

'It's a pleasure to play someone so different to me'

# Winslet, Ronan escape into characters in new films

LOS ANGELES, Dec. 2, (RTS): Saoirse Ronan and Kate Winslet each won acclaim as teenagers. Ronan was 13 when she earned an Oscar nom for "Atonement," while Winslet was 17 when she burst onto the scene in Peter Jackson's "Heavenly Creatures." In their new films, both use accents that are not their own. Ronan headlines "Brooklyn," playing an Irish girl who immigrates to New York in the 1950s. Winslet disappears behind a wig, glasses and a Polish accent for "Steve Jobs" to portray Joanna Hoffman, a friend and adviser to the Apple founder.

**Kate Winslet:** Playing Joanna Hoffman was an experience that I really wanted to have. It's a wonderful thing to be 40 years old, which I am now, and all of that stuff that you sort of bother about in your

20s and early 30s just kind of evaporates. And actually, all you want, really and truly, is to work with lovely people and to be challenged as much as possible.

**Saoirse Ronan:** What's the stuff that evaporates?

**Winslet:** The stuff that evaporates is: "What do I look like? What do you people think?" That just literally goes away. And I think that also has to do with having children. Playing Joanna was something so different to me; unlike you in "Brooklyn," I don't know anyone like this person. It was absolutely playing a role.

**Ronan:** Which is a treat to do. It's such a pleasure to play someone like that. Because you can escape into it. Like with "Heavenly Creatures." I mean, I hope you weren't like that when you were 17.

**Winslet:** I don't think I was a murderer at the age of 17. But now, maybe! But, no, it was a huge luxury to play somebody who absolutely was nothing like me.

**Ronan:** What did (Joanna) think of the film?

**Winslet:** She likes it a lot. Thank God she approved of the accent.

**Ronan:** For me, that's the biggest thing. I know that's the first thing I think about. I went into "Brooklyn," and I said straight away, "I'm not using my own accent." I've never used my own accent. The accent was something that — and I'm sure it is for you as well because you do accents so much and you're so good at them — is one of the first things that I think about. When I read a script, the first thing that comes into my

head before the visuals or anything is, "What is this person going to sound like?"

**Winslet:** And it's lovely to be able to attach yourself to that, to be able to do a thing, isn't it? It's always so comforting, because I think when it is literally just you, it's really scary. I mean you might as well be walking onto set with no clothes on.

**Ronan:** That's what it feels like, and it's very intimate. And I've always been so fascinated by it, I think because I was always surrounded by so many different accents and so many different sounds. I realized that your accent, in the best possible way, can really kind of define you.

**Winslet:** I was extremely young when I realized that I wanted to be an actress, but I have absolutely no

idea how old you were. Did you have that moment of going, "Yup, I'll do that?"

**Ronan:** My dad is an actor as well, like yours. We had moved back to Ireland. He was doing this short film, and they needed a kid. It was like a bizarre, weird, arthouse film. So he came to me and asked me if I wanted to do it. I remember I was on the set, and there was this guy, and he kept talking and talking and talking, and it was right before a take. I must have only been about 6 or 7. And I just turned around to him, and he must have thought I was such a little brat. I turned around to him, I was like, "Shhh! Quiet on the set!"

**Winslet:** I've had a similar moment to that with my own daughter. She actually had a small part in a film that I did a couple of

years ago, as a teeny-tiny thing. But it was enough to already have that feeling of, "I think I need more of this." I was on set with her, and she'd come to visit something I'd done when she was 8 or 9. And I was having a snack in between takes, and she went, "Mommy I really, really don't think that you should be eating on set."

**Winslet:** I remember really wanting to be cast as Mary in my school nativity when I was 5. I remember actively thinking, "It's either Mary, or the angel Gabriel. If they give me the angel Gabriel part, I'll still be OK about that."

**Ronan:** It's the dream role. Such an arc for Mary.

**Winslet:** Angel Gabriel just does kind of one thing. Mary, she goes on a proper, full journey.

Film

Variety



(Above and inset): Models present a creation during the 12th Chanel Metiers d'Art show 'Paris-Rome', an annual event to honor craftsmanship that artisan partners bring to the house's collections on Dec. 1, at the Cinecittà studios in Rome. (AFP)

Film

Lucas felt like divorced father watching 'Star Wars' film

## Abrams recalls first cut of 'Force'

LOS ANGELES, Dec. 2, (Agencies): On a recent visit to "The Howard Stern Show," "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" director J.J. Abrams recalled his experience of screening the first cut of the movie, which had no visual effects, for Disney execs Bob Iger, Alan Horn and Alan Bergman.

"We screened the movie, and it was horrifying," Abrams admitted. "I'm nervous beyond words. I'm showing this movie that I know is so far from finished, there's not an effect in it..."

Abrams said he was even trying to temper their expectations before they saw the film: "It was a lot of me giving excuses before the screening," he said. "I'm reading their body language while they're watching it... I couldn't tell if they were miserable or in ecstasy."

Apparently, he needn't have worried, because hearing their positive reaction after the screening was "the biggest relief of my life. And then of course I laughed and all I could think was 'what do they know? They spent four billion dollars, they have to love it!'" Abrams chuckled. "I'm so critical about it, and their response was so kind. I'm like, 'they're just being nice.'"

Abrams also shared what led him to direct the film, after initially turning it down because he was tired of directing sequels and, as a "Star Wars" fan, just wanted to go to the theater and watch it like everyone else. After being invited to sit down with producer Kathleen Kennedy, Abrams said the story just started to flow.

"We just started talking about what the story could be and as we were talking about it I found myself suddenly on fire about what this movie could be," Abrams said.

**Excited**

The idea that Luke Skywalker, Han Solo

and Princess Leia would be myths to people was what excited Abrams, especially if the story was told from the perspective of "a new, young female character," who ended up becoming Daisy Ridley's Rey.

"That question of this young woman asking 'who is Luke Skywalker?'" I don't know why, but it made me feel like 'that's so cool,'" Abrams admitted. "These would be essentially kids who didn't see 'Star Wars' themselves, in this movie, who would be in this universe," Abrams continued. "The idea of discovering or re-discovering this world that had been created."

The "Force Awakens" director also spoke, for assuredly the umpteenth time, Luke's absence from the trailers.

"I hate when I go and see a trailer and I feel like I've just seen the whole movie in an encapsulated form," Abrams said. "I'd rather be asking questions and feel that they'd been answered for me [by the film]."

He also touched on the controversy that emerged following the casting of John Boyega as Finn, a Stormtrooper who happens to be black.

"All I know is that John Boyega is extraordinary in the movie," he said. "I think the people who are complaining probably have a lot bigger problems than [that] there's a black Stormtrooper."

"Star Wars" creator **George Lucas**, who was not involved in making the long-awaited new film, "The Force Awakens," said he is as ambivalent about seeing the movie as a divorced father would be about attending his child's wedding.

Lucas, who sold the franchise to Disney three years ago for some \$4 billion, told the Washington Post in an interview he had no

connection with "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," which opens worldwide on Dec. 18.

Despite initial reports that Lucas would act as a consultant, the director said Disney "didn't like" the stories he had outlined for the three sequels.

"There is no such thing as working over someone's shoulder," Lucas told the Post in the interview published on Monday.

"You're either the dictator or you're not. And to do that would never work, so I said 'I'm going to get divorced.' ...I knew that I couldn't be involved. All I'd do is make them miserable. I'd make myself miserable. It would probably ruin a vision — J.J. (Abrams) has a vision, and it's his vision."

At the time of the interview, about two weeks ago, Lucas said he had yet to see the film, which reunites original 1977 cast members **Harrison Ford**, **Carrie Fisher** and **Mark Hamill** and is directed by J.J. Abrams.

**Decision**

Lucas said watching it would be like a divorced man going to the wedding of a grown child. "My ex will be there, my new wife will be there, but I'm going to have to take a very deep breath and be a good person and sit through it and just enjoy the moment, because it is what it is and it's a conscious decision that I made."

Lucas also defended his controversial decision to change a key scene in the original 1977 movie in which pilot Han Solo (played by Ford) opened fire first on bounty hunter Greedo.

When the digitally enhanced version was re-released in 1997, it was Greedo who shot first, creating one of the most enduring and divisive debates among "Star Wars" fans.

"Han Solo was going to marry Leia, and

you look back and say, 'Should he be a cold-blooded killer?'" Lucas told the Post, adding he thought of the Han Solo character as a John Wayne type hero. "When you're John Wayne, you don't shoot people (first) — you let them have the first shot. It's a mythological reality that we hope our society pays attention to."

**Carrie Fisher** has revealed that she was pressured to lose weight for her role in "Star Wars: The Force Awakens."

In an interview with Good Housekeeping, Fisher said she was pushed to lose more than 35 pounds for the new film.

"They don't want to hire all of me — only about three-quarters!" Fisher said. "Nothing changes, it's an appearance-driven thing. I'm in a business where the only thing that matters is weight and appearance. That is so messed up. They might as well say get younger, because that's how easy it is."

She added, "When I do lose the weight, I don't like that it makes me feel good about myself. It's not who I am. My problem is they talk to me like an actress but I hear them like a writer... We treat beauty like an accomplishment and that is insane."

Fisher's revelation echoes her recent comments to "Force Awakens" co-star and franchise newcomer **Daisy Ridley**. "You should fight for your outfit," Fisher said in a conversation with Ridley for Interview Magazine. "Don't be a slave like I was... I am not a sex symbol, so that's an opinion of someone. I don't share that."

You'd think **Lin-Manuel Miranda**, the creator and star of Broadway hypemagnet

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Features

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**LOS ANGELES:** Writing duo **Joe Shrapnel** and **Anna Waterhouse** have come on board to rewrite "The Gray Man" for Sony Pictures, sources confirmed to Variety.

**Charlize Theron** is currently attached to star with **Christopher McQuarrie** to direct.

The movie is based on the **Mark Greaney** novel, which focuses on an expert CIA op-turned-assassin who is forced to evade adversaries as he saves the lives of daughters she didn't know were still alive. The studio is putting a twist on the story by swapping the gender of the main character for Theron.

Theron is producing along with **Joe Roth** and **Jeff Kirschenbaum**.

**Joe and Anthony Russo** were once on board to write and direct the projects. The Russos are currently busy with "The Avengers: Infinity War" and had to part ways with the project, leaving way for McQuarrie to direct and Shrapnel and Waterhouse to pen the script. (RTS)

**LOS ANGELES:** **Helen Mirren** is in early discussions to join **Will Smith** in the New Line Drama "Collateral Beauty," sources tell Variety.

**David Frankel** was recently announced as the director of the film following the departure of helmer **Alfonso Gomez-Rejon**, who departed the pic earlier this fall.

Anonymous Content's **Michael Sugar** and **Bard Dorros** are producing along with screenwriter **Allan Loeb**. PalmStar CEO **Kevin Frakes** and **Anthony Bregman** are also producing.

The story follows a **New York** advertising exec (Smith) who experiences a deep personal tragedy. His colleagues devise an unconventional plan to break him out of his depression, which ends up backfiring. PalmStar and Likely Story acquired the rights to the script in June, with PalmStar fully financing. Production is expected to

start at the beginning of 2016 in New York. (RTS)

**LOS ANGELES:** Warner Bros is moving ahead with **Reese Witherspoon's** Wall Street comedy "Opening Belle," tapping **Matthew Aldrich** to adapt **Maureen Sherry Klinsky's** upcoming novel.



Theron



Mirren

The novel, due to be published by **Simon and Schuster** next year, is a comedic version of a woman juggling motherhood with a career on Wall Street in 2007, when she must deal with the impending financial crisis while raising three children. The novel is loosely based on Klinsky's real-life experience working as a man-

aging director at Bear Stearns.

**Witherspoon** and **Bruna Papandrea** set up the project in June through their Pacific Standard banner with an eye to **Witherspoon** starring. **Julia Spiro** and **Chantal Nong** are overseeing for Warner Bros. (RTS)

**LOS ANGELES:** **David M. Rosenthal** has signed on to direct the Sierra Pictures action-thriller "How It Ends," sources confirmed to Variety.

**Brooks McLaren** penned the script with **Paul Schiff** Productions joining Sierra Pictures as producers.

Sierra Pictures is developing and financing the project and

the company's **Nick Meyer** will exec produce. Sierra/Affinity will handle international sales of the project.

The film is set after a mysterious apocalyptic event turns the roads into mayhem and follows a young father who will stop at nothing to get home to his pregnant wife on the other side of the country. (RTS)