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OFF THE RECORD

Star of **Juliet, Naked** and **Instant Family**,
Rose Byrne gives us her spin
on life in the limelight



MATT GLASBY



MARTIN
SCHOELLER



LEONARDO
MANETTI



Dress by
Dice Kayek.
Belt by Yves
Saint Laurent
at Albright
Fashion Library

Previous Dress
by Valentino.
Earrings by
Chanel at What
Goes Around
Comes Around



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No matter whether she's the leading lady or a supporting player, doing high drama or low comedy, Rose Byrne *always* gets the job done. You want laughs with a heart? We give you *Bridesmaids*. Legal thrills? How about five seasons of *Damages*. Sci-fi with smarts? Hello, *X-Men: First Class*. Interdimensional horror (*Insidious*)? Animated animalia (*Peter Rabbit*)? Fluid-spattered frat-com (*Bad Neighbours*)? You get the general idea.

It says a lot about Byrne that, though you'll have seen some or all of these, you won't necessarily consider them Rose Byrne films/shows. To use her own term, she "flies under the radar", which is quite a trick when you have the fine-boned beauty of a supermodel and act in a foreign accent (she's Australian, not American). If her characters have something in common it's a sense that they are almost but not quite holding it together – like the proverbial paddling swan. But in conversation, she's a delight; talking fast, laughing often, and quick to self-deprecate. She's currently appearing in two very different comedies onboard this flight – *Juliet, Naked* and *Instant Family* – in which she speaks in two very different accents (English and American), and, as ever, she makes it look effortless.



Based on a 2009 Nick Hornby novel, *Juliet, Naked* is the story of Annie (Byrne), "a nice, well-adjusted English lady in a sensible cardigan" who lives a buttoned-down life in a nondescript seaside town with her man-child boyfriend, Duncan (Chris O'Dowd). The problem is, there's three people in Annie's relationship.

Duncan is obsessed with reclusive rocker Tucker Crowe (Ethan Hawke), composer of the eponymous album, *Juliet, Naked*, but when Crowe emerges from obscurity it's Annie he's interested in, and vice-versa. So how did Byrne, a self-confessed "stickler" for accents, nail Annie's clipped English tones?

Long story short, she cheated. "The wonderful actress who plays my sister, Lily Brazier, she's from the town we filmed in, weirdly [Broadstairs, Kent], and she's got this incredible accent that's so specific and really funny, so I got her to record every single line of dialogue that I had," says Byrne, laughing. "She sent me voice memos and then I would listen to these recordings of her talking every morning, every night until it was really in me. So that's my dirty little secret about my accent!"

Was she ever tempted to get Brazier to actually do the voiceover for her? "No! But perhaps I should I've been," she says. "She'd probably do a better job. Next time I'm getting her to do it!" This kind of modesty is, as you will discover, typical Byrne.

As with most Nick Hornby works, the film explores the tyranny of super-fandom, something Byrne says she can relate to. "I was obsessed with Kylie Minogue as a youngster," she says. "I dragged my dad to five or six of her concerts, then I became obsessed with Nirvana as a young teenager, like *Nevermind*, wearing Doc Martens and pink hair and all that 1990s stuff. I had Kurt Cobain on my wall. I think I tried to have dreadlocks. That was another big period, probably trying to make myself more cool after being such a pop princess." From Kylie Minogue to Kurt Cobain is quite a contrast. "Kylie's a national treasure," she says. "I'm proud of my Kylie years."

While Duncan spends his life on his Tucker Crowe forum, it is Annie – unhappy, unfulfilled, approaching 40 – who must play the grown-up. Why is it, we wonder, always men who exhibit this kind of behaviour? "Dude, I know! Why is that?" she says. "It's so many things: it's our conditioning. It's like guys have been allowed to do it and had it >

Below Byrne and co-star Ethan Hawke hit it off in *Juliet, Naked*





Dress by
Valentino.
Boots by
Givenchy.
Earrings by
Chanel at What
Goes Around
Comes Around



Top by Delpozo.
Blouse by Chloé.
Earrings by
Kenneth Jay Lane

Dress by Calvin Klein. Boots by Moschino at Albright Fashion Library. Earrings by Dannijo



fostered in them – boys will be boys – rather than growing up and taking responsibility for who they are. Whereas women tend to get bored and move on; they don't have time or they're not encouraged to do it. It's interesting, having two boys myself and wondering whether they'll have that level of obsession about something."

Part of Tucker Crowe's allure – the legend, rather than the man, who's nearly as much of a shambles as Duncan – is that he ran away at the height of his fame. Is that something Byrne ever feels like doing?

"Ha! Of course, yeah! Are you kidding me? There's so much noise in the business. Noise, noise, noise, noise, noise, noise, you know?"

You've got to keep your head clear, and sometimes it is tempting to check out, just press pause. I've always felt like that with life in general, in any business, you're like, 'Oh dude, I could totally check out.' But you know there's that thing, you just keep driving yourself until you die I guess." She's joking, but perhaps that paddling swan analogy isn't too far off the mark.



Thankfully Byrne isn't checking out just yet. Not least because there's another movie to promote. While it's unlikely to trouble the Academy Awards, *Instant Family* isn't quite the knockabout comedy it appears. Based on director Sean Anders' own experiences of adoption, the film sees Ellie (Byrne) and Pete (Mark Wahlberg), taking in three Hispanic siblings (Isabela Moner, Gustavo Quiroz and Julianna Gamiz), who swiftly turn the couple's world upside down.

While the film delivers plenty of good-natured anarchy, it also packs an emotional wallop. For Byrne, that was part of the appeal. "You walk in thinking it's

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going to be one thing, but it's really another," she says. "It gets you with the laughs then punches you in the gut with the tears. It's actually very moving and surprising. Sean's such an advocate for this stuff, and he really wanted to show the flaws of Ellie and Pete while they're doing this, their indecisiveness, their regrets and ultimately the rewarding experience it is when you foster or adopt."

To get her head around the character, Byrne took a group of foster mothers out for pizza and wine. "Yeah we had a couple of great dinners with these foster moms and they were awesome," she says. "You know, they came from all different walks of life and all different circumstances which led them to fostering and then adopting. It was really fun, really heavy and dark, but most of the time a lot of laughing, then some tears. >



◀ Left Byrne and Julie Hagerty in *Instant Family*

What was so interesting about speaking to these parents was me saying, 'You're a saint to do this.' And all of them were like, 'Don't call me a saint. I'm not a saint, I'm just a normal person.' There was something about that which takes away from the experience for them. It's actually really rewarding, and less like a saintly act. I thought that was very interesting. It's easy to idolise people but they were like, 'No, it's really hard, but it's just what we do and we love it.'



Byrne, you sense, feels the same about her work – devoted, but keen to undercut any sense that she's special. She grew up in Balmain, Sydney, and, she says, "just started acting classes which segued into getting work. I wasn't from a family in the business. I didn't quite know how it worked, and once I just started auditioning for plays and getting little parts I was completely smitten and wanted that to be my life for sure, but I didn't know how sustainable it was. I'm from a very practical Aussie family, so I was ambitious and driven but also practical. I knew I enjoyed it and that I'd love to be able to make this my living if I could be so lucky to do so." Isn't *I Should Be So Lucky* a Kylie song? She laughs, "Yeah, to quote Stock, Aitken and Waterman."

Having worked in the industry since she was 13, Byrne applied to drama school at 18 and was rejected. Was that the setback that lit the fuse for her? "No," she says. "I was under-rehearsed. I did *Viola* from *Twelfth Night* and I'm sure I was rubbish."

She's equally dismissive of an early breakthrough role, as a handmaid in 2002's *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones*. "That was easy," she's said in the past. "I just stood by Natalie Portman looking serious."

A move to America followed, and her career snowballed, until the 2010/2011 hat-trick of *Insidious*, *Bridesmaids* and *X-Men: First Class* put her into a new category. Still, you won't read an interview with her that doesn't use the word "shy", which seems hard to believe. Is it still true?

"Less so than when I was little, that's why I started doing drama, to come more out of my shell," she says. "Now, no, as you get older you care less what people think. As a child I was a strange mixture of being shy and being a show off, which is a weird thing to hear from an actor, but it's very common." Also, it must be difficult to stay bashful with an actor husband (Bobby Cannavale) and two kids? "Yeah, they definitely bring you out of yourself."

Next up is *I Am Mother*. "It's a very clever, very dark, sci-fi film," she says. "I play a robot, which is cool." Will she get her own action figure? "I better!" It's not too far away from another early Byrne role in Danny Boyle's magnificent sci-fi *Sunshine*. In it, a crew of scientists is sent into space to restart the sun. Which begs the question, if they *really* asked her to go into space, what would she say? "I would say you probably need someone smarter to fly the ship but I'd totally be there to provide the comedy." In other words, she doesn't have enough tabs on herself to think she could save the world but sure, she'd give it a crack.

It's this can-do attitude that's sustained her for 25 years in the business. "I've tried," she says. "I've done my best. Highs and lows, right?" Looks alright to us. ■

Watch **Juliet Naked** and **Instant Family** onboard now

Suit by Elie Saab
at Albright
Fashion Library.
Blouse by
Michael Kors



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