









tom hanks

courtney love

brendan fraser

# contents

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THE US INTERVIEW: TOM HANKS

He went to Philadelphia and took home the Oscar; now the star of Forrest Gump talks about growing up, falling in love and making some bad-hair movies. By Mark Morrison

#### WHEN STARS DIVIDE

Don & Melanie, Christie & Billy, Emilio & Paula - why Hollywood marriages are tough to maintain and even messier to dissolve. By Ryan Murphy

#### READERS POLL BALLOT

Who's the worst, and who's first? Who should break up, who should give it up, and who should take it off? Here's your chance to tell US what you think about the stars.

#### MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Get on board the soul bus with Salt-n-Pepa, as the funkiest mothers in rap hit the highway and show everyone how to work it 'til it hurts. By David Hochman

#### THE BOY NEXT DOOR

His good looks spell leading man, but Brendan Fraser, who stars in The Scout and Airheads, can't resist adding an oddball twist. By Mark Morrison

COVER: TOM HANKS PHOTOGRAPHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR 'US' BY MARK SELIGER Styling: Nancy Steiner/Smashbox Beauty L.A.; Grooming: Victor Vidal/Cloutier; Paper Suit: Designed by Nancy Steiner; Made by Silvia's Costumes; Shirt: Western Costume; Shoes: Converse

#### BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE, BIG PROBLEMS

Hot tubs, cat fights and no acting coaches allowed. Models Inc. is the soap that wants to make Melrose Place look like a rest home. By Tom O'Neill

### SOUTHERN COMFORT

Alan Jackson may be a superstar, but he's no workaholic. This family man claims to know a little about living and a lot about love. By Karen Schoemer

#### LUCKY JIM

He's being called Jerry Lewis for the '90s, but how did Jim Carrey go from "the white guy on In Living Color" to \$7 million movie star? By Michael Kaplan

### LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

The deaths of husband Kurt Cobain and bandmate Kristen Pfaff have left Courtney Love struggling with grief, anger and ugly rumors. By Neal Karlen

11 ELLE MACPHERSON, KEANU REEVES, MEG RYAN and more By Wendy Jenson

#### partments

- LETTERS The write stuff
- 25 INSIDE MOVES Stars are playing hard-to-get for sequels.
- 38 ESSENTIALS What to see, hear and read this month
- 40 SPOTLIGHT Marco Hofschneider; Joanna Going; Ace of Base
- 43 LOOKING GOOD Cameron Diaz; Maria de Medeiros
- 87 Q&A Stevie Nicks: shaking the tambourine with the prez.
- 89 IN THE ACT Charlie Sheen's got a rocket in his pocket.
- 92 CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
- 96 LOOSE TALK Barbra Streisand





## About Fraser: He's never been in therapy, he loves roller coasters, he's a wallflower at

raaaack!

You can almost feel the breeze as Brendan Fraser slices the air with his Louisville Slugger and sends a hardball crashing violently against the batting cage. "That one had home run written all over it," calls out Frank Sanchez, the same

USC baseball coach who trained Tom Hanks and Madonna for A League of Their Own and who is now lobbing pitches as well as pointers to the young star of the upcoming baseball comedy The Scout.

Fraser leans in for the next one, his rainwater blue eyes fixed on the ball.



Full metal racket: Brendan Fraser and Adam Sandler play musicians who take a radio station hostage in 'Airheads.'

Rangy in black sweats and cleats, a baseball cap covering shaggy brown hair, he swings again and misses. But he scores points for his execution. "I can hear the bat speed—you're fine," Sanchez says reassuringly as he readies the next ball. "Now, just be patient, be balanced, and let it go."

For the 25-year-old actor, these are words to live by. He's made seven movies in three

short years, including his other summer comedy, *Airheads*, but it's been an adjustment. "People are able to raise money because they stick my name on a project," he says with a loopy laugh. "That's bizarre to me." But not as bizarre as becoming a walking photo op. "It's very jarring," he says of his encounters with the *paparazzi*. "They're yelling: 'Brandon! Frasier!' I want to go: 'Time out! My name is *Bren-dan Fray-zer*.'"

A few mornings before his batting practice, Brendan Fraser wanders L.A.'s Farmer's Market unrecognized by the tourists flocking fruit stands and food counters. Wearing jeans, brown Canadian construction-worker boots he's had since high school, a necklace of purple and blue beads tucked under his T-shirt, he orders corned beef on rye — for breakfast — and finds a corner table where he can hide out. "I have to apologize for something about me," he says. "Sometimes I turn into a haiku. I want to say so many different things, but sometimes I grab it, sometimes I miss it."

At six foot two and a half, the actor is impossible to miss but easy to mistake. Gently roguish, he is part Byron, part Bunyan. And it's this balance of extremes that has become his *métier* in movies. In the '50s-era drama *School Ties*, he was a brooding presence as a Jewish football player who tackles anti-Semitism at a snooty academy; in the hunk-out-of-water comedy *Encino Man*, he gave a strangely poetic performance as a Cro-Magnon teen who learns the joys of 20th-century dudehood from weaselly Pauly Shore.

Sherry Lansing, who produced School Ties and now heads Paramount Pictures, says: "Brendan combines incredible looks and sexiness and vulnerability with talent. And I mean serious talent." She had spent six months trying to cast the lead when Fraser walked in. "He wasn't just a hunk. What really struck me was his fundamental core of decency," she recalls. "He won't self-destruct because he has a really good value system. I think he's going to be a huge star."

At first glance, Fraser would seem born to the strait-laced hero roles of School Ties and the recent With Honors, in which he played a Joe College type opposite a homeless Joe Pesci. But there's also a restless, off-kilter energy to Fraser that keeps him from fitting a mold. "It's your job to basically streak for everyone to look at," he says. "It doesn't matter if you're wearing cave-man garb or a suit."

Albert Brooks, who co-wrote and costars in *The Scout*, was convinced Fraser was the only guy to play Steve Nebraska, "He can play odd as well as anyone in his age group," says funnyman Brooks. "I could tell from Encino Man that he's able to let loose. He's not afraid to go into areas where other people might be. But let's make it clear — he's acting. Brendan's a pretty straightforward guy. You don't have to analyze him a lot. In Mexico these little kids would come up to him after a 15-hour day, and I never saw him once not take a moment to smile, wave. That means something."

Other things about Fraser that mean something: He's never been in therapy, he loves roller coasters, he learned French as a child in Ottawa, he was a javelin thrower at boarding school in Toronto, he's parked cars and bused tables (which gave him a hernia) in Seattle, he stays up late and gets up early, he's a wallflower at parties, he won't divulge his girlfriend's name, and some of his best friends are women.

Says one of them, Seattle-based actress Lisa Halpern, a close chum from their days at Cornish College of the Arts (she made him the beaded necklace he wears): "For the longest time we wondered if Brendan even knew he was good-looking. But he's not about that. He's your basic dopey, loyal, warm, goofy pal. Last year I was going to get married in August, but my mom suddenly got sick with cancer, so I moved the wedding up to April. Only about 10 people could show up. He was in the middle of shooting With Honors in Chicago, and he tracked me down in Oregon and said, 'Can I come?' He got the production to let him fly across the country to be there. He knows that might not have been a good career move, but he's well aware of his priorities - that people and friendship and all that kind of stuff is the real stuff."

For Brendan James Fraser, the real stuff started in Indianapolis, where he was born the fourth of four sons. His father was a Canadian bureaucrat who worked for the Office of Tourism, so the family moved a lot — Amsterdam, Detroit, Seattle, Ottawa. Brendan, who has dual citizenship, learned to adapt quickly. "As a kid, I asked, 'Why do we have to move?' and I was told, 'Because Ottawa says so,' "Fraser recalls. "I always pictured Ottawa as somebody who sat behind a desk with a dart and a map saying, 'OK, you're going to go to Jakarta.'"

Early on, Fraser was set on acting ("I'd make a lousy plumber"), but by all accounts, he wasn't a star at Cornish. ("I was once told I was undisciplined," he says.) After graduation, he tried the Seattle stage and accepted a scholarship from Southern

## parties, he stays up late and gets up early, and some of his best friends are women.

Methodist University. Hollywood was out of the question. "I was still conditioned to what was taught to me at Cornish," he says. "Which was 'Don't go to California — you're selling out.' As if by being hungry and out of work, we'd be better performers. Meanwhile, the instructors snuck off to L.A. to do a pilot or voices on a cartoon series."

But Hollywood sort of came to him. In 1990, director Nancy Savoca was shooting Dogfight in Seattle; Fraser joined the crew and wound up with one line — he got his Screen Actors Guild card for saying, "How'd you like to eat my s---, huh?" as Sailor No. 1 in a bar brawl. But he found on-camera work alluring. Then one night, Savoca introduced him to the film's star, River Phoenix. "I was prepared for the rivalry and animosity I'd been sensing from the young actors I'd been working with in Seattle," Fraser recalls. "I shook his hand, and he said, 'I'm sorry we didn't get to work together.' He really impressed me.

"Later on, there was a wrap party. We talked briefly, and he gave me his phone number in Florida. I never called it. Why would I?" Fraser pauses. "I was very saddened by his death. I went to the memorial his family had and didn't say a damn thing. I just wanted to be there."

Now it's Fraser's name that's above the movie title. In Airheads, he plays Chazz, the lead singer of the Lone Rangers, a hard-core rock band (including Reservoir Dogs' Steve Buscemi and Saturday Night Live's Adam Sandler) that can't even get arrested until it takes a radio station hostage. Fraser learned four chords to get him through the performance scenes and spent half an hour every morning screaming along to Pearl Jam to get the voice down. "If that didn't work, I'd ball up my sweater and holler into it for a while," he says, laughing.

Originally, director Michael Lehmann (Heathers) was going to dub in another singer's voice, but Fraser, who had sung in college musicals, asked to do it himself. With a little coaching - "and some genius producing" - he managed to resemble the real thing. He only felt intimidated once while filming a scene with the heavy-metal band White Zombie. "They were very sweet and intelligent," says Fraser. "But they looked quite rabid. Their eyes were sunken. They wore sleeves of tattoos. Of course, we were walking around with fake tattoos and wigs. Even the catering people knew who was real or not - though as far as they're concerned, we're all fake."

But Chazz and Steve Nebraska are nearly history for Fraser. This summer he's off to Germany's Black Forest to plumb his depths as "a man who loses his mind" in Passion of Darkly Noon, co-starring Ashley Judd. It's a risky departure, but one he feels he's earned — and can't wait to begin. "I'm really happy with what I've done so far," he says. "Sometimes, though, I feel like I'm in a big petri dish, looking at myself in the microscope. I'm not going to pretend I know what's going to happen, but even if things come crashing down, I'll be OK. I know that much."

Hours after batting practice, Fraser climbs inside his black Honda, opens the windows and blasts the tape of the Lone Rangers singing "Degenerated," originally performed by the now-defunct '80s band Reagan Youth. As he mouths the lyrics, his nostrils flare, his lips curl, his face becomes a snarl. "It's a kick-ass song," he says, admitting that he's already blown his speakers once. Then, maybe because he's working enough to afford yet another set — or simply because he can't help himself — Fraser reaches for the volume button and cranks it up — way up.

