

MAX FACTOR

interview by MATT MUELLER portraits by HEDI SLIMANE

SOME PEOPLE ARE BLESSED FROM BIRTH. MAX IRONS, SON OF JEREMY AND LA'S LATEST BRITISH IMPORT, IS A CASE IN POINT. YES, HE'S GOT FAMOUS PARENTS, BUT THE HEAVENS HAVE ALSO ENDOWED HIM WITH STRIKING GOOD LOOKS, AN IRRESISTIBLY AFFABLE DEMEANOUR AND HIS OWN STORE OF DRAMATIC TALENT – IT'S ALL VERY MUCH ON SHOW IN LATEST PROJECT *RED RIDING HOOD*. JEALOUS MUCH?



Max Irons is a hard man to pin down. Having come face to face with the 25-year-old British actor twice in a month while attempting to schedule a London interview for *Man About Town*, I've now got him on the phone from the sun-kissed rooftop of his boutique hotel in West Hollywood. ("I'm jealous," I say. "You should be," he chortles. "It's very nice.") Our first encounter took place in a West Hollywood photo studio, where he was posing for *Red Riding Hood* publicity snaps and I was interviewing his pint-sized co-star Amanda Seyfried. Hearing I was from London, he came over and introduced himself. Nice guy, I thought – while also considering he looked a little jumpy as he prepared to enter the publicity gauntlet for his big Hollywood break: playing Seyfried's undesired fiancé (via her arranged marriage) in *Twilight* helmer Catherine Hardwicke's lusty teen twist on the medieval fairytale.

We next bump into each other at the BAFTA dinner in London, where Irons, looking spiffy in black tie and having earlier presented an award with Eva Green (they share the same agent), happened to be sitting at my table. Laughing when I remarked on his LA anxiety, he explained that he'd been subjected to his first media training session the day before, during which actors are taught the dark arts of speaking to journalists without ever actually saying anything. Irons had been brainwashed into fearing he might blow it on his first day. "It's all, 'Don't say this,' 'Don't say that,' 'Don't make racist jokes,'" he shuddered, but swore he was looking forward to our chinwag in London that week. Only to go MIA, finally surfacing on the Palihouse Holloway hotel's rooftop three days before the Oscars...

"I'm sorry!" Irons whimpers, explaining he was summoned back to LA for a Bruce Weber photo shoot at the Chateau Marmont, inspired by Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere*. "It was like hijinks in the Chateau Marmont – lots of diving into swimming pools in Dior suits and being caught short in the elevator in a towel with Natalia Vodianova, that kind of thing." OK, we forgive him. If we polled his friends and family – including his illustrious parents, Irish actress Sinéad Cusack and Jeremy Irons – we have no doubt they'd all agree it's impossible to stay mad at the eminently affable Maximilian Paul Diarmuid Irons for very long.

So you didn't mind strolling around the Chateau Marmont in nothing but a towel? Not at all. We were shooting in the elevator with this little guy crouched in a corner to hold the door open, but Bruce told him to move because he was in the picture. Needless to say, no sooner had he budged than the lift doors slammed shut and we sped down to reception, where there were five little Japanese tourists waiting to get into the lift. It made me feel very good, I have to be honest.

Sounds like you're having a blast. I am, although mum and dad – my mum especially – are both convinced that I'm living like Charlie Sheen. Mum doesn't know why I've been out here for so long, so she thinks I'm holed up in a hotel suite with a pile of cocaine and a bunch of hookers. Which, for the record, is not true.

If not cocaine and hookers, then what are you getting up to? Lots of interviews, auditions, photo shoots – fluffery, really. And my girlfriend's out here with me as well, which is nice.

And who might that be? [Actor] Emily Browning. It's a new relationship, we've been together a month. We've been forced into going to various pre-Oscar parties. Which apparently is the done thing out here – you don't ever go to a party with the intention

of staying, you just show up for ten minutes and then move on to the next. I'm dreading it. I find myself being socially awkward at that kind of affair.

I heard the audition for *Red Riding Hood* was pretty cut-throat. I didn't mind it so much because drama school pretty much immunises you against mortifying situations. But it was brutal in the sense that I found myself stuck in a room with 30 other actors, all pretty good-looking guys – especially the American ones, who were all absurdly buff and white-teethed and bubbly – and we had to do chemistry tests up against each other. They were casting for the two male leads vying for Amanda's affections and I wound up going up against every single one of the other guys.

Did you hit it off with Ms Seyfried? Amanda's got a great sense of humour, which helps when you're working on a production where you're short on time and everyone's completely stressed out. You need someone to come up and jokingly ask you all your sexual proclivities before your first take. It helps take the ice off.

It must be exciting to be starring in a big studio movie. It's pretty exhilarating. When you're lucky enough to find yourself in a Warner Bros movie, in turn you find yourself in the offices of every other big studio in LA, having things pitched to you. And even though you know that a lot of it's hot air, hopefully for every 20 seeds you plant, one of them will grow.

Do you think your famous surname gives you advantages? No, I don't realistically think it does. I'd be lying if I said that there aren't a few casting agents out there whose interest might be piqued by the fact that my parents are who they are. But if ever I turned out to be worse than what they expected, they would never forget it. So I'd say it's a bit of a disadvantage, and as an actor, I'm trying to make a name for myself in my own right. The expression "follow in your father's footsteps" has always struck me as weird. Personally, I'd much rather forge my own path.

Did you ever consider taking your mother's surname? I did consider it. But I thought, people will find out anyway. And I'm very proud of my parents and what they've done.

Did they encourage you to follow them into the profession? They didn't initially like the idea of me being an actor, and they warned me how unstable and occasionally unfulfilling – both financially and creatively – an acting career can be. But when they realised I was serious about it, they said, "OK, we'll back off and let you do it."

Did you accompany your father when he was making films? I was often on movie sets until I was about eight, but then I left for boarding school. I can't really remember much of it, except that it was really boring.

Your father has played some creepy parts. How old were you when you first watched *Dead Ringers*? I was 16 and it scared the shit out of me. There's also a film called *Damage*, which is burned into my retinas. Thank Christ I wasn't on the set of that! I just remember the sex scenes and I'm never going to watch it again.

Do you have favourite performances for either? In dad's case, I'd say *The Mission* and even *Lolita*, which I really like.



And mum just did *The Cherry Orchard* with Sam Mendes... I love Chekhov more than Shakespeare if I'm honest, and she was wonderful in it.

Why is there a picture of one of the Treadaway twins on your IMDB page? I don't fucking know but I've been going on about it for ages! IMDB is a bit like Wikipedia – anybody can put stuff up and then it's near impossible to get it off.

Are you sure you didn't upload it yourself as some sort of in-joke? I wish I had! No, some other twat did it.

Your CV certainly makes for a light read, with only three credits to your name besides *Red Riding Hood*. Tell me about your film debut as "curtain call boy" in *Being Julia*... (Laughs.) Shit, I was 16 and my dad basically said, "Would you like to come in and do it?" I'd auditioned for the part that Tom Sturridge ended up getting, but it didn't work out and the director asked me to play this teeny-weeny part. It was terrifying because there were 200 people on set. It showed me how little I knew about how it all worked.

...Lucius in *Dorian Gray*...? That was weird because, again, I'd auditioned for Dorian but they ended up offering me this bit part. In the script, my character kind of slid up to Dorian, lasciviously took this key from around his neck and whispered into his ear, "You've got the key to my heart." But when I arrived on set, the first thing I had to do was go and stick my tongue in this very pretty girl's ear, which was just horrible. And then the director said, "We've changed the scene ever so slightly. You're no longer on a chaise longue with Ben [Barnes]; instead, it's a party scene with three African dancers and your character, who's strung out on opium, is going to enter the fray and dance with them." At which point my heart sank. Again, this was in front of 200 extras and Colin Firth, Emilia Fox, Ben... I spent half the day dancing like a mental person, and then I had to snog Ben. And then the

next day I was called in for an unscheduled bisexual sadomasochistic orgy. It's all just a haze of embarrassment. This is what you've gotta do, you know: it's one chromosome off prostitution!

...and finally, Tommy in *The Runaway*? That's a mini-series for Sky about Irish and Italian gangsters fighting for control of the Soho sex district in the 70s. My character joins a drug gang, starts consuming and dealing cocaine, winds up directing porn, kidnaps a child and then ends up killing himself with a cocktail of drugs. Something for the parents to watch, I think.

In 2009 you appeared in fashion campaigns for Burberry and, erm, Mango. Are you planning on doing more modelling? I was in drama school back then and I always hated scrounging money off my parents. I just thought, "OK, this will give me financial independence for the next couple of years." Also, it was an experience, getting to work with Kate Moss and Mario Testino. It was something to tick off my bucket list, but not something I intend on doing ever again.

Are you still living at home? Yes, but I'm working towards my own place; I'm putting money aside. We have a house in Ireland and another in England, in Oxfordshire.

What's something that would surprise people to know about you? God, that's a horrible question. Mum's always saying, "You need to think what it will look like in print!" (Laughs.) I love *Star Trek*, I'm a big sci-fi fan. And I've loved fighter planes and submarines ever since I was a child. I wanted to be a fighter pilot but then I realised it involved killing people. It would be the best thing ever if it didn't mean dropping bombs.

Not on the bucket list then? Well, I'm told you can go to Russia and buy various military aircraft at heavily reduced prices. So one day, if I've got more money than sense, maybe I'll go and buy myself one.