


 A full-page portrait of actor Bradley Cooper. He is wearing a grey, patterned suit jacket over a white dress shirt and a dark tie. He has a slight smile and is looking directly at the camera. The background is dark and out of focus.
 

# Face off

They're both Oscar-nommed, on fire and on opposite sides of the law in cool actioner *The Place Beyond The Pines*. Total Film hangs out with two actors out-performing their looks.

WORDS MATT MUELLER

## Bradley Cooper

"When the cameras are rolling and people are staring... It can be effortless or it can be physics."

I love this film so much," says Bradley Cooper about *The Place Beyond The Pines*. "I got to work with Derek [*Cianfrance*, director] and Ryan [*Gosling*] and they're both at the top of their game. I feel honoured that they let me into their creative world because they were so successful with *Blue Valentine*."

Top of his game is arguably where 38-year-old Cooper is right now, having been nominated for a Bafta and an Oscar for his performance in the multi-nommed *Silver Linings Playbook*. And as that movie and *The Place Beyond The Pines* prove, the smarter breed of American filmmaker is finally wising up to Cooper's skill set - one that

doesn't rely on chain-smoking monkeys or tigers in bathrooms. Not that he's been dawdling away his career until now, but it has taken the 38-year-old Philadelphia native more time than his *TPBTP* co-star Gosling to find a sure footing on Hollywood's slippery slopes. He's always been deemed sexy (*People* magazine's Sexiest Man

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## Ryan Gosling

“I always wanted to rob banks but was too scared of jail.”

**T**o hear Derek Cianfrance tell it, Ryan Gosling is some sort of superhero made flesh. “He’s just a magic person. He makes things better. We’ve all seen him save people from getting hit by a car and we’ve all seen him break up fights in the city,” the *Blue Valentine* director says, referring to the actor’s

widely reported off-screen heroics. “He makes me a better filmmaker; he makes the world a better place.”

Certainly Gosling appears to have managed that magical feat of impressing both male and female audiences (and studio execs) with a cool combo of on-screen swagger, dramatic integrity, daring career choices and well, a six-pack that had Emma Stone’s

character in *Crazy Stupid Love* exclaim, “SERIOUSLY! It’s like you’re Photoshopped!”

So how does it feel to be 32 years old and already mythic? *Total Film* is in Toronto to find out, meeting Gosling and Cianfrance in the bowels of a downtown hotel to discuss their second collaboration, *The Place Beyond The Pines*. It’s another indie excursion for >>





Bradley Cooper



<< Alive 2011), but had to take detours into small-screen hijinks (*Alias*, *Kitchen Confidential*, *Nip/Tuck*) and dire romcoms (*Failure To Launch*, *All About Steve*) before charismatic talent met commercial success in 2009's *The Hangover*.

Filmmakers took notice, not only because of intoxicating box-office but also for the underlying darkness behind Cooper's baby blues, that made frat-man Phil more than just your average cocky alpha male. Cianfrance didn't instantly think of Cooper when he was casting around for someone who could be as compelling as Gosling, but upon meeting him, he came away impressed. "Bradley had that same kind of phenomenal charisma that Ryan has," nods the writer-director. He hunkered down to rewrite the role of Avery - a member of small-town royalty who spits out his silver spoon to carve his own path as a 28-year-old rookie cop - for Cooper, feeling the actor could go "much deeper than I had originally suspected of him."

Being underestimated may have been part of Cooper's problem, but perhaps he came to underestimate himself too, after too many years in forgettable froth. David O. Russell claims it was the palpable anger Cooper brought to his brief but memorable role as 'Cyclops' in *Wedding*

**'I don't feel like I need to prove anything. I just want to work with great people and get better'**

*Crashers* that convinced him he had the requisite depth to convey a bipolar sufferer's journey in *Silver Linings Playbook*. Cooper wasn't convinced at first, "but I made the leap because David believed in me. I think any role as an actor is scary," he admits. "When those cameras are rolling and people are just staring at you... It can be effortless or it can be physics."

His roles in *TPBTP* and *Silver Linings Playbook* appear to match Cooper's own career progression, which grows more complex as time passes. Take his gung-ho cop in *TPBTP* - hailed for a heroic act following his encounter with Gosling's motorcycle-riding robber. It's really a rookie mistake, leading to toxic feelings of shame that he can't escape despite going on to do good deeds as a local politician. Avery is one of the most complex and flawed characters Cooper has ever portrayed.



**Coops and robbers:** (main) Cooper and Gosling share just one scene in *TPBTP*; (above) Dane DeHaan and Cooper go beyond those pines; (top left) Cooper plays a rookie cop.

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Ryan Gosling



**Pining for mum:** (above) Gosling and Eva Mendes bringing up baby in *TPBTP*; (top right) Gosling helped design his character's tattoos.

## 'I've always lived up to my own expectations in the ways I've dealt with the opportunities I have'

« Gosling, who fought to avoid the heartthrob straitjacket at the start of his career before realising he could use it to his full advantage. It was *The Notebook* that diminished his mainstream aversion, and the angsty compulsion he felt to always play self-destructive outcasts (though after surrendering himself to that swoony romance, he still waited another seven years to do it again, in *Crazy, Stupid, Love*). Now, though, we're just as likely to see Gosling in studio pics like *Gangster Squad* as we are in an über-cool mood piece like *Drive*, the wheelman thriller that cemented his star power.

"I've always just lived up to my own expectations," Gosling muses in his trademark rasp, "in the ways that I've dealt with the opportunities that I now have, the opportunities that I've always wanted." *The Place Beyond The Pines* is another opportunity to play with audience expectance. As Luke, a performer in a travelling motorcycle show called 'Handsome Luke And The

Heartthrobs', he's dark, mysterious and damaged on the inside; a wall of muscles, tattoos and charisma on the outside. In other words, cinema's favourite archetype: the bad boy. As Cianfrance puts it, "the kind of guy that 1960s girl groups like The Shangri-La's used to sing about. He's like a big cat in a small cage: abused, dangerous and utterly compelling."

The same qualities that have propelled Gosling into the hearts and minds of moviegoers – he brings an impulsive, devil-may-care quality to his roles that make him the kind of guy who'd convincingly build you a house (*The Notebook*), worship you no matter how lifeless your dinner-party conversation (*Lars And The Real Girl*) and rob banks to bring up your baby (as he does with *TPBTP* co-star Eva Mendes after discovering their brief fling has resulted in offspring). Gosling was hooked on this project, based on Cianfrance's idea of 'passing the narrative' in *TPBTP*, which sprints out of the blocks with Gosling in the lead before passing the baton to Bradley Cooper – playing a rookie cop who confronts Gosling's Honda-riding outlaw.

That and the fact that Gosling has always harboured a fantasy about robbing a bank and escaping on a motorcycle. "Before *Blue Valentine*, I told Derek how I'd always wanted to rob banks but was too scared of jail," says the actor with

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# Bradley Cooper

«“I want to grow as an actor but I don't feel like I need to prove anything,” he considers. “It's so simple for me: I just want to work with great people and get better, whatever that means. And that's taken me to places where I'm working with directors who are my friends, and people that I've admired for years like David O. Russell, or a guy who is so captivating like Derek Cianfrance. I just hope they keep hiring me.”

While there's plenty of career upside from *Silver Linings Playbook* for O. Russell and Jennifer Lawrence, no one looks likely to gain more than Cooper.

Now, *The Hangover's* breakout star has Cameron Crowe ringing up to offer him the leading role in his new, as-yet-untitled romcom; he's paired up again with Lawrence for Susanna Bier's Depression-era drama *Serena*; and O. Russell has rehired both of his *Silver Linings Playbook* stars for an untitled drama about the 1970s Abscam

sting operation. Originally going by the title *American Bullshit* and co-starring Jeremy Renner, Amy Adams and Christian Bale, the project casts Cooper as Mel Weinberg, a convicted con-man who posed as an Arab businessman to expose Congressional corruption.

It sounds like another juicy part for Cooper, with plenty of potential to show off still more of the angry-prick dimensions he portrayed so expertly in *Wedding Crashers*. He and Gosling now share a standing as accomplished, award-nominated actors, and to see them square up to each other in the one scene they share together in *The Place Beyond The Pines* is to watch two actors at the height of their powers. Both magnetic, both with undeniable star wattage, combined with charisma and a sexual allure that puts them at the top of casting wish lists, and yet both trading on talent over looks.

A savvy approach – but then Cooper's no fool. He graduated with honours in English from the prestigious Georgetown University. His thesis topic? Nabokov's *Lolita*. And his interests are unexpected. He's obsessed with *The Elephant Man*, loving David Lynch's film since the age of 12 and playing John Merrick on stage last summer. And as a man in touch with his feelings, Cooper may convince as a macho wolf-pack leader, but he also admits Merrick's story makes him cry, as do many things: he practically wept his way through an *Inside The Actor's Studio* interview

## 'Ryan Gosling' is about to direct his first film... I hope I have the courage to do it myself one day'

with James Lipton, shed a tear when David O. Russell won the Bafta for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Silver Linings Playbook* and even welled up at Best Actor rival Daniel Day-Lewis' Bafta acceptance speech. Sensitive, steely... and single – a winning combination.

With such a varied and edgy schedule ahead, 2013 could be the point at which Cooper graduates from mere *Hangover* guy to A-list star. Three *Hangover* films is apparently the limit (“I'd say so,” he says), and he's already looking to find the right project to direct. “I would only do something where I believe there's a real reason why I should direct it, whether I write it or not,” he says. “I have such tremendous respect for directors, and I know Ryan is about to direct his first movie and I think that's the most honourable thing for him to do with the story he wants to tell. I hope to have the courage to do it myself one day.”



Brad acting: (from top main) *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012); *Wedding Crashers* (2005); *The Hangover* (2009); *Atlas* (2001-06).

RICHARD SAKER/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES, WIREIMAGE





# Ryan Gosling



« a smile. “But if I was going to do it, I would do it on a motorcycle and drive into a U-Haul [trailer] at the end.” He even picked up some pointers on *TPBTP*: “I learned that you just have to ask for the money; they have to give it to you. I’m not promoting it but I would say don’t use a weapon if you’re going to do it because nice bank robbers spend less time in jail.”

Spoken like a born rebel—which Gosling was for much of his youth. The small-town Canadian boy who defied authority has always found the murky corners of humanity to be the most interesting and admits, “I have a very arrogant side.”



‘I was looking at this guy with blood coming from his head, thinking: I’ve got to get a motorcycle’



**Pride of Ryans:** (from top main) *Drive* (2011); *Blue Valentine* (2010); *Crazy Stupid Love* (2011); *Gangster Squad* (2013).

But while Gosling can portray cocksure conceit and supreme confidence, as he has done in *Fracture* (“I wanted to punch that guy,”) and *The Ides Of March*, he’s been even more effective rendering self-loathing and self-deception: the ferocious Jewish-Nazi in *The Believer*, the crackhead teacher in *Half Nelson* (his only Oscar nom) and cool-hand Luke in *TPBTP*. Even bad boys have doubts, though: Gosling helped design Luke’s rough-and-ready tattoos but felt he’d gone too far when he added a knife with a drop of blood onto his face. Too late, the director told him he was stuck with it. “[*Cianfrance*] said, ‘That’s what happens when you get a face tattoo. You wish you hadn’t.’ I regretted it the whole time.”

Gosling’s worry of over-egging the pudding may stem from coming off his creative imput on *Drive*, in which he stripped back dialogue and expression to portray Driver as an existential Zen outline, defined more by his toothpick and satin bomber

jacket than words. *Drive* gave Gosling licence to indulge his love of fast-moving machinery, as did *TPBTP*, in which he shot some of the thrilling (and dangerous) motorcycle escape sequences himself. The fear factor was there but so was the buzz—something Gosling first experienced as a child. He was walking home from school one day and saw a motorcyclist in the road who had been struck by a car. “I was looking at this guy laying on the ground, with blood coming out from his head, and my first thought was, ‘I’ve got to get a motorcycle,’” he recalls. “They put some kind of spell on you.”

And he, in turn, has put some kind of spell on audiences, on Hollywood, on directors—a master of nuanced expression and enigmatic intrigue, even when he’s playing creeps, screw-ups or sociopaths. Having recently reunited with *Drive* director Nicolas Winding Refn for Thai-boxing thriller *Only God Forgives*, he’s also filmed a leading role in Terrence Malick’s next untitled film, set amid the vibrant music scene of Austin, Texas, and undoubtedly used the experience to absorb a few tips.

Even in *Total Film*’s first encounter with Gosling, several years back, he talked about wanting to direct—specifically a script he’d co-written with Oren Moverman about child soldiers in Africa. But his debut as a writer-director will actually be *How To Catch A Monster*, the hallucinatory tale of a single mother swept into a fantasy underworld, which is set to go in 2013 with Gosling’s *Drive* co-star Christina Hendricks and his current squeeze, Eva Mendes. So, in his strut towards world domination, is becoming an actor-director the logical next step? “I’ll be able to better answer that question when I’ve done it,” Gosling drawls. “Let’s talk then...” **T**

**The Place Beyond The Pines opens on 12 April and is reviewed on page 48.**