

COVER STORY

THE MAN
BEHIND MARS

Going from good to bad

Aaron Taylor-Johnson had to delve into the dark side of his soul to play a psychopath, writes **Fiona Purdon**

The first evil character of Aaron Taylor-Johnson's film career, in psychological thriller *Nocturnal Animals*, took him to dark places he is unlikely to venture again.

The young Brit gives a mesmerising performance as charming yet vicious murderer Ray Marcus in Tom Ford's Oscar-buzzed second film.

Taylor-Johnson found it difficult to get inside the "dark and toxic" Ray, especially as his previous film roles had been more about saving the world, with varying degrees of finesse, in last year's *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, 2014's *Godzilla* and as the title character in the *Kick-Ass* films.

The references Ford gave the 26-year-old English actor in order to find Ray included Jack Nicholson's mad-eyed killer in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* and Robert De Niro's vigilante Travis Bickle in the classic *Taxi Driver*.

"I knew he meant someone who was unpredictable, charismatic, intimidating and menacing," says Taylor-Johnson. "Ray was not exactly a character I related to instantly. I looked at someone like (serial killer) Ted Bundy, who was considered a heart-throb, who was very charismatic and charming, but his evil took everyone by surprise."

These days, Taylor-Johnson only takes on one film project per year, to ensure he can spend time with his wife Sam Taylor-Johnson, 49. He met the *Fifty Shades Of Grey* director on the set of 2009's *Nowhere Boy*, in which he played John Lennon.

Together they have four children — Angelica, 18, Jessie Phoenix, 10, from Sam's previous relationship, and their daughters Wylda, 6, and Romy, 4. *Dad's Nocturnal Animals*

character was certainly not a favourite at home.

"I was doing research during funny hours of the day, when the kids were at school and when they were asleep," he says.

"Luckily, we shot in the Mojave Desert, two hours away from home, so I was able to keep the character out of the house (during filming). The moment the movie was finished my wife was happy because I was able to shed Ray."

In *Nocturnal Animals*, Amy Adams plays successful art gallery owner Susan, who is sent the manuscript for a new book by her struggling novelist ex-husband Edward (Jake Gyllenhaal), who Susan betrayed for a new man.

"My character is a metaphor for Edward and Susan's breakup," Taylor-Johnson explains. Susan starts reading Edward's story about a family who encounter Ray's gang one night on a

lonely stretch of road in Texas. The film depicts that story with Gyllenhaal and Isla Fisher as Taylor-Johnson's victims.

"It was nice to have Isla on set because she's hilarious, especially on those dark nights — she breaks up that tension," he says.

While Fisher was making him laugh, Taylor-Johnson was supposed to be coming across as intimidating to Gyllenhaal. He admits he found that hard.

"I needed to take control of the scene and manipulate and provoke him and get a reaction from him," he says.

"I've never seen him play a vulnerable and insecure role like this before. It's not easy to make Jake look and feel pathetic."

SEE NOCTURNAL ANIMALS OPENS TODAY

"Ray was not exactly a character I related to instantly"

FEELING 1

Adele thinks Bruno Mars will be the biggest pop star on the planet, but he just wants to share real emotions, as **Tiffany Bakker** discovers

Bruno Mars can't enjoy the moment. Ever. Take the Super Bowl back in February. Here he was tearing up the stage next to Beyonce (and, let's be honest, a slightly awkward Chris Martin) in front of one of the largest television audiences on the planet, but instead he was fixating on a pile of unfinished songs he had percolating back in a Los Angeles studio.

"I'm on that stage and I'm dance-battling Beyonce, and in the back of my mind, all I'm thinking about is, why don't we have that song right yet?" Mars says, throwing his hands up. "How come I can't get that bridge right? I got off that stage and flew straight back to the studio."

Now sitting in that same Burbank studio some eight months later with his third album — *24K Magic* — completely done and dusted, Mars is still not letting himself bask in the moment, even for a minute.

"I worry because I don't know where the f--- we are in music," he says, voice rising.

"I don't even know what the hell this album's going to do or where it's going to go or how many streaming platforms it's going to be on



"I wanted to create my world. I wanted to envision me and the band dancing, draped in Versace and gold"

HOW BRUNO MARS SEES HIS MUSIC

or whatever — it's the wild west out there."

Anxiety aside, the album has been a while coming. It's been four years since *Unorthodox Jukebox* (his debut *Doo-Wops & Hooligans* was released in 2010), which featured the mega-hits *Locked Out Of Heaven*, *Treasure*, and *When I Was Your Man*, was released.

In between there was a little song called *Uptown Funk*, co-written with Mark Ronson. You may have heard of it. "That song just won't go away," laughs Mars. "I hope it never does."

Despite the lengthy wait, Mars reckons he wasn't feeling outside pressure to get new music out.

"No one puts more pressure on me than I put on myself," he says. "When it comes to pressure, I know how much work it takes and I'm meticulous with every song so the pressure's on me."

The album's first single, also titled *24K Magic*, is classic Mars, a joyous funk song, with added swagger. With the album, Mars

"You could just keep going," he admits. "A song like *Uptown Funk* took eight months to write — we kept going down the wrong path with it. Whereas the song I wrote with Adele took two days. You can never predict how long things will take, but you feel when it's good."

When asked about working with Adele (Mars co-wrote *All I Ask* off the British superstar's 25 album), he grins madly.

"Really, I just wanted to impress her," he says. "And she comes in with this massive voice, this incredible energy — that's inspiring to me. She's super cool and she's just funny."

(Mars puts Beyonce in the same superstar basket. "She's a life force — she never phones it in.")

Recently, Adele said in an interview she reckons that Mars will end up being the biggest star on the planet.

"That's sweet ... as she sells how many millions of albums?" laughs the 31-year-old, cracking up. "We're living in a time where (Adele's success) might never happen again."

Given he's sold 26 million albums, he's no slouch himself.

"For me, the definition of success is being successful the way I want to be successful. I don't want to be on the cover of every magazine in the supermarket — that sounds like hell to me," he says.

"For me, personally, I just want to do music

wanted to invoke the goodtime R&B he grew up on in Hawaii.

"Our job as musicians is to make people feel something," he says. "Whether we want them to dance or have sex or have a drink or party or fall in love, it has to be a real emotion. So you put that into a song and you make people feel what you want them to feel."

"I wanted to create my world. I wanted to envision me and the band dancing, draped in Versace and gold, and my hair spraying people in the audience. It was more of a sweatier party, and I wanted the songs to feel like that."

Still, if Mars had his way, he'd still be in the studio tweaking away.

EXTERMINATE!
EXTERMINATE!

Doctor Who completists can't miss this! *The Power of the Daleks*, an animated series based on lost episodes, is in cinemas Saturday. sharmillfilms.com.au



THE BIG READ

THE FUNK



and then go home and watch Netflix, which is not as easy when every person has a camera phone and are like members of the paparazzi.”

(Mars had a run-in with police in 2010 when he was charged with cocaine possession. The charges were later dropped. “We make mistakes,” he says.)

Mars says the deaths of his two childhood heroes, Michael Jackson and Prince, have changed his perspective on fame.

“Prince felt immortal to me. I thought for sure I’d be long gone before him — I thought we all would. He was a genius. He altered my life.”

And though they never

formally met, Mars had one encounter with the diminutive icon.

“It was at an awards show just after I’d done the Superbowl the first time (in 2014) and Prince comes walking through the crowd. It was like the Red Sea parting — all of these big celebrities tightening up because ... it’s him! Then he turns and looks at me and gives me the thumbs up, and I just started screaming like an idiot,” laughs Mars.

“And then I was just hoping that there wasn’t some supermodel behind me that he was really talking to. But Prince looked at me and he gave me the thumbs up again and that was it. I was done.”

HEAR 24K MAGIC (WARNER) IS OUT NOW. ALBUM RELEASED NOVEMBER 18

“He looks at me and gives me the thumbs up, and I just started screaming”

BRUNO MARS ON SEEING HIS IDOL PRINCE

Bruno Mars is a perfectionist when it comes to music; (top left) with Beyoncé at the Super Bowl.



Latest step in right direction

Luke Bracey is finding his feet after following the Hemsworth path to Hollywood, writes **Vicky Roach**

Luke Bracey shares Hollywood management with the Hemsworth brothers. And like the Hemsworth boys, Bracey spent some of his first days in the US crashing in manager William Ward’s guesthouse.

“Chris stayed in his guesthouse, then Liam, then me,” says the 27-year-old Aussie, who returned home last year to play a key role in Mel Gibson’s World War II epic *Hacksaw Ridge*.

“They were kicking goals and my manager was like: ‘I’m two for two on this, mate, so there is a little bit of pressure.’”

“I didn’t want to be the one who screwed things up.”

Now that Bracey has some runs of his own on the board — *G.I. Joe: Retaliation*, *November Man*, *Point Break* — he can afford to relax a little.

But there was a time when the actor, who missed out on three plum projects in the space of two years, wondered whether he’d made the right choice.

Losing a key role in *Divergence* hurt the most.

“It looked like I was going to do that, but then the bloke came in and obviously knocked the audition out of the park.”

Bracey also screen tested for *The Need For Speed* and *Fifty Shades Of Grey* — “Though I might have ducked a bullet on that one,” he observes of the latter.

Hollywood can be a very lonely place, but Ward’s support, and healthy competition from the Hemsworth brothers, spurred Bracey on.

Hacksaw Ridge is the first film Bracey has shot in his own country. And his performance as Smitty, the alpha dog of the platoon who torments conscientious objector

Desmond Doss (Andrew Garfield), is his best yet.

To prepare for the role, Bracey opted for an old-school training regimen.

“I wanted him to look like a dude from the 1940s, one that had steak and eggs for dinner and drank a couple of beers,” he says. “I didn’t want him to look like an Abercrombie & Fitch model with 3 per cent body fat.”

So, instead of the gym, he spent eight weeks lumping heavy bags up and down stairs and doing pull-ups on ropes.

Bracey, who takes a special interest in men’s mental health, describes it as a gift of a role.

“He’s a tough bloke but also a scared and very lonely one. He puts up a front. Even now,

it’s hard for men to reveal their vulnerabilities.

It’s something that needs to be talked about. And I feel glad to be able to do that in the film.”

Bracey is well acquainted with the limitations of the Aussie male stereotype — at school he dreamt of becoming a professional rugby player.

“I think my mother and my girlfriend are pretty happy I don’t do that any more.”

He hadn’t even considered acting as a career until TV producer John Edwards, who happened to be a mate’s father, suggested Bracey audition for *Home and Away*.

“I don’t know why, and maybe I don’t want to ask too many questions, but I fell into something I really enjoy,” he says. “Rugby was great for me creatively and physically it was really, really rewarding, but I was missing perhaps the intellectual stimulation that I needed in my life. Acting for me ticks all those boxes.”

“I didn’t want to be the one who screwed things up”

SEE HACKSAW RIDGE IS NOW SHOWING