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Love is in the Air

Actor Jason Schwartzman, known for his quirky, intellectual turns in *Rushmore*, *Bored to Death*, and *Moonrise Kingdom*, has long been the thinking girls' Hollywood heartthrob. In this fireside chat, the multitalented renaissance man opens up about his famous filmmaking family, fatherhood, and the time he crushed out so hard on a celebrity “it hurt”

BY LISA BUTTERWORTH
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STYLED BY LIZZIE CURTIS | GROOMING BY LORI GUIDROZ | PROPS BY JONI NOE

“Oh, this is for the Love issue? How 'bout I do this?”

a designer-suit-clad Jason Schwartzman asks before turning, wrapping his arms around himself, and faking a hot and heavy make-out sesh. It's his first pose of the day, and the 32-year-old actor/musician has already won over everyone on the set of our cover shoot. “More props!” he yells. “I love props!” For the next 20 minutes, he pretends to talk on a phone shaped like a pair of red lips, sucks a rainbow lollipop while wearing Lolita heart sunglasses, covers his face with kissy stickers, and takes a felt heart pin from his lapel and tacks it to his crotch, making serious bedroom eyes. And he's just getting started. Schwartzman is a wonderful whirlwind of crushability; equal parts dork, comedian, and crowd pleaser, he's entirely irresistible. From the moment he arrives on location at photographer Amanda Marsalis' house on a rainy day in Echo Park, Los Angeles, Schwartzman lights up the set the way he lights up the screen—just like he did in his very first role, as the awkward-yet-lovable Max Fischer in Wes Anderson's classic *Rushmore*; then again as the sweet, self-deprecating DIY detective he played on HBO's cancelled-too-soon *Bored to Death*; and now as the hirsute sidekick he portrays in his latest film, *A Glimpse Inside the Mind of Charles Swan III*.

“Ryan Gosling comes to a photo shoot and he just does this,” Schwartzman says, making a brooding sexy face. “I come to a photo shoot and I'm like...” he brings his hands up under his chin and proceeds to mime a series of glamour-shot poses. “We're different,” he says, trailing off. It's true. Schwartzman may not have the smoldering hunkeness Gosling is known for, but he is his own particular brand of dreamboat. When it starts to drizzle and he says, “Do we have to work? I just want to sit on the couch, drink some tea, and watch a movie,” you can almost hear the collective sigh from the ladies in the room. As he mugs for the camera and tells stories, he seems to barely pause for breath. His charisma is intoxicating. But he also radiates a genuine, disarming kindness. His kinetic curiosity (“Where did you get these sheets? What kind of TV is this? What do you think of this shirt? Do girls like six-packs?”) is matched only by his enthusiasm, which is ignited as easily by something like tequila (“I drink it every day as a nightcap”) as it is by his love for acting (“It's everything to me”) or being one of *BUST*'s rare cover boys. “It's a big deal for me,” he says, when, after a



long day of shooting, we settle onto the hardwood floor of Marsalis' living room with a pot of tea in front of a crackling fire. "That's why I was like, *Oh God, I hope I do a good job out there*. I was quite taken aback and honored."

Of course, we wouldn't put just any guy on the cover. His gentlemanly ways in real life only reinforce the devotion his career inspires. Schwartzman has made his mark in movies like *I Heart Huckabees*, *Marie Antoinette* (directed by his cousin, and former *BUST* cover girl, Sofia Coppola), Judd Apatow's *Funny People*, and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*. He has charmed on the small screen as well, briefly on *Freaks and Geeks* and for three smart seasons on the Jonathan Ames-created *Bored to Death*. But it all began with 1998's *Rushmore*, when the then-17-year-old rocked braces and a beret with the most appealing mix of bravado and vulnerability. While many actors cut their teeth on commercials and bit parts, Schwartzman's very first audition landed him the career-launching role, thanks in part to the connection he had with the film's writer/director, Wes Anderson. "I went to the audition for *Rushmore* so nervous, I definitely felt like I was out of my

league," he says. "I remember—the door opened, [I saw Anderson], and I was like, *Oh, he's young, he has Converse, he has glasses that I like*. He seemed instantly like a peer, even though I was 10 years younger. We got to talking about *Pinkerton*, the Weezer album, and it moved me into a zone where I was away from the audition, where I was able to just talk about something that I felt comfortable talking about, because I wouldn't have known what to say about acting."

Since *Rushmore*, Schwartzman has gone on to star in three more of Anderson's films: *The Darjeeling Limited* (which he co-wrote), *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and, most recently, *Moonrise Kingdom*. It's the kind of relationship many actors dream of. "[At that first audition] I thought to myself, *I'm probably not going to get this part, but I hope I could somehow know this man in some way, that maybe we could be friends*," Schwartzman says. "Now he's my mentor. We're incredible friends; we talk all the time. He plucked me out of a bunch of kids and took a chance on me."

It was a chance Schwartzman never expected to have. Growing up in Westwood, Los Angeles, music was his first love. In

his teens and early 20s, he was the drummer for the band Phantom Planet (famous for "California," the theme song for FOX's *The O.C.*). Being in movies seemed completely outside the realm of attainability. "Looking back, I realize I just didn't have the self-belief that I could be an actor," he says, demonstrating the humility that infuses much of our conversation. "Growing up in the '80s, it was Tom Cruise and Arnold Schwarzenegger and Mel Gibson who were in the big movies." Music on the other hand, felt more familiar. "Music you could listen to in your house, and walk around with a boom box. Now, that said, I was walking around listening to *Thriller*—it was still big, big music. But there was just something a little more accessible about it."

Though acting wasn't a career Schwartzman originally thought to pursue, it's something he's fallen hard for. "I work as if my life depends on it, and I love it," he says, sipping from his mug. "I love movies and making movies and being on the set. You watch a great movie or listen to a great album or have a great conversation, and it can move you. I love the feeling of making things that maybe someone else would



like.” It’s no surprise he took so quickly to the art form, though, since he comes from a filmmaking family. His father, Jack, who passed away in 1994, was a producer (*Being There*) and his mother is actress Talia Shire, who played Adrian in the *Rocky* movies and Connie Corleone in *The Godfather* trilogy. The latter was directed by his mom’s brother, Frances Ford Coppola, which means Schwartzman grew up squarely in the heart of America’s foremost filmmaking family. And though his mom never pushed him into acting, her love for it certainly had a huge influence on him. “At a young age, I’d come home and she’d be in her room watching an old movie—I remember her always watching *The Red Shoes*—and that wasn’t something I saw in other kids’ homes, someone watching a movie alone, studying it,” he says. “She’d come into my room when I was little, and she would read me some passage from something. And I didn’t understand any of it, but I think I recognized at an early age that movies, music, and art can nourish you.” In addition to nurturing a creative environment, Schwartzman says the main lesson his mom taught him was not to be a dick. “Especially to women,” he says. “She was always like, ‘If you don’t like someone,

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but they want something, don’t lead them on.’ I was like, “Thanks for the advice, Mom, give it to someone who can use it. Because I can guarantee one thing: I’m not leading anyone on. I wish I was. I wish I was giving people the wrong impression.”

Perhaps Schwartzman wasn’t a Lotherio in his youth, but his mom isn’t the only important lady in his life these days. In 2009, he married fashion designer and owner of the L.A. boutique TenOverSix Brady Cunningham (Jonathan Ames officiated the ceremony in the couple’s backyard), and two years ago they welcomed daughter Marlowe Rivers, whose photos he excitedly shares on his iPhone. “I’m so glad I have a daughter!” Schwartzman says. “Growing up, I was playing baseball, hanging out with boys, and I always wondered what the girls were doing. Now I know!” In this case, it’s often dressing up mermaids and rearranging dollhouse furniture. “I just love every moment with her,” he says, beaming. “I feel like I should just always have daughters. I don’t want a guy around. I mean, I’m sure I’d love it, but I feel like having a daughter is just good for me.”

Asked if raising Marlowe has heightened his awareness of women’s-rights

SHIRT: VINTAGE LANDS; END; SWEATER: A.P.C.; JEANS: AGNE; SOCKS: J. CREW

SHIRT AND TRENCH: BAND OF OUTSIDERS; JEANS: ACNE; SHOES: NEW BALANCE





SHIRT: BAND OF OUTSIDERS; TIE: J. CREW; SUIT: VINTAGE KENZO

issues, he says he doesn't feel qualified to talk about feminism but answers in a way that makes this feminist feel good. "I was born in a time when—though there's always so much progress to be made striving for equality—women were working, so women and equality and rights were always in my life and my house. My mom is very strong, and I have very strong females in my life. I always thought about [women's rights] because I grew up when the discussion was, 'How can we make things better?'" he says. "I'm not a fan of forcing beliefs onto people, and I don't like it when people do it to me, but the idea of everyone being equal—it drives me nuts when I don't see that. It makes me angry."

As we chat, Schwartzman can't sit still. He leans back, squats, wraps his arms around his knees, pours another cup of tea, and jumps up to thank and hug every crew member as they leave. But he never loses focus. With the fire crackling in the background and the rain coming down outside, naturally, talk turns to romance. "Yes," he says definitively, "I am a romantic person. You grow up with happy endings in movies and beautiful scenes in TV shows where the music hits, and the guy gives the girl a thing, and it's like, *awww*, and they kiss. It always kind of gives you something. Love, in general, drives so much of my life."

When Schwartzman recounts the details of his earliest pop-culture crush, I learn that his preoccupation with romantic love started early. "I fell in love with girls at a really young age," he says. "I had a big crush on [actress] Sherilyn Fenn, on a level where, really, it hurt," he says. When I nod knowingly and say, "*Twin Peaks*?" he admits it was well before that, thanks to a 1986 movie called *The Wraith*. "I remember being a little kid, and my dad taking me to the Santa Monica beach to go fishing. It was really early, and I'll never forget, I saw Sherilyn Fenn on the beach talking to some woman. She was wearing a cream cable-knit sweater, and she was crying and walking, and I was like, *Oh, my God, it's you, it's you*. I was very little but very in love with her," he says earnestly, before getting wistful. "Maybe she'll read this and think of me."

The Wraith also stars Charlie Sheen,

bringing us full circle to today: Schwartzman plays Sheen's confidant Kirby Star in the February release *A Glimpse Inside the Mind of Charles Swan III*. It's a wacky '70s-influenced tale of love lost, and though Schwartzman is his usual charming self, he's nearly upstaged by his character's Afro and impressive beard. Was the facial hair authentic? "Yes, ma'am!" he says, with more than a hint of pride before launching into a stand-up-worthy diatribe about its impenetrableness. "Eating was crazy. You know, I'd see a lot of guys with food in their beards, and I'd think, *That's disgusting, how did you let that happen?* But the truth is, it's very difficult not to let that happen. It's like having a bunch of little hands around your mouth, trying to grab food as you put it away, 'Give me that, give me

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”

that!" he says, miming with his fingers. Along with an excuse to grow a formidable beard, *Charles Swan* gave Schwartzman the opportunity to work with his cousin Roman Coppola, who wrote and directed the movie. "I think it's incredible," he says, when I ask about filming with family. "I'm lucky that I'm very in sync with Roman and Sofia. We're all interested in the same things, so it's almost like we're not family when we get together; we're just a bunch of people who like to be around each other at work." The best part about it, though, is the familiarity. "When you go to a set for the first time—I don't know about anyone

else, but I'm really nervous. Because all of a sudden, all these people are quiet, and they stare at you. And you have to say all these lines. And some of what you have to say is, 'I love you, don't go,' and it's really embarrassing to be terrible. But when you work with someone like Wes or Roman or Sofia—you're returning to a set where everyone there has seen you be embarrassingly bad. So working with someone who's your family or your friend, you can just get to work faster." Schwartzman says he felt the same sentiment working on multiple seasons of *Bored to Death*, an experience he loved not only because he was able to live in New York and enact ridiculous high jinks around the city, but also because he came away with wonderful friends in Zach Galifianakis, Ted Danson, and Jonathan Ames. "It was like a delicacy," he says about getting to do the show. "We just kept saying, 'We could do this forever,' we were just so happy. You know when you eat food and it tastes incredible in your mouth? Well, saying those [scripted] words was like that. It felt good." Hopefully, it's a feeling he'll get to recapture, since a *Bored to Death* movie is in the works (Ames is writing the script).

But without a TV show taking up all of his hours, I wonder if Schwartzman has more time for making music, because frankly, there's nothing I want more than another album from his solo project, Coconut Records. "People ask, 'Are you working on it?'" But I'm just sort of doing music every day. It's like someone asking, 'Are you working on eating?' Yeah, I eat every day, I do music every day, it's just part of my life," he says. "Some people just write 10 songs and it's an album. But I'm inefficient. It takes a lot of time for me to write music. There's just a lot of bad stuff, so I have to way overshoot the mark and then start to chip away." As he's saying this, Marsalis comes into the room and dims the lamp. "Mood lighting!" I say with an embarrassing giggle, before Schwartzman slips back into comedian mode, cocking an eyebrow, and affecting a cheesy air. "And on that note, how would you like to drink some of this special tea I made and us three ladies go upstairs and do a real cover shoot?" Music to my ears. **B**