

So why isn't every woman, minority, sensitive New Age male, metrosexual, homosexual, healthcare worker and Democrat ready to vote for her? Hillary Rodham Clinton seems to have systematically frustrated our desire to love her more. Maybe it's our fault. Maybe it's us, not her—although her erstwhile supporters point out that, since becoming a senator from New York in 2001, she has compromised her record and innermost beliefs by becoming more moderate and centrist in her policy-making.

Let's consider for a moment what a shift in the gender balance of the nation's most powerful job would mean for Capitol Hill and the rest of the country. This is the big chair, the big leagues, and the first time America has had to reconcile the notion of a woman in command. Patriarchies are accustomed to men being in command; that is, in fact, their *point*. Yet feminists and an impressive array of psychologists, philosophers and those who still align themselves with New Age creeds allege that the modern world is out of balance. History, they argue, has been largely repressive of the essential aspects of feminine power that could theoretically level a testosterone-infused socio-political system. And, as one theory goes, male dominance—aside from some necessary evolutionary elements—is an exaggerated and rigidified defense against how vulnerable, and yes, inferior a man can



feel when he measures his own prowess against the life-giving power of the female. Patriarchal cultures throughout history (which is like saying, “pretty much all cultures”), it follows, are thus pervaded with aggression, dominance, violence and repression of others as compensation for how little power men actually feel they have.

Enter Hillary and her 2007 bid for presidency. Even when you consider the larger, aforementioned implications of her candidacy, she still seems quite suited for the job. She has been bent on changing the system—any system—since her childhood. Her early rebellious struggles against her father evolved into a lifelong effort not only to be seen, heard and understood, but also into a struggle to surpass Father. By all accounts, she has what a former Clinton friend and advisor called “a quality of ruthlessness.” But, hell, that's *Politician 101*. To develop into the

extremely powerful woman she has become, in the unbelievably misogynistic environment in which she finds herself, necessitates perseverance, determination and aggression.

Yet perversely, these same characteristics that have enabled her to succeed evoke in us feelings of resentment, disdain and abandonment. We don't like that she seems often unable to leave the guns at the door. There are ways in which her well-intentioned fighting spirit betrays her. Recall her “...I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was fulfill my profession...” comment, along with her infamous dis of Tammy Wynette—when she huffed that she wasn't just going to, as Wynette put it in song, idly “stand by her man.” (Never mind that she eventually did just that, standing by her philandering mate, much to the dismay of ardent female supporters everywhere.)

“I'm the one person they're afraid of,” she said recently, referring to her Republican adversaries. Hillary has fighter fatigue—the bitter taste of resentment that comes from having spent her entire life fighting for something. Warriors often win, but seldom forget the war.

Clinton has been in the spotlight for close to 40 years. After numerous severely probing investigations and countless biographies (including a few scandalous ones), no big skeletons have emerged from her (now turned inside-out) closet. While there is an abundant legacy of information about her politics and her life choices, The Real Hillary Clinton remains an impenetrable fortress. We complain that we still have no idea who she truly is. And that can only mean two things: Either we have failed to find a consistent Hillary in which we can see ourselves reflected, or she has failed to let us in on whatever lies beyond her voting record or rhetoric—which is what we expect and demand from our *nec pluri-bus impar* leader. Hence our collective compulsion to keep investigating her. Perhaps this is why we've critiqued not only her voting record, but also her hairdos, outfits, and lately, her cleavage. Actually, I think it's only one piece of the puzzle.

“Help make history!” her campaign Web site extols. Indeed, her election would be historic. Surely such a shift of power would require the right combination of elements: stars must be aligned, as well as our ideas about masculine and feminine. The Jungian psychologists have posited that, regardless of our respective gender, in order to be a truly individuated being, we must reconcile, integrate and find a balance between both masculine and feminine archetypal qualities within us. The ancient art of alchemy was thought to be the symbolic representation of this process.

What remains to be seen is whether Hillary Clinton and the rest of the country is ready to turn lead into gold. ■■■

David Hayes, M.A., MFT, is a licensed marriage and family therapist in Beverly Hills, and reachable through LAtherapist.net

# GET MEAN

WITH TODD RASSMUNSEN

WHEN OUR TRUSTY CORRESPONDENT GETS EMBEDDED IN HOLLYWOOD, HE OBSERVES THE PLIGHT OF LOCAL WORKING STIFFS AND HIGH-PAID STARS—AND DEVELOPS A MYSTERIOUS ALLERGIC REACTION TO THE ENVIRONS

“IF MY TIME IN HOLLYWOOD TAUGHT ME ANYTHING, IT’S THAT ONE MUSTN’T FUSS OVER PESKY FACTS.”



TODD, RESOLUTE AS EVER.

By a peculiar twist of fate, I recently found myself in line at Hollywood Station, one of L.A.’s landmark post offices.

I was in town at the paid behest of a major motion-picture studio. A cabal of producers had contacted me after learning of my expertise in the field of arctic exploration gear, and inquired if I was interested in acting as a wardrobe consultant on the set of an upcoming film about the legendary Teufels-son expedition of 1909. As I felt an obligation to my great-grandfather Arne Rassmussen, a member of that vaunted scientific voyage, to ensure that the film was as historically accurate as possible, I agreed. It also didn’t hurt that the money the studio was offering would finally enable me to complete the construction of the telioscope I had been laboring over for months at my Zurich home base.

Having flown into Los Angeles and checked myself into an overpriced hotel abutting Sunset Boulevard, I now awaited my turn to mail the contents of my price-less package (papers I had obtained which confirmed the existence of Aldous Huxley’s never-produced script for a Don Quixote cartoon) while curiously pondering my surroundings.

The industrial thrum of the Hollywood P.O.’s beleaguered air conditioning unit was a reminder of just how hot fall can get in the dark heart of Southern California. In front of me stood a fellow with straggly, long, blond hair and a sun-whipped face. While he tapped his foot impatiently, fretting with his own package, I noticed the crimson rash covering his hands and wrists. I took a half step back as he coughed into his red fist.

When this stricken son reached the front of the line, he asked the woman behind the counter to borrow some tape. She handed him two even strips of adhesive and looked aghast at this hands. He thanked her for the tape in a loud voice. Then he noticed her staring.

“Ha! Yeah!” he said. “I’m, y’know, Spider-Man? I work that stretch on Hollywood Boulevard by Mann’s

Chinese Theater... Yesterday I go to put on my costume for work, and there were tears in the gloves. So I took a red Sharpie and colored in where the skin was showing through. But now I can’t get the ink off!”

I had encountered this strange strain of working stiff earlier on that very day, when I went on a reconnaissance trip around my hotel looking for a proper cup of espresso. Costumed as various legendary movie characters, they mill about Hollywood’s certified tourist-trap locales, entertaining out-of-towners. On the one hand, I was relieved that the Spider-Man for rent before me wasn’t suffering from some abominable dermatological disorder. But on the other, I felt a profound melancholy at the plight of today’s street-corner American superhero.

I left the Hollywood P.O. and drove to the Überpeak Pictures lot. After a mildly invasive security check, I advanced through a Byzantine series of connected buildings toward an elevator that would take me to the sub-space where the initial costume fitting was already under way.

“First time?” asked the elevator operator, an ancient man with silver hair sprouting from his ears.

“Why, yes, it is,” I replied.

“Well, I suppose we all cross the River Styx at some point,” he offered with Charon-like insight.

The elevator door opened, spilling us directly onto a cavernous soundstage. A Big Hollywood Actor, gayer than a summer day, was standing in the middle of a large pile of clothes. Upon closer inspection, they appeared to be the actual garments worn by members of the Teufelsson expedition, items of immeasurable historical importance.

“Christ, these muggings are hot,” the B. H. A. huffed, staring accusingly at his feet.

“They’re called mukluks,” I retorted. “And if I’m not mistaken, you’re also wearing a genuine pair of sealskin gloves that once belonged to the great Barley Byggvir of the Teufelsson expedition.”

“Sealskin?” shouted the B.H.A. “I don’t do seal-skin!” He pulled off the offending gloves and threw

them roughly to the ground.

Greatly disturbed, I instinctively reached down to retrieve them. As if on cue, a petite assistant entered soundstage right, bearing a large platter of rhomboid-shaped hors d’oeuvres. The B.H.A. grabbed a fistful of sandwiches and pressed them into his mouth. He chewed for a while, his mastication face resembling that of a randy camel.

“This is the finest Genoa ham that money can buy!” he enthused over his snack.

“Looks like baloney to me,” I muttered under my breath.

“So,” the B.H.A. burped forth, slapping me on the shoulder with extravagantly affected bonhomie, “let’s get rid of all these crappy old outfits, eh? Too much of a premium is placed on authenticity these days, don’t you think? To be frank, it’s fucking up my artistic license.”

He must have seen the expression of incredulity on my face, for he quickly corrected himself:

“Did I say artistic license? I mean, my wife’s shopping allowance at Macy’s!”

The space erupted in laughter, and it was only then that I noticed the half-dozen assistants posing in a semi-circle formation well away from the B.H.A. They scampered forward and collected the clothes before disappearing into the darkness.

In the end, a film was made of the Teufelsson expedition of 1909. Only, of course, the locale was changed from the Arctic Circle to Ibiza, the subsequent wardrobe consisting primarily of slimming swimwear and tennis outfits. But if my time in Hollywood taught me anything, it’s that one mustn’t fuss over pesky facts. They only get in the way of Academy Award nominations.

As for me, I cashed my Hollywood check and returned to Zurich, ready to finish building my telioscope. It was only as I got to work that I noticed a peculiar rosaceous rash tainting my hands and forearms. And the funny thing is, I don’t recall penciling it in with a red Sharpie.

ILLUSTRATION BY JORDAN CRANE

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