

RYAN GOSLING



Living It Up in La La Land

Words by Jan Janssen
Interview and selected images
courtesy of Viva Press

The actor taps into Hollywood's musical roots to dance and sing his way through a romantic film that looks to be the top favourite in this year's Oscar Awards. **QH** asks him about that experience, how it is to work with Emma Stone, and what it's like to be a dad.



TORONTO - Ryan Gosling is probably less impressed with himself than any movie star in the business. In person, he is distinctly matter-of-fact when it comes to discussing his work and he greets you with a charming nonchalance and shy smile. Apart from the fact that he is ridiculously handsome, you might never guess that he is one of the biggest movie stars on the planet.

Another giveaway might be the scores of screaming female fans who lined the red carpet at the premiere of his new movie and were blessed when the obliging and ever-affable Gosling spent a half-hour taking selfies with them.

The Canadian actor revisits his musical roots in *La La Land*, the sensational new musical directed by Damien Chazelle (*Whiplash*) and co-starring Emma Stone. The film resurrects the magic of a long lost Hollywood genre and transforms Gosling and Stone into a post-modern Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers.

As a 12-year-old, Gosling sang and danced alongside future musical superstars Justin Timberlake and Britney Spears on *The All-New Mickey Mouse Club*. But having later made his mark as an actor, he never imagined he would be asked to display his old soft shoe technique again, much less participate in old-style Hollywood musical numbers.

"I was pretty nervous about doing a musical because it's been a long time since I did anything like that," Gosling says. "As a kid, I used to sing 'When a Man Loves a Woman' at weddings. When you're eight years old, it was a huge deal to earn \$20 doing that.

"Also, on *The Mickey Mouse Club* we were doing '90s hip hop numbers and that's very different from the complicated tap (dance) routines and waltzes we do in *La La Land*. But fortunately I had very patient and very talented coaches who were very, very good and helped prepare me. It was also great to have Emma as a partner - she makes everything seem so effortless."

Gosling plays Sebastian, a cynical jazz pianist on his way up in Hollywood who becomes romantically intertwined with Mia (Stone), an aspiring actress and barista who maintains an indomitable faith in herself despite repeated rejection.

Touted as a favourite to dominate the Oscars, *La La Land* has already earned multiple Golden Globe nominations including those for Best Picture (musical or comedy) as well as individual acting nominations for both Gosling and Stone, who first endeared themselves to audiences in *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (2011).

The 35-year-old Gosling lives in Los Angeles with his girlfriend of the past three years, fellow actor Eva Mendes, 41, and their daughters, Esmeralda, 2, and toddler Amada, born April 29 last year.

He recently completed work on *Blade Runner 2049*, the long-awaited sequel to Ridley Scott's original 1982 sci-fi cult classic, directed by Quebec filmmaker Denis Villeneuve (*Arrival*, *Sicario*).

QH: Ryan, it's very rare to make a musical these days. Are you a fan of the genre?

Gosling: *I never really got into musicals. My sister Mandy was a big fan of musicals and she studied musical theatre while I was growing up so I really became acquainted with the genre through her.*

What I enjoy most about musicals is how the characters are able to connect through the songs and dances they do and that's what I felt when I was doing the numbers with Emma. It's a very different and unique way to communicate emotion and romance.

QH: So the musical numbers were an extension of the regular scenes with dialogue?



Gosling: Yeah. That's why we enjoyed working with the choreographer and composer because they helped us understand how we could express what our characters were feeling for each other by the way they sang and danced together.

We wanted to stay in character in the sense that our characters' relationship would simply be extended and expanded when you saw them in those (musical) numbers. Our choreographer Mandy (Mandy Moore of *Dancing with the Stars* fame, not the singer/actress) developed the dance numbers in a way that you wouldn't feel that they turned into different people as soon as they started singing or dancing.

QH: What do you think *La La Land* is going to convey to audiences?

Gosling: I really like how Damien (Chazelle, the director) was able to bring out this old-fashioned sensibility that we virtually never see anymore in film. The real essence of a musical is how it engages you by creating this kind of magical world in which the characters live, even though there's still this underlying reality of the show business world that they're part of.

QH: How did you like getting to work with Emma Stone again?

Gosling: This is the third film we've done together but until this one I never knew how truly talented she really is. I always knew that she was a great

actress but in this film she really does so many things and is so good that it was incredible to watch her and work with her.

QH: Your character Sebastian has a very jaded perspective on Hollywood whereas Emma Stone's character Mia has this wide-eyed sense of hope. What was it like for you when you left Canada at a very young age to work in the film industry?

Gosling: It was hard at times. You feel cut off from your family and the world that you know and suddenly you're in Los Angeles competing against a lot of other talented people who all have the same dream as you do.

Sebastian is close to turning into a very bitter and cynical person because of all the failure and rejection he's gone through trying to make it in the business. But then he meets this very optimistic and enthusiastic girl and he starts to remember how he once felt about that world. They help each other stay afloat at a critical time when otherwise they might have given up. When he falls in love with her that really saves him from turning into the worst version of himself.

QH: What are your memories of your early years as an aspiring actor in Hollywood?

Gosling: I was happy just to be able to have enough money to live and get enough jobs to keep me going and help my family whenever I could. I was pretty lucky that whenever my money was running out, I always found another part that would give me enough to keep on going.

In my own case, I never really considered giving up because I didn't have anything else to fall back on. Acting was really the only thing I was capable of doing. Most actors, when they're starting out, just want to be able to earn a living and survive until you get that one audition or one role that does it for you. You want to reach a level where you can choose from different projects and not just take any job that comes along just to be able to pay the rent.

QH: You've spoken in the past about how you would go on numerous auditions and how frustrating that process could be.

Gosling: Auditions are the toughest because you have to get used to dealing with the rejection, because you feel you're being rejected personally and it's hard to separate that from your identity. But I always tried to see it as something that's part of the business and it's not as if you've suffered some terrible loss.

QH: Where did you get your work ethic from?

Gosling: All the men in my family worked pretty hard. My father and uncle worked at a paper mill and I wanted to everything possible not to have to do that for a living. But I like working hard. I think you sleep more peacefully at night after a good day's work. Also, when you're working a lot you don't have too much time to worry about things.

QH: Your image is that of the ultimate nice Canadian guy....

Gosling: Thank you!

QH: Is there anyone you saw as a role model whom you take after?

Gosling: My uncle Bill. He has supported me ever since I was a kid and he always told me that I was going to succeed one day. He's always taken care of everyone around him. He's the type of guy who is a very good and generous man - the type of guy who will help people in the neighbourhood shovel snow out of their driveways. He's the nicest person I've ever known.

QH: As the father of two girls, what's that experience been like for you?

Gosling: It's like being in paradise. I'm so lucky. The birth of Esmeralda and Amada Lee has radically changed my life which every day becomes more beautiful than I ever imagined. Getting to spend time with them every day is exciting. I love reading to Esmeralda and watching her grow up. I never really thought that being a father would be such a wonderful thing. ■