

## COVER STORY

DOWNEY  
AND DIRTYCrying out for  
a quick return

The prolific Johnny Marr is returning to Australia for the second time in a year, writes **Cameron Adams**

When Johnny Marr played Australia at the start of this year grown men and women were visibly weeping.

Communal waterworks were triggered when Marr's new solo band launched into songs by his first group The Smiths, particularly perennial adolescent soundtracks *There Is a Light That Never Goes Out*, *How Soon Is Now* or *Please Please Let Me Get What I Want*.

"It's a real feeling of joy," Marr says.

"I started to notice it after people mentioned it to me. We played Glastonbury last year in the early evening, it was still light. People were crying and being really transported somewhere in their lives. That's beyond me. It's obviously very humbling."

Also humbling were some of the festival shows Marr played in Australia over the New Year's period — he found himself in front of some of his smallest crowds in years due to an early afternoon slot and young punters unaware of his history. Unusually, Johnny Marr had to win a festival crowd over.

"I try not to be snobby about it," Marr says.

"I'm not above any of that, it's all alright. I like playing. Even at rehearsals, I like plugging in my amp and looking at three or four other people and making an exciting noise. It is good for you now and again to have to win people over. The faces I was playing to were great, every gig is the same to me in that regard, you don't phone it in no matter who it is."

Marr was in Australia to promote his first solo album *The Messenger*. Harking back to the album-a-year workrate of the Smiths, Marr will be back in Australia this summer to promote the swiftly-released follow-up *Playland*.

"*The Messenger* album was the first record I've ever made where I've been able to play every song live and they've gone down well.

"Every band I've been in has had one or two songs that didn't translate live, my solo stuff works in clubs and theatres and festivals. The new record is the same but more-so, the drums and riffs are louder."

Marr cleverly sprinkled Smiths songs, as well as his work with New Order's Bernard Sumner as Electronic, with new material in his solo sets.

"Because the audiences like the new songs, it makes playing the old songs even more celebratory and all the more reason to do them," he says.

"I like those moments when we kick into an old song and everyone goes mad. If you're a musician who has those kind of songs you're very lucky. It is something to celebrate.

"People can get too academic about rock music. It takes all the fun out of it. They forget sometimes it's about making something that is going to make something feel good or think or be entertained by — or all of the above. That happens when you play some of the old songs. It's as simple and as great as that."

Marr, 50, says he may rotate different Smiths songs into next year's tour, as well as *Playland* material, "but it'd be weird if I didn't play *How Soon Is Now* or *There Is a Light That Never Goes Out*.

"I think my band do a better job of *How Soon Is Now* than anyone else has done — it's a tricky song to play."

**HEAR PLAYLAND (WARNER) OUT NOW**

**SEE JOHNNY MARR, FORUM THEATRE, JAN 31, TICKETMASTER**

IRON-CLAD  
CONFIDENCE

Robert Downey Jr has self-belief in spades after Iron Man and Sherlock Holmes made him the hottest actor around, as **Tiffany Bakker** reports

For a man who managed one of the greatest comebacks in Hollywood history, it's not surprising that Robert Downey Jr isn't shy on confidence.

"Depending on the day," says the actor, with a shrug, "I can tell you that I should get an Oscar just for getting out of bed."

Though he may not have taken that little golden man home just yet (he came close for *Chaplin* in 1992), he is currently the biggest movie star in the world — the success of the billion-dollar *Iron Man* franchise guaranteed him that.

"It's a really weird job," says Downey, kicking back at a fancy Beverly Hills hotel.

"I don't know why I'm so well suited for it."

Downey's latest film *The Judge* is a drama, a genre he hasn't gone near since 2009's *The Soloist*. Asked if he deliberately took on a dramatic role to move away from his more recent blockbuster fare, Downey shakes his head.

"It's funny because I don't look at it that way," he says. "I look at *Iron Man 3* and I go, this guy is having a complete personality meltdown and he's supposed to be a hotshot."

In *The Judge*, Downey plays Hank, a high-flying Chicago lawyer who returns to his hometown after the death of his mother and ends up staying when his estranged father (Robert Duvall), the town's judge, is accused of murder.

"I read the script and just sat around weeping," says Downey. "The story was heartbreaking to me."

*The Judge* is the first film produced by Downey's company (named, yes, Team Downey), which he founded with his wife, Susan, whom he married in 2005 after meeting her on the set of *Gothika*.

Susan Downey is not only a respected producer in her own right, but credited with turning her husband's life — and career — around.

"I loved seeing him have to battle stakes that weren't about saving the world. Because between Sherlock Holmes and Tony Stark, that's what he's usually



doing," she says of Downey's role in *The Judge*.

"These stakes are in some ways far more important

because they're personal." Asked whether it was difficult for the couple to separate their personal and business relationship during filming, Downey laughs.

"I don't know a couple that doesn't fight," he says. "Some couples definitely shouldn't work together ... they probably shouldn't even vacation together. We met working and so it was just kind of a natural thing."

But was *The Judge* in any way a risk? Downey smiles.

"I don't know how risky anything is for somebody who dresses up and pretends to be someone else for a living," he says. "Maybe it was risky for the studio ... I mean, it helped that I

**"It's a really weird job. I don't know why I'm so well suited for it"**

**ROBERT DOWNEY JR ON ACTING**



was in it, because of my popularity in other movies."

That's an understatement.

Downey's massive global popularity has made him the most highly paid actor around.

*The Hollywood Reporter* recently speculated that he had earned as much as \$80 million over the past year, thanks to *Iron Man 3* alone.

Downey doesn't want to talk money ("boring"), saying he gets annoyed when people focus on his pay packet rather than his body of work.

"The only problem that money solves is the fear of financial insecurity," he says. "It's a big fear, but it's just one of a thousand fears. There are many, many problems that money doesn't fix."

This may sound like the musings of a man who has a stack of cash in the bank, but Downey has trodden a difficult path. His early career was defined by his brilliant turn as a drug-addled party boy (where art certainly imitated life) in 1987's *Less Than Zero*.

After *Chaplin*, his career hit an impasse in the late 1990s and early 2000s, his drug addiction leading him to jail and in and out of rehab. (At one low point, he was found passed out on his neighbour's bed.)

Downey's resurgence, which fully kicked into gear around 2008, has been the stuff of Hollywood legend.

He nabbed the role of Tony Stark in the first *Iron Man* flick, despite the concerns of the studio, then followed that up with an Oscar-nominated performance as an Australian method actor donning blackface in *Tropic Thunder*.

He was then cast in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (according to Ritchie, that casting is thanks in no small part to Susan) and racked up another success.

"I've been lucky

these past few years," Downey says. "People seem to like me."

As well as appearing in next year's *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Downey is contracted for a third *Avengers* film.

He also has a burning desire to play Gepetto in a live-action adaptation of *Pinocchio*.

"In a sort of Chico Marx meets Raging Bull way," he explains.

Right now, though, his big production is his family. He and Susan, who are already parents to two-year-old son Exton, are expecting their second child, a girl. (Downey is also dad to 20-year-old son Indio, with ex-wife Deborah Falconer.)

Downey is excited about having a bit more oestrogen around the house.

"I like girls, I always have," he smiles. "It'll be great and I think it'll really balance things out. I'm actually really looking forward to nesting for this little baby."

At 49, Downey says that lately he's been thinking a lot about his own mortality. His mother, who battled alcoholism for much of her adult life, recently died.

And his relationship with his filmmaker father has always been up and down.

"Well, we get along great now," he says of Robert Downey Sr, "but we don't see each other often. It makes you realise that time is short and you want to try to connect."

"You want to let people know — whether it's my generation saying it to my kids — like, hey, you know we're actually supposed to try to prioritise each other in some way."

**SEE THE JUDGE OPENS TODAY**

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**X-GIRL'S MYSTIQUE**

Simon Kinberg, writer of 2016's *X-Men: Apocalypse*, has let slip the film will be "radical", set in the 1980s and centred on Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence).



Robert Downey Jr in *The Judge* and *Iron Man* (left) and, below, with pregnant wife Susan.



**MEL'S STILL MY MATE**

Robert Downey Jr has asked Hollywood to forgive his friend Mel Gibson before, *Now*, says the star, the black-listing of the Aussie expat is just "getting a little bit old".

In an interview published last weekend on US site *Deadline*, Downey was asked — "as Hollywood's best example that not giving up on a talented person can result in redemption" — to make a case for Gibson.

"Nobody should make a case for somebody who just wants forgiveness but hasn't changed, but he's a fundamentally different guy," Downey says. "We are talking about a competitive business and it all comes down to this: because he is so gifted as a storyteller and a director, I don't know that he requires some sort of mass forgiveness. He has changed, but at the same time he's still Mel. He really, honestly, is the first to admit his character defects."

A run of incidents starting in 2006, including drunkenness, arrests, anti-Semitic slurs and screaming at his ex-girlfriend, saw Gibson fall sharply out of favour, despite his high-grossing resume and mantel full of Oscars.

Gibson has acted in five films since 2010, including *The Expendables 3* this year, but has not directed since 2006's *Apocalypto*.

Downey says the anti-Gibson hysteria "was just the very worst aspects of somebody's psyche being treated as though they were the blanket statement about a person". Saying he judges the quality of people by their children, Downey gave Gibson a big pass mark.

"He has the healthiest, happiest, most productive kids you could ever meet or know ... There's stuff he taught me about parenting that didn't sink in at the time but have proven to be true."

Asked if he might reconsider his refusal to do a fourth *Iron Man* if Gibson was allowed to direct it, Downey replied: "That movie would be bananas."

Gibson famously covered the insurance to get Downey cast in a movie when Hollywood considered the former addict unemployable.

Downey reckons allowing Gibson a similar second chance is already overdue.

"Sometimes with these things, it becomes a matter of time ...

It seems like it's getting a little bit old to hold a grudge.

# Spreading the soul message

Neo soul pioneer Maxwell is finally heading Down Under to make sure we get it, writes **Kathy McCabe**

One of the early high profile champions of British breakthrough artist Sam Smith was neo-soul pioneer Maxwell.

The American artist who ushered soul music back on to the charts two decades ago, alongside D'Angelo and Erykah Badu, was quick to embrace Smith's vocal talent and spread the word via social media.

"I heard his stuff before it blew up; New York is a small world and we have some people in common," he explains.

"His voice is just amazing and I became a big fan."

When Smith eventually got to New York, as *Latch* (his hit with Disclosure) made its way up the charts, the pair shared their mutual admiration in person.

"He's a great friend to have," Smith says.

Just as Smith has burst on to the global stage with his soul-drenched songs, so Maxwell dominated the global airwaves when he delivered his acclaimed debut album *Urban Hang Suite* in 1996.

His smooth, emotion-charged voice captured hearts everywhere. Except in Australia.

While there was a small and devoted neo-soul fanbase in Australia, the artists who defined the genre never ascended to the upper echelons of the charts here and consequently did not tour.

Until now. Maxwell and his fellow neo soul architect D'Angelo make their first trip to Australia for the inaugural Soulfest this month, with Angie Stone, Mos Def, Aloe Blacc, Common, Musiq Soulchild, Anthony Hamilton, Leela James and a clutch of local artists including Nathaniel, Miracle, Ngairie and Ms Murphy.

"I'm excited to finally get

down there now you get what I do," he says, laughing.

"It's funny that since this tour got booked, I bump into an Australian almost every day."

Taking up the keyboards when he was 19, Maxwell quickly made a name for himself in New York's club scene and caught the attention of label talent scouts, signing to Columbia Records in 1994.

The 41-year-old artist has enjoyed a consistent recording career since releasing his debut, with all his records including subsequent albums *Embrya* (1998), *Now* (2001) and *BLACKsummer's night* (2009) all selling more than a million copies in America alone.

He also featured on Alicia Key's *Girl On Fire* record, duetting with his longtime friend on *Fire We Make*.

*BLACKsummer's night* was heralded as the first instalment of a trilogy which Maxwell plans to complete despite the gaps between recordings.

Like most authentic soul artists, he draws from the emotional wellspring of his own life experiences to write songs. He has accumulated plenty in the last year.

"I tell you I have been through some stuff. There was the loss of my cousin who was 33, and prior to that, I was involved in some difficult situations with friend and issues with girls," he says. "And also turning 40 and your life shifts into a whole other chapter. It's been a lot to process."

"But it has been good for the music. The songs I had already put together for the second album (in the trilogy) didn't seem to have that life in them."

**SEE MAXWELL, SOULFEST, YARRA PARK, MCG PRECINCT, OCTOBER 19, TICKETMASTER**

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