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A List

Jim Sturgess on playing a Dad in Home Before Dark and going incognito in London

The actor talks to Sara Feigin about his Vancouver lockdown, playing a father figure and the blessing of being more famous in America

by Sara Feigin • New York • 25 May 2020

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Jim Sturgess is on the 32nd floor of a high rise apartment building in Vancouver, Canada when he calls me. Like most other people in the world, his 2020 is not going the way he had originally planned.

The British actor should be halfway through filming the second season of Apple TV's Home Before Dark, but instead he and his wife of barely a year, Dina Mousawi, are in lockdown in a rental apartment thousands of miles away from their home in London.

Sturgess has been acting professionally since the early 2000s, making his silver screen debut as the lead role in the 2007 movie musical Across The Universe and has not stopped grafting since.

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(Getty Images)

Over the years he's worked on blockbuster hits such as 21, Cloud Atlas and The Other Boleyn Girl, independent projects and multiple television series, being everything from a card shark to a detective to his latest role as journalist turned stay at home dad.

Home Before Dark sees Sturgess stepping into a new role for him where his main scene partner is child actress Brooklynn Prince whose career started at the age of 7, starring opposite Williem Dafoe in The Florida Project.

Jim Sturgess in 21 (2008) (Sony Pictures)

When Sturgess video calls me to discuss his role in Home Before Dark and how he's handling lockdown it feels like chatting with an old friend. It's unclear if this because we've both been lacking in outside human contact for so long now that any conversation out of the norm is welcome, or if Sturgess is always this warm of a person, I like to think it's the latter.

After two months of isolation and having some time for the world to digest the dark yet somehow family forward themes of his latest project, Sturgess has some very thought provoking things to say.

Season two of Home Before Dark stopped filming mid-season due to the coronavirus - what are you up to now?

I'm in Vancouver. We had started filming, and then we got shut down. We're all sitting here on hiatus waiting to find out what's going to happen next. We filmed about three episodes. We were in the middle of a scene, and they came in and said, "All right, we're going to have to shut the set down, and everybody's just going to go home."

(Apple TV+)

Are you in a house with outdoor space or are you stuck in an apartment?

I'm in a one-bedroom apartment on the 32nd floor of a big high rise building which is kind of amazing. We're able to go outside and go for a walk and stuff like that whenever you need, but it's hard being stuck in a one-bedroom flat that's not your own home. But on the flip side we do have views that are amazing that are keeping us sane at this point in time.

Did you try to get back to England or had they shut the borders due to coronavirus before filming came to a halt?

England had shut their borders already and even if I went back to England it would be very hard to come back again if we are able to get production back up on its feet. We were all kind of set to be here for the next six or so months anyway, so we all had apartments and everybody's kind of settled here. So most of the cast stayed in Vancouver.

How was having a child actress as your main scene partner - was it a different experience?

It is different. Of course Brooklynn [Prince] is just beyond amazing, and I knew very, very quickly that she was more than capable of getting to the places emotionally. But at the same time, she is eight years old, and you can't forget that. You have to try and keep everybody concentrated. I don't normally do a scene with another actress, and then when 'cut' is called, start playing around and making up songs and making up silly handshakes. There was just an extra layer, but I really enjoyed that. When I first watched The Florida Project, which is where I first saw Brooklynn acting, I knew that she was amazing.

NO
SLEEP
TILL
BROOKLYNN
VANS

You started acting when you were young, but you didn't start in Hollywood until you were in your twenties...

I did a few bits and pieces, some theater stuff back home. Then I sort of lost interest in it a bit. I was more into skateboarding and music and hanging out with friends. Then I picked it up again when I went back to university, and then I really got sucked into acting, as well as filmmaking. So I definitely have memories of being quite a young age and being involved in a theater production and memories of the older actors in those productions taking care. I really cherish those relationships I had with some of the older actors when I was younger.

You've played a dad in shows before, but it's never been the main trait of a character that you've played. Did you have to approach this role really differently than past roles you've done?

No more than any other role that you take on has a different set of rules on how you approach it because it's a different part, it's a different situation, it's a different dynamic. I didn't feel there was any difference in that. But I did really enjoy being a part of a family and making that family feel as real as possible. I remember really early on we did some scenes in the kitchen with the whole family, and I remember thinking how the energy had this sort of alive, kind of phonetic energy that a family has. It did make me think a lot about my own childhood. I remember those big family breakfasts where everything's chaotic, and people are all trying to rush off to school and getting their bags packed and eating breakfast at the same time.

What do you make of the 'hot Dad' comments?

I haven't seen them, but I'm very pleased. It's nice to hear! I think I was a bit nervous to play a dad. I wanted to make sure if you're going to do it, it was going to be in the right context and that it was going to be something interesting and it wasn't just a 'generic TV dad', that there was something sort of interesting about the character.

Do you use social media much?

I have an Instagram account, I like taking pictures, so I enjoy posting there. Instagram, for me I like the fact that you can promote your own work on it. A lot of us make independent films that don't get huge distribution deals. I've found loads of music and loads of films because of the people that I follow on Instagram that I wouldn't have necessarily found because there's no big poster campaign or there's no big online support for the project.

Do you have any projects in the works that you're working on or are you mainly focusing on Home Before Dark?

Home Before Dark took up a lot of time last year. I then shot an independent film straight after in Georgia. That's one of the great things about acting is you can travel to places that you would probably never normally go to. It's tucked right underneath Russia in between Russia and Turkey, so it's got Eastern European and Middle Eastern influences. I really fell in love with the place and met some incredible people and made some really great friends. It couldn't have been a further experience from shooting something like Home Before Dark. I was shooting some weird independent film in this beautiful but very unique country. And I literally did it straight off the back of doing Home Before Dark. I pretty much went from one set to the next. But it was great. And then it was really nice to have done that, and then I was able to take a bit of time off and spend some time back home in London.

Do you get recognized a lot or can you go around without being stopped?

I've always felt like I can go out and about. Particularly back home in London it's like nothing ever happened, which I found confusing at the beginning. But as time went on, I realized it was a real blessing, I could be pretty anonymous. I feel I'm probably more recognized in America than I am back home.

Sturgess with Ed Harris and director Jim Weir on the set of The Way Back (2010) (Newmarket Films)

Which actor has been a real inspiration to you?

I shot a movie called The Way Back with Ed Harris, which was about a bunch of prisoners who escaped a Soviet labor camp in the second world war. It's a true story about how the guys walked from Siberia to India. So the actors and the cast we were on set all day every day with each other, and we were the only people in the film. We were with each other all day every day out in the wilderness, in the woods and climbing deserts and mountains. It was a bigger experience than just making a film. Ed Harris was one of the other actors in the film, and we spent three months all day every day together. And we learned a lot from him, became good friends and have remained friends since. He was somebody that I really looked up to as a young actor.

Jim Sturgess Apple TV Interview home before dark

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