

1883

magazine

JAY LYCURGO

DIGITAL COVER

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AIME LEON DORE
Sunglasses
CUTLER AND GROSS
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AFTER BEING NAMED A 2024 STARS OF TOMORROW, NABBING A ROLE OPPOSITE CILLIAN MURPHY IN THE FORTHCOMING PEAKY BLINDERS FILM, AND STARRING IN A NEW ZOMBIE-SATIRE SERIES GENERATION Z, THIS YEAR IS SETTING THE STAGE FOR JAY LYCURGO.

JAY LYCURGO

PHOTOGRAPHER
CONNOR HARRIS
STYLIST
KOULLA SERGI

lycurgo

When Jay Lycurgo sits down with 1883 to chat over Zoom, he has the biggest smile on his face, his demeanour instantly brightening when we mention we're situated in Toronto. Titans filmed in the city, he explains, sharing that the experience helped shape him into the actor he is today. He notes that back in 2022 the role of Tim Drake was his break. He reflects on the time fondly, taking a moment to share his favourite spot and swap stories. But it's fair to say that a lot has changed since then. His career has skyrocketed beyond his wildest dreams, and he finds himself increasingly booked and busy. A result of hard work and learning to discipline himself in acting school, a feat that came with time and maturity.

With standout performances in Generation Z, The Radleys, and Titans, Lycurgo taps into the authenticity of each character, finding their vulnerabilities, and what makes them truly tick, stripping back the layers to give us something special and more importantly - relatable. It's something that he prides himself on, as he continues to navigate this acting journey. As Charlie in Generation Z, Lycurgo strikes a balance between the goofy, light-hearted friend and the blunt, sullen, weight-of-the-world on his shoulder's son and older brother. It's a difficult line to straddle but that's what makes it a compelling watch for the viewer.

His path has led him to a very busy 2024 and soon-to-be 2025. With the announcement of his casting in the upcoming Peaky Blinders movie starring Cillian Murphy and several projects in the throws of production; Steve, The Immortal Man and Eternal Return to name a few, it won't be long before we're familiar with Lycurgo and his work.

In conversation with 1883 Magazine's Dana Reboe, Jay Lycurgo discusses his latest project Generation Z, finding his footing as an actor in Toronto, why it's important to play every character with authenticity, and more.

I love Toronto. I love Toronto so much.

Really? You've been?

I lived there on and off for two years because of Titans.

I didn't know they filmed it here. I assumed they filmed it in Vancouver.

No, it was Toronto, man. I did it when I was 22 and it was such an amazing experience. I actually just went to

Toronto as well. I was there maybe a month and a half ago.

For anything in particular? Or just visiting?

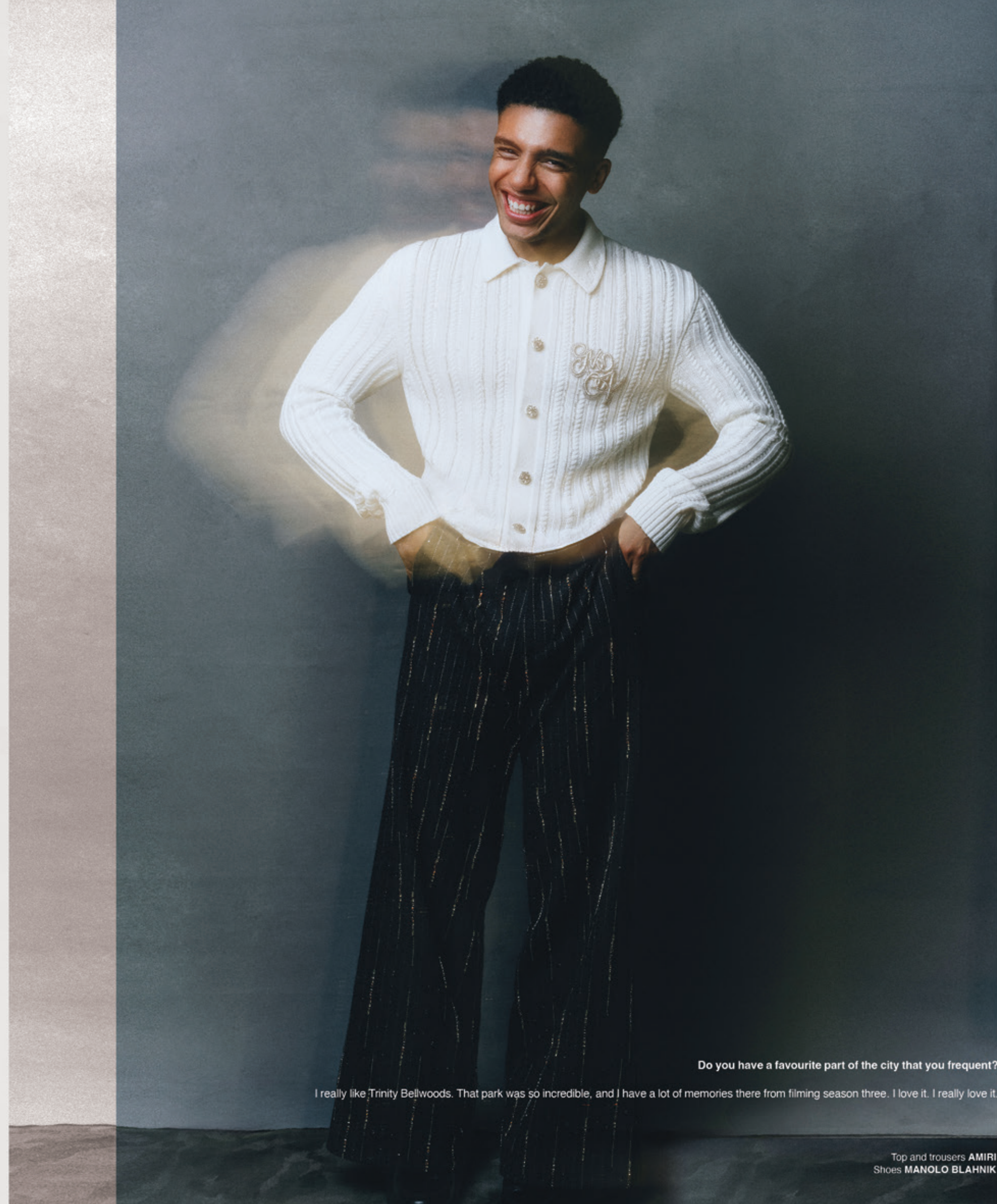
My good old friend was there and I just visited him, stayed with him for the week. I have a lot of people there

that I cherish. It's been two years since I've been there.

Do you have a favourite part of the city that you frequent?

I really like Trinity Bellwoods. That park was so incredible, and I have a lot of memories there from filming

season three. I love it. I really love it.



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Top and trousers AMIRI
Shoes MANOLO BLAHNIK



Oh, amazing. Hopefully you get to come back soon. I read in an interview you did with Screen Daily that you realised at the age of 17, your passion for football had waned a little bit and you fell into acting. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Was acting even a notion to you before 17?

I think acting was always in the background, but it just wasn't an ambition that necessarily evolved in my family. There are no creatives in my family. My dad was an ex-footballer, and I wanted to follow in his footsteps. I would have done anything to do that in my teen years. I started like any British boy — I started young. When I was around 13 or 14, I was getting pretty good. I was playing every day, and it was something that I really wanted to do. As I got to my later teens, when I hit 17, I realised that I just wasn't good enough or passionate enough. There were little sparks of acting. I auditioned for The Brit School when I was 15 because my friend went there. I just thought that acting was crying [laughs]. I was trying to fake cry for half an hour. I didn't get into the school.

There was a Year 10 audition for Little Shop of Horrors that I auditioned for, but I think I was too arrogant. You know teenage arrogance. They wanted me to improv. That's what it was. I didn't know what improv was. I was like, "Actually, I just prepared 'If I Only Had a Brain' from The Wizard of Oz and I'd love to do that. I know I did it in the first round but let me just do it again." I didn't get that part. Throughout my youth, I did enjoy it [acting], but I didn't know it could be a profession.

You said that your dad is an ex-footballer. Can you talk about what that conversation looked like when you said to him, "Hey, dad, so I don't want to be a footballer anymore. I want to do this acting thing." How did that go? I said, "I want to be a bright star." [laughter] No, my dad is not that masculine or toxic. He's always supportive. I'm very fortunate to have a supportive family. They were always up for me changing my ambitions. It wasn't a conversation, it naturally happened. Everyone was going to university and I didn't want to go. My teacher told me to go to drama school and I thought I could go that route or I'll work with my dad. I don't know if he wanted me to work with him. I think it was really more a thing of, "Okay I'll just go for this one audition" and let's just see what happens. I feel like sometimes being laid back can be your superpower. That young innocence and naive energy of no pressure helped me. I also don't know where I got the 50 pounds from because you have to audition for these schools and you have to pay for the auditions [laughs]. I didn't have any money. I think my mum or someone gave me £50 so I could go to a drama school audition and luckily it worked out.



I'll say it did. You graduated from school in 2019. What was your favourite thing about learning to act formally and what did it teach you about yourself? Oh, wow. That's such a good question. In my first year, I didn't understand it. I lacked discipline. At this point, acting for me was devising a piece of theatre and trying to make your friends laugh. I had older people in first year who wanted to do this professionally. I was more, "Hey, can I go play FIFA at lunchtime and make a peanut butter and ham sandwich?" I wasn't learning in my first year until probably the end of the year when we started doing Shakespeare. I'm not even a huge fan of Shakespeare but I would rather do it than watch it. I guess it was around that time that I learned how to enjoy it, understand it as a profession and find the discipline within what acting is. There's such a focus within it. It's a simple thing, but it's very hard work. And because it's a craft as well, it takes years to perfect it and even then, you're not going to perfect it because perfection doesn't exist. It's subjective. I think by the third year, I really started to hone in. I was one of those boys who everyone was surprised that I was there. They were very surprised at how much I'd improved. It was also becoming more playful, becoming looser and needing that discipline.

You also stated that you like being part of things that make you honest, real and vulnerable. What about that fascinates and challenges you? It's just the truth. I've been able to play versatile roles; I have the superhero world in Titans or fantasy within Bastard Son and Gen Z. I find it really fascinating to escape yourself. But splitting the difference between that, and finding what someone else has gone through, as well as adding your elements and attributes to that. It's a real challenge. I think there's real fun in the commercialism of the fantasy world. I love to feel grounded in something and challenge myself to grow; some trauma as someone in the circumstances that they've been given.

Speaking of trauma... I try. From Charlie in Generation Z, Evan in The Radleys and Tim Drake in Titans, each are vastly different, but they share a melancholy. Each of them has a similar thread of sadness. What is a common thread you all share? What are you looking for in a character? With Tim, Charlie, and Evan, I love the fun that I can play with them. People who are the happiest when they smile are sometimes the people who are struggling the most. Both Charlie and Evan have those moments. People who are in their environments — their apartments or spaces — are different from what they are actually like in the outside world. It's a recurring theme. With me, when my family comes to visit, I have a cup of tea and my mum asks how I'm doing that week. I reply with, "Oh, you know, I'm struggling a bit." Then I go outside or I'm on set or seeing friends, there's a cloak that you put on to feel better.

There are different versions of ourselves. I guess I always try to find that within different characters. There's not one way a character can be played. So, with Charlie, I feel like he has this version of himself that his mum sees. She's lost her husband. I've lost my dad, there's a stepdad who is potentially mentally abusive. Charlie's very blunt with them. But when he's with the group, I like being more playful. I guess the thing about it is always trying to find something that is challenging. I want to feel a little bit intimidated by what's in front of me. There are certain things I did last year that I wouldn't do now.

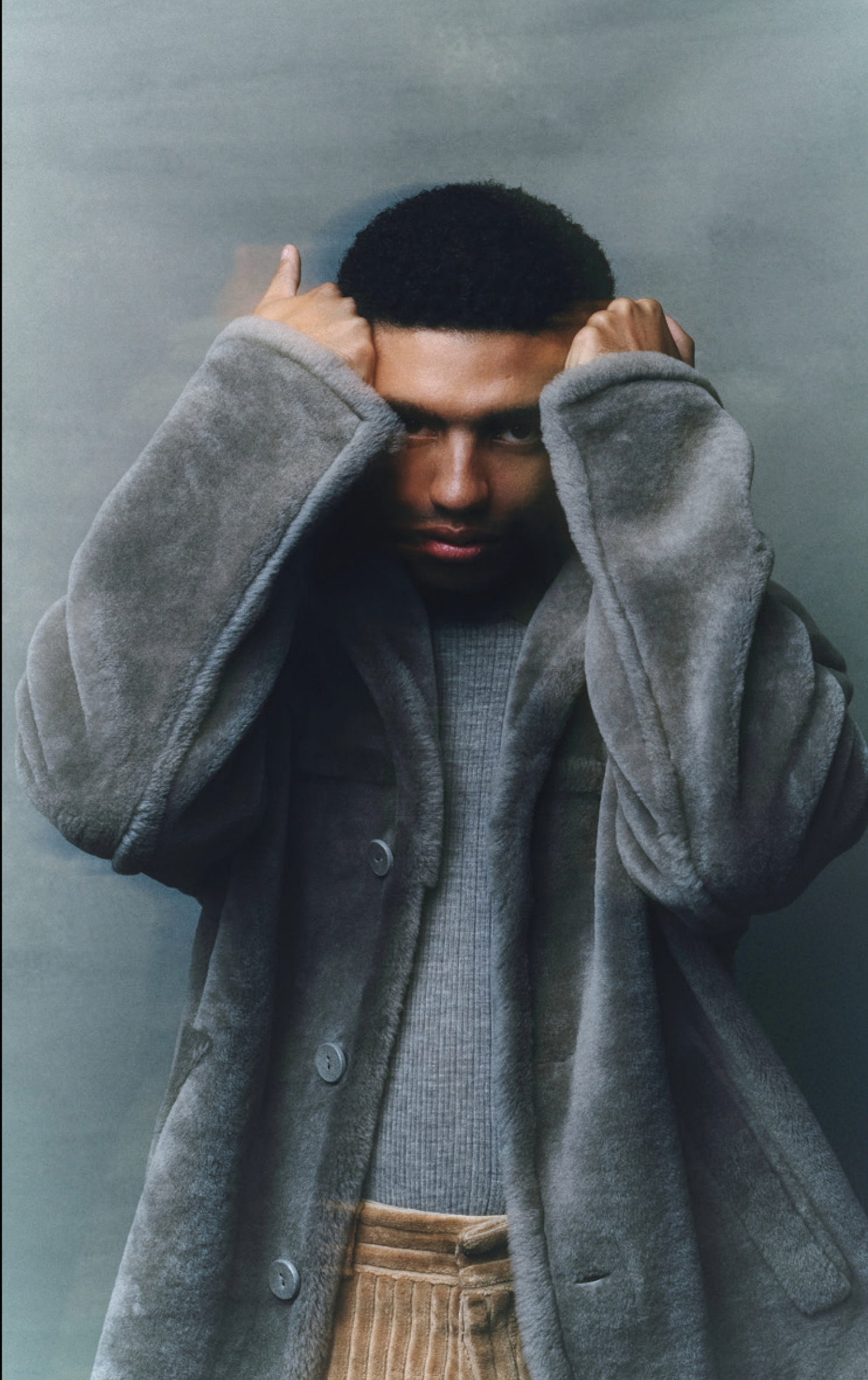
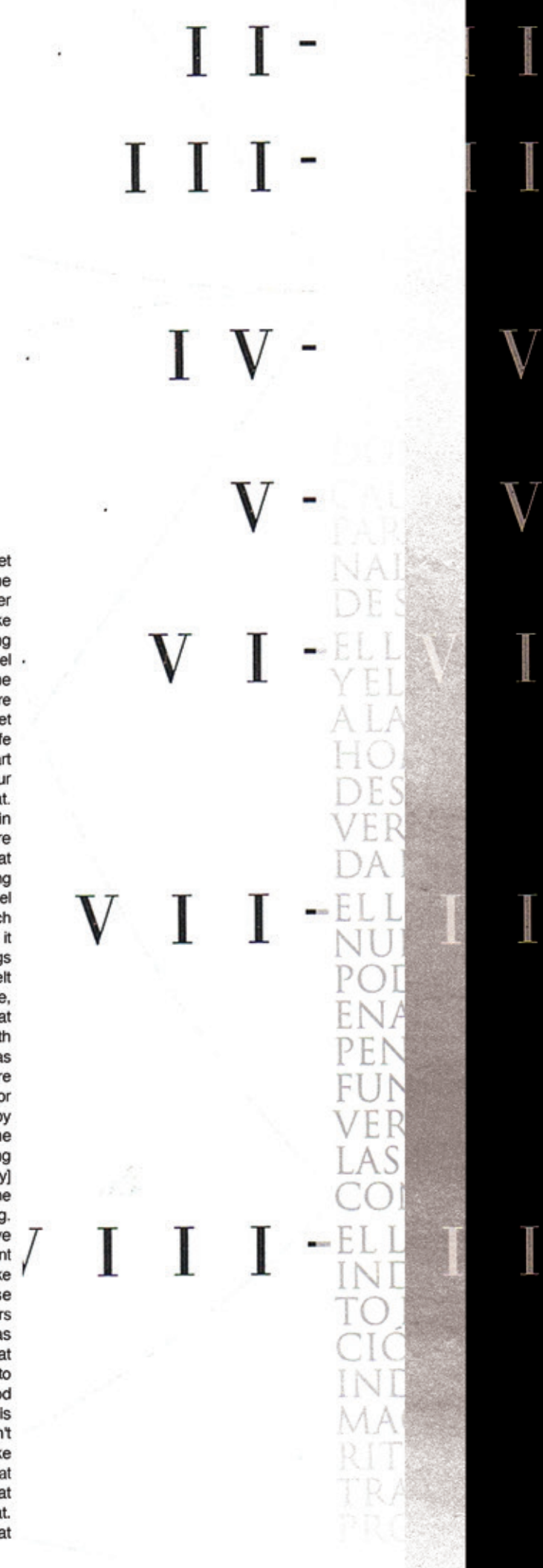
Really?

Yeah, you progress. Life goes on. My life is very different. I want to do different stuff now. I want to feel surprised, but it always comes down to finding something that's truthful and a hundred and ten percent authentic. I love authenticity in a script.

With Generation Z and The Radleys, both are unorthodox stories within the vampire and zombie genre, which I really enjoyed. What attracted you to both projects? I remember with The Radleys, I liked the Evan storyline. There comes that trauma again [laughter]. I'll link it with Charlie's story as well. It was really tough for Evan without his mum and trying to get through to his dad. I don't know about you, and I don't mind getting a little personal, but it's like my dad, the men of that generation are very stubborn.

Definitely.

I try my best to get him to go to the doctor or look after himself. That felt like Evan. He's taking care of his dad. I feel like in my life at the time, and even more so now, that you get to a point in your life when you do start taking care of your parents. I liked that. There's a scene in The Radleys where he's having a go at his dad. He's talking to him on a real level and I am very much related to that. So, it was those little things that I enjoyed. It felt very true to me, especially in that scene. Then with Charlie, I think it was the first round, there wasn't a script or anything. I think by the time I got to the chemistry meeting with Ben [Wheatley] and I just thought he was so interesting. He's a nerd. I love him. I loved how blunt Charlie was. I do like to play these vulnerable characters but there was something that Charlie didn't want to show. He was good at masking his emotions. I hadn't played anything like that at that point. That was something that was really great. Something that caught my eye.





Despite the gory background of *Generation Z*, the show continues to deal with these character's issues. Charlie has an incredibly complicated relationship with his mother, which we kind of touched upon. Why, in your opinion, is it important to show these nuances even in zombie satire? I think it's important because it feels like a reminder. I find that stuff interesting. If it was just another zombie show, then there wouldn't be — nuance is so important. You want the characters to feel three-dimensional. That's why the show is so great, because how funny is it that you've got these guys dealing with this outbreak and at the same time, Charlie's got to deal with his abusive stepdad and his naive mom and his girlfriend that's trying to get back with him. I mean, problems don't stop if there's an outbreak, you know what I mean? [laughs] Life moves on. The world doesn't stop. If anything, that's the reminder in that show.

Moving away from *Generation Z* for just a second. I just have to say: congratulations on *Peaky Blinders*. Oh, thank you.

That's incredible. And I know you can't say much, but is there anything you can tease like the tiniest bit? I mean, I'd be remiss if I didn't at least try, you know? I'm in it. Stephen Graham is in it [laughs].

Have you gotten the script? I've gotten... papers.

Oh, just some papers? I've seen a script.

You've seen a script. Okay, cool. All right. I'll leave it there then [laughter]. When scrolling through your Instagram, I saw a picture of the Robin costume hanging up with the caption 'Titans forever'. What did that experience mean to you? In hindsight, it was just the start of my 20s. I didn't have a clue about myself or the industry. I grew up a lot on that show. It was such a good opportunity to improve as an actor. I got to know myself more [through *Titans*] because I did it during COVID and I was by myself a lot during that time. I had to grow up a lot and provide for myself. I'm so grateful now that I got to do that because when I think back to it, it was one of those things I auditioned for [via Zoom] with COVID. I was as ill as anything and they gave it to me. I was brand new. I hadn't really had a lot under my belt at the time. So that whole experience was so exciting and I'll forever be grateful for it.



The nerd in me has to ask: what did it feel like putting on that suit? It was great. It was months of preparation as well. I'll tell you, I was only contracted for one season. I think we finished in June and then the following March, I got an email that said, "We're going to give you the Robin suit." I was like, "Okay, so I'm coming back." I went on to do *Bastard Son*. And that was six months, I didn't really hear much, just little things about what the suit might look like. They didn't reveal the suit to me until I got to LA and then it was just a lot of back and forth. To be honest, when I first put it on, it was a little tiny scene with a few of the other actors where we were just on a stairwell. It was a bit anticlimactic at that point. Once I did one of the fights, and I saw the playback... Yeah, it was real!

You've barely stopped for breath since 2019. On your IMDb, you have three projects that are classified in production. *The Immortal Man*, *Steve* and *the Eternal Return*. Is there anything you can tell us about those projects? I think I can. I know because I've been announced for *Steve*. It's an incredible project that I can't wait to really get into. It's something very close to home. It's about these kids who have been kicked out of traditional education and thrown into referral units. That's a topic that I don't feel like has been touched upon in recent media and it's just something very close to home. My dad is a unit teacher. He has dealt with it every single day since 2009. It's something that I've seen him go through and it can take a mental toll and physical toll. So, it's really beautiful. That's all I can really say. And *Eternal Return* has been announced. I can't say much other than it's just a romance film.

I'll take it. You've mentioned that you wouldn't mind stepping behind the camera. In what respect? As I've got a bit more experience, I want to look into producing one day. I think I've got a good eye on ideas and what films and stories have been told and what stories I could tell. That's definitely something I'm looking into slowly and educating myself when I can and just talking to people who are doing it. I guess that's a great thing about being in these environments — you get to ask people who are really in a respectful position. I would love to direct but I know that is its own thing. I don't think you can just throw yourself into it. It's something that I would want to educate myself on. But that's something also quite great about Ben Wheatley because when he wanted to direct, he didn't really go to any film schools or anything. He just taught himself and went for it. That sort of inspired me.



Jeans and shirt
BIANCA
SAUNDERS
Shoes
VAGABOND



Moving away from acting for a moment, what does an ideal kind of day off look like for you when you can stop for breath? Or are days like that kind of too few and far between? Yeah, at the moment, it's really busy but there are times of unemployment [laughs]. I guess by that time, I'll wake up, look at myself and go, "You can do it." [laughs] Okay, no, seriously, I wake up, I have a cup of tea, throw some honey in there. I'll play my guitar. I'll go for a walk. As I said, I love true crime or documentaries. I'll make some food. I'll go to the gym if I can be bothered. I listen to a lot of music also. Music surrounds my day, because I live by myself as well. I like to always have something on in the background whether that's a podcast or music.

What are you listening to now?

Around the time I did the shoot, I was obsessed with The Mamas & the Papas. That whole band is so interesting to get into. If You Can Believe Your Eyes and Ears is their first album, which came out in 66, I believe. It's just incredible, the harmonies on it and just the way that John Phillips has orchestrated everything on there is great. I feel like I'm just listening to songs that I want to learn on guitar. I always listen to the Beatles. They're like my granddad's in my head. I just want to go back in time. I'll listen to their first album, which is a bit more folky or Revolver that's a bit more experimental. At the moment, I'm listening to more trap as well. I want to hear that bass. I'm quite versatile when it comes to music.

And lastly, when you look back at the beginning of your career to where you are now, what is one lesson you've learned that you take with you into everything that you do?

Good question. I think it's something that I've been saying to a lot of my support system and what they've been reminding me is that it's just to be yourself. I think that's something you can forget quite easily, especially being in the public eye or people watching you as different characters. You can start to trick yourself into believing that you need to be a different version. For me, I have to be as honest as I can be and as real as I can be. I'm not a big fan of fakeness. I always remind myself to be real. I guess that's the thing that I'd say.

Generation Z is streaming now on Channel 4.

Interview Dana Reboe
Photographer Connor Harris
Stylist Koulla Sergi
Grooming Lauraine Bailey
Photo Assistant Georgia Marshall
Location Bankside Hotel, London