



ROCK CANDY!

Known for playing rugged, roguish characters, James Hoare is perfectly cast as Albert in the new *Picnic At Hanging Rock*. Interview by Matt Myers.

DNA: *Picnic At Hanging Rock* is an absolute Aussie classic. How familiar are you with the original film?

James Hoare: I saw the movie as a kid and always assumed it was a true story. I grew up on a cane farm in Queensland and we had cattle, so there was a lot of mustering and nights spent in the bush. I can certainly relate to the whole mystique of the story.

You play the bush-wise coachman

Albert... big shoes to fill as a young John Jarrett, now most famous for *Wolf Creek*, played the role.

That's right! It's funny and a bit of a coincidence because I was having dinner with my family and my uncle casually said, "Oh, John Jarratt was my housemate in Townsville, back in the '70s". He said it so casually, but I was amazed. This was before he became an actor.

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I'm not in the minority. I'm a straight, white man... but anyone who's told they can't do something or that they're not good enough, I can relate to.

Have you met him?

I haven't but, having seen the film and read the book, I came up with my own interpretation of the character. I know Albert pretty well. I see him all the time as I have a lot of friends like him. He's a larrikin, an opportunist, and a young rouge. He's a sailor with a tattoo and doesn't conform as much as the other characters.

He's freer than the other characters.

Yes. I grew up on the land and I'm also a carpenter by trade so I relate to that stuff.

Some people find *Hanging Rock* eerie.

Did you have any strange feelings while you were working there?

During filming there were camera crews, tourists walking up and down... So, not really. Bruce Carter, who plays Tracker Joe, described his interpretation of *Hanging Rock's* history to me; about it being "the pinch of three tribes" and being a significant landmark for the local Indigenous people. Through his eyes I could see how excited yet uneasy he was, even though he isn't from that area. The Rock is quite majestic and awe inspiring, and you do feel a bit of *déjà vu*. It's very

easy to get lost up there.

What do you think it is about this story that resonates so strongly with people?

It's something about the mystery of the Australian bush and the concept of going missing. I went missing as a little kid. We had a cattle station in Cooktown, Queensland with no electricity or phone. One day there was a fire up in the mountains. My dad went to put it out and he lost me for a bit. You can imagine the panic. Once a kid disappears from sight they may as well be on another planet. Where do you start looking?

But you could interpret the story in many different ways.

Yes. It can be a coming-of-age story dealing with social conformity. It's also about restless adolescence, unrequited love, and definitely about female suppression. It's also about colonialism and ignorance of cultures, such as Aboriginal culture. It's a big cast and there are a lot of different stories teased out. It's like six independent films with the three directors. That may be why its catching on internationally; a lot of people are asking, is this a TV show or an indie film?

Natalie Dormer who played Margaery Tyrell in *Game Of Thrones* plays Mrs Appleyard. Are you a fan of that show?

Yes, and Natalie was great on set. I didn't have any scenes with her but I'd see her a lot in passing and she was a great leader of the ship. She set a high standard of being very professional and wonderful to work with.

You were involved in another Australian classic: you played Johnnie in a theatre production of *Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll*. How was that?

Incredible! It was my first job outside of studying at NIDA and it couldn't have been a better introduction, with older actors like Robyn Nevin, Alison Whyte and Steve Le Marquand all making it a great learning experience - the calm, steady hands of professional actors. And for me, playing a young rural cane-cutter wasn't too far a stretch. On one side of my family they were cane-cutters and the other side were fishermen.

Before acting you were a carpenter by trade.

Do you get the whole "tradies are hot" thing?

That's actually funny because from what I've seen there's a lot of overweight tradies! [Laughing]. And they're usually rude, cranky and pissed off!

That's part of the attraction!

Really? Well, there you go! I think there's something sexy about anyone with dexterity or skill, swinging a hammer and putting up frames and roofs, while being a larrikin at the same time.

The attraction has more to do with being muscled, tanned and wearing next to nothing.

I guess it depends what kind of man you're after. Concreters are constantly in the sun, sweating it out, and they often work half naked! Sometimes you'll see them working in the their



JOHN JARRATT IN THE ROLE IN THE ORIGINAL 1975 MOVIE.



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DNA: IF YOU WERE GAY, WHO'D BE THE MAN FOR YOU?

James: Seth MacFarlane (*Family Guy/Ted*). The guy's so smart. He's enjoys creativity and seems like easy company.

underpants. It's hilarious.

Who is your music diva?

I'm a big old-school fan, so I'll say Janis Joplin. I love the song *Piece Of My Heart*.

Who or what has been the biggest influence on you professionally?

My father would be the biggest, but also Barack Obama. When he was elected I read all his books. Anyone who comes from behind and told that they can't do something or that they're not good enough, I can relate to. I was also absolutely obsessed with Bruce Lee and his way of seeing the world... his interpretation of coming to another culture like the US. I don't know what that says about me. I'm not in the minority. I'm a straight, white man, but I think it's something about not being the favourite, being the underdog.

From a straight man's point of view, what did you make of last year's marriage equality debate and postal survey?

I have many gay friends and family members and, of course, I think they should have the right to marry. The postal vote was an unnecessary process and quickly became a political issue instead of a human rights issue. I was with friends in Surry Hills when [the results were announced], and we were all in the mosh pit parade, partying down Oxford Street. It was incredible!

What advice can you give to anyone wanting to make it in your industry?

I auditioned eight times before I finally made it into NIDA. So it's perseverance. But also you need to be original and unashamedly honest to yourself. Make yourself as vulnerable as you can and don't care what anyone thinks. The emphasis for any success at schools like NIDA or WAAPA is that they look for brave, bold and fearless people.

Have up ever had an on-set wardrobe malfunction?

In the movie *Galyntine* we wore these weird, old-fashioned pants made of leather and one of them split at the crotch all the way down. I didn't notice at first and I was standing there like an idiot. I had a prop malfunction in *Blood Brothers*, the musical, which involved shooting a big gun, with blanks, of course. One performance it didn't work so I yelled out "bang". How stupid was that!

Briefs, boxer briefs or free balls?

Briefs. I wore boxers all through high school and finally found briefs so much more comfortable.

What about Albert the coachman?

[Laughing]. He'd be wearing long johns. Albert's pretty comfortable in his skin. If it's hot, he'd be walking around naked. I don't think he'd have a problem with that.

MORE: *Picnic At Hanging Rock*: from May 6, 8.30pm on Foxtel's Showcase