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Hollywood reporter roundtable drama actors

Billy Porter of 'Post' sat down for a deep conversation with his friends at The Hollywood Reporter's Drama Show's Roundtable to promote the show and provide insight into the journey that brought him into the arms of the show, still at the table? Being gay and black and coming out with a lot of unemployment. It's a double layer of being a person of color in this industry, then a layer of being queen. No one sees you otherwise. If the flamboyant is not in the description of the character, no one will see me forever for anything see below. It wouldn't be very angry if it went in another direction, but it wasn't because every gay straight guy wanted to give them an award. In an attempt to loosen up the six actors gathered for the annual Drama Of The Hollywood Reporter Roundtable, moderators tossed out an innocent question: What would people be surprised to learn about you? Jump in the first place, offering an honest, if mild, response. When I was growing up Fosse/Verdon's Sam Rockwell, 50, seized the opportunity to agree, saying he suffers from social anxiety. Next up is Richard Madden, 32, of Netflix's Bodyguard, who has a little more fun with the query. I really like pop music. The actor, who found himself rumoured to be playing James Bond, didn't refer to a single song on his iPod, but he was confident on the table: really rubbish, cheese stuff, and now we're going somewhere. Enter Hugh Grant, 58, who looked down at his hand and then deadpanned: How nasty am I. With the rest of the group, which includes Narcos: Diego Luna of Mexico, 39, and Homecoming's Stephan James, 25 — Laughter, the very English scandal star continues as if persuading his friends he's serious: people see all the romantic jokes I'm good at, written by Richard Curtis, who's a very nice guy, and they used to think 'oh Hugh must be like that', but I'm evil. Seriously, i'm not going to Not so - as Grant proved throughout the course of the hour, keeping the group in stitches while still managing to reveal some serious things about the challenges of fame. From invitations to the White House to the opening tuxedo, the Oscar red carpet, all the stars weighing in on the moments and options that make or break a career, let's start with this simple sentence: I know I did it in Hollywood when... Stefan James, I found myself at the White House, Barack and Michelle Obama invited us to screen Selma specifically, and I remember when I received an email I sent straight to my garbage because I thought it was fake. Indeed, the email says, White House, and you want my passport and Social Security? Yes, there's no way (laughter) a week later I'm in the White House theater with Michelle, and she's not going to be able to do that. Popcorn's over there, keeping himself at home, Sam Rockwell, wow, Richard Madden. Yes, I'm not going to top that... DIEGO LUNA I started working when I was really young and a scary movie as a kid that no one has seen, and the first time I made a horrible movie here, it was screened everywhere. What kind of movie? The film opened in every country, and I was like, That's what Hollywood did with your career, Billy Porter, I've been in this business for 30 years, but they're just starting to pay attention. That's when I arrived at ROCKWELL for me, these little moments where you meet people you admire like Kathy Bates or Don Rickles Hughes? Hugh Grant Bah It's been a long time since everyone was good to me [in Hollywood], it's hard to remember. After I did four weddings and a funeral, and I came out as an unknown actor hitto (laughter), and suddenly a big studio man sent me a basket, you know, there was an endless basket, Rockwell. It's fun to turn the lights on or off in a large suite, and people used to say something special to me, like, think about you. I just met you today (laughter). The level of fakeness is great. I've enjoyed it so much. Grant, I've never spent time here [in Los Angeles] to be honest with you. I didn't make a movie [or just] a small film I made here, so I still feel like an outsider. I remember the first time I arrived here, pre-four weddings, I came out to my girlfriend and I checked in at the hotel and the man behind the counter said (put on an American accent) OK and how do you take care of your room? We didn't say that in England, so I said, As good as I can be, it's as tidy as I can be (laughter). At this stage of your group career, the role you each are tired of approaching? I played Romeo for about 10 years in different ways, I literally played when I was 21, and when I was 30 I checked that box. Porter, I was labeled early on as a flamboyant clown, and I fought that for decades. No one thought to stop the show straight - it was fun and wonderful - but in the end I was at this moment in my life where I could play that character as a fully developed human being, and not just a two-dimensional version set up for entertainment and lived long enough to see that it happened on my terms, so great. Rockwell, yes, I can take a break from racism. Long breaks (laughter) and I play a lot of rednecks - the country is probably a better way to put it. It is. I'm a kid in town and they always try to throw me on a horse or get a lasso or something. Grant, I'm so happy that I don't have to play a piece of women anymore. At school I went to all the boys and I was a lovely kid and I just played girls for 11 years and quite well I have to say. I'm a very good Brigitta Von Trapp in my white dress with a blue satin sash, but it's good to play with the guy again (laughter)LUNA. After Y Tu Mamá También for 10 years, I was offered the role of a young child kissing his best friend. I remember the director saying to me that I know this isn't a role, but can you bring that light to this, and you go like no, because it's very hard. I loved that film, but suddenly the character became more than anything I could do as an actor. It's what movies make audiences feel more. Suddenly you can relate to your childhood and they want me to be a kid who has fun and doing things they didn't do, JAMES, the first thing that popped into my head was a period piece. I'll stay away from it for a minute. You're doing one after the next for stretching there. James, yes, and playing historical figures is great. I play Jesse Owens and John Lewis and have a lot of pride that comes with playing that kind of person, but at the same time you get this feeling that people in Hollywood think you only existed in the 1940s or '50s and you can't do anything contemporary, Hugh. Does it feel like a box at that time? But it's not the one you can complain about. I got a ton of money. I'm very lucky, and most of those romantic comedies I can look squarely in the face - one or two are shocking, but overall I can look them in the face and people like them, and I firmly believe that our job is entertainment. It's not a bizarre religious experience exercise. I see us as artisans with the firemen and the ones who fix and the ones who push the dolls. I'm saying, Help yourself, okay? Billy, before the post, you'll be sent to the next part. After a section in Hollywood, how close are you to throwing towels and what keeps you going? Porter is black and gay and comes out with a lot of unemployment. It's a double layer of being a person of color in this industry, then a layer of being queen. No one sees you otherwise. If the flamboyant is not in the description of the character, no one will see me forever for anything, which will not be very angry if it goes in the other direction, but it is not because straight men play. Everyone wants to give them an award: thanks for gracing us with your straight presence. So here I sit, I can't get a gay part, I can't get a straight section. The theatre was quite kind, but I would go in and put myself on tape and Y'all said it was flamboyant, then not a callback, not a not-nothin', he was too flammable. I'm going to kill someone, and I've got something else going on. I'm directing Topdog/Underdog at the Huntington Theatre. So I wrote, I was directing, and I finally liked it. I don't need to do this anymore. Ryan Murphy wants to see you for a show called Post. For the rest of you, what are the most challenging points of your career and how do you beat them? I've been doing 11 months where I'm broke and nothing. I turned down a theatre gig - a small theatre gig - because I wanted to try and do a camera show, and the offer stopped coming after you rejected them for a while and you went. Right now I've ruined a bit of my career and I don't get the camera. I'm going to shoot myself in the foot, and then I get Game of Thrones [Madden played Robb Stark for the first three seasons], and that changes things a little bit (laughter) to the difference, namely when I'm unemployed, I took everything. Even worse. The sooner I take it, the sooner I'll be able to take it. As you know, the project is not good when you sign? I used to call them Euro Rockwell puddings, yes, yes, yes, so I remember director Gonzalo [Suárez] literally couldn't speak English. So they have a local guy who will translate English from a local university and he has never been on a film set before and he doesn't understand the strategy. He used to come to the actor after the reception and say, yes, Gonzalo said 'it's less wood', it's a very difficult record to use (laughter). Madden We've all heard of it. Stefan, one thing you say draws you to Homecoming is that it's a rare opportunity to play a colorless character. How is it different from previous proposals and why is it refreshing? James, often when you get a breakdown for these characters, it's a hard pill to swallow when you see African-Americans being just explained in one way. In the past, James, African Americans, had been very one-dimensional writers, maybe they were living some kind of life, maybe they weren't educated, maybe they were some kind of criminal. For the work we're taking out in the world. So for me it means a lot that I have this character in Homecoming that doesn't say African-American. In the breakdown, it might be a good sign that the Caucasian I'm acting like Julia Roberts, who I grew up watching. And this is mine, it makes you feel invincible - that people see you in a different light, and while I don't think it's so important that [the character] is black for the story, it's important in life that he is, you know? It's important for kids who watch it, Porter, and for adults who watch it, that's one of the powerful things for me to watch it in another era where if you're not playing a thug or a drug dealer, you're not working at a certain age. Hopefully you guys will speak with the emotion that these project calls have taken on you. At the end of the bodyguard shoot, I believe you question whether you want to continue acting. Am I eligible? Madden, yes, at the end, I'm like, I have to stop doing this for a while because it's so heavy on me. I'm very lonely in the meantime, you spend a lot of time in other people's clothes, say other people's words, think of other people's thoughts, you lose yourself a little bit, and I'm not an actor in any way, but you get a big hangover, and at the end of that I feel broken like a character, physically and mentally exhausted. I know we're not cancer-treating, but you're giving everything she has. Diego Before You Sign Narcos: Mexico Scout Place Killed Later, you have said that because of that devastation, it becomes more important for you to do the series. Why, what do you expect to portray with this show? Luna first because I live in Mexico, and the fight is going on. It was a harsh time for my country and it was interesting to revisit my childhood and Mexico's '80s from this perspective because my father tried to hide this Mexico from me. Now that everything is starting to make sense, the story has been told [before] in the wrong way — which is very convenient for many criminals who are not in the prison who are currently in the country. The show begins in the early 80s, with more than half a million people dying in Mexico. So the idea of making sure that audiences around the world think about when they are going to have a line of cocaine makes sense, and it's interesting to jump into this accessible project that can tell people that this is our problem, and it's quite complicated because, yes, we have the longest border between the first world and the third world, we happen to be the neighbors of the biggest drug consumers, and it's quite unfair to be honest, and the story hasn't been told that way - drug dealers are often the bad guys and there. Good people chase them and it's more in the gray area what's actually happening. The involvement of the military police government on both sides of the border, it is important for this gigantic business to exist. So it's a great opportunity to start a conversation from a different perspective. I know how well this series has been in the United States. But what is the reception like in Mexico? At first, people were very important to us. People want to say, don't tell the story of Los Narcos, stop it with Mexico again, and I agree, but now we're at war, and Mexico needs this conversation. The violence has started to hit the city and it's getting very close, and now everyone has a story and that has to stop, and I think TV is willing to take risks, yes, for entertainment, but also planting seeds that hopefully can bring change. Are you worried about your own safety? No more than before making a transaction because I live there. I have children and I still choose a city that will be my city. So I will struggle to try to make it a safe place, always because that's where all my love stories are. Hugh, at first you were reluctant to make TV. Why and it's about this project that makes you change your customizations? It's just pure spying, but I've done Florence Foster Jenkins with Stephen Freres and he sent this to me [a very English scandal], it's three scripts and I think television? I don't do television, and I read it, and I know everyone's doing TV now - I can't help a little bit for the old days of glamour and cinema with a lot of people in them, anyway, it's gone (laughter), but I have to say, I don't know which part he wants me to play, Freres is very good at things that have seen me that I've never seen for sure, and he said Jeremy Thorpe [a liberal member of Congress who was upset by a disgruntled former lover, played by Ben Whishaw, in 1970s England]. So I have to say yes, and then I spent a good year panicking about it. Then the project was delayed and I spent a year researching this character. I met anyone who knew him and I read every book and I watched him on YouTube, maybe that helped. Maybe it'll make me better. I don't know, talk to us about watching the show, especially the early gay sex scene with your 89-year-old father, Grant. For my horror, I went around. When the show just came out on the BBC and he said, Now wait, isn't your [gay] movie on TV tonight? So I had to sit there with my old dad. Look at this [scene] where I brought Vaseline into the room and spread it on Ben Whishaw, and it was at a point where my dad said, I think I might go to bed now(laughter). Is there anyone involved with the awkwardness of that moment? Sex scenes and watching mom have never been fun. I always [try to prepare her], but sometimes you forget and tea spill out or close your eyes! I didn't warn my mother because she suffers from anxiety, so it's one of the things I let her go through what she went through. Sam, I read that you consulted a therapist about your role. He's a complicated guy [he's been married many times and been involved in special affairs] and, as Hugh said, I'm showering deep in this and it's probably a little mess with your head, but there's a lot of elements to play with him, like the dance section. Early in the morning, the choreographer brought me together with this young woman who was a dancer and I was fascinated by hoofs and I was crazy about it. But I realized I wasn't a dancer and I worked very hard (laughter). Porter, you're doing great, Rockwell. It's me. There's no stunt double (laughter), Billy. It's not the role you play in the end. That confidence came from being able to push back and say, Wait a minute, I think there's another role here for me. Porter, I get a script and it's for a dance teacher outside the world. And that's where Tony and the Grammys gave you confidence, and age! so I went in and auditioned and then I spoke to [casting director] Alexa Fogel. Whatever y'all want me to do, I'll be there for it, but what about one of the mother's houses? And she said, Ryan wants to be transgender, which is the best idea ever, and I've just directed a play for a public theater writing program with four transgender actors of color in it, so I'm saying, I work in that world, the talent is there, there's no chance to cut their teeth. Many actors and actresses are really green and you need someone there to be a dad, right? I'm right here. I got a call a couple of weeks later. Ryan thinks you're right, if you can come in and do an emcee imitation of Paris is burning, he'll develop something for you and I think if I can...? three weeks later a character named Pray Tell and we go out to race for the rest of you have changed that you're fighting for, or the direction to take your character that might not be in the face and how it turned out? Grant. Grant, I'm very disturbed, and maybe I'll do it to you. I tend [to think she is] quite disturbing and difficult (laughter). I got better when my power dropped, but when I had a little power, I was heavily involved with the script and the casting and crew down to what the poster would look like in Italy. Do you have an opinion on it all? Really crazy, crazy. And I'm alive, I have kids. People listen, or are they fighting against you? They pretend to listen — they're not MADDEN, you're interested in production, then if you want to have such a [controller]? I don't know if you've accomplished it, but it's like driving from the back seat, you just rip your hair off while the other person is driving, saying no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no I'm worried about doing things like intervention because I'm worried what my own motivation is for it, especially when it comes to things that are near you, or you've experienced that I don't want to therapy myself through. I don't want myself to come in and affect it because I'm trying to understand something in me. I'm always afraid, and sometimes my journey because I end up not connecting with something out of fear that is some therapy for me and I have to not allow myself to do that. I used to be a pain in the buttocks, but with directing, suddenly you're telling other people's stories and trying to read their views and perspectives, and to honor that view and it's very tiring, and sometimes you work with a substance and you don't know it before and you have to go on and get to the end. After I directed my first film, I called a few directors. [I work with] say, I'm sorry (laughter), but it changes when you go through that process, actually having to answer every question and sound safe to convince everyone that I know what I want when you [really]. I can't. It's impossible. Hugh, I want to experience what you're saying, which I hope you can elaborate on: every actor in the world likes to play darker characters. In Shakespeare's time, I'm sure everyone wants to play Tybalt, not Romeo Grant. No one wants to be a good person. Will everyone agree? All yes. More fun to give all those parts, but the interesting question is, why? I think it's because we know deep down that wicked people and good ness are very thin veneers. So when you're dark, it hits The Rockwell Chord, and it's epic. Are there things you guys hope you know about navigating fame and success that you know now? Give everything. Every decision I've ever made could be wrong. When I was here, she was now (to James) and now she's here. After four weddings and the world is my oyster, I should make interesting decisions and do things differently. But I repeat myself almost the same about 17 times in a row madden, but that's the problem because if you do something good, people go. Grant yes, I have to wait until all the romantic comedy has dried up before I've been offered anything else (laughter) Stefan. James, I think it's harder in a strange sense. However, the more eyes are on you, the more conscious you are. Suddenly I met these directors that I've loved my whole life, and now I'm going to have coffee and lunch with them and they know me and that's a good thing. But I think the decision will be more difficult. You're constantly thinking about what will challenge you next, something that will be different from what people expect, and then don't want to be saturated or do too much. For those of you who left any advice to offer about that navigation? Richard, if you Google your name, now you will see a lot of James Bond speculation MADDEN yes never google your name (laughter). Porter, I've been around enough who's never been online. Never Google, never read comments. Let the kids on social media do so MADDEN yes, nothing better from it, but I've never been more confident than when I'm not successful because I have nothing to lose, then something goes down well and it's getting worse and it's all in your own head and it should be a confidence boost, but you feel you have more to live up to and more to lose James yes MADDEN I have to try to be more relaxed on the journey of success and failure because you learn a lot of more when you fail. This story first appeared in the June 5 issue of The Hollywood Reporter magazine. To get a magazine, click here to subscribe. Subscription

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