

# arts

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX


‘Actually,’ I say, ‘can we hug?’

**Kevin Bacon is still Hollywood's Most Cuddly despite his latest role as an X-Men baddie, says Tim Teeman**

As Kevin Bacon reveals he's not drawn to playing villains above heroes — “As soon as I sense a pattern to what I'm doing, I need to break it” — I am thinking about the “six degrees of Kevin Bacon”, which posits that many of us are connected to the handsome, earnest actor in six steps, predicated on a remark he once made about working with everyone in Hollywood. How can I, in our 45 minutes together, connect to Bacon in an impressively intimate, singular way? Hmm.

The 52-year-old actor, famous first for *Footloose* and later for movies including *The River Wild*, *JFK* and *Tremors*, is in a candid mood. Lean, muscular and intense, in white T-shirt and jeans, he will talk about ageing, why he won't star in the *Footloose* remake, his wild years as a young actor and losing money in the fraudulent Ponzi scam overseen by Bernie Madoff.

He's next in *X-Men: First Class*, playing the supervillain Sebastian Shaw and again the bad guy in the indie movie *Super* as Jacques, a strip-club owner. “That cost \$3 million to make, whereas *X-Men* cost gazillions. But I'm a nice guy in *Crazy, Stupid, Love* with Steve Carell and Julianne Moore. People say it's more fun to play the bad guy, but for me it's no fun playing a character that's uncomplicated. I don't know what to do with a straight-down-the-line-hero. I always want to find some kind of darkness. I gave Jacques *joie de vivre* and while Shaw is using the Cuban missile crisis to create Armageddon and take over the world for mutants, I wanted to

ask whether he believes what he's doing is right. If I got close to slipping into ‘mwah-haha’, Matthew Vaughn [the director] said, ‘Stop twirling your moustache.’

Does he prefer blockbusters to indies? “Well, an indie means a smaller pay cheque and it's tough cobbling a living together doing just that, but I like independent film, playing straight, gay, rich, poor. It's just that *Super* will be seen by a fraction of people who'll see *X-Men*.”

Bacon's career has been “all over the map, for which I'm very grateful” since *Footloose*. He could have become a Hollywood heart-throb, but instead made “three or four bad choices” and found his career revived playing a rent boy in Oliver Stone's *JFK*. Later he played a paedophile in *The Woodsman* and a shifty presidential aide in *Frost/Nixon*. “I like taking chances. I'm afraid of earthquakes, tsunamis, environmental catastrophe and war, but not difficult roles. I never think about, or even know, what my public persona is. I'd rather have the work speak for itself.”

Bacon and his five siblings grew up in a liberal, artsy Philadelphia home; his mother Ruth was a teacher and activist, his father Edmund an architect. “She would drop some pens and say, ‘Why don't you create something?’ Or someone threw an instrument at you. Or you put on a play. The first gift my mother gave me was a dressing-up box full of costumes. If we wanted a sword, bow or arrow we had to make it. They didn't put any pressure on us about getting jobs, but neither did they give us the skills to earn money. When I told them, ‘I'm going to New York to try and become an actor’, they said, ‘See ya.’”

Did he want fame? “Yes, but through



acting school and watching actors like Meryl Streep, Raul Julia and Kevin Kline I saw the skill and versatility needed. Suddenly acting seemed more sacred than a way to stardom.” He played a rent boy in the play *Forty Deuce* (made into a film by Paul Morrissey). “To research the role I pretended to be a hustler in these bars on 42nd Street and guys would try and pick me up. I said I was this young ‘chicken’ from out of town.” Did he ever have sex with them? “No, I would always tell them I was waiting for my john [client].”

Was he egotistical? “I wasn't a diva or pain in the ass, but when I was younger I thought, forgivably, I knew everything there was to know. I was definitely cocky. The older you get the more you realise you don't know.” How wild was he? Did he drink, do drugs? “Totally, ha ha, it was f\*\*\*ing awesome. I was living in pre-Aids New York.”

So he had lots of sex? “Yes. New York was a dangerous place but it never felt dangerous. I worked as a waiter and lived at night on the cash in my pocket. I had two sides: one was down-and-out Upper West Side, which wasn't smart like today. I went to bars with pool tables, tough-chick waitresses and fights. I was robbed at gunpoint. Then I had another life: disco. I'd go to Studio 54 and dance by myself for hours, but it was not a place to pick up girls because I never had the money to buy that much coke. I remember once staying out late, getting f\*\*\*ed up and missing an audition, and thinking, ‘Wait a second, you gotta keep your eyes on the prize.’”

After his first movie role in *Diner*, Bacon found fame in *Footloose*, after which “people started to tell me these ‘rules’ for movie stardom: only do parts with your name above the title, think about your image. It felt like bullshit. I was tempted, but it didn't really sit with who I was or what I thought an actor was supposed to be.”

The producers of the film recently asked if, on a forthcoming DVD rerelease of it, they could include his screen test, which they sent to him. “It was weird. I don't watch my old movies and haven't seen *Footloose* since I made it. Watching my audition I thought, ‘I don't know that guy any more.’ There's this hunger, a desire to f\*\*\*ing take over. I didn't think I was particularly driven back then, but, boy, I really was.”

The producers of the forthcoming *Footloose* remake approached him to appear, “but there was nothing there I liked. It was an odd idea that wouldn't have worked. The director [Craig Brewer] is fantastic and I'm sure the kid [Kenny Wormald] is great, but the script wasn't good for me.”



Kevin Bacon; above, with his wife, Kyra Sedgwick; and, top left, with January Jones in *X-Men: First Class*

When the original made him famous, “I had wanted it for so long, I could be on the cover of any magazine but I was like, ‘No, no, no’ — magazines I would do in a second now. I didn't want to work the machine, but later learnt you had to embrace it. If you're in a successful movie it doesn't matter if the movie isn't taken seriously, great scripts will come to you because everyone in Hollywood wants to be associated with successful things.” But Bacon appeared in some duds, “the scripts started getting worse, the number of directors who wanted to work with me shrank, my dream of stardom was getting washed downstream. I also hadn't met the right person, and if you don't have something outside your career where you can find some peace, you're defined by your career and if that isn't going well, you're unhappy.”

He fell in love with and married the actress Kyra Sedgwick in 1988, then *JFK* “led to *The River Wild*, *A Few Good Men* and suddenly a different career started. There are peaks and valleys, but I'm grateful to get sent things that are all over the map.” He has won a Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild awards but not an Oscar. “The Academy has so far decided none of my performances have been worthy of nomination. I think some have, but the timing has been off.”

Marriage to Sedgwick (famous for her role in *The Closer*) changed Bacon. “She got pregnant on our honeymoon, my mother died of cancer. It was a crazy time. I took *Tremors* because I felt enormous pressure to support what was now a family. She was 21. I was 30, but like a kid. It was a real rite of passage. Any marriage is hard work, but what I always say is: ‘Keep the fights clean and the sex dirty.’”

Turning 50 was “a big deal” as it coincided with his and Sedgwick's 20th anniversary and his son and daughter turning 18 and 21 respectively. “I said to my wife recently, ‘When I die be sad, but don't be sad for too long because I've had a good life.’”

Bacon runs, lifts weights and bikes to stay fit. He says he hasn't had plastic surgery “yet, but any moment” and laughs. “I am a restless spirit with a restless mind. I'm still hungry for roles. I have great moments of fulfilment with my wife and my children, a walk in the woods with my dogs, but I'm still chasing it. It's a vagabond lifestyle. My suitcase is always sitting there.”

Bacon won't say how much money he and Sedgwick lost as Madoff investors. “It's a drag. It hurts. It was money we'd worked hard for that nobody gave us. But we're both healthy and can work. A lot of people are far worse off. I'd like him to serve as a wake-up call to the immoral cult of despicable greed, consumption and money-for-money's-sake which is pervasive in this country. People have asked me, ‘Didn't you know what he was doing?’ But I don't kick myself. I'm an actor, not a money manager.”

As for the “six degrees” game, Bacon says it was “irritating when it felt like a joke at my expense”, but has since made peace with it as “a constant”. He even made it into the basis for a charity, “and, not to get too heavy about it, at its roots it's about our relations to others which is good”. Bacon goes to shake my hand. Actually, I say, can we hug: there can't be too many mere mortals who can tell their compadres that, hey, they are one hug from Kevin Bacon. He laughs, possibly a bit nervously, then folds me in an embrace. Yee-sssss. Now, form an orderly line.

*X-Men: First Class* is released on May 30

## Barking on the Croisette

It's been a vintage Cannes for **Kate Muir**, with her question to Lars von Trier prompting his Nazi confessions. And then there's that ironic dog...

This is a vintage year at Cannes, with mind-blowing, toothsome films ranging from the cosmic and cerebral to campy horror. The greatest joy, however, has been from two clever, funny directors that left audiences on a high: *Le Havre* by Ari Kaurismäki and *The Artist* by Michel Hazanavicius. Those, along with Terrence Malick's daring and exquisitely photographed elegy *The Tree of Life*, mean the Palme d'Or will be hard fought.

The awards will be announced on Sunday evening, amid much pomp beneath the palm trees of the Croisette. In the meantime, with four films out of 20 yet to screen at the time of writing, the big themes troubling film-makers are emerging. A good half of the plots seem to be about boys in peril, such as the Dardenne brothers' subtle and emotional *The Kid with a Bike* and Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk about Kevin*. Then there are at least three films with women in disturbing psycho-sexual traps, and two others — *The Tree of Life* and *Melancholia* — in which we ponder the deep meaning of life, death and the cosmos.

I want to see *The Tree of Life* again, just to dig deeper into the 1950s family story with Brad Pitt and its complex spiritual counterpoints, and to luxuriate in Malick's light. It is more powerful than Lars von Trier's much-anticipated *Melancholia*, which is a grandiose, Wagnerian drama about marriage at the end of the world. Kirsten Dunst plays a depressive, beautiful bride whose wedding party crashes and burns as she and her relatives — including John Hurt, Charlotte Rampling and Kiefer Sutherland — await a death planet hurtling towards Earth.

Von Trier always likes to play the *enfant terrible* and at the press conference for *Melancholia* he told everyone his next project would be a porn film “with lots and lots of very unpleasant sex, three or four hours long”. Then I asked him a question about his Germanic roots and his discussion in a film magazine of the “Nazi aesthetic”. His response was an eccentric rambling monologue beginning, “I understand Hitler...”, which he clearly considered funny. Later, he made a public apology for his “OK, I'm a Nazi” remark, but by then the ensuing furore had hit the international press, upstaged his film and left it tainted for the judges. The next morning, the festival itself declared him persona non grata.

On a more cheerful note, the Finnish director Kaurismäki gives us that fashionable Scandi sensibility, coupled with a tribute to the French at their best. Although his charming *Le Havre* is set now, it feels more like a wartime resistance story. André Wilms is outstanding as an ageing shoeshine man who befriends a young stowaway from the Ivory Coast. With the lightest comic touch, it's a quayside film that warms the cockles of the heart. In one scene, featuring an old-fashioned, moustached French detective and a pineapple, I cried tears of laughter.



Jean Dujardin and Berenice Bejo in *The Artist*, hotly tipped for the Palme d'Or

People have been fighting to get into screenings of *The Artist*, after word of mouth sent this film stratospheric. Even Brad Pitt couldn't get a seat. The director Hazanavicius is better known for his Bond-like spoofs, and this almost silent black-and-white film about the Roaring Twenties in Hollywood showcased his amazing skills and zippy, slapstick humour. I can't recommend it more highly, to anyone of any age, and it has been bought by the Weinstein Company, which previously snapped up *The King's Speech*.

Yesterday, we entered a whole new zone of bonkersness with Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*, a high camp horror movie about a plastic surgeon, played with consummate seriousness by the adaptable Antonio Banderas. Also in the weird corner was the out-and-out stinker in the competition: *House of Tolerance*. This excruciating tat was set in a Paris brothel in the 1890s. In a surreal and queasy zone between soft-fleshed porn and a venerable disease education film, one of the prostitutes cried tears of sperm, while others danced in full period costume to *Nights in White Satin*.

In the Palme d'Or, the bookies are betting on *Le Havre*, and it tops the critics' poll in *Screen* magazine. Old hands at Cannes say, “Don't study the films, study the jury,” and the Anglo-American triumvirate of the chairman Robert De Niro, Uma Thurman and Jude Law may give traction to *The Tree* or *The Artist*. On the other hand, the Asian contingent of Johnnie To, from Hong Kong, and the producer Nansun Shi may encourage the jury to look more closely at an action film, perhaps *Drive*, as yet unseen.

Anyway, I'm rooting for *The Tree of Life* for its pure cinematic daring, or *The Artist* for re-inventing the silent film, with Tilda Swinton winning best actress for *We Need to Talk about Kevin*. Also, *The Artist* has the added attraction of Uggly, a Jack Russell terrier who steals every scene and can play dead with irony. As a newly appointed member of the jury for the Palm Dog for the best canine performance in Cannes, decided today, I shall be putting the case for Uggly in the strongest possible terms. Read Wendy Ide's report on films in the Un Certain Regard category at [thetimes.co.uk/cannes](http://thetimes.co.uk/cannes)



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