

# Fashion and substance

Colin Firth may win an Oscar for his portrayal of a grieving gay teacher in *A Single Man*, writes **Helen Barlow**.

**T**all, square-shouldered and with impeccable posture, Colin Firth casts an imposing figure. He always looks good in a suit, too, which is just as well because during his publicity chores for his new film, *A Single Man*, he has been side-by-side with the immaculately groomed Tom Ford to promote the fashion designer's directorial debut.

*A Single Man* tells the story of George, a gay British university professor who is grieving the loss of Jim, his partner of 16 years. In the movie, Firth looks 10 years younger than his 49 years, possibly because he was having one of the great acting experiences of his career. He was awarded his first significant best-actor prize in Venice and has been nominated for an Oscar. Firth says he had no trepidation in playing a gay man or in working with a first-time director.

"Tom wanted to make use of the same sensibilities as his vision in fashion, somehow converting it into how you convey a narrative, and I completely understand that sort of thing," he says. "Tom's a highly imaginative, highly intelligent person with an extraordinary set of skills, so there was nothing but intrigue from the beginning."

Based loosely on Christopher Isherwood's novel and a screenplay by David Scearce, *A Single Man* changed greatly in the hands of Ford as the book is mostly an interior monologue about a man's mid-life crisis. Most

**Directorial debut ... Tom Ford in London.** Photo: AP



Former lovers ... George (Firth) with Charley (Julianne Moore), who wants to restart their relationship, in *A Single Man*.

significantly, Ford added the concept of George planning his suicide and had him looking at the world during his final day. He goes to work and, after resisting the sexual overtures of his angelic student Kenny (Nicholas Hoult from *About a Boy*) and a street hustler (Ford's James Dean-like house model, Jon Kortajarena), he finds comfort speaking to his friend and former lover Charley (Julianne Moore), who is also interested in reigniting their relationship.

After being warned by Jim's relative not to attend the funeral, George glides around 1962 Los Angeles with a strange optimism. He eventually returns to his sumptuous John Lautner-designed

house, which, like everything in the film, was chosen carefully by Ford.

"If people didn't know Tom's history, they would look at the film and think, 'What a beautiful cinematic sensibility!'" Firth says. "It would be nothing to do with the decorative elements."

"Yes, it's beautiful but to me, when I put George's clothes on, I didn't think they had been decorated by a fashion designer; I felt they spoke of George's desperation, his need."

"It's explicit at the beginning of the film - how he fastidiously put on a kind of body armour he needed to step out his front door. That's what the cuff-links and tiepin are all about. Pull one piece of that away and [he] could collapse."

The ever-prolific Firth, who turns 50 in September, is on a career high. He seemed to be everywhere last year, promoting films as disparate as anyone could imagine.

"Who could believe I would sing and dance in *Mamma Mia*?"

Certainly not me," he says of the musical. "I'd love to do a sequel just to be back with the same cast because we all enjoyed it so much. I think there's some fairly serious intention to do it in some way or another but it won't be with Abba songs, from what I understand."

Yet Firth doubts whether he has finally escaped his brooding image from the *Pride and Prejudice* television series.

"[Mr] Darcy will be dead when he's buried at the crossroads at midnight with a cross through his heart. I think a generation is going to have to die out. The number of times I've done something and people have pronounced his death and yet he lives and walks in some way or other. I don't care what happens to him, frankly. I'm getting on fine."

## A SINGLE MAN

Director **Tom Ford** Stars **Colin Firth, Matthew Goode, Julianne Moore** Opens February 25

COMING SOON

## North Face

Based on a true story, *North Face* follows two mountaineers, Toni (Benno Furmann) and Andi (Florian Lukas), as they try to climb the face of the famous Eiger, known as the Murder Wall. The press and the public watch the historic attempt from below, as well as Toni's former girlfriend and her boss, a committed Nazi, who has an agenda of his own in observing their fraught, possibly fatal, climb. Opens Thursday.

## Wog Boy 2: Kings of Mykonos

Nick Giannopoulos, the star of cult Australian hit *Wog Boy*, returns as unlikely hero Steve Karamitsis in the sequel. The former dole bludger inherits a beach resort on the island of Mykonos from a distant uncle. Expect high jinks galore as Steve is tempted by the prospect of a new life in Greece. It also stars Vince Colosimo as Steve's friend Frank. Opens May 20.



Lopez (left) in *The Back-Up Plan*.

## Prince of Persia: the Sands of Time

Jake Gyllenhaal buffs up to play Prince Dastan in this film from producer Jerry Bruckheimer, which is based on the hit video game. The sword-wielding hero teams up with bold princess Tamina (Gemma Arterton) to prevent evil ruler Nizam (Ben Kingsley) from securing a dagger with the power to help its owner conquer the world. Opens May 27.

## The Back-Up Plan

Romantic comedy veteran Jennifer Lopez returns to the genre in *The Back-Up Plan*. Zoe (Lopez) has finally given up on meeting Mr Right and decides to become a mother via artificial insemination. Unfortunately, on the same day as the procedure she meets dream man Stan (Alex O'Loughlin). As the pair date, Zoe must frantically hide signs of her growing baby bump and keep her secret from Stan. Opens May 27.

# Looking down the barrel

*The Ultimate Wave Tahiti* takes viewers inside the most notorious waves in surfing, writes **Tim Elliott**.

**I**n 2000, a young Tahitian surfer named Breece Taerea paddled out at Teahupo'o, a particularly dangerous reef break described as "unrideable" and "the world's heaviest wave". Attempting to punch through a four-metre monster, Taerea got sucked over by the lip and speared, head first, into the reef. He entered a coma but died two days later in hospital.

Teahupo'o, in all its horrifying reality, had arrived.

There are lots of scary waves in the world, including Hawaii's Banzai Pipeline and Waimea Bay, Cyclops in Western Australia and

Ours in southern Sydney (dubbed "Cape Fear").

But for sheer ferocity, nothing comes close to Teahupo'o, which *Tracks* surf magazine editor Sean Doherty nominated as the "wave most likely to be the actual cause of your death".

Now Imaax gives us *The Ultimate Wave Tahiti*, a feature-length exploration of this formidable chunk of ocean.

"This isn't your average surf movie," nine-times world surfing champion Kelly Slater says.

"It's filmed with a million-dollar camera, it's in 3D and it gets in

closer and tighter than ever before with perhaps the most insane wave in the world."

Slater is the main face in *Ultimate Wave*, which also features legendary Tahitian big-wave rider Raimana van Bastolaer, one of the first people to surf Teahupo'o in the mid 1980s. The film makes much of its underwater photography, exploring Teahupo'o's barrels inside and out, while explaining the extraordinary forces that shape them. "You learn how volcanic islands form and how outer reefs form and what makes them surfable," Slater says.

At the southern entrance of a pass a kilometre out to sea, Teahupo'o stares into 10,000 kilometres of unimpeded ocean, out of which steam some of the most powerful swells on the planet. Making the movie wasn't easy: Imaax's camera did not allow for replaying any footage at the end of the day. "It was hard to tell if we had nailed it or not," Slater says.

"So we just had to go as hard as we could for as long as we could and hope we got what we needed."

Of course, existential musings are de rigueur with surf flicks: here, Slater, the consummate



Carve or else ... Kelly Slater.

competitor, is contrasted with van Bastolaer, an avatar of the ancient Polynesian waterman. They could not be more different, yet both reflect surfing's reality.

## THE ULTIMATE WAVE TAHITI

Director **Stephen Low** Stars **Kelly Slater, Raimana van Bastolaer** Opens February 25 at Imaax Darling Harbour.