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The Rupert Report

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One of the similarities, on the other hand, between Everett and his character is implicit in a line written by Everett himself: I'm tired of all the drugs and body issues and everything else gay.

"I do identify with that line, but it's not meant to be something critical," Everett candidly revealed. "I think it's a line that comes to everyone at age 40 on the gay scene, because the thing that gay people and women, really, have in common is that we begin to become—unless you're lucky genetically—invisible at age 40. So you do tend to start re-evaluating.... I am slightly bored of all that, for me personally, but on the other hand I think the body attention is also quite fabulous."

Despite my exhaustive research and careful packing for this press junket (I remembered to bring my nipple clamps and Play-boy), it turned out some of my fellow journalists knew a few things I didn't. Noting that this particular media frenzy was unique—in that it was arranged exclusively for reporters from queer publications—one thoughtfully asked why Everett, who masterminded the all-gay press event, was so keen on reaching out to smaller, regional gay publications.

"First of all, it's a film with the lead character who's gay, so, you know, obviously we want to make as many gay people as aware of the film as possible," Everett explained, adding, "My particular problem with the usual way that you'd promote that, i.e., in *The Advocate* and *Out* magazine, is that I don't terribly like those publications."

Although no one on the interview panel questioned his dislike for the two glossies—and some eagerly testified to their own disdain—Everett spelled it out: "I find that politically I'm not in line with a lot of those people, I don't really have a political enough stance. And I find that every time I've dealt with those magazines—and I don't really have any criticism of them—but if you don't share the political angle of these 'modern day prophets,' they tend to take quite a hard line for you.... I'm not suggesting that I've got you here so you don't take a hard line for me."

(This last comment was greeted by knowing smiles from the journalists, many of whom had come from much colder climes than Portland to bask in Miami's sun and Paramount Pictures' largesse.)

"I like very much the gay press that is more to do with practical events, like new drugs, club venues, hookers," he continued. "If I go to a town, the type of gay magazine I want to find is one which will tell me where to go and what's going on in that town.... I much prefer the idea of someone just leading through me in a club, so to speak, than showing myself up for

not having enough of a political line in an in-depth kind of wank-off in *The Advocate* or something."

Everett isn't limiting his outreach to the gay community, however. He believes *The Next Best Thing* will appeal to hetero audiences too, even while it deals with issues, such as "family values," that often divide queers from straight folks. Not that the professedly apolitical Everett would necessarily explain it that way...

"The thing that appealed to me about it—coming from *My Best Friend's Wedding*, where I didn't really expect to become so successful—was that I was looking to do another gay role that was still funny and accessible to middle-American straight people, not just a ghetto film, not just a specialized film," Everett said after a contemplative pause. "And the story of this seemed to me kind of ideal, because it's jokey and fun to start with and then it has a turn, which personally I like a lot. And it deals in the end with a series of serious subjects."

One of the things that was most beguiling for me was that you can be a practicing homosexual and a really good father, and I think from my point of view it was a very important thing to do."

Asked whether he approached the film primarily to advance his career or as an opportunity to have a social impact outside the movie theaters, Everett responded frankly and with less hesitation than before:

"Both things. It's obviously exciting for me to become more successful, because that's what actors are about, partly. But then it's also really exciting to be part of a movement to destereotype characters like this. I think this gay character is a really positive image for the most part, and I think it would be great if this film is very successful—there'll be a million more gay films happening...."

"My fantasy for this film has always been that if every gay and lesbian person came

to this movie it would be more successful than *Titanic*, and if that happened there would be so many movies coming out with gay and lesbian characters, because all Hollywood needs is the financial incentive. It's a great opportunity for gay characters to join the Hollywood family in a mainstream way. It means, if this film really worked well, there would be a lot more opportunity for a lot of other things that went further, more diverse."

It's been rumored that *The Next Best Thing* met with a lot of resistance from anti-gay forces in the entertainment industry, but Everett disagreed strongly, saying that Hollywood's reputation for homophobia is overblown.

"People always say Hollywood's homophobic, but Hollywood's not really homophobic, Hollywood's just business oriented," he explained. "So whatever's gonna make the money is what they're interested in; they don't really have homophobia. I think films like this are very puzzling to them because they're not sure where the audiences are, if there's an audience, if one audience is gonna be turned off because it's too in your face."

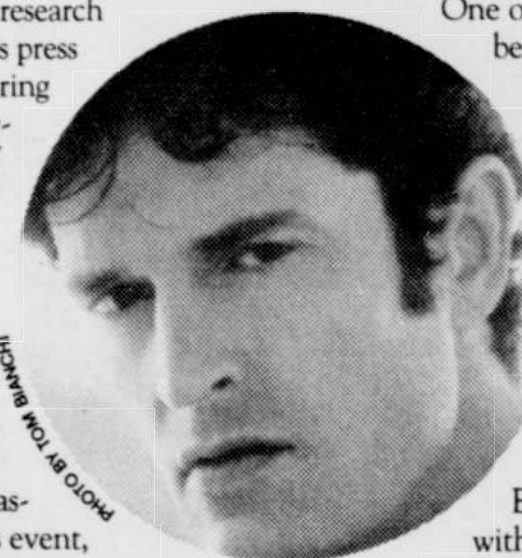


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