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Matthew Goode & Nicholas Hoult

11 Feb 2010

Fashion designer turned director Tom Ford knows a thing or two when it comes to designing a nice suit. He also knows that a beautifully crafted two-piece looks best when worn by a dashing young man.

Matthew Goode and **Nicholas Hoult** are two stars of Ford's directorial debut *A Single Man*. The film centres on a day in the life of a gay college professor in the 60s, George played by Colin Firth, devastated by the loss of his long-term lover. He remains impeccably well dressed throughout his grief, as does everyone, and the publicity shoots since have seen Goode and Hoult wearing nothing but Ford's clothes.

The two co-stars didn't share any scenes in the film because Goode is the dead lover Firth's professor is mourning and we only see him in flashback. Hoult represents Firth's love interest in the present, the young student Kenny, steering his teacher away from the loaded gun next to his bed.

Sitting in a suite in London's Soho Hotel, Goode and Hoult make an impressively handsome couple. Goode, 30, is classically tall, dark and handsome, even better looking than on screen; whilst Hoult, at 6ft 3in with piercing blue eyes, has blossomed from the cute kid in *About a Boy* to a towering hunk with expressive eyebrows.

Goode has opted for the more casual look for our interview, blue jumper and jeans. He slouches on the sofa in an informal fashion that matches his candid, laidback attitude towards the press. Hoult seems to have adopted Ford's dress ethic, wearing a white shirt, smart black trousers and slightly stacked shoes. Both are friendly and at ease with the expected questions about straight actors playing gay roles.

Goode has already said it was nicer kissing Firth than Amy Adams, his co-star in *Leap Year* and he's no slouch when it comes to associating himself with gay themed movies. We saw the world of the aristocracy through his eyes as Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited* and he played the cuckolded husband to **Piper Perabo's** sexually confused wife-to-be in *Imagine Me & You*. He's probably best known for his role as the smartest and most evil man in the world, not to mention one of the campest, Ozymandias in *Watchmen*.

So Goode's been building up to a full on gay role for quite some time now despite romancing leading ladies such as Scarlett Johansson in Woody Allen's *Match Point* and Mandy Moore in *Chasing Liberty*.

As for Hoult, well there's a lot of buzz around him at the moment not just about *A Single Man*, but because he's been nominated for an Orange Rising Star Award by BAFTA alongside **Kristen Stewart** and **An Education's** Carey Mulligan. He could follow in the footsteps of **James McAvoy**, **Eva Green** and **Shia LaBoeuf**.

Still only 20, Hoult started acting when he was six years old. There were small roles in television soaps like *Casualty* and *The Bill* before we noticed him alongside Hugh Grant in *About a Boy*. Then there was the sexy bad boy lead role of Tony Stonem in Channel 4's groundbreaking teen drama *Skins*.

Last year he played a sexually confused schoolboy on stage in William Sutcliffe's ***New Boy*** and in *Skins* the confident, manipulative Tony experimented with his sexuality, at one point kissing co-star **Mitch Hewer**. The role made Hoult as famous for his numerous bonking scenes as much as his acting ability and his fearlessness when it comes to onscreen nudity has continued with a skinny dipping scene with Firth in *A Single Man*.

There's more to Hoult than a cute backside though and Kenny represents hope for poor George, who's stopped living in the present. He's also the only person who senses that he's a shadow of his old self and needs help.

Hoult's now moving into Hollywood big time with a supporting role in CGI blockbuster *Clash of the Titans* opposite **Sam Worthington** and Ralph Fiennes and he's signed on the dotted line for the fourth installment of the *Mad Max* series, *Fury Road*, opposite rumoured stars **Tom Hardy** and Charlize Theron.

Rachael Scott sat down with five other lucky journalists to discuss *A Single Man*, why British actors are more prepared to play gay than Americans and what they thought about the controversy surrounding the film's publicity poster and Harvey Weinstein recutting the trailer.

When you go for a meeting with Tom Ford, do you automatically think, 'I must put on my best bib and tucker'?

Matthew Goode: It's such a weird situation to be in the first place. It's like OK, Tom's phoned and he wants to meet me tonight and you think, 'Well, he's impossibly famous. I wonder what this could be about'. I think I did put on a jacket for sure, but I didn't go the whole nine yards. He was in his three-piece suit as always without a hair out of place.

Nicholas Hoult: I wasn't aware of Tom's fashion background until I met him. I'd just got off a flight from England to LA after not sleeping the night before, so I was just exhausted and kind of falling asleep. I asked



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him why he wanted to make this film and he explained very humbly about his fashion in the past, how he got into it and what it meant to him. I knew from then, and from the people he'd got involved, it could potentially be a great film.

"Because of the state of the script, a compelling and beautifully told story, you jump to be involved, regardless of the fact that it's Tom Ford and you're not sure how it's going to pan out with a first time director."

How come both of you got to be cast because both of you are playing Americans?

MG: I'm always amazed when people ask you to do these things, but he'd probably been around the circuit and a lot of other people didn't want to play gay, you never know. He just phoned up and asked for a meeting and even then I wasn't sure if he was going to offer it but he did. I don't know why you'd cast a couple of English guys as American and cast an American as English. It's an odd balance really.

So did neither of you have any reservations about playing a gay character and a sexually ambiguous character at all?

MG: It was the end of my triptych. There was Charles Ryder and Ozymandias and then Jim so we're full gay with Jim. I think Brits don't really worry about it too much. I don't know if that says something about the state of the English film industry because we're so unbelievably happy to be offered anything at all.

As a slightly more serious answer, because of the state of the script, a compelling and beautifully told story, you jump to be involved, regardless of the fact that it's Tom Ford and you're not sure how it's going to pan out with a first time director, but I just loved the story. I didn't think it was about sweaty clinches or anything like that and when I read the script, apart from dying on page one which was an interesting start, I kind of thought, 'Well, I don't have anything terribly dramatic to do', so I wondered what the hell I was going to be doing.

There's a real beauty in the banality of those scenes. The irony was that we were shooting when Prop 8 was going on, but we certainly weren't commenting on that whole situation, but it's amazing how far we haven't come and although there's a lot of interviews that we've given where we've been criticised in a way for saying that it's about the universality of love, but that's essentially what it is and what people who see it who are prejudiced will get from it is that it's as boring as any other relationship.



Has there been criticism over the billboards in America because they give the sense that Colin Firth and Julianne Moore are together?

[A Single Man's distributor Harvey Weinstein recut the trailer to give the impression the film centred on a failed heterosexual romance between Firth and his best friend played by Julianne Moore. Goode and Hoult's names were omitted from the credits and the film's poster.]

MG: There was a slight reworking of the trailer as well to make it look like it's a heterosexual relationship gone wrong. Harvey [Weinstein] came in for a bit of criticism about that, but ultimately he is trying to get the story across to as many people as he possibly can as it's a reworking that's done for a financial thing, I suppose. He is a businessman and I don't criticise him for that.

I know a lot of gay groups have come out saying that it's denying what the story is and it's hoodwinking it into being something else. Well, frankly I've been to see enough bad films because of a trailer that I don't see it as a bad thing at all.

A lot of British actors are criticised for having ropery American accents, but I think you pretty much nailed it. Were you worried about appearing inauthentic?

MG: I was thinking about whether or not to take an acting coach on this one but didn't. I think because it's the 60s it's a more Anglocised sound so I wasn't too worried about it but yeah, it's always a worry. There's always going to be someone who thinks you've done a bad job even when you've done it well.

NH: I did have a dialect coach. I'd done an American accent once before and when I sent an audition tape over to Tom he said that the one word that sounded English on the audition tape was 'perception', so I had to practice on the word 'perception' a lot. I had these weird breathing exercises and stuff that I'd do in the morning and then five minutes to get into an American accent and then talk in it for a day. The dialect coach was perfect and made it very easy.

"We've been criticised in a way for saying that it's about the universality of love, but that's essentially what it is and what people who see it who are prejudiced will get from it is that it's as boring as any other relationship."

Nicholas, you have a slightly racier role in this. Did you feel uncomfortable about this or did you feel you'd been slightly broken in by Skins?

NH: Did I feel nervous about the racy stuff?

MG: Removing your draws.

NH: Colin was fantastic to work with and very relaxed and calming on set. We had fun. He made me feel very comfortable. Also Tom was very clear on what was happening in the story and it wasn't there for the sake of it generally. Also, you know, whenever you're doing those sorts of scenes it's not so uncomfortable at the time when you're the character playing the part because there's a reason for them to be doing it. It's always awkward afterwards when they say cut and you're left there.

MG: It's very easy running away into the sea and then turning around without a towel...

NH: There's always an awkward moment afterwards I find, not actually at the time.

If it's not too rude, how cold was it?

NH: It was cold. We had the Santa Ana winds, which were quite warming. Then ten minutes before we went

in the first time it turned around and it was freezing. We did it three times. The first time, you know, it was kind of one of those things that I guess is quite liberating, you feel quite invigorated afterwards and then say we'll do it again and then you kind of go, 'Ah no, it's cold now and I don't want to go back in'.

MG: Luckily Colin's wig fell off on take three, which is still floating in the Pacific somewhere.



It's not quite sure what Kenny's motives are towards George. How did you decide to play that? Is he not quite sure about his sexuality or did you play him as being gay?

NH: He's a lonely boy who's trying to understand the world around him and himself and his feelings. He just wants to connect with someone and he's drawn to somebody he feels he can connect with and maybe learn from, so that's why he's reaching out for him. He's going out on a whim, you know, he's putting himself out there. He could be embarrassed and look like a fool, but he's very much about living in the present and about being alive.

MG: It's interesting he's the aggressor, certainly with the older man in different stories is preying upon...where actually you're much more....

NH: ...the predator.

Were you entirely joking earlier when you said probably American actors would shy away from gay roles?

MG: I don't know. I know that there are some people who, you know... there's much more of a protection of career over there and maybe more testosterone. It's a fucking generalised statement from me really. I'm not saying that all American actors are afraid of playing gay. I mean, **Sean Penn** does it and I don't think you can get anymore of a 'male' person going there, but I think it's a slightly different land that is affected probably due to its size and wants to keep its people as uneducated as possible and so they - God, I'm getting in trouble already.

It does seem to have a problem with testosterone against, you know, male love. I don't know, prejudice is everywhere, but it's certainly something I think British actors lend themselves to a little more easily. I think if you look at the whole of cinema, I don't know.

"I'm not saying that all American actors are afraid of playing gay...It's a slightly different land that is affected probably due to its size and wants to keep its people as uneducated as possible...God, I'm getting in trouble already."

But the other cliché tends to be that Americans think we're gay anyway because we speak properly.

MG: They think we're a bunch of woofers anyway because we do Shakespeare, so maybe that's...

Tights.

MG: Exactly. Tights.

You've obviously established yourself as an adult actor after making that transition from child star. Are you moving more into action drama with *Clash of the Titans* and *Mad Max*?

NH: I was the youngest of the Greek soldiers that in the actual times would have been...

MG: The bitch.

NH: The bitch. So it's maybe not that big a jump for me. But at the same time, obviously, in a family film...

MG: Quite literally the spear carrier...

NH: Yeah, there's none of that in there really.

All subtext.

NH: Yes. I definitely played it like that so you'll probably catch a few moments maybe.

What about *Mad Max*?

NH: Yeah. If it all goes ahead I'll be starting that later in the year. The script's full on and very exciting. I did a work session with George Miller, who's a fantastic director and I'm looking forward to working with him.



Do you know what your role's going to involve in that?

NH: I know it's a character called Nux. I've read the script so I know what it's about.

MG: Leather basically.

NH: Yeah. Not too far of a stretch for me again.

Were you an avid fan of the previous films?

NH: I've seen all three of the originals yeah, and *Babe*, *The Witches of Eastwick* and *Happy Feet*, so he's done a real mixture of stuff. This new one's going to be exciting.

How soon do each of you get used to seeing your face on a film poster or the bus going by with a picture of you?

In unison

MG: Not very often.

NH: We're very lucky to get on the poster!

MG: We used to have our names on it until they were taken off. I don't know, I've never really had that many films out over here.

Alright, you're sitting in the cinema watching something completely different and one of your trailers comes on.

MG: Generally I don't think you escape the fact that you feel physically ill, certainly for me.

NH: You just hope someone behind you won't go, 'Who's that twat?'

MG: It's definitely an odd thing to go through but I love the job.

"I find it funny when Tom comes in for criticism for over-beautifying the film...he adapted a screenplay which is told very much in the third person in someone's mind and he did that rather brilliantly, yet he's being ignored."

Matthew, now that Nicholas is a rising star and moving into Hollywood territory, what advice would you give him to stop his ego running wild?

MG: Oh. Am I Hollywood territory? Oh great. Erm, to be honest with you I think he's got his head fairly well screwed on. He was doing *About a Boy* while I was still in shorts, so no, I don't think he needs any help from me.

How do you feel about being nominated for the BAFTA Rising Star Awards and how do you assess the competition?

NH: It's fantastic to be nominated. It was a massive surprise and a huge compliment. So I'm very grateful for it and also the fact that the award was set up in honour of my agent's mum, Mary Selway, makes it very personal as well. The award that the public can vote for is an exciting prospect, but the competition is very strong. I don't have any hopes of winning.

You've got Noel Clarke on the panel who you've obviously worked with before. [on *Kidulthood*]

NH: He was on the panel that voted to get me into the top five, but now it's gone out to public vote so... My mum was voting lots off her mobile, but it turns out you can only text once.

Can you not reach out to the *Skins* viewers because there's a lot of those so surely you should be able to get a kind of *Rage Against the Machine* campaign going.

NH: Yeah. I don't know.

MG: Not that you aren't the deserving number 1.

NH: It's just nice to have the opportunity to be invited out.

MG: Good night out and the opportunity of a free bar.



And you know where to get a discount on a tux.

NH: Got the tux lined up from TF himself.

He must have dressed you for the premiere.

MG: Not personally. I don't think he trusted us and in some ways it was part payment for actually doing the job. He's been incredibly generous.

During the course of promoting the film I assume you've done all the American junkets and that. Have you found any reaction to the film that surprised you in any way? One would think in this day and age people would feel quite warmly to a film like this.

MG: The thing I've been really surprised at I think is - it's always a slightly barmy situation and so subjective. I find it funny when Tom comes in for criticism for over-beautifying the film and obviously the stand out performances of Julianne and Colin are incredibly worthy but it seems to me that he adapted a screenplay which is told very much in the third person in someone's mind and he did that rather brilliantly, yet he's being ignored.

And obviously it's a very strong category for Adapted Screenplay this year, but it seems that also as a director we might not get into the Top 10 Best Films, which obviously would be a real accolade and I think it does sort of deserve to be there, but it seems like he's just the guy who made it beautiful, but had nothing to do with the performances, which I find quite bizarre because you can't have one without the other. There's a bit of prejudice there, which I don't think has anything to do with the fact he's gay, but you never know.

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