

screen time

with
Alice Wasley

Start from scratch



STAR Trek director J.J. Abrams (pictured), in Australia this week for the world premiere of the film, says the fact he wasn't a Trekkie before he made the film will help it appeal to a broader audience.

"My hope is that it helped because I wasn't holding it sacred and I wasn't looking at it like it was gospel or sacrilege to cast someone else as a character," he says, referring to original 1960s TV stars William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy.

"There are certain people who love it so much that though they might have done some things far better than what I do and did – they might also have been reluctant to take any chances. The fun of coming to this was that freshness, that sense of not knowing the world of it."

Film fully exposed

FILMMAKER Chris Waitt is planning to capitalise further on "the massive public humiliation" he endured for his film *The Complete History Of My Sexual Failures*. It is being remade into a feature film by Universal Pictures and he plans to make "a little documentary" behind the scenes of the filming of the Hollywood version.

"I'll just turn up on set and meet whoever is playing me, which I'm hoping is Owen Wilson," Waitt says. "I'm getting worried it might be someone as bad as Matthew McConaughey. Or I don't know how bad it could get."

Vicky Roach is on leave



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Contact us:
movies@dailytelegraph.com.au
9288 3000

To be forever young

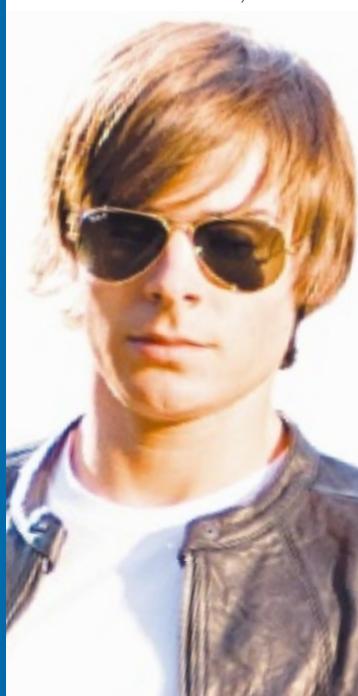
Always acting like a teenager is tough, writes **Alice Wasley**

THE title of Zac Efron's latest film could well have been his response when he was asked to do the film. As in: "17 again? Now that I'm in my 20s, surely I can ditch the high school films and graduate to college?"

If that is how things played out, which, given that people rarely converse in film titles, is unlikely, then Efron isn't letting on.

"Truthfully, in *17 Again*, although it takes place in a high school setting, the character is very removed from a high school," says Efron, who is best-known as the star of Disney's *High School Musical* franchise.

In the tradition of body-swapping films, including *Big*, *Freaky Friday* and countless others, *17 Again* tells the story of Mike O'Donnell (Matthew Perry), a 37-year-old who falls into a river during a mid-life crisis and is transformed into his 17-year-old self (played by Efron). "Adam Shankman, who



Teen pin-up: Zac Efron attracts hordes of screaming fans wherever he travels the world over

directed me in *Hairspray*, came up with the idea and he asked me about it," Efron says.

"I was intimidated at first – I didn't know what to think. I was scared to play a 37-year-old guy who's pretending to be a 17-year-old because it was confusing. I couldn't even wrap my own mind around it. It wasn't just another high school romance."

Twenty-one-year-old Efron isn't exaggerating about the romance element. His character has to dodge the advances of his own daughter while trying to woo his estranged wife Scarlet (Leslie Mann), who can't work out why she's drawn to a 17-year-old and finds it quite creepy.

Efron says he was initially daunted at the prospect of romancing Mann.

"On paper I was," he says. "But when it actually happened, when we actually started filming, the closer I got to Leslie the easier it was. It felt very natural."

Fortunately he already harboured a soft

spot for older women. "I think I definitely have a crush on Leslie. She's very sweet, very pretty and her personality shines," he says.

Efron was propelled into a level of fame that few people experience due to his role in the *High School Musical* films.

Emerging as a stand-out star of the franchise, Efron cannot travel to many places on the globe without attracting hordes of screaming girls.

"With *High School Musical* it was difficult to talk about the process or the filmmaking and it was much easier for journalists to talk about the popularity of it and popularity is a difficult thing to talk about," he says.

"Not that it's a sore subject or anything but what can you say? Personally I think that when anyone talks about it no matter how popular they are it always comes across as gloating."

While he is grateful for the leg-up *High School Musical* has given him, he is intensely focused on making the transition from tween idol to serious actor. He names Leonardo DiCaprio and Johnny Depp as role models.

"Since I was young it's been my

goal and my priority to always challenge myself to the fullest," he says. "I think I see that in Leo, I see that in Johnny, I see that with a lot of great actors."

Efron says "it's incredibly easy to do what's comfortable", which might explain his decision to drop out of the *Footloose* remake.

"It was more along the lines that I was looking for a new challenge, and this was another musical," Efron told *US Weekly*.

Whatever Efron decides his next move will be, it is not a decision he will take lightly.

"Every time I think to myself, 'Man, I wish I could go back and just miss that [*High School Musical*] audition. Life would be so much easier right now.'

"But then I visit my friends who are in college and they are every bit as busy as I am. Every time I think I've got it too rough or I start to feel sour, I remind myself I could be taking mid-terms right now."

17 Again opens today

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