



ACTOR

GEOFFREY RUSH

He's always taken a shine to extreme roles and now the Oscar winner, 62, is ready to play a mythological god

I imagine, has an element of pressure to it [Rush laughs]. How do plaudits like that sit with you? To know we've reached a point where so many of our actors now are not only household names in Australia, but internationally... It's not so much for David Denby's accolade, but the fact we can now even be considered in that kind of reference from an American critic

in New York who, you know, two generations ago would have probably not even known where Australia was, there's a certain sense of reward in that.

I heard the biggest diva you've worked with was the capuchin monkey that played Jack in Pirates of the Caribbean. If we could ask the monkey if you had any diva-like qualities, what would it say? That story came up on a few chat shows. People wanted gossip – "Is there anyone you've worked with who's had a meltdown?" – and there wasn't, actually.

I've chosen projects that have been very harmonious. But I'd always say, "There was one female performer that I worked with..." They trained the monkey to have absolutely no rapport with me at all. If I suddenly pulled out a sword and yelled, "Fire!" the monkey would freak out.

Is it true that when you won the Best Actor Oscar for Shine, your mum fell off her chair in shock? [Laughs] I didn't see it. Apparently what happened is that the Nine Network, which carried the live broadcast, really looked after her because my wife and I had gone [to the Oscars]. At that stage, I remember, we had no money

because I'd had no income and we only had the two flights. So Nine took her to watch the live feed – in those days, they used to hold the broadcast 'til night-time – and when they put up the little pictures of the nominees, they also added a box for my mother. You've got five people, all with expectant looks, when my name's read out... And the audience probably didn't see anyone's reaction because all they saw was my mother just all of a sudden bouncing out of frame in a state of ecstasy.

You live in Melbourne with your wife, Jane, an actor, and your children [Angelica, 21, and James, 18]. Has making the choice to raise your family in Australia paid off? For sure. I mean, it's what we wanted and it's what happened. I suppose, when the international possibilities started happening for me to do films – even then, in the mid '90s – I didn't think, "Oh, well, I'll have to be LA-based," because that wasn't for me as a character actor, who was probably put into the too-hard basket after a film like *Shine*.

What's next for you? I'll be playing Ra, the Sun God, in *Gods of Egypt* with Gerard Butler, which is filming in Sydney. It's a madly mythological role you probably wouldn't even get to do on stage, let alone film. But on film, now, they can do that. He's the guy that runs the boat that pulls the sun around the earth every day, and I thought, "That's a challenge." **ALICE WASLEY**

The Book Thief is available on Blu-ray, DVD and Digital HD from Wednesday.

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You've said that what appealed to you about the character of Hans, in the World War II drama The Book Thief, was that he was an ordinary man. A lot of your characters have been more extraordinary and required you to show off a bit more. Is it your natural inclination to be a bit of an extrovert? I've often thought about this because, before I seriously got into films, I did spend about 25 years honing my craft, working in repertory companies and playing lots of different things. I gravitated towards the classical end of the theatrical spectrum, where the great plays are Greek or Shakespearean or Chekov, or whatever. I tend to work on a fairly bold and all-encompassing scale, where a whole world is put into a play. And so, I suppose, in terms of the things that came my way in films, I naturally had an inclination towards playing an extreme character like Peter Sellers or Marquis de Sade, or even David Helfgott. *David Denby, a film critic for The New Yorker, once said he considers you "not just one of the great Australian screen actors, but one of the great actors, period". That sort of statement,*

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