



Denim blazer by **LACOSTE**, tank top by **AMERICAN APPAREL**, navy and grey stripe trousers by **SELF CLOTHING**, white high-tops by **NIKE**, socks by **FALKE**

TOM HUGHES

Interview **MATT MUELLER** Photographer **TOYIN** Fashion Editor **WAY PERRY**

TOM HUGHES IS ABOUT TO GET NOTICED – AND IT’S MAKING HIM FEEL NERVOUS

“To be honest, I’m a little bit overwhelmed,” admits 24-year-old actor Tom Hughes. “When you leave drama school, you just want to get a job, but last year’s been a daze because everything I expected has become something else.”

What’s driving Hughes’s anxiety (and let’s be fair, we’re talking the mild not wild variety) is the impending release of *Cemetery Junction*, the writing-directing debut of Office cohorts Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. Loosely based on Gervais’s own adolescence in 1970s Reading, the coming-of-age comedy-drama makes a compelling showcase for its quartet of young stars – the trio of blue-collar best mates that numbers Hughes, Christian Cooke as Gervais’s alter ego Freddie, and Jack Doolan as podgy social maladroit Snork, plus Felicity Jones as spicy love interest Julie. But it’s Hughes’s portrait of Bruce Pearson – a boozing, brawling attention-seeker on a kamikaze mission of self-destruction – that lingers in the memory. Channelling James Dean by way of little England, the Chester-born actor’s brooding charisma (and high-plane cheekbones) give *Cemetery Junction* its poignant soul. “If someone had given me the opportunity to write my dream character for a film,” muses Hughes, “it would have been pretty similar to Bruce.”

For the northern lad who strummed his first guitar at six and told his mum he was destined for an acting career at seven, *Junction* represents the culmination of lifelong ambition and industrious slogging. Which is why the nerves are kicking in. Meeting up at his local in Belsize Park (it’s only 11 am but he persuades the manager to let us in for a cup of tea), Hughes arrives clad in the uniform of the expressive performing-arts youth: black jeans, white Converse, leather jacket and a wool cap he pulls off to reveal an incongruous 1920s-style mop that makes him look like he should be punting down a stream in blazer and boater. “I feel like I’ve got a ferret living on my head,” he smirks of his tousled locks, which have been clipped for his first professional stage appearance in *The Young Vic*’s revival of Arthur Schnitzler’s sex tragedy *Liebelei* (retitled *Sweet Nothings*).

Calling the turn-of-the-century play “deep and dark”, Hughes plays a hedonistic Viennese drifter named Fritz, living it large with his decadent friends before tragedy strikes. He chuckles at all the murky souls he’s been inhabiting of late, quick to point out that he was “the light of the piece” in *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*, the recent Ian Dury biopic in which he played the polio-afflicted Brit-rocker’s best friend. Face to face, there’s nothing dark about Hughes apart from his dress and tresses. Cheerful, grinning, keenly enthusiastic – he’s not much like Bruce, much to his own chagrin. “He was a fucker to play because I used to come home after work and go, ‘I’m not as cool as Bruce. I’m not that guy,’” the actor laments. “It took me a month to get over him

because I wanted to be him, without all the pain and anguish of course. He does what he wants, he’s charismatic, he’s always smoking fags – I don’t smoke – and drinking, and you just go, ‘He’s got the dream life.’”

Before he arrived in London, Hughes’s life was up north in Chester. Only a ten-minute walk from the centre, he calls the city “a great place to grow up – small enough to know every corner but big enough to not be boring and keep your imagination alive. It’s a great place to discover who you are.” Which, for Hughes, happened earlier than most, putting what he calls “an overactive imagination” to good use from a tender age. At 14, he told his parents he wanted to leave school to pursue acting full time and then between 15 and 18, gave up Friday nights with his friends to catch the train up to Liverpool’s Everyman Youth Theatre. “I never saw it as a sacrifice,” he says. “I always thought, ‘I’ll see my mates tomorrow.’ I knew it was what I had to do.”

Ending up at RADA, Hughes initially found the hallowed stage school “a weird experience because they pick you apart, they analyse every aspect of you. They don’t focus on your good points, it’s all about honing the things you can’t do. You’ve got to be quite strong because it can knock you. It took me by surprise at first.” Playing *Romeo* at the end of his first year was his sea-change moment, when he realised that impulse and intuition were great, but he needed technique too. Now

I’D RATHER GO WATCH
A BAND THAN A PLAY

he’s hooked on the craft, recalling Andy Serkis’s fearsome, method-style dedication to channelling Dury with wide-eyed awe. “He blew my mind. He never really came out of character. He wouldn’t be the bastard that Ian Dury could be when you weren’t filming, but he did go really deep into it. That level of commitment really inspired me.”

A passionate music fan (“I’d rather go watch a band than a play”), Hughes lapped up his role in *Sex & Drugs* because it allowed him to show off his guitar skills, although “after 18 years, I should be better than I am,” he sighs ruefully. Eighteen months ago, he formed a band – *Quaintways* – with his three flatmates, all friends from childhood. “Things are about to start happening,” Hughes reveals, but prefers not to go into any more detail. He cites his own influences as 70s blues-rock bands like *Free*, as well as *The Stone Roses* and *Oasis*.

With the soul of the 70s in his musical bones, it’s fitting his breakout role is entrenched in the decade. Part of Hughes is still gobsmacked they handed him the role of Bruce, but he has nothing but praise for them. “You just have to stand back and admire people who are that ridiculously funny,” Hughes vouches. “I’d never worked with two directors before but they were brilliant – you never felt like you were being pulled in different directions. They’d always go to the toilet together. They’d disappear and then come back and give you a note. So you knew when Ricky and Stephen wanted a toilet break, you’d done something wrong.”

Cemetery Junction is out on April 14th



Grey geometric pattern jacket by **PRADA**, tank top and braces by **AMERICAN APPAREL**, jeans by **LEVI'S 501**

LEFT: Navy and red stripe cardigan by **SELF CLOTHING**, grey and white sweatshirt by **Y-3**, braces as before, jeans by **LEVI'S**

MAKE-UP

Martina Luisetti using Mac and Illamasqua

HAIR

Chi Wong at Jed Root using L'Oreal

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SPECIAL THANKS

Angelspace studio