

Shouting Out While Holding Trophies

Moe Dunford

by Silvia Bombardini / photography Philippe Gerlach



pants, blouse
and jacket **Bally**

Moe Dunford, the Irish Shooting Star at this year's 65th Berlin Film Festival, follows in the wake of fellow countrymen such as Domhnall Gleeson and Andrew Scott. As one of the ten most promising young actors and actresses in the whole of Europe, he is naturally exceptionally gifted, yet oddly down-to-earth. That a look at his very first major role in Terry McMahon's *Patrick's Day* was enough to convince the Berlinale jury should come as no surprise — a festival favorite that hopefully will soon see international release, the film is craftily built around Dunford's performance with award-winning close-ups swinging gently in and out of focus, and perfectly proves his talent, his sensitivity, and his charm, and the courage of an unconventional approach when handling a theme as thorny as mental illness in movies can be. As his four days in Berlin draw to an end, we catch up with Moe to speak of kissing Kerry Fox and Catherine Walker and dancing around with his mum and Aunt Ann, of the beauty of being shy and the importance of breaking down stigmas.

Silvia Bombardini: You come from Dungarvan, a self-proclaimed country boy despite the fact that before *Game of Thrones* you didn't know how to ride a horse. A background that has, perhaps unexpectedly, proven crucial for your breakthrough role, that of Patrick in *Patrick's Day*, who you say was inspired by some people you knew while growing up and the issues you all had to face. It's also where the film held its Irish premiere, only a few days ago. What was the audience response that night, and how did it feel to be back?

Moe Dunford: Where we come from and where we grow up of course inspires who we are for the rest of our lives. It makes us the individuals we are. Growing up I had a hero who was my Uncle James. He taught me a lot of the things that today I value the most. Like love for family and for people in general. The premiere in Dungarvan was dedicated to him.

That night I was surrounded by family and friends, including Terry McMahon, the writer and director of *Patrick's Day*. We had three packed screenings in my local cinema and all the proceeds went to Pieta House, an organization dedicated to those who are in suicidal distress.

It's all about giving something back. What can you give as a person? I'm proud of my hometown and it was a thank-you to them. An incredible night.

As for the horses — I'd never ridden one before that, I just didn't realize I actually could!

SB: It was Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, performed on stage by some friends, that initially convinced you to give acting a chance — do you believe it had a somewhat therapeutic effect on you at first, and is it something you would recommend to youths struggling with depression, with shyness or anxiety, and the pressure to conform?

MD: Being shy isn't a bad thing. It's a beautiful trait. It's just hard to be an introvert nowadays, for young people, there's a pressure to be outspoken. What is so bad about engaging with people on a one to one basis, having meaningful conversations with individuals rather than explosive chitchat shit talk? Acting is a mode of expression that can be really freeing if you give yourself to it.

As for my reasons for wanting to go down that route, I just wanted to do something different and prove it to myself. Also, I got a kick out of shutting naysayers up. Still do.

SB: Compared to your character Aethelwulf in *Vikings*, which you had several seasons to build and attune to, the sixteen-day shoot of *Patrick's Day* must have been a truly immersive, intense experience. What was the main difference for you, between acting for television and cinema, and if you were allowed one more day as Patrick, is there any additional scene you would have liked to film?

MD: They were very different parts. And experiences. The scale is huge on *Vikings*, as is the arc with Aethelwulf. I don't know what's coming up and that's exciting each year that it continues. Also the food... catering on TV sets is excessive and the low budget on *Patrick's Day* allowed us to keep the weight down!

I wouldn't want to film any more scenes as Patrick, no. We had sixteen days to shoot it and everyone from cast to crew under Terry's direction worked really hard to tell that story. We told it.

Saying that, I'd have loved to kiss both Kerry Fox and Catherine Walker a few more times. But I think at the time I botched those takes enough on purpose to do so!

We also filmed a lot of *Patrick's Day* that never made it to the finished film. It will all thankfully be in the deleted scenes on the DVD release. My own mother is in one of them. I'd like to see that.

SB: Other than a humane and educational portrayal of a young man's struggle with mental illness, *Patrick's Day* is to McMahon just as much a political film. Parallels are drawn between the relationship of Patrick and his mother and a censorious society's aim to impede and dampen the hopes of the youth. Representing Ireland at the Berlinale, what do you think is the power of cinema in your country as an art form of protest?

MD: I believe this film is a very valuable contribution to the public discussion on a crucial social issue. I'm passionate about the importance of breaking down the stigma attached to speaking about mental health in Ireland. I like to work with Terry because he's brave enough and intelligent enough to write and make films in Ireland about issues that others won't touch.

SB: One of your fellow Shooting Stars this year is Maisie Williams, whom you might have had the chance to meet before, on the set of *Game of Thrones*. How about the others: is there anyone in particular whose work you've been especially impressed with? What has been the most memorable moment of your attendance?

MD: No, I never met Maisie before Berlin. I was pretty much a special extra on *Thrones*. We've been like brother and sister on this though. I'm ten years older than Maisie and I could learn a lot from her. I find her inspiring. She's in the public eye so much, being around her and seeing how grounded she is, it's cool. She's deadly. As for the rest, they're a shower of bastards. *[laughs]* We've all melded on this. The four days together have been a lot of fun. A lot of messing around too. My favorite moment was when we were all on stage together with our awards looking out. It could easily have been posy, staged shit.

In Waterford when the hurlers win a match the place goes nuts with a guttural roar. So I said to the lads, "Go on and let's give the crowd something while we're up here."

Moments like that don't happen a lot. That's a memory I want to keep: shouting out from the heart while holding the trophies up on stage in Berlin.

That'll tell you a lot about the group of actors I had the pleasure to be with this year. I wish them all the best in their future and we'll always share that win.

SB: I know your will to pursue an acting career wasn't perceived by your family as a very



pullover
and pants
HUGO BOSS



sensible choice at first. Yet I've also read that you planned to bring your mum to Berlin with you, as soon as you got the call. Would it be fair then to say that their views on the subject have changed? Did she actually come?

MD: My parents' thinking acting might not be such a good idea (especially during a drought of work) never meant that they didn't support me. I'm lucky, my folks have shown me nothing but support. Both Mam and Dad have enjoyed the journey these past few years with the roles. We're in this together as a family.

And Dad is a big Ragnar Lodbrok from *Vikings* fan. He wants to be Ragnar Lodbrok. Haha.

As for Mam, well, she's with me right now. She had a great time at the after-party. Herself and my Aunt Ann were dancing around on a bed on the top floor of the Bikini Hotel with the jury all night. When the casting director of the Bond

movies comes up to you and says "your mum has a touch of class" then you know you've done something right.

SB: You star in another film due to be released later this year, a dark comedy titled *Traders*, and the first episode of *Vikings*' third season will air in little over a week. What else in 2015 are you especially looking forward to, or what does your schedule look like for the months ahead?

MD: I'm looking forward to the year ahead and whatever may come. To keep working with Terry is a goal of mine providing there's a part there. I believe he's up there as a director with the likes of Jim Sheridan and Ken Loach. Ireland needs directors like him and I look forward to working with him and the gang again on *The Dancehall Bitch*, a dark prison movie.

I'm working on a film called *Goodbye Cruel World*, shot in Ireland with the producers Cormac Fox and Rory Gilmartin involved. To be directed by Michael Goldberg. I've also got *Vikings* season four coming up. I love that show and I love playing Aethelwulf. I'm really involved in the storyline now and Michael Hirst does such a great job keeping the narrative exciting. Gustaf Skarsgård who plays Floki is my friend and a former Shooting Star. It's a boyhood fantasy really to be riding round the fields in Wicklow leading armies, and Batman's dad — Linus Roache who plays King Ecbert — is playing my dad!

This past week has been an experience like no other. Now I'm going to see what happens. And keep it fun. I'm enjoying life. Go raibh maith agat! [Thank you!]