

WITH TWO
BAFTA
NOMINATIONS
— ONE FOR
BEST ACTOR
AND THE
OTHER FOR
EE'S RISING
STAR — DARYL
MCCORMACK'S
30TH YEAR IS
TURNING OUT
TO BE HIS
BEST YET.

Daryl

MCCORMACK

PHOTOGRAPHER PIP
STYLIST JACK O'NEIL

Entering a new decade can be daunting, but Daryl McCormack isn't merely embracing this new chapter of his life — he's diving right in. The Irish actor has been in everything from soaps to the gritty *Peaky Blinders* and working tirelessly, project by project, to use every character and every script to bring something new to the screen. With his portrayal of the titular character in *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*, he did just that. McCormack portrays the sex worker Leo Grande opposite Emma Thompson's Nancy, an anxiety-ridden and insecure middle-aged school teacher, brought together by Nancy's desire to have her first orgasm. The film celebrates sex and all of its complexities, with McCormack in particular dancing seamlessly between Grande's suave nature and the inner turmoil that plagues him.

Shortly before Christmas, he found out he was nominated for BAFTA's EE's Rising Star award — one that the likes of Tom Hardy, Kristen Stewart, and Daniel Kaluuya all won — for his work on *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*. He found out about the Best Actor nomination while filming the new thriller series *The Woman In The Wall* opposite Ruth Wilson. After trying out for *Star Wars* back in the day and waiting tables in between jobs, the gravity of this moment is not lost on him. He just now has the perspective of a 30-year-old that understands that everything truly happens when it's meant to.



Now, as he awaits two big milestones — a cross-continent move to New York City later this year and the big BAFTA ceremony later this week — Daryl McCormack chats with 1883 Magazine about being nominated for his first BAFTA, the importance of finding lessons through his work, why he's moving across the world and more.



You just celebrated your 30th birthday, it's safe to say the start of your thirties is off to a wonderful start. You're one of a handful of actors that have been nominated for both best actor and British rising star. Yeah, I'm the third. The other time it happened was when Timothée Chalamet and Daniel Kaluuya were nominated in both those categories when they did Call Me By Your Name and Get Out.



I know it's the question everyone is asking you but — how has it been? You found out just before Christmas, right? I knew about the Rising Star nomination before Christmas, but I found out about the Best Actor nomination on my birthday. I know everyone always says this, but... It usually takes me a while to process things anyway and this just took a bit of time. It's finally sunken in, but it's a strange one. It's a small film and there are only two of us in it. I was happy to just see that response to it. It's the first time I've played a lead in the film and it's quite an exposing one in the sense of there's nowhere really to hide. I just really wanted to survive it and to have people enjoy it. I didn't expect that, a year later, this is where I would be in terms of being celebrated in some way. I'm taking it in stride and allowing myself to just enjoy this particular moment.

It's like a tumultuous experience. Yeah, I was going to say tumultuous. When you're starting, the job has a slightly tumultuous nature to it. I think you have to try and stay steady in something. Five years ago, I would've been waiting tables. Five is still a relatively long time for things to change — and you have to put two years of COVID in there, too. It's been ups and downs and trying to find my feet. For me, this does mark a moment where I'm encouraged beyond my self and recognized by people like BAFTA and award ceremonies. It gives an extra bit of encouragement and just allows me to continue to trust in myself.

Yeah, I'm not an actress so I can't speak to this but with every job and every character, you're adding a new tool to your kit. Weirdly enough, each job teaches you about a season that you're already in within your life. I often tend to decode the jobs I'm in and think, Oh, that's teaching me about something directly related to my own life. Whether the story that you're playing is speaking something into your life or teaching you about something, I find they quite often run parallel. It's not like you only learn when you're learning too. I often find the downtime away from acting is just as valuable to learn something. Ultimately, for me, it's about trying to enjoy everything but not make it 'ride or die' in the sense I will disappear if work slows down.

Sometimes you don't understand the significance of a character that you're playing until you're looking back! Yeah, totally. There is something spiritual about characters because it feels like characters find you as opposed to the opposite way around. For me, it's how I want to step into characters. I don't want to step in unless I feel like I'm genuinely offering something unique to that person or that role, so that's another thing you kind of have to navigate at some point.

Good Luck To You, Leo Grande had its wide release in June of last year, and I was doing some snooping in your Instagram comments and people are still applauding the film and your work. After a year from its premiere at Sundance, how has it been to still have people come up to you and share their feelings about the film? It seems to hit home for some people and I think that was one of our biggest wishes because it hit home for Emma and me. We just hoped it would translate because, ultimately, you get a script and you don't always know whether the execution of it will really carry the message through to people. I think the main thing that's been most touching is that it's opened people up to having discussions about things that they haven't talked about.

I rewatched the film this morning as a refresher. I think my favourite scene in the film is when Leo is trying to ease Nancy into the long list of things she wants to accomplish and suggests putting on music to dance to. Is there a scene in particular that, after all this time, still really resonates with you? Yeah, there are a few. There's a moment that keeps popping into my mind. It's the moment when Leo is in the room whilst Nancy is in the bathroom and he catches himself in the mirror. He's just really looking at himself and he's challenged by an internal dialogue. I think that hit him off-guard. I just love those moments where there's not much being said, but there's so much happening. I love that Katy [Brand, screenwriter] wrote such a beautiful moment like it in the film. It felt so full, for me, about who he was and it was such a brief moment. It will always be one of my favourite bits to see and also to play.



It's the first time we get insight into who he is, outside of him being so charming and suave. Yeah. I think it's clever that it happens the first time when he's on his own. It happens by surprise and catches him off-guard. It's amazing because we don't always have full control over our internal dialogue. Sometimes, it'll sneak up and go, wait, why am I feeling shame in the weirdest moment? Why am I having self-judgement or, you know, detrimental judgment about myself in a moment where I should be comfortable or happy? That's what I kind of signified from it.

When you approach a character like Leo, what are you doing to prepare? I know you spoke with sex workers and I read that you created a backstory for Leo, but was there anything else you did to get into his head? There were playlists that I made. I always make playlists for characters. I think I find it quite useful. I was speaking to sex workers which were part of the process with Sophie. Personally, a lot was in the script. It was just about getting to know his primary wound if you could call it that, and trying to translate my own self onto him. There wasn't a whole lot of building, it was just trying to get to the core of who I thought he was and then allowing the rehearsal process with Sophie and Emma to explore.



Something I really admire about the way you approach your projects is that you understand the importance of hindsight. I know you auditioned for Star Wars, but not getting that role has now given you 9 years of completely different experience that has now resulted in building your craft. Laughs It would've been very different. Totally different.

Not in a way where you missed out, but in the sense that you've been able to build your craft in an entirely different way. I think that's a very, very good thing.

I'm honestly so grateful I wasn't part of that film on a personal basis. It's given me the maturity to really know what it is I want to do and the kind of acting I want to do. I think something that big happening so early on would've limited me, strangely enough. I feel like it would've limited me from developing that taste for myself. I'm grateful that I have the time to just build that up.

Is that frame of thinking — knowing that everything is a building block that all amounts to something — your way of pushing forward?

Yeah. Weirdly enough, I think all of the small things amount to something. Going back to when I was in uni or what it's like to wait tables and work to make traction in my career. I just think all of it is so character-building for a person and it would've been a recipe for disaster if I hadn't ever gone through all of that. I developed a circle of friends early off the basis of who I am. I think all of that stuff can be a bit trickier to navigate if fame or success happens earlier on. I'm grateful for all of that.

You, Emma and the director Sophie Hyde approached intimacy in a really beautiful and unique way, choreographing the sex scenes yourself rather than getting someone else on board. I feel like that experience of doing it all on your own mimics the journey Leo and Nancy have together as they slowly unravel in front of one another. As you navigate your career and future projects, I'd love to hear about how you approach collaboration while on set — are you looking for other projects that allow you that collaborative experience?

A hundred percent. I want to really dive into someone else's process, particularly filmmakers. Anything that might be obscure, out of the ordinary, or anyone that has a particular vision or a method in which they work. I want to just completely be at the mercy of that. That's my hope — to meet with filmmakers and build a relationship with them. I love that part of the job as much as anything else, like the preparation and the creativity that can happen within the preparation.

Often when it feels particularly unique, you take a certain type of ownership over the process of filming or the shooting side of things. For example, the process of developing intimacy alongside Sophie and Emma, just knowing that my director buried herself into the same capacity as these characters and us as actors did. Then, on the day, obviously, myself and Emma were unclothed, and Sophie was clothed as she was directing the film. But I had known that my director had gone to the full length of the vulnerability that I was standing in, at that moment. That's something that could only happen if a director had an idea to go that far. It gave me an extra bit of understanding. I really welcome all of those nuanced experiences moving forward hopefully, for whoever that's listening.



I love to end my interviews asking what someone would like to manifest for themselves over the next year, but I read in your chat with Stylist that you're moving to New York this year which is a big change. So instead I'd like to ask what excites you most about this big cross-continent move? Oh, that's a good question. I mean, I'm half-American so my dad is American. There's an element where I want to be closer to my family and just to be a bit more involved in that part of my culture. On top of that, New York, to me, has always been romanticized by everyone. I've been a culprit of it as well, I've really romanticized it. I really wanted to get the subway to art and comedy shows, underground music venues or whatever. I thought I owed it to myself to have a season of my life in New York. I don't know what that will entail, but I can't wait. I really can't wait.

I get it! I'm a dual citizen and I've romanticized London to the point where it's not even a real place. You get it! I really can't wait. I guess it's always that opportunity when you move somewhere to reinvent yourself to a degree. There is somewhat of a blank slate and that's all exciting as well. I'm excited about that chapter and it is kind of perfect. I'm entering my thirties, there's a lot of symbiotic stuff happening.

How has turning 30 been for you? Did you have a little meltdown before? I turned 30 in November and it was a breeze. Yeah, I thought there wouldn't be. I thought it was just a number, but then I felt a little switch. Do you know what my grandma said to me? We were joking around because anytime I Facetime my father he introduces me to my grandmother and she jokes "Who is that young man?" A week after my birthday, I Facetimed them and said "It's just a young man from Ireland" and she said, "You better take that 'young' out of there."

Oh no! [Laughs]
I was like, "are you kidding?" Just because I don't have a '20' before my age I can't call myself young! [Laughs] I know she was joking but it really was a knife in the back.

It might keep you up at night. It'll be the last thing you hear before you fall asleep.
Literally, yes! I have a sore back now, is that going to become the norm? [Laughs]

Voting for the EE BAFTA Rising Star award is now open at ee.co.uk/BAFTA and closes at 12 pm on Friday 17 February 2023.

Interview **Kelsey Barnes**
Photographer **Pip**
Stylist **Jack O'Neil**
Grooming **Nadia Altinbas**

