



# Off the Pegg

Nick Frost, the nation's favourite wingman, prepares to take centre stage in *Cuban Fury* – without his best buddy by his side

WORDS MATT GLASBY PHOTOS PAUL STUART

Nick Frost is not your typical leading man. He's too bearish, too much of a bloke-in-the-

street and, besides, he doesn't really seem to want the attention. Despite featuring in some of Britain's best-loved comedy films, beginning with 2004's *Shaun Of The Dead*, he remains resolutely unstarry, unaffected, almost unfussed. Take a look at contemporaries such as best mate Simon Pegg and *The Hobbit* star Martin Freeman – which you can easily, they're all in last year's sozzled sci-fi flick *The World's End* – Frost's just as good, but has a much more modest profile.

*Cuban Fury* should change all that.

A brassy Britcom about a sadsack office worker (Frost) wooing the woman of his dreams (Rashida Jones) through a shared love of salsa, it boasts a great cast (Olivia Colman, Ian McShane, Chris O'Dowd), plus, in its own words, has "a heart like a bison and balls like an elephant". There's a fair bit of dancing too, for which the surprisingly twinkle-toed Frost trained seven hours a day for seven months. As we chat in

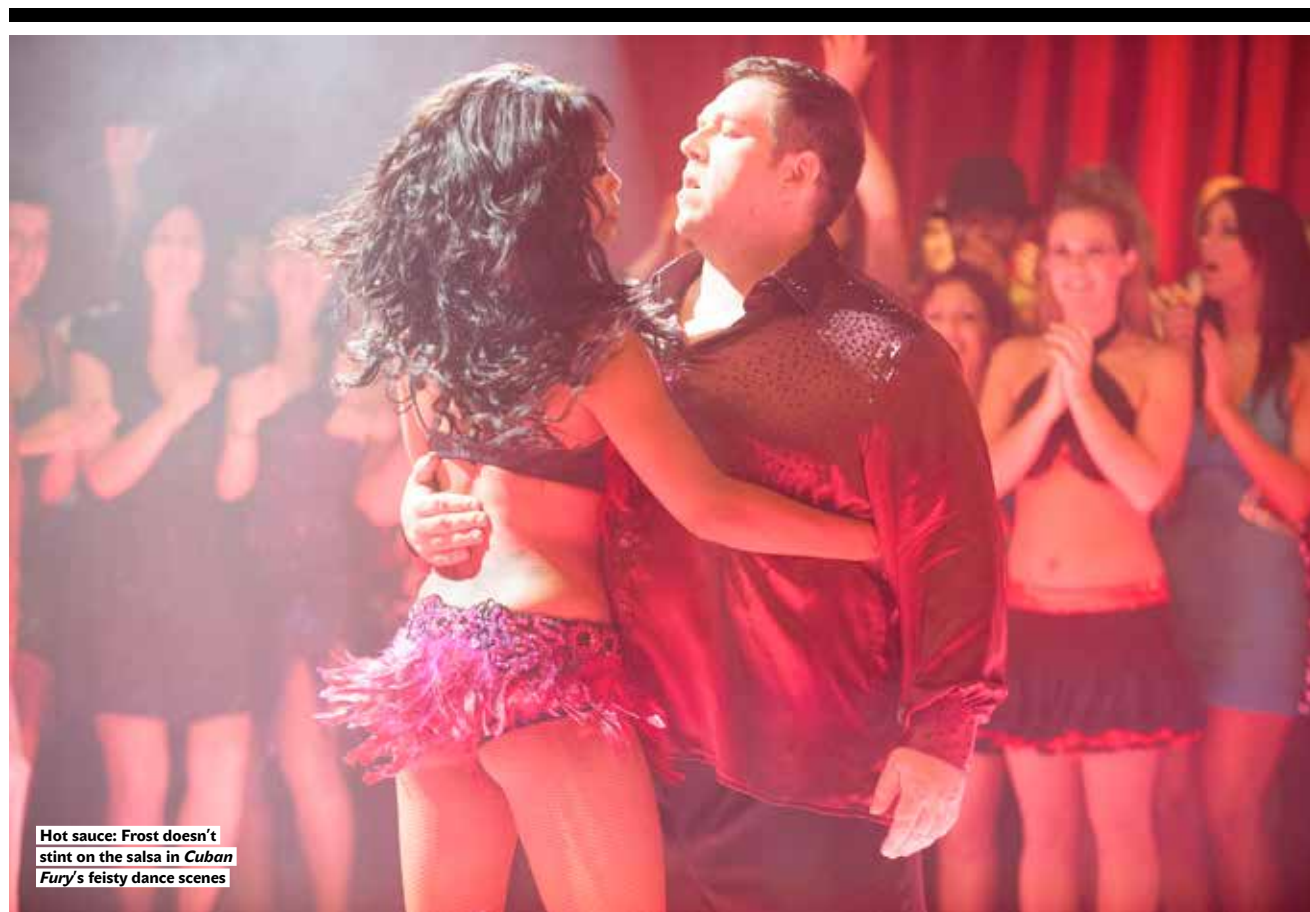
early December, he's courteous and softly spoken, and he seems happier being just outside the spotlight. So why take on such a demanding, look-at-me role?

"Dancing's like a giant spider," he says. "I hate it, I'm fascinated by it, and if I'm drunk eventually I'm probably going to want to touch it." He went one better than that, pitching the original idea to the producer in a tipsy email, as if his inner Fred Astaire could no longer be contained. Was he ever scared of falling on his face? "No – it's not live! – but in terms of looking ridiculous I just worked so hard that I knew I didn't. I knew I could dance and we weren't making fun of it. It's a love letter to salsa,

essentially." I wonder if dance partner Olivia Colman felt the same? "I said to Olivia on the second day, I will never, ever drop you," Frost says sincerely, neatly summarising the sweet nature of the film and its hero, the 41-year-old's first romantic lead.

"I saw some things on Twitter, you know, will a Nick Frost film work without Simon Pegg?" he tells me. "I'm not really bothered to be honest. You put a lot of heart into something and you believe in it and people will go and see it or they won't. I can't physically pull someone to the cinema." Well maybe a few... "Yeah, very weak people, perhaps I could drag them. But we've made what I think is a good film and I'm really ►

**"Dancing's like a giant spider. I hate it, I'm fascinated by it, and if I'm drunk eventually I'm probably going to want to touch it"**



Hot sauce: Frost doesn't stint on the salsa in *Cuban Fury*'s feisty dance scenes





Drinking buddies: Frost, Pegg and a bevy of British comedy stalwarts hit the bar in *The World's End*

proud of it – and that’s enough for me.” Is he still dancing? “No!” he laughs. “It’s a film! It’s like saying to Anthony Perkins, ‘Are you still murdering women?’” So what has he taken from the experience? “This is going to sound weird, but I think it’s more about what dancing unlocked in me: the courage to say forget it and enjoy myself.”

That courage has been a long time coming. Born in Romford, Essex, in 1972 and leaving school at 16 to help his parents through a traumatic bankruptcy, Frost first honed his acting skills waiting at Chiquito, a Mexican chain restaurant in north London. “I liked it,” he recalls. “I was a good waiter. It’s very instinctive. You tailor your

performance to what you think the customer wants and that way you stand the best chance of making money.” How does he treat waiting staff now he’s got a few quid? “I’m a great tipper!”

It was during the Chiquito era that he met and moved in with Simon Pegg, who wrote Frost into his TV comedy *Spaced*. “I was pushed into it,” admits Frost. “I’m very pleased that he did now, but I was nervous as I’d never done it and I was afraid I’d let Simon down. But in terms of thinking to myself, ‘This is pretty cool!’ it wasn’t lost on me.” *Shaun Of The Dead* followed (starring Pegg), along with TV roles (sketch show *Man Strike Woman*, sci-fi sitcom *Hyperdrive* with Miranda

Hart), and a high-quality, low-maintenance film career that’s seen him appear in action spoof *Hot Fuzz* (alongside Pegg), alien comedy *Paul* (co-written with Pegg), fantasy *Snow White And The Huntsman* (no Pegg), *The World’s End* (Pegg again), and Steven Spielberg’s animated *The Adventures Of Tintin: Secret Of The Unicorn* as one half of the detectives Thomson and Thompson. You can probably guess who played the other one.

Onscreen, Frost excels at flawed but forgivable men who can’t help being what they are. And audiences, particularly those with Y chromosomes and a passing knowledge of *Star Wars*, love him as one of their own. Perhaps it’s because he’d rather go for a pint than go to a premiere, or perhaps they can see there’s a shyness – almost a sadness – beneath the bonhomie.

How would Nick Frost the waiter have reacted to the news that one day he’d be Nick Frost the leading man? “It would have been a real curse for me to be honest,” he admits. “I don’t like having my photo taken and being looked at. Secretly I’ve always been a bit of a show-off, but showing off in front of your mates and doing it in front of hundreds of people are different ball games.” ▶

**“Secretly I’ve always been a bit of a show-off, but showing off in front of your mates and doing it in front of hundreds of people are different ball games”**

**“Mr Sloane is about a man becoming the person he always could have been”**

He'd better get used to it. *Cuban Fury* is all set to do a *Full Monty*, *Tintin* and *Snow White* sequels are on the way, and he's starring in TV's *Mr Sloane*, a black comedy from the creator of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. "It's set at the end of 1969 and it's about Jeremy Sloane who's a 1950s bloke, very buttoned down," says Frost. "One day he loses his job and his wife leaves, so his world is completely split. The opening scene is me hanging myself, which was horrible to shoot." There are funnier bits, though, right? "Nope that's as funny as it gets!" he laughs. "Then he meets a hippy girl and she picks him up and starts to open him up a little. So it's about him becoming the person he could always have been."

Having made the transition from sidekick to star himself, Nick Frost knows all about that. I wonder if he sees the irony? ←

*Cuban Fury* is out on 14 February and *Mr Sloane* is on Sky Atlantic later this year



Dressing the part: Nick Frost sharpens up his act for a starring role in our exclusive shoot

## Real men dance

Nick Frost's not the only one with lightning in his heels

**WHO?**

**Tony Manero**  
(John Travolta)

**WHEN?**

**Saturday Night Fever, 1977**

**THE MOVE:**

**Disco hand-jive**

The original and – arguably – best, John Travolta's smooth moves as Tony Manero catapulted him to mega-stardom. Together with the classic Bee Gees soundtrack and that unforgettable white suit, Tony has earned a permanent place in the boogie hall of fame.

**WHO?**

**Peter Crouch**

**WHEN?**

**England vs Hungary, 2006**

**THE MOVE:**

**The robot**

He didn't invent it, but England's lanky striker may as well have. By contorting his 2.3-metre-tall frame into mechanical harmony, he sparked a dance craze that spread from his home town of Macclesfield to Ibiza. His wife, 2013 *Strictly Come Dancing* winner Abbey Clancy, clearly learned from the best.

**WHO?**

**Johnny Castle**

(Patrick Swayze)

**WHEN?**

**Dirty Dancing, 1987**

**THE MOVE:**

**The Time Of My Life lift**

This cult classic contains possibly the best-known dance move in film history – *that* lift – and more quotable lines than you can shake a watermelon at. Patrick Swayze's hunky dance teacher was enough to give most viewers *Hungry Eyes*.

**WHO?**

**Jamie Bell**

**WHEN?**

**Billy Elliot, 2000**

**THE MOVE:**

**Teenage kicks (pirouette style)**

Little Billy, who found he would rather bust ballet moves than boxing ones, captured the hearts of the nation, thrust 14-year-old Bell into the spotlight and made leotards cool. The parallels between Bell's real life and Billy's fictional one – namely that both kept their passion for ballet a secret – made it all the more poignant.

**WHO?**

**Prince Charles**

**WHEN?**

**Sheffield, 1998**

**THE MOVE:**

**The Full Monty pelvic thrust**

Following on from the Chippendale-esque shimmy made famous by Robert Carlyle, Mark Addy and Tom Wilkinson in British comedy classic *The Full Monty*, the future king proved that he, too, had the moves, shaking his money-maker to *Hot Stuff* by Donna Summer. Cue plenty of "The Full Monarchy" headlines.