

Previous spread: Sunny wears fleece **Napapijri**. This page: Olan wears hoodie **Fucking Awesome**, beanie hat **Gucci**

"A lot of things in the 90s were at their core, you know?" So says skater Olan Prenatt, who, like the rest of the non-actors in the room, isn't old enough to have actually experienced the decade's pursuit of authentic expression. But it's thanks to this unlikely gang of skater kids that the nostalgic coming-of-age film finds gritty new traction this autumn, with Jonah Hill's screenwriting and directorial debut, *Mid90s*. Set in Los Angeles, and bolstered by a killer Wu-Tang Clan-meets-Nirvana soundtrack, the film follows a group of skateboard-wielding teen libertines as they navigate the thrilling, sometimes brutal community lines of their neighbourhood subculture. Here, skating is no mere sport: it's a street brotherhood, complete with rough-and-tumble bonding rituals and the emotional weight of what it means to choose your family when your own flesh and blood fails you. It's no coincidence that *Mid90s* captures a near-mythical moment in time before mobile phones were commonplace. Loneliness, boredom and a skin-crawling need to escape leads these kids to find each other – and, eventually, themselves.

Hardcore yet heartfelt, *Mid90s* is more uplifting than Larry Clark's infamous *Kids*, but shares with it a taste for unconventional casting. Hill, honouring skate culture's affinity for the 'real', risked it all by opting to hire actual skaters over actors. Fortunately, the gamble paid off: skateboarders Sunny Suljic, Na-Kel Smith, Olan Prenatt, Ryder McLaughlin and Gio Galicia, alongside actress Alexa Demie, steal the show by simply skating, scheming, existing – by coming as they are. Plus, they knew each other already. To meet them – which I do in early October, as *Mid90s* scores early awards-season buzz – is like stumbling into a casual group hang, where inside jokes and jabs are traded with carefree ease. Turns out Hill was right: sharing the soul of skateboarding is really just letting the people who love it show you why – scars and all.

So, you're all real-deal skaters?

Na-Kel Smith: We all official!

How did Jonah find you guys?

NS: I think Jonah searched for Sunny and then (producer) Mikey Alfred brought in the rest of us to Jonah.

Sunny Suljic: We auditioned parts from the actual film but they got rewritten a little bit, or taken out. Actually, it's funny watching the movie, 'cos there's so much stuff we filmed that just isn't in there. There's about an hour and a half of the movie that didn't make it.

That can be the director's cut! What was your first impression of the script?

SS: I mean, with my character alone… so many people can relate to it. Everyone goes through that phase where it's like, 'I'm trying to find my friends, my place in the world.' Jonah was really able to create something special.

NS: I was surprised with certain turns it took. I don't feel like anyone has made a skateboarding movie that made it feel like real life, except for *Lords of Dogtown*, maybe. But that was based on a true story. Jonah's is original, and I was like, 'Oh shit, this is kinda deep.' Like, drugs, sex and all that shit is pretty normal, but not necessarily what you expect in a skating film. He went in from one of the best angles, where it was less about the physical act of skating and more about friendship, camaraderie and shit like that.

Olan Prenatt: I agree with Na-Kel. It was like an intense book. I was in awe.

NS: Jonah's fucking insane.

OP: Jonah's fucking *insane*!

SS: The skating in the film is so real and genuine. Most of the time skating on film is directed by people who have nothing to do with skating, so to actually capture that feeling in the film… I was impressed.

Ryder McLaughlin: I was a little sceptical, because skateboarding movies have been kinda misinterpreted (in the past). I saw this old video where Jonah listed his top five favourite skate videos, and it was all videos I'd never heard of. I was like, 'Why? I *know* this stuff!' So he knows a lot about skating and has really good taste – it's not just, you know, Supreme hype stuff. As I read it I was like, 'Wow, this is, like…' He hit the spot. (*coughing and laughter*)

OP: He definitely hit *my* spot. (*laughter*)

Alexa, your romance with Sunny is definitely a surprising element in the movie.

Alexa Demie: I had a lot of anxiety about that (at first) because obviously there's somewhat of an age difference between Sunny and I. But he is just so cool and it felt very comfortable and safe, and after thinking about it… There's no way I didn't want to be a part of it. I've always wanted to do a film that was set in (another) time – that felt like a dream, you know? I knew these guys growing up in LA and also two of the other girls. So I love the way it turned out.

NS: In a few years, she gonna forget us, though!

AD: Can you fucking stop? (*laughter*) He loves to say I'm Hollywood, but no – I was just born there.

NS: It's all right, we're all about to be Hollywood.

AD: You were walking around wearing a fucking *Variety* hat… You're Hollywood!

NS: I know!

What does skateboarding mean to you guys?

OP: Skateboarding makes you forget who you are. Everybody *shows* you who you really are, because there's no jealousy and no embarrassment.

NS: You know damn well that is a lie! But skating does make you more open to different cultures, music and (other) types of stuff. It's my spirit and my soul. It taught me a good work ethic – if you fall down, get right back up and try again.

That's basically the movie's catchphrase, isn't it?

NS: Yeah! Skateboarding gave me all my friends. If I didn't skate, I wouldn't be in this movie.

SS: It kinda sounds corny, but there is no age, race or gender in skating. Everyone is super open-minded. We meet so many types of people – we can adjust to a specific crowd. Like, you'll see a homeless person and you'll talk to them like a normal human being!

OP: I had a lot of homeless friends growing up in Venice.

SS: My friend went to rehab for smoking weed because his parents are really protective. But looking at it from a skater's perspective, we just see that as a part of growing up! Some people from the nice suburbs aren't open to a lot of things.

NS: I mean, I don't even come from the suburbs, but everyone always says to me, 'What you doing skating – get a job!' Especially when I was younger – it was like, 'You're doing that white-boy shit, that shit (is) for nerds.' Even my parents are like, 'Na-Kel, you better get a job.' And I'm like, 'I'm telling you: this shit is going to pay off. I'm getting good; I know what it takes.' But nobody understands it. No one does unless they skate!

What drives the characters in the movie to skate? They all seem to have something they are trying to resolve through it.

NS: You know, everyone got shit going on. (My character), Ray, wants to take skating somewhere where it could help out his family and his life. I relate to that a lot. Whereas (Prenatt's character), Fuckshit, is trying to have fun and not worry too much about the future. Stevie (Suljic) is going through shit at home and starting to have feelings against it. He's starting to be like, 'I don't fuck with this.'

SS: When Stevie gets beaten up by his brother or argues with his mom, the next day he goes to the skate shop with his friends and is a whole other person. It's like another family, really. And there is the commitment to skating itself. It's like, you're only gonna stop skating when you either get really hurt or get kicked out somewhere – it's not just like you're not feeling it any more.

Gio Galicia: I do feel like it's an escape. (My character), Ruben, gets beaten up by his mom but then he goes skating and he's a different person: he's happy, he's having a good day, he doesn't wanna go home.

I could also imagine it being a meditative experience, because you're not really thinking

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