

THESE ACTORS ARE NOT NECESSARILY NEW TO HOLLYWOOD, BUT THEIR CURRENT ROLES ARE BRINGING YOUTHFUL ENTHUSIASM TO THE BIG AND SMALL SCREENS

BY SAMUEL ANDERSON

NEW ENERGY



Fionn Whitehead

WHEN HE WAS CAST AS THE LEAD IN CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S behemoth war flick *Dunkirk*, 20-year-old Fionn Whitehead hadn't spent much time as a struggling actor—but his resumé suggested otherwise. "I was a barista and a childminder," he says, "and a boat driver on the River Thames in London." The theater-kid son of a jazz musician, Whitehead left high school at 17 with the intention of attending drama school—to no avail. "I applied to loads of different schools, really kind of desperate to get in," he says. "I was told to reapply but didn't have enough money."

But Whitehead wasted little time paying his dues in odd jobs, searching casting calls online. "I was just logging on at work whenever I had free time [to send] my crappy, homemade CV with a really grainy photo taken on my laptop," he says, "and getting no response." But onward he slogged. "Once I left college ... I kind of knew that I wanted to do it. It's kind of hard to describe. But it's just an urge or a compulsion. So I just pursued it on my own; quite viciously, I suppose." Then, a monumental break: after appearing in the UK miniseries *Him*, he scored an agent who arranged his *Dunkirk* audition. "It was a series of very lucky events in a strangely small space of time," says Whitehead, who beat out thousands for the top-billed role of Tommy.

For the five-month shoot, Whitehead immersed himself in Nolan's sweeping set. "There was very little postproduction, so a lot of it was real and rigged to look as real as possible on camera and in the moment," he says. "To be on the beach with real spitfires overhead and 1,300 extras dressed as soldiers. ... It was really incredible."

Like the effects, there was nothing fake about the bond that developed onset between his band of brothers, which included Harry Styles and Barry Keoghan: "We were the middle of nowhere so you kind of have to let people in, otherwise you'll go insane." But unlike most 20-year-olds, Whitehead abstains from social media. "I think that my absence on [it] is just a reflection of my own slightly awkward shyness," he says. "I've always been kind of a private guy and it would be nice to keep it that way."

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROKAS DARULIS



Ross Lynch

WHEN IT COMES TO TRANSITIONING FROM CHILD TO ADULT actor, some make a complete one-eighty; take Former Mouseketeer Ryan Gosling, who had played a teenage serial killer and a neo-Nazi by the time he made *The Notebook*. That said, when it comes to molting one's Disney exterior, Ross Lynch may be the most extreme case study yet.

If you're familiar with Lynch's previous work, you are probably a tween; Lynch, 22, is best known as one half of the musical duo from Disney Channel's series *Austin & Ally*. But for his first feature film role, Lynch chose the gonzo, gore-tinged coming-of-age tale *My Friend Dahmer*—in which he plays the titular role.

Based on a graphic novel by one of Jeffrey Dahmer's real-life high school classmates, the film tracks the killer's rocky adolescence just before his 17-victim spree began.

Most young actors might have resisted the prospect of humanizing a serial killer, but not Lynch. "I made a self-taped audition with my band R5's tour photographer, and he was like, 'You're going to get this; that was really good,'" says Lynch, who had never heard of Dahmer before reading the script. "The self-

tape was just sort of an exploration. I just put myself in the headspace and took a whack at it."

And despite his high profile as Austin (who inspired a wax figure in the character's likeness at Madame Tussauds Orlando), the character of Dahmer was harder to detach from once he started filming. "Dahmer's harder to shed than most of the other characters that I've played. I found myself going home at night and just sitting in the shower for a little longer than usual to sort of decompress and steam out," he says. "I had this hair dye in my hair everyday, which I use as a metaphor. When I watched the hair dye going down the drain, that was my version of my shedding Dahmer from the day."

Next up, Lynch will return to lighter fare as the lead in *Status Update*, a teen comedy from the team behind *17 Again*. But, he says, he wants to keep audiences guessing. "I like being one of those guys where you can't really predict what I'm going to do next," says Lynch. "I think that's kind of cool, whether it's a teen comedy film or an indie film where I play a serial killer. I like that."



Cole Sprouse

COLE SPROUSE, STAR OF CW'S SUPERCHARGED ARCHIE Comics adaptation *Riverdale*, nurses a sly self-awareness that most child stars lose somewhere along the way. "I was never boxed in. It's silly to even think I was boxed in," he quickly volleys back when asked about the negative byproducts of growing up in the funhouse mirror that is Hollywood. "The opportunity I got to work in that environment was great. It's just that after doing it for eight years, you have to learn what parts to take and what not to," he adds, referring to his nearly decade-long Disney Channel run with his identical twin Dylan.

To a certain generation, Cole and Dylan were the male analogs to Mary-Kate and Ashley, serving cuteness with preternatural comedic timing in 1999's *Big Daddy* which led to full-blown Disney stardom on *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* and *Suite Life on Deck*. But his role as the omniscient narrator and brooding best friend Jughead on *Riverdale* has already eclipsed Sprouse's juvenilia.

Like the character of Jughead, Sprouse stands out from the garden-variety hot people around him by outsmarting the system. While social media adds a layer of exposure unknown to

previous generations of young actors, Sprouse subverts it (his Instagram account @camera_duels captures fans' attempts to sneakily photograph him) and uses it to his advantage. "I think studios recognize that it's fundamental to integrate social media into the success and the hype of a show," he says. "Because the belief in a character is based on humanity and empathy, and I think all of us realize that we have to sell a little bit of that belief on social media. But it's still kind of a wild west."

And like Jughead, there's more to Sprouse than meets the eye. Even at Disney—that "Vaudevillian," "very loud" acting school, in his words—he was attracted to dark, cerebral storytelling. "I grew up with a poster of *The Twilight Zone's* [narrator and writer] Rod Serling," he says of his inspiration for Jughead. He's also a photographer, recently shooting Sam Smith for the cover of *L'Uomo Vogue*.

With the CV of a Hollywood veteran and substance beyond his years, Sprouse's potential is limitless. But like any good Millennial, he refuses to be boxed in: "I think if the work is quality then the work is quality. It doesn't matter if it's small or big screen."

Daniel Kaluuya

IT WAS A BALMY LATE FEBRUARY, A TYPICALLY SLEEPY season for film releases, when the comedy-horror parable *Get Out* set the internet ablaze with its highly meme-able commentary on the perils of well-meaning white liberalism. The film centers on a young black man meeting his Caucasian girlfriend's family, whose overeager reception betrays a terrifying agenda. While the main target of the film's satire was Obama-era white magical thinking ("Racism solved!"), the critical and commercial raving served as a salve for Trump's presidency—and seemed to signal a turning point in Hollywood's treatment of race: that weekend *Moonlight* won best picture and *Get Out* dominated the box office.

But the film's star, 28-year-old Londoner Daniel Kaluuya, doesn't entertain fantasies about the impact one movie can have. "I feel what the film's done is articulated an experience. It's a touchstone where people can go, 'Yeah, this,' and feel like they aren't crazy," says Kaluuya. "But I can't say it's changed the political landscape."

Indeed, more chilling than any Hollywood horror was the real-life violence at the white nationalist rally in Charlottesville in August, which, came as no surprise to Kaluuya. "Everything that's happened [this year], it's like, yeah, racism exists. As a black person, you feel it." But, says Kaluuya, blatant racism and social satire are two sides of the same coin: that any illusions of a post-racial America are gone. "[It's] not that *Get Out* has brought [racism] to the fore, but it's come to the fore because it's there," says the actor. "I just think the veil is slipping."

Kaluuya has always been interested in uncovering the truth. He wrote his first play at nine, and from 13 to 16 studied improv at a community theater. His big break was joining gritty British teen drama *Skins* as a staff writer at 18, drawing on his own experience growing up in London. Acting on the show followed, and Kaluuya eventually achieved crossover notoriety in the gut-punching second episode of sci-fi series *Black Mirror*, about a world governed by a Candy Crush-like VR game, when it hit Netflix.

Next up, Kaluuya can be seen in Marvel's highly anticipated, Afrocentric *Black Panther* followed by Steve McQueen's *Widows* continuing his streak of high-impact, yet highly accessible, hits: "Someday I might feel like making 15 films that only Lithuanians watch," he says. "But right now I feel like doing stuff for my friends."



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