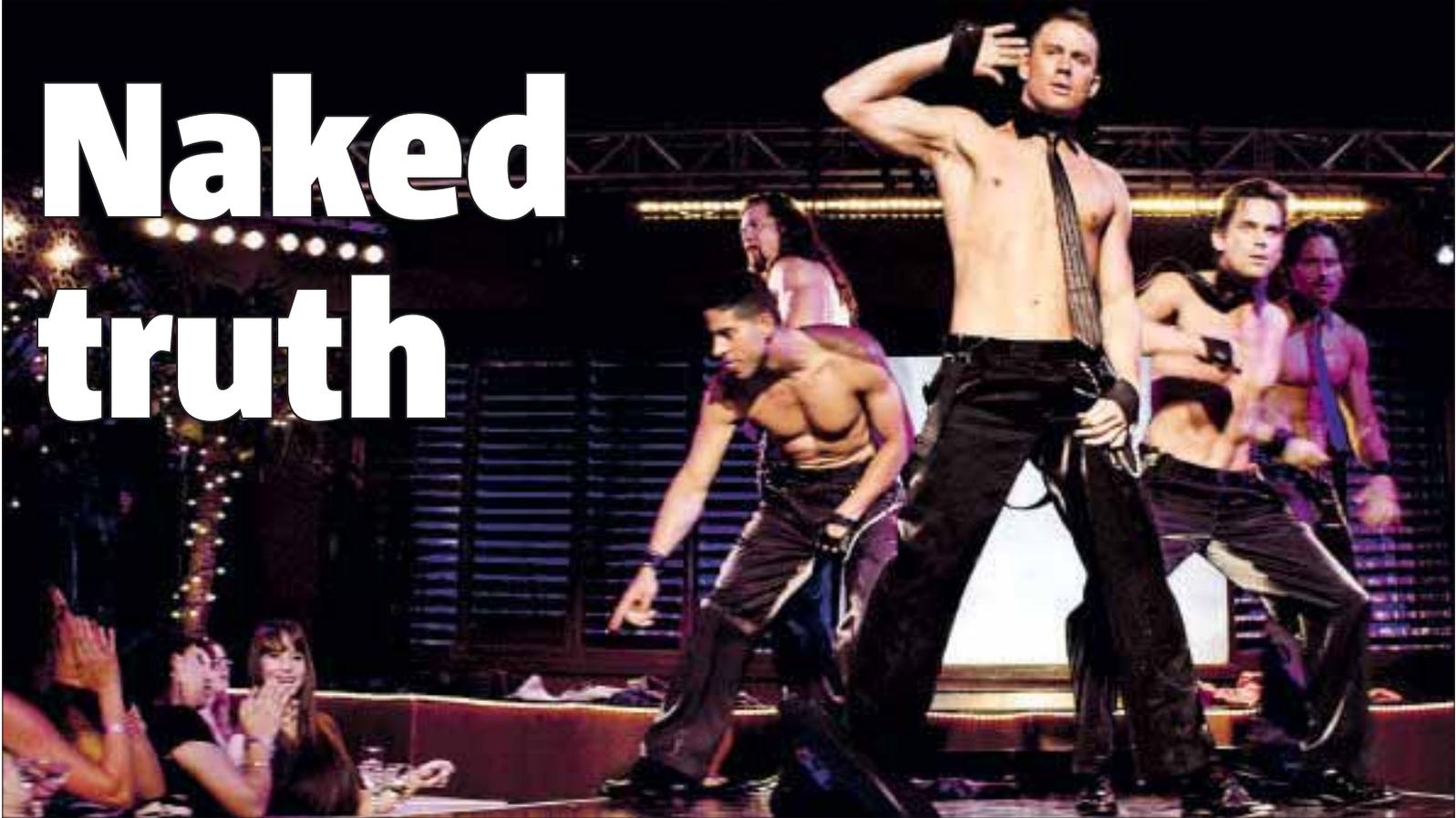




# Naked truth



**I**T'S easy to imagine Steven Soderbergh waking up hearing that his male stripper opus *Magic Mike* debuted in the US with a \$39.2million bang, outstripping all his previous opening weekends bar *Ocean's Twelve*, and wondering whether he'd been a bit

At the zenith of his success **STEVEN SODERBERGH** is prepared to rip it up and start again **By Matt Mueller**

premature in announcing his much-ballyhooed retirement. However, it's still on the cards.

'I need to rebuild,' insists the man

who brought us *Out Of Sight*, *Erin Brockovich* and *Traffic*. 'I think once a film-maker has reached the apotheosis of their aesthetic, they

should just destroy it all and start over, build a brand-new approach. Most film-makers don't. They make that one movie that's a perfect

example of what they do and then, 15 years later, they're still doing it.

'I'm feeling at the end of this version of myself as a film-maker and I need to annihilate everything I've done and start over again.'

Do his peers in the industry think he's nuts to walk away? →

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# Life films

➔ 'Most people get it; Matt Damon gets it. A lot of my friends who are actors have said: "I totally understand what you're talking about. I don't have any new tricks as an actor and I've thought about whether I want to keep on doing it."'

Though it's a bleaker tale than its glitzy marketing campaign suggests, *Magic Mike* is still as much of a hoot as you'd expect a film starring Channing Tatum, Matthew McConaughey and Alex Pettyfer as male strippers to be.

'As I get older, I'd just rather do something that's fun,' says Soderbergh, 49. 'My appetite for serious movies has diminished. Even something like *Contagion*; I was trying to make it as much a genre film as I could. I could have made that movie feel more like Oscar bait but I edited an hour of material out of it because it was starting to feel too important.'

*Magic Mike* is a Tatum passion project based on his own stripper experiences that he told Soderbergh



about while they were making *Haywire*. Soderbergh calls it 'a comedy, a buddy movie and *Saturday Night Fever* rolled into one'.

Having spent his career weaving in and out of wacky experimentalism (*Bubble*, *Schizopolis*) and star-studded studio pics, Soderbergh likes to let his avant-garde impulses rip, even when working for *The Man*. At the start of *Magic Mike*, Soderbergh told his cast: 'Jump off a cliff and I'll catch you' – and they deliver the goods with game, spirited performances. Renowned for a swift, no-fuss directing style that actors love, there is, in Soderbergh's own words, an 'artisanal, hand-tooled quality' to his films that's increasingly rare in Hollywood.

And there are few directors as prolific or genre-hopping: last year, it was viruses run amok (*Contagion*) and oestrogen-fuelled martial

arts action (*Haywire*); this year it's beefcake celebration (*Magic Mike*), pill-popping drama (the upcoming *The Bitter Pill*) and famous fop pianist *Liberace* in an HBO biopic.

**Bare essentials:** Soderbergh shoots *Magic Mike*, featuring Matthew McConaughey and Alex Pettyfer (pictured below), plus Channing Tatum in the title role

that if I f\*\*\*ed that up, I was in real trouble,' he admits. 'I'd just made five movies in a row after *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* that nobody saw and that was the first proper studio assignment with movie stars that I'd said yes to. If I didn't pull it off, my career was going to be in trouble but I was still able to go on the set each day and act as though I was shooting *Schizopolis*.

'Once I got through that, I felt like: "If I can keep pulling that Jedi mind-trick of blocking out all external forces, I'll be fine."'

Soderbergh has kept that aura of creative liberation throughout his career, feeling no pressure to fulfil anyone else's expectations but his own. 'If somebody put a gun to my head and said: "Pick one of your films for me to watch", I wouldn't be thinking: "Should I give them a serious movie or one of my fun movies?" I would just look at it as: "Which one of them is the least flawed?"'

And which one would that be? 'There's not a lot about *Out of Sight* I would change,' he volunteers. 'But never trust an artist praising their own work.'

*Magic Mike* is out today.  
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**S**ODERBERGH is also prepared to walk away from choice assignments – as he did last year with *The Man From Uncle*, a big-screen adaptation of the cult TV series, after he and Warner Bros couldn't settle on casting or budget. The only time Soderbergh has felt pressure on his career was on *Out of Sight*, the George Clooney/Jennifer Lopez vehicle that propelled him on to the directorial A-list.

'I was very conscious of the fact

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## THE END? OTHER RECENT (SEMI) RETIREES

### Jackie Chan, 58

On retiring from action movies: 'I am not young any more. I am really tired. It's a dilemma – I love fighting. I like action. But I don't like violence. The world is too violent. I want to be an Asian Robert De Niro. I don't just want to be an action star; I want to be a true actor.'



all my businesses; I'm finishing all my obligations and I'm going to retire to my garage with my saw and hammer and build hobby movies.'

### Uggie the dog, 10

After winning the Palm Dog Award for Best Performance By A Canine at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival for his role as Jack in



*The Artist*, Uggie has decided to retire from showbiz. Now in his mid-seventies

(in small dog years), the 15-hour shooting days for feature films are just too much, although he may consider doing the odd commercial. As his trainer Sarah Clifford puts it: 'He's at the stage where he just says: "I think I want to go and lay in the sun by the pool."'

