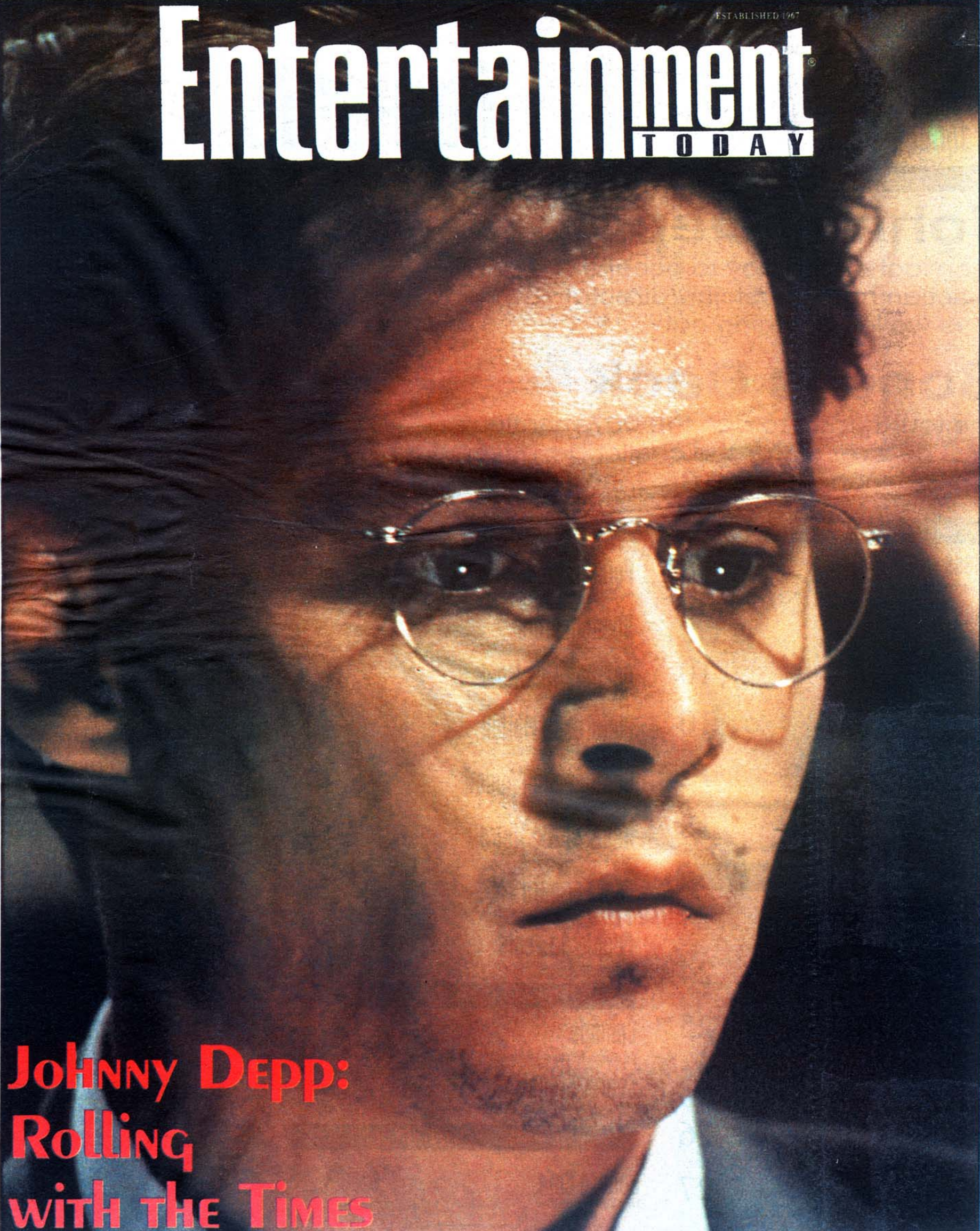


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**JOHNNY DEPP:
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JOHNNY DEPP'S TIMES ARE CHANGING. . . AGAIN

In his newest role as action-adventure hero, the versatile actor bravely dives into more uncharted territory

BY REBECCA KRAUS

From success on the TV show "21 Jump Street," he went on to play a teary-eyed musical delinquent in *Cry-Baby* and a forlorn outcast in *Edward Scissorhands*. He performed uncanny pantomime in the offbeat *Benny and Joon*, showed deep compassion in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, wore angora in a manic frenzy as *Ed Wood* and became the romantic, if not disillusioned, heart-throb in *Don Juan DeMarco* with Marlon Brando. With nary a critical setback for the depth and range of his feature film portrayals, Johnny Depp is still growing. There's been bad press, there's been wrong press, there's been intrusive press about his relationship with one slender cover girl, but based on his work alone, Depp can do no wrong. And it's equally impressive that what he has done has always been unpredictable and challenging.

In his latest endeavor, Johnny Depp plays a straight man, a suited accountant named Gene who happens to be a doting single dad. Gene also happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time when he is blackmailed into becoming an assassin targeting the campaigning governor of California. If he fails his mission to kill the governor in 90 minutes, his captors will kill his daughter. This is what thrusts the new action adventure film, *Nick of Time*. It is, again, an unpredictable role for the young actor, and proves his range beyond script or direction.

Johnny Depp, while being an actor's actor, also happens to be a bit of a renaissance man. As owner of Hollywood club the Viper Room, Depp has long played with a group of formidable musicians in P, the revolving house band. The band has just released an album on which Depp plays numerous instruments, including guitar, bass, piano, drums and sitar. He also co-wrote the screenplay with his brother for *The Brave*, a film that he will direct and star in next year. As if that were not enough, he will star in *Donnie Brasco* with Al Pacino.

For all these talents and endeavors, Depp still remains a bit of a mysterious character off-screen. Upon meeting him though, a fair description of the man is gentle and genuine. He talks about himself in a humble, quiet manner, sometimes a bit reluctantly, wholly grateful for his success, and always thoughtfully. His words come out piecemeal. He's contemplative, sprinkling his language with "I suppose," sometimes giving himself the luxury of a cerebral chuckle midsentence. Often, Depp is as dispassionate as *Ed Wood* was impassioned about making *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, which only adds

to the charm of a guy who seems so laissez-faire about a career that has been widely praised.

"From the beginning I suppose I've been really lucky. It's certainly beyond what I could have hoped for, being able to go to work with



people like Marlon Brando who's just an incredible man, teacher, friend, just an amazing human being. To be lucky enough to go to work with someone like him, Martin Landau, Robert Mitchum, Jerry Lewis, Faye Dunaway — it's unbelievable," Depp muses. *Nick of Time* hooks him up with some others who have become mainstays in entertainment, including Christopher Walken as the inevitable bad guy and John Badham, who went from directing a young John Travolta to an Oscar-nominated performance in *Saturday Night Fever* to *Wargames*, *Stakeout* and *Point of No Return* success. While Depp had to make it interesting to watch the movie's ordinary protagonist act in extraordinary situations, he also had to cross the barrier of audience expectations of him as an actor.

Director Badham comments, "Johnny Depp is a fascinating choice for this movie because what this character needed was a Jimmy Stewart of the '90s. Forget what you've heard about Johnny Depp tearing up a hotel room. Jesus Christ! I want to say lighten up on that subject. [He] is an energetic young man with passions ... but at his basic core he is the sweetest, nicest man you're going to talk to. His basic nature you cannot hide. You can pour mud on this man and there is a terrific person there." Badham knew that Depp's gentle sensibilities could bring integrity to the part of Gene. "He's got great instincts for the honesty. That's what's great about Johnny Depp. He is incapable of approaching a character in a dishonest way."

Chosen for the part due largely to this fresh-

ness, Depp is happy to have had the chance to circumvent more categorizations by the media with a story, he says, that kept him on the edge of his seat. "The idea of playing a straight role was very appealing and very challenging; it's difficult to play a straight man and keep it interesting and keep it honest."

Depp hopes this role will illuminate yet another side of his capabilities: "I've been trying to fight labels since I started working in this business. It used to be kind of teen idol, teen hunk, whatever those things were. Then it was rebel, bad boy, all that stuff. I did my best to combat those things. And then I suddenly started getting called oddball and strange, in doing these quirky, weird, kooky, wacky - whatever those words are that they use - characters. [*Nick of Time*] was a good opportunity to take a sharp right turn and fight those labels, again." For all the press Depp has received about his acting choices and the categories to which he has been assigned, much more has been said about his personal life.

"It's funny because I think the more that people write about my personal life, the more obtuse it becomes. It takes on all these different flavors and stuff, so you lose the point. [Stories] get rehashed and rehashed by all these different tabloids — it becomes so far from the truth that reality is deeply, deeply masked."

"It's ridiculous; at a certain point it becomes a game. I'm thinking of just starting the ru-



mors myself at this point. [in deep gossipy voice] 'I heard Johnny Depp went to the market and bought a side of bacon. He bought pork. How about that?? Fascinating!' Equally "goofy" are reports of his relationship with model Kate Moss who, according to the tabloids, he has wed many times. He jokes, "Yeah, we've been married seven times. It's a great thing to do. You get married, you get divorced. You get married, you get divorced."

It keeps it fresh." When it comes down to the attention Depp receives, the bottom line is this: "Some of it has been hysterically funny, some has been incredibly mean and vicious, so I really don't I have time for any of it. It's got nothing to do with my work."

That work is fairly constant, and certainly stands on its own when evaluating the young actor. Even though Depp can be heard on P's debut album or seen sitting in the director's chair for *The Brave*, he says he's quite content to continue acting. He doesn't know if he'll ever direct anything else or if any more records will be made. Let's dispel rumors right here then, shall we, of any albums entitled *Johnny Depp Comes Alive!* or *Depp & P: the Concert for Bangladesh*. No touring is planned. While music may have been the impetus for Depp's original move to California from Kentucky, its place in his life is determined. "Music has always been and always will be my first love ... It just so happened that I was playing with a bunch of friends of mine and some guy recorded it. That's really ultimately how it sits with me. I don't know when the record's coming out, I don't know anything about it... I'm not looking to do it as a career... Music is a great escape. [It] is really just therapeutic and rehabilitative for me... Any stringed instrument is an opportunity to sit down, forget myself and slobber - just sit there and be a vegetable." Depp adds that his creative urges are often impulses, not calculated career machinations. So why does he want to direct *The Brave*? "I don't know. I suppose 'cause somebody said I could... It's just an opportunity to be in the driver's seat, to try and express emotion through imagery and sound."

With all his current interests, it's surprising to learn of Depp's pool of inspirations. He reveres the pop culture of generations ago, with an interest in classic films and music recorded long before. "I haven't been to a movie theater," he states, then pauses to calculate. "I'm kind of proud and embarrassed to say, in about five years really, to actually go to a movie and buy popcorn..." He appreciates vintage silent films starring Buster Keaton, John Barrymore and Lon Chaney. And rather than mentioning modern hip musicians, Depp says he is as big a fan of Cab Calloway and Louis Jourdan as his is of the Sex Pistols.

You can't attach any labels to Johnny Depp: they simply don't stick. The scope of his creative projects defies just about everything except his own bravery. Nostalgic for things past, and talented enough to tackle any number of varied future projects, Depp chalks his budding, changeable career all up to fate: "I think things happen as they were supposed to happen." ■