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Interview with: Patrick Swayze
by: Xav Judd

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK SWAYZE

6 Degrees speak with Patrick Swayze who plays Lance, a lascivious golf instructor with designs on vicar's wife Gloria Goodfellow (Kristin Scott Thomas), in Keeping Mum.

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Patrick Swayze burst onto the Hollywood A list with roles in Dirty Dancing and Ghost. But his taste is far more eclectic than traditional leading man roles would allow, so in recent years the 53 year old has appeared in Donnie Darko, Green Dragon, 11:14 and One Last Dance, the latter film with his wife Lisa Niemi.

In Keeping Mum he plays Lance, a lascivious golf instructor with designs on vicar's wife Gloria Goodfellow (Kristin Scott Thomas). But he reckons without the unlikely charm of her husband (Rowan Atkinson) and the protective instincts of family nanny Grace Hawkins (Maggie Smith).



Are you a fan of sick, twisted British humour?

I fell in love with English crews when I did City of Joy with Roland Joffé in India . I've never had an assistant that wasn't English, it turns out – I don't know if it's by accident or because I am attracted to the wit. Games of wit seem like they've been an English way for forever. So it's like I've definitely met my match with you cocky little suckers that think you can rule the world!

Did you enjoy the Isle of Man ?

You get really used to the fairies, and not drag queens either. I really loved it, I couldn't believe how beautiful it was. It was really magical, but it took some getting used to, having to say good day to the fairies every day. Or you'd have real bad luck.

Did you think it was an old fashioned place?

Yeah, it really is a throwback in time. It was very interesting, you could see thrillers or horror movies being there, there could be some strange cult that lives back in some hollow somewhere.

Have you seen early Ealing comedies?

I have, I was a big fan of those movies. For me it was very much like Arsenic & Old Lace when it came up. For me, what I've been trying to do career wise, I knew I had to break that box office, blockbuster mentality. If I wanted to stay on this road of discovering what it is to be a true actor you had to take chances. So about nine years ago I decided to start to do things that scared me, characters that scared me, wild Zen like surfers, or messed up doctors in India , drag queens, paedophiles or sleazeball voyeurs.

Was your role in Donnie Darko part of that process?

Actually it was before that. It turned out I was the first actor ever to have two movies in the Sundance Competition at the same time, with Green Dragon which I did with the Bui Brothers. Their movie Three Seasons won the Sundance Festival audience award the year before. It was interesting, because when I did To Wong Foo, Travolta and I were both nominated for the Golden Globe Award. That was a very, very exciting moment for me, going off into this foray of independent movies.

Why did Keeping Mum appeal to you?

I knew that people were going to love Keeping Mum, it had too much of this fabulous sense of humour, and wit and intelligence to it. At the same time as being funny it really grabs your heart at different moments, and really depicts that middle world family everywhere. It has such a sense of fun, with such a fabulous cast. I would have to say that it was the cast that made me want to do this at all costs. I'm really into this ensemble, team thing. I don't like ego, I love volatility, whatever it takes on the set to make something wonderful as long as it's not about your ego rearing its ugly head.

What did you think of characters like Lance?

Are you kidding me, they're scary. I don't see how a woman finds a guy out there in the world because there's so many guys like Lance. It wasn't hard to try to find role models, especially with those guys who think they're God's gift, who think they're an aphrodisiac to women but they're incredibly lame. I can't identify with that at all.

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What did you think of the underwear scene?

That was a really, really scary thing to do. I've never done anything like that, that I can remember – or will talk about. Usually if it scares me I know I need to do it. I had a hard time with it when I read it. I forget what it said on it, it was very funny. Did I choose it? I had a hand in it (as often as I could). Oh God. I remember walking on that set and thinking 'I have to take myself seriously and view myself as a professional, standing here in this cheesy assed thong' [which is an unfortunate choice of words]. I almost said no to that, but Niall Johnson the director has got such a sense and such a vision.

How do you decide which film roles to take?

It's hard to find any kind of story or project that hasn't been done before. The key is the slant, the direction that the vision is coming from. And as you go along you start realising that you want to be in control of that vision. As you do this for a lot of years you wake up one day and realise 'what's wrong with me, why don't I direct, why don't I produce?' My vision might be as interesting as someone else's. And there are many times when, the longer you do this, you start getting faith in your abilities to look at a script and know what needs to be fixed. So I just look for something different. I kind of live for the goose bump test. It's really hard to find anything that isn't trash, and it's amazing how much money people have out there to offer you for crap.

Are some offers hard to turn down?

Yes and no. We all have that side of us. I turned down \$10 million for the sequel to Dirty Dancing 2, but everybody missed the point. Everybody was keying into Patrick Swayze's sensuality, but that wasn't the point. I don't believe that movie would have stayed around this long if it was. I don't know how many generations of Dirty Dancing fans we are on. A lot of them have blue hair, and a lot of them are barely walking – for age and youth.

Did Rowan surprise you?

For me, I loved him. It felt like, just in the tiny bit of work we did together, in that one scene, it was so much fun, so easy and so effortless that I felt like Swayze & Atkinson should take it on the road. It inspired me, I really hope I get to work with him more. Also he's got some hidden wild man in there, because he showed up in a different penis extension car every week. It was incredible. He has got some amazing vehicles, that boy's made some money off of Mr Bean.

Were you attracted to the idea of sending up your heartthrob image with Keeping Mum?

O love taking the piss out of myself. It was like the Saturday Night Live that I did. I'm really cautious about not allowing my ego to rear its ugly head. The moment you buy the hype, the moment you buy the 'sexiest man alive' stuff I think it's over with. Keeping Mum was part of that process of giving me a chance to make fun of myself.

PATRICK SWAYZE Q AND A

Keeping Mum is a quintessentially British black comedy, are you a fan of this tradition as seen in the great Ealing comedies among others?

"I'm a big fan of those movies. For me it was also very much like Arsenic & Old Lace when it came up. It reflects what I've been trying to do career wise, I knew I had to break that box office, blockbuster mentality. If I wanted to stay on this road of discovering what it is to be a true actor I knew I had to take chances. So about nine years ago I decided to start to do things that scared me, play characters that scared me: wild Zen like surfers, or messed up doctors working in India ; drag queens, paedophiles and sleazeball voyeurs."

Were you attracted to the idea of sending up your heartthrob image with Keeping Mum?

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How did you find it working with co-star Maggie Smith?

"Maggie and I were working late one night, and we got back to the hotel in Cornwall about one o'clock in the morning. I thought I'd call her because we were sort of shot out of a cannon on this movie, we didn't really have a chance to talk so I thought I'd ask if she wanted anything. Her room was right next door to my room, so I could hear it ring. She answered the phone and I said: 'so, what are you wearing? Have you ever seen a grown white boy naked?'. There was this silence, and she went 'OH MY GOD, WHO IS THIS?'. And she never spoke to me again for the whole movie! I thought I'd really screwed it up. But later on in the shoot when we all went out for dinner, I actually found out she liked me. But I thought I

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had so screwed it up with this goddess, you know?"

So you played Lance in a very 'method' manner then. Did you have to look far for inspiration?

"It wasn't hard to try to find role models, especially with those guys who think they're God's gift, who think they're an aphrodisiac to women but they're incredibly lame. It's scary, I don't see how a woman finds a guy out there in the world because there's so many like Lance. I can't identify with that at all!"

The ultimate example of Lance's self belief comes when he attempts to seduce Gloria, and reveals his dubious taste in sexy underwear. Was that a tough scene to film?

"It was a really, really scary thing to do. I've never done anything like that, that I can remember – or will talk about. But usually if something scares me I know I need to do it. I had a hard time with that scene when I read it. I forget what it said in the script, but it was very funny. I remember walking on that set and thinking 'I have to take myself seriously and view myself as a professional, standing here in this stupid thong'. I almost said no to that, but [director] Niall Johnson has got such a sense and such a vision. We spent so long talking on the phone, about the layering that he wanted throughout the piece. And it was an opportunity for me to do another one of these characters who comes into the film and then goes away. I've been enjoying that, finding these little forays and little journeys. And also you can do a lot more movies if you don't star in every one."

So that's why you've been so busy in recent years, is it?

"I've been working my brains out. I did a film called Icon, I did King Solomon's Mines for Hallmark, I did Chicago on Broadway and in LA and Keeping Mum. Then there's One Last Dance, Lisa and my dance movie just came out on DVD in the States."

In other interviews you have described Kristin Scott Thomas as a 'professional kisser'. What do you mean by that?

"Well you go on set and it goes something like 'I'll call action, and come out kissing!'. She certainly wasn't bad at it, Kristin is such an elegant being, really professional. I loved her sense of fun, and her sense of play. I really enjoyed it, but there wasn't a person in this movie I didn't enjoy working with and that's really rare."

Did Rowan Atkinson surprise you, being such a quiet man away from the screen?

"I loved him. It felt even in the tiny bit of work we did together that it was so much fun, so easy and so effortless. I felt like Swayze & Atkinson should take it on the road. It inspired me, I really hope I get to work with him some more. But he's got some hidden wild man in there, because he showed up in a different car every week. He has some amazing vehicles, that guy's made some money off of Mr Bean!"

You talked about the team ethic in these ensemble films. What is it that annoys you on a film set?

"The only thing that really sets me off is if when someone acts as if it's all about them. I learned a big lesson from Gene Hackman years ago when I did Uncommon Valour, which is about these guys going back to Vietnam to get their buddies out. I watched this man give 100% of himself in his off-camera work. If it required tears and a great deal of emotion he was there every time for the other actor. That can be a bummer because sometimes your best performances are off-camera, but I love the ensemble thing. I love being part of a team."

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Dir: Niall Johnson, 2005, UK, 103 mins

Cast: Rowan Atkinson, Kristin Scott Thomas, Patrick Swayze

Reviewed by: Xav Judd

REVIEW: KEEPING MUM

Although Maggie Smith once starred with Alec Guinness in the seventies spoof *Murder by Death*, her latest film is much more of an attempt to capture the dark humour of the Ealing comedies the Scottish actor made in the 1950's.

Set in the modern-day fictional village of Little Wallop, Gloria Goodfellow (Kristin Scott Thomas) is the sexually frustrated housewife of Walter (Rowan Atkinson), the local vicar. Although well-intentioned,

the only time he seems to 'get-off' nowadays is when he is producing a sermon. Thus, he neglects his kids too: Petey is being bullied at school and Holly has become so promiscuous that she could be mistaken for a foreign sex-worker.

With a lackluster marriage and offspring who are set to become more dysfunctional than Michael Jackson, Gloria is stuck in a rut. Salvation seems to arrive in the form of her golfing coach Lance (Patrick Swayze). At first, a charming rogue with an arsenal of double entendres, he wants to show off his equipment, and drill into her the enjoyment of a hole-in-one.

Content with her new hot-rod, Gloria doesn't seem to realize that he's a complete 'sleazoid' who doesn't understand why trousers have got a zipper. Indeed, Lance's libido is where her problems really begin, as there's a lot more to him than his cheesy smile and sun-baked skin – he's a kinky voyeur.

Fortunately, however, this is where Maggie Smith, the Goodfellow's recently acquired housekeeper, comes in with a unique way of dealing with her new family's problems – she bonks them off!

Director Niall Johnson's film should have had a bellyful of laughs with such an interesting plotline. However, whereas classic Ealing comedies like *Kindhearts and Coronets* (1949) and *The Ladykillers* (1955) excelled in gallows humour, for long periods Johnson's picture simply isn't funny. Arguably, part of the reason is because the earlier movies were better at wrenching comic moments from the eccentricities and foibles of parochial British culture.

Keeping Mum couldn't hope to offer such a witty and incisive examination, as it is hindered by pedestrian and clichéd dialogue. So even though he tries his best, it's difficult for a performer like Rowan Atkinson to amuse us when the substance of a joke is replacing 'God' with 'cod' – 'cod's mysterious ways' – during a sermon. Indeed, at such embarrassing moments, one wishes Atkinson would take a leaf out of Mr Bean's book and keep entirely stum.

This movie does have its good points though. Although most of the acting is just routinely competent, Patrick Swayze is a revelation. His Lance is so gun-ho and seedy that you could have imagined him being Richard Nixon's gofer during Watergate. In line with his appearances in *To Wong Foo* (1995) and *Donnie Darko* (2001), by choosing another risqué role and eschewing his former sex symbol status, Swayze continues to pursue an interesting career.

Unfortunately, though, not even his electric performance or Gavin Finney's cinematography can save this movie. Despite the exquisite shots of Cornwall and the Isle of Man - that double for Little Wallop – which try and bring the production alight, at times it's hard to escape the feeling that you're watching a rejected episode of the *Vicar of Dibleby* or a mundane TV movie.

