

THE SIX PARTICIPANTS ON THIS OSCAR SEASON'S EDITION OF *THR*'S ACTOR ROUNDTABLE CAN SPEAK TO A WIDE VARIETY OF SHOWBIZ EXPERIENCES.

Ranging in age from 30 to 56, some started out as child actors (*Everything Everywhere All at Once*'s Key Huy Quan and *Elvis*' Austin Butler), others have anchored big studio blockbusters (*Unstoppable*'s Adam Sandler and *The Whale*'s Brendan Fraser) and still others are longtime critics' darlings (*The Banshees of Inisherin*'s Colin Farrell and *The Inspection*'s Jeremy Pope). But there is one thing that none of them has ever experienced: an Oscar nomination.

That will almost certainly change for most — if not all — on Jan. 24, especially given that their 2022 performances already have been recognized with major nominations. Farrell, Fraser, Quan and Butler received both Critics Choice and Golden Globe noms; and Pope landed the latter and is, like Quan, nominated for a Spirit Award, too. And some already have wins tucked under the belts, with Quan having scored Gotham, L.A. Film Critics Association and New York Film Critics Circle awards, and Farrell having earned Venice Film Festival, National Board of Review and New York Film Critics Circle prizes.



"I had to grow back into the [tuxedo] and put away the real hunger that I had to get away from. Sandler says he's not eating before performing in the role of Charlie in *Damen Alexander's* *The Whale*."

And while that undoubtedly accounts for some of their excitement upon gathering at *THR*'s offices in late November, there were other reasons too. Farrell's son was accompanying him for the festivities. Fraser and Quan hadn't seen each other since working together on 1993's *Encino Man* ("We're still here," Fraser greeted his fellow comeback kid, who was visibly moved). And Fraser and Sandler reminisced about working together early in their careers on 1994's *Airheads* ("I wasn't thinking about stuff like this back then," Sandler said with a chuckle. "We were just like, 'Holy cow, we're on a movie set! There's craft services?'"). As for Butler and Pope, two of the year's breakthrough performers, they were just in awe of being at the same table as some of the actors they grew up adoring.

I'd like to ask you each to discuss a moment when this moment may have felt furthest away. Ke, this is your first film role in 20 years. You started as a child actor in films like 1984's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and 1985's *The Goonies*. And then...

KEY HUY QUAN It just went downhill from there! (Laughs.) For the longest time, I couldn't get a job. Hollywood didn't want me. There were no roles for me. I spent the majority of my late teens and early 20s just waiting for the phone to ring, and it rarely rang, so I had no choice but to step away. The difficult part was saying goodbye to the dream that I'd always had, but it was just difficult to be an Asian actor at that time, so I went to film school, graduated and then started working behind the camera and was content doing that. I didn't think that one day I'd revisit that dream. It felt so distant and far away — until a movie called *Crazy Rich Asians* came out [in 2018], and I realized that Hollywood had changed dramatically, that they were giving more opportunities to a wider group of people. It was really then that I said, "Ah, maybe I should try acting again." I was 49, about to turn 50, and I was so worried that I'd reach my 60s and look back and have regrets. So I had a conversation with my wife: "Should I do this?" As you all know, it's tough to be an actor. You're rejected again and again. It's OK to face those rejections when you're younger, but to do that when you're a middle-aged man is something else. **COLIN FARRELL** If I had a vote, I know where my vote's going — what a journey!

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QUAN So being here is beyond anything I could've imagined. **BRENDAN FRASER** Well, get used to it because you have courage.

So do you, Brendan. You've been in films for 30-odd years, in action-adventure movies — some in the jungle, as folks will recall — and dramas like 1998's *Gods and Monsters*, 2002's *The Quiet American* and 2005's *Crash*. But you've also come out of a period during which you stepped away from the business. **FRASER** I think it was the night that I was shooting a scene wherein I was being mauled by a bear, and I was in a Porta Potty, and the Porta Potty got inverted, and I was on my head, and all this Gatorade and stuff dropped on my head that made me have a conversation with myself: "Is this worth it? Maybe I should reprioritize myself and stop working with animals." Look, I stepped back for a number of reasons. I had some chips and dings in the paint [injuries], and the business had changed a lot, too. I had to grow back into it and get back the real hunger that I had to tell stories.

Colin, you were shot out of a cannon at the beginning of your career with the Joel Schumacher films *Tigerland* in 2000 and *Phone Booth* in 2002. More recently, you've done daring projects like 2008's *In Bruges* and 2019's *The Lobster*. But I understand there was a moment, after *Alexander* in 2004, that forced you to rethink everything.

FARRELL Expectation is a dangerous thing. *Alexander* was a story that Oliver Stone had dreamed of since he was in college. So, as grand as it was, as global as it was, as political as it was, as thrilling as it was, as violent as it was, and as sensual as it was, it was really personal — to Oliver and to me. It took us six months to shoot, on three continents. It was incredible. When I say "expectation," we all had our tuxedos ready [for awards shows]. I'm not even joking. We were all like, "Right, lads, we're off to the Oscars. This is a sure thing." And then it came out. The reviews came out, and I remember someone going, "Oh God, it's not good." And my publicist going, "It's really not good." I was like, "Well, what do you mean 'not good'?" There wasn't any Rotten Tomatoes then, so they had all the printed reviews, and one after another was telling me to pack my bags. I'd been found out: "Alexander the Bull," "Alexander the Boring," "Alexander the Inarticulate," "Alexander the Weak." I was like, "Holy shit." I thought, "What

can I do?" I felt so much shame. I found myself in a place where with everyone I met I wanted to say, "Have you seen *Alexander*?" If you have, I'm really sorry. I'm not even joking. I wasn't going to give them their \$20 million back, but... So I went to Lake Tahoe to a ski resort. I didn't ski, but I realized I could wear a mask and a beanie, and I did that for three days. And then after that, yeah, I did question. I went, "I'm just shit at it. I'm a crap actor. I've been found out." I came blazing onto the scene with a bit of music and a bit of Irish this and that — "Fuck, I don't give a shit about it!" I was 23. When you're 23 and you actually care a lot, and you don't know how to articulate that or

BRENDAN FRASER



The Whale



The Inspection

have a relationship with that care, the easiest thing to do is to say you "don't give a shit." This is not to apologize — I was a young man — but *Alexander* really made me go, "I don't know." And what I had to do was plug back into the Colin that went into an acting class when he was 17. And not only the fellow that went in the first time, but more importantly the fellow that went back for the second workshop. I had lost that. I was shot out of the cannon, as you said. I was given so much opportunity. It was insane how much money I was given, the keys to this, the keys to that. And that's why, when I heard years ago that Justin Bieber threw eggs at his neighbor, I was like, "He deserves a



"WHEN I GRADUATED COLLEGE, IT WAS LIKE, 'DON'T LET PEOPLE KNOW YOU'RE GAY.' YOU'VE GOT TO BE THIS VERSION OF A BLACK MAN TO BE SUCCESSFUL AS AN ACTOR."

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