

BELIEVE THE HYPE

Ryan Gosling Profile

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The label “best young actor of his generation” is dubious enough to make anyone reach for the hype repellent, but for once a young actor delivers such a visceral wallop of a performance that you get bruises simply from watching. In Henry Bean’s *The Believer*, the top-prize winner at last year’s Sundance Film Festival (in theaters in May), Canadian newcomer Ryan Gosling embodies neo-Nazi skinhead-with-a-secret Danny Balint with all the brooding ferocity of a young Robert De Niro or Sean Penn. All this from someone who got his start, Britney-style, as a cast member on *The Mickey Mouse Club*. But it’s the quiet corners of his role in *The Believer*, rather than the intense “You talkin’ to me?” physicality of his acting forefathers, that catapults Gosling to the frontlines of his métier. A hater harboring a quietly brimming humanity, Gosling’s character is a conflicted Jew who’s so close to his faith that he feels compelled to push the envelope to the furthest extreme — by masquerading as a Jew-hating skinhead.

“I figured the more I learned about Judaism the more I would understand,” Gosling explains. “Because the piece to me was about love. It was about a kid who loved his faith so much that he felt weak because of it. He didn’t know where he ended and where the faith began.” Gosling shirked any kind of research into the skinhead community (“they didn’t really know why they hated what they said they hated”), opting instead to immerse himself in the rituals of Judaism. “I had a lot of help from Henry,” Gosling says. “It was a great script and his wife helped me learn as much about the faith as I could. I also hung out with a friend of Henry’s named Judah Lazarus. I kind of took his walk and his cadence of speech. I stole a lot of his mannerisms. Whatever happened in my head, I’m not sure. It all sort of happened naturally.”

Gosling’s upcoming roles suggest more of the same pensive ferocity — an intense small-town football player in Alex and Andrew Smith’s *The Slaughter Rule*; a murderous high-school student opposite Sandra Bullock in the studio thriller *Murder By Numbers*; and the incarcerated teenage killer of an autistic child in *The United States of Leland*, co-produced by and co-starring Kevin Spacey. “Some people try to do films that relate to where they are in their lives,” Gosling says. “But I try to do the opposite. At the time it was very hard for me to play Danny, because I couldn’t wrap my head around half the things he was doing or saying. If you continue playing that kind of character, you risk becoming mannered and loud and preachy.” If quiet is the new loud, Ryan Gosling explodes from the screen with a deafening roar. For once you can believe the hype. ■

Nicholson's in *Five Easy Pieces*, and the cultural echoes are similar; Bill Murray's Oscar-worthy turn as Bob Harris could prove to be just as emblematic of its era.

"The only reason people make these movies is for the right reasons," Clarkson insists. "It might be serendipity that all these bittersweet, melancholic films are coming out together. But I think at the core of independent filmmaking lies a certain amount of soulfulness."

"I don't think it's anything calculated," says Pressman, whose company also produced *The Guys*, the first feature film to incorporate 9/11 into its storyline. "The best filmmakers are somehow connected to their times, their culture, in ways that defy explanation. It's part of the zeitgeist." ■