

Cotton self stripe shirt, \$169, by Herringbone. White cotton briefs, \$9, by Bonds. Starfish bracelet, \$5,200, by Elsa Peretti for Tiffany & Co.

'Derby' tailored pillowcases, \$80 each; white fitted sheet, \$90; white flat sheet, \$90; 'Vanderbilt' accessories pillow sham, \$80; Euro pillowcases, \$80 each; coverlet, \$400; European pillows, \$69.95 each, all by Sheridan.

Forthcoming sci-fi flick *Sunshine* will see Rose Byrne make a soaring leap into the unknown... and we're not just talking about the plot. Gentlemen, meet *GQ*'s dream girl as she teeters on the brink of megastardom. >

# Byrne voyage.

Words Nick Scott.  
Photographs Nick Leary.

Australia's brightest young star actually detests the sun. And so, with the mercury nudging 40, Rose Byrne is lurking, Gollum-like, in a dingy corner of a modest café in Balmain, Sydney. If advanced heliophobia sounds discordant with the 27-year-old actress's Bondi Beach upbringing, not to mention her name, it jars even more with the chimerical plot of her latest movie, sci-fi seat-clencher *Sunshine*.

"The sun is dying," she explains with rehearsed clarity, "and my character and five other people have been plucked from the top echelons in our fields and sent on a mission with a bomb the size of Manhattan strapped to the back of us to reignite it." She clocks my furrowed brow. "It's science fiction but with a streak of thriller. Quite intelligent — not just a straight-out schlock sci-fi. It's smart, how it unfolds."

*Sunshine*, which also stars Cillian Murphy of *Batman Begins* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* fame, and leading heart-throb-on-the-rise Chris Evans, is the latest offering from cult movie auteur nonpareil Danny Boyle (*Shallow Grave*, *Trainspotting*), scripted by *The Beach* author Alex Garland. The pair have pedigree when it comes to outlandish apocalypse scenarios (in their last collaboration, *28 Days Later*, the annihilation of the human race took the form of an incurable monkey virus), and they would never serve up such a batshit premise without also offering some sturdy twine from which viewers can suspend their disbelief: verisimilitude, with *Sunshine*, was paramount.

"Preparing to get into our roles," says Rose, "we met with a lot of guys in the aviation field — I play the pilot in the film — and we had quantum physicists, biologists, talk to us about space travel, and all these other concepts that to me are just, 'pheeew'. You have to build up a picture of the world these characters would have been living in; the level they'd be thinking on. We even talked to a futurist, who explained how they delay product releases like the iPod until the market is ready to make the transition — all this *Matrix*-y kind of stuff; the Big Brother-ish quality of large companies today."

She is referring, of course, to George Orwell's fictional dystopia, not the banal global exercise in TV twerp-gazing. The latter turns out to be a bugbear of Rose's ("It's kind of medieval — putting a load of people into a ring, and watching them fail, be ostracised, excluded. In sport you shake hands at the end and it's about skill — but this is about people talking crap...") but seems to have been an inspiration for Boyle's meticulous approach to method-directing: "All the cast stayed in university accommodation for two weeks together," says Rose. "It broke the ice more than anything, and helped with the dynamic. The idea in the film was we'd been on this ship for 16 months. It helped create the sense of ease you'd have after that time."

\* \* \*

The ever-humble Rose describes Icarus II — the fictional spaceship that has been her second home for almost a year — as the "real star of the movie", but *Sunshine* is likely to send her career on a similarly stellar trajectory. It's her first lead role in a major movie — perhaps what *Cold Mountain* was to Jude Law, or *Dead Calm* to Nicole Kidman. The leap comes at the end of a long run-up (her first movie, *Dallas Doll*, came when she was 12). She has weathered a failed attempt to enrol at NIDA, as well as another more prolific Australian celeb factory. "Yes, I went for the role of Selena [Cook, eventually played by Tempany Deckert] in

104.GQ

*Home and Away*, and did a soap subsequently [*Echo Point*] that never went anywhere — I think it turned out to be a tax break for Channel 10 — but I had my moment of soapy glory."

Turns in *A Family Affair* and *Heartbreak High* followed, but things took an upward turn when she was cast as the object of Heath Ledger's rather sweaty amour in *Two Hands*. At this point began what future Rosologists might call The Eclectic Phase, with performances including (deep breath): an emotionally scarred blind road-tripper in *The Goddess of 1967* (for which she won a best actress award at the Venice Film Festival); Natalie Portman's mute handmaiden in 2002's *Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones* ("That was easy — I just stood by her looking very serious."); a gold-digging, turret-dwelling beauty in Thirties England in 2003's *I Capture the Castle*; a nerdishly sexy, crayon-eating high-school chick in *The Rage in Placid Lake* (2003); a Trojan temple acolyte and mistress to Brad Pitt's invariably naked Achilles in *Troy* (2004); and a pre-French Revolution aristocrat in *Marie Antoinette* (2006).

Still to come are turns as a funeral embalmer in *Pushing Up Daisies* ("A little black indie comedy I did in Canada") and moll to Hugo Weaving's gangster in Twenties Sydney-set boxing movie *The Tender Hook* ("Very stylised with a cinematic feel," she says), the rehearsals of which have brought her here. But, diverse as her CV is,

*"I've got my life exactly how I want it. I have no boundaries."*

certain terms keep cropping up — movie-description chestnuts such as "love interest", "beautiful" and — above all — "sexy". Without detracting from Rose's adroitness and presence in front of a camera, her looks — softly sculpted, Celtic features (she is descended from Ireland and Scotland); that porcelain-doll blend of innocence and vulnerability that is conducive to period dramas — is never going to draw a blank from the casting couch.

"I was watching *Troy* when it first came out," Danny Boyle tells *GQ* of the time he spotted Rose. "All the stars were blazing away, and all the computer-generated ships were multiplying, when suddenly this girl walked on. Along with every other guy in the audience, I thought, 'Never mind Brad, Orlando, Eric — who is that?' She turned out to be Rose Byrne, an actress living in a rough area of London about two miles from where we're making *Sunshine*. A brilliant, beautiful actress and no overnights to pay. We cast her straight away."

As well as Rose's looks (and a small touch of parsimonious caution), Boyle was swayed by her mien: demure, with a veil-thin gossamer of mischievous, incisors-on-bottom-lip seductress. "There's no bullshit and no fawning with Rose," he says. "She's very quiet, and often quite solemn, but has an evil laugh when she wants to. She tiptoes into scenes, but through truthfulness and honesty walks away with them."

Boyle's not alone. Paul McGuigan, who directed her in *Wicker Park* (opposite Josh Hartnett) has described her as the best actress he has ever >

## The next Nicole Rose is one of many home-grown stars who may soon be thanking the Academy. And the nominees are...

### Isla Fisher

**Breakthrough role:** Scene-stealing borderline psycho in *The Wedding Crashers*.

**Upcoming:** Comedy, *The Pleasure of Your Company*.

**She says:** "Womanising, misogynistic men crashing weddings; I straightaway liked the story [of *Wedding Crashers*]."

**Buzz:** Hot. We love a lass who can send herself up on the big screen. Having Sacha Baron Cohen as her handbag doesn't hurt, either.

### Abbie Cornish

**Breakthrough role:** Town bike in *Somersault*.

**Upcoming:** *Elizabeth* sequel *The Golden Age* (with Cate Blanchett, Geoffrey Rush and Clive Owen).

**She says:** "If anything, I'd always wanted to be a vet." (See '7 reasons we love Abbie Cornish' on page 33.)

**Buzz:** Scorching. She has a killer body, is comfortable with on-screen nudity and is one of the most convincing young actresses of her generation. Need we say more?

### Holly Valance

**Breakthrough role:** For her first appearance on the big screen, she played a butt-kicking vixen in the poor-man's *Lara Croft: DOA: Dead or Alive*.

**Upcoming:** *The Tourist* (playing a Bosnian Muslim).

**She says:** "[My ex-manager] helped me become a star." She then fired him, breaking her contract, for which she was sued and forced to cough up \$350,000.

**Buzz:** Tepid. Despite a few bit parts on TV series and films, we're starting to think that her *Neighbours* role as Felicity may be her career highlight.

### Emma Lung

**Breakthrough role:** 2004's *Peaches*, in which she got steamy with the much older Hugo Weaving.

**Upcoming:** *The Jammed*, a gritty home-grown flick about the illegal foreign sex-worker trade in Australia.

**She says:** "I was so driven. I remember in Year 9 it would plague me — how was I going to be successful?"

**Buzz:** Simmering. With her exotic looks (a mix of Chinese, French and Scottish ancestry) and a mysterious family history (her great aunt was an ASIO spy), Lung has all the makings of an intriguing star.

### Melissa George

**Breakthrough role:** Ross and Rachel's lesbian "hot nanny", as dubbed by Joey, in *Friends*.

**Upcoming:** *30 Days of Night*, opposite Josh Hartnett; *In Treatment*, an Israeli-made TV drama.

**She says:** "I want things to happen yesterday."

**Buzz:** Temperature rising. With a career spanning *Home and Away*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Derailed*, there's no knowing where this flaxen-haired nymph will turn up next.

### Teresa Palmer

**Breakthrough roles:** An angst-ridden schoolgirl in Aussie film *237*, and recalcitrant teenager in *The Grudge 2*.

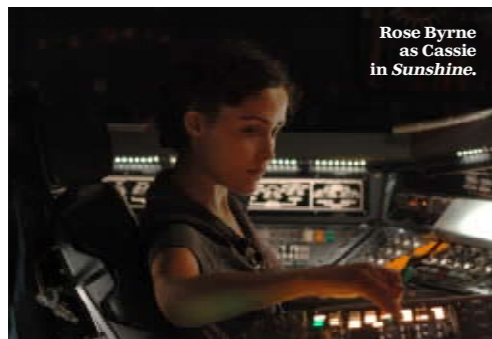
**Upcoming:** She plays the love interest of Harry Potter... sorry, Daniel Radcliffe in the coming-of-age film *The December Boys*, based on a novel by Michael Noonan, to be released later this year.

**She says:** "Acting is the only thing I'm really passionate about."

**Buzz:** Volcanic. She's the most exciting thing to come out of South Australia since the Snowtown bodies-in-barrels serial killings discovery in 1999.



Silk kimono, POA, by Akira. Cotton briefs, \$9, by Bonds. Silver peep-toe heels, \$1,105, by Gucci. Eternal ring in diamond and platinum, \$11,000, by Tiffany & Co.



Rose Byrne  
as Cassie  
in *Sunshine*.

worked with, while eight-time Oscar nominee, Peter O'Toole, has called her "a beautiful, uncomplicated, simple, pure actress". Inevitably, she's going through a few sex symbol rite-of-passages — from the inevitable Bond girl rumours (courtesy of *The Daily Telegraph*) to appearances on the 100 Sexiest Women lists at the racy end of the men's mag market. How does it fit into her career plan? The cackle. "You're the first person to tell me that. I can't take that seriously."

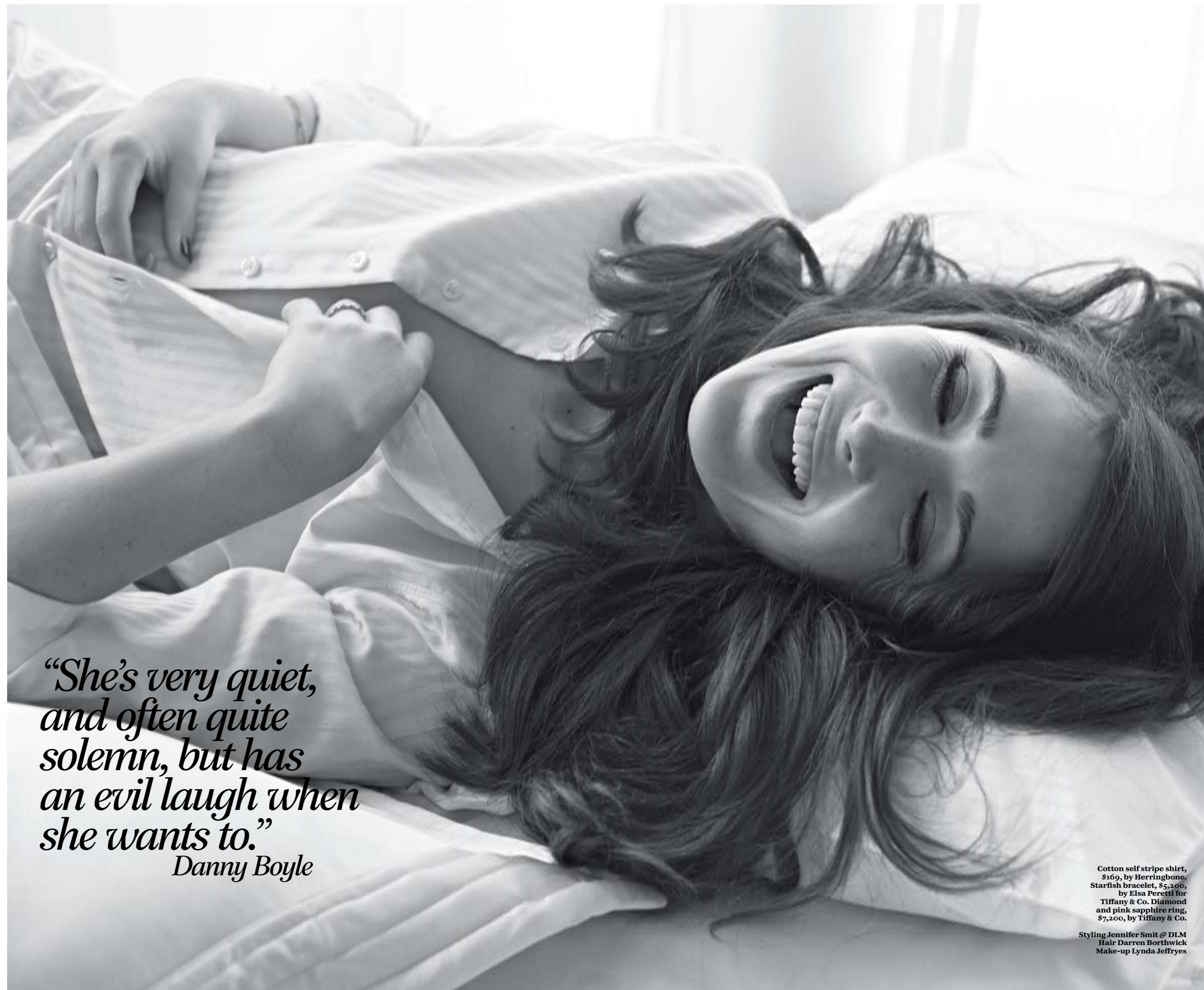
But then Rose Byrne doesn't take herself too seriously in general. Remarkably devoid of celebrity baggage, she batters crockery with the occasional hapless sweeping gesture; says the word "bollocks" more than "I", "me" or "my"; reacts to my borderline risqué questions with nothing more than a quick choke on her toast with Vegemite and a switch in expression from forlorn to vivacious; slags John Howard with visceral honesty ("Could you get a more utterly charmless man?") and spews soy latte back into its vessel gleefully when I relay Billy Connolly's remark that the PM is only on this planet to show us what Harry Potter may look like when he gets old.

She met her boyfriend, London-based Australian actor and writer Brendan Cowell, "Not on a set, but at a mutual friend's birthday party — a traditional meet." She lives in "a small neighbourhood, a little Ramsay Street, in Hackney" — a pocket of East London slowly being gentrified by the likes of Rose Byrne. She laughs — gutturally, unselfconsciously — all the time.

So how would such a no-frills starlet respond to the stratospheric rise that Boyle, McGuigan and this magazine all predict? What about the total recognisability, the swelling Wikipedia profile, the hoards of dictaphone-armed snoopers such as myself devouring her life like piranhas skeletonising a submerged horse? "People have been saying, 'You're on the brink' for ages now, but that stuff's intangible to me. If it happened, it'd be quite bizarre; I just don't think about it. The whole celebrity thing — there's only really 10 or 20 people in the world who are really that ubiquitous — huge household names — when you think about it. I've got my life exactly how I want it. I have no boundaries. I feel lucky to be working, and not have anyone following me around. My favourite actresses are actresses, not celebrities."

People on the cusp of big things have a clear-cut choice to make. Either Rose can become that nauseating kind of PR-committee celeb, spitting out clichés like some automatic tennis ball-serving machine flobbering bite-sized globs of slightly sweetened gruel; maybe end up selling her wedding pics to *People With Lives* magazine. Or, she may instead graduate from the Natalie Portman School of Dignified Fame — you know the type: all eloquence, integrity and vegan musician buddies. She's clearly smart, and the odds are shorter on the latter. Either way, the future looks Rosy. **GQ Sunshine** is out April 12.

106.GQ



*"She's very quiet,  
and often quite  
solemn, but has  
an evil laugh when  
she wants to."*  
Danny Boyle

Cotton self stripe shirt,  
\$169, by Herringbone.  
Starfish bracelet, \$5,200,  
by Elsa Peretti for  
Tiffany & Co. Diamond  
and pink sapphire ring,  
\$7,200, by Tiffany & Co.

Styling Jennifer Smit @ DLM  
Hair Darren Borthwick  
Make-up Lynda Jeffries

