



Benedict Cumberbatch as Patrick Melrose

Money, debauchery and drugs

Benedict Cumberbatch's Patrick Melrose 'cuts to the heart of a rotten class system'

BY ADRIAN LOBB
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Benedict Cumberbatch's recent achievements are quite dazzling when spoken out loud.

Saving (or potentially destroying) half the universe as Doctor Strange in Marvel's record-breaking box office smash Avengers: Infinity War, finishing Sherlock – for now at least, getting an Oscar nomination for The Imitation Game, starring in a sell-out run of Hamlet at the Barbican, being made a commander in the Order of the British Empire, performing on stage with Pink Floyd, marrying theater director Sophie Hunter and becoming a parent. And now he's playing his most extreme character to date – damaged, drug-addicted, debauched high-society playboy Patrick Melrose, in a TV adaptation of Edward St Aubyn's high-octane-novel series.

"I have squeezed quite a bit of life in, you are right. Who would have known?" he says. "It is extraordinary. I've been a very lucky man. I have a lot of people to thank, because it has been a wonderful time. It really has."

It's not all luck, though, right, Benedict? You're allowed to take a bit of the credit.

"Of course. Of course it takes hard work

and all of it is the result of something, but I often just stand back and go: 'How? Why?' It is extraordinary that all this stuff keeps happening to me," he sputters.

"And yeah. It reminds me, every step, how lucky I am."

Visiting Comic-Con in 2017, where he signed thousands of autographs and posed for pictures with hardcore fans, was, he says, a reminder of how far he's come.

"People dress up as all sorts of things. There is a lot of Star Trek and Strange and Sherlock, of course," says the 41-year-old, who recently defended the hardcore fandom, describing Sherlock co-star Martin Freeman's comments about them taking the joy out of the show as "pathetic."

"What I love about what I get to do is that I don't have to sit in a role for long. But then you put your arm round someone to pose for a photo and they go: 'I really loved you in Stuart: A Life Backwards.' That is lovely. There is a huge amount of emotion attached to so many of these roles for me and I am quite sentimental about some of them."

But where is he going next? Well, having launched production company SunnyMarch – the brains behind BBC One's The Child In

Time which aired last September, for the first time Cumberbatch is in full control of his own artistic destiny.

So far, most of the films and TV shows SunnyMarch has announced will star Cumberbatch. But how does it feel to be involved in the creative process from page to screen, using his star power to shape the culture?

"Oh, god, that sounds terrible," he says. "Like I'm deciding what TV or movie you watch."

Well, next up he's making us watch Patrick Melrose, which explores issues around class, addiction, abuse and survival. It's fear and loathing in the aristocratic set – and Cumberbatch is perfect for the role.

He describes the series as offering a "scalpel-like post-mortem of an upper-class system that's crumbling".

And Melrose himself, whom Cumberbatch will play in his early 20s in the opening episode right through to his late 40s in the finale? "He's addicted to drugs and near suicidal, but also incredibly funny and brilliant," he says.

For the role, he spent time with the Liverpool-based 3D Research Bureau to learn more about addiction and abuse.

"Most important was the drive beyond the appetite, the addiction, the psychological need these destructive drugs create," he explains.

"What are they replacing? With heroin, pretty much everyone I've spoken to says it's about the warm embrace you never got from your mother. The relief from the suffering of existence.

"The type of person who struggles with addiction, the type of person who has experienced abuse, sadly ranges across all class divides and so there is a universality to this that I think will translate."

It's not all money and debauchery and damage and destruction, says Cumberbatch (although some might dispute this after watching episode one). "This story is about how the true wealth is love, and how true, pure, good, innocent love can win through. But boy does it struggle to get there."

The actor lists Big Little Lies and Twin Peaks among his own recent television highlights, plus Al Pacino in The Panic in Needle Park, which he watched as part of the mood music for Melrose.

But it's the role as executive producer that has captured his imagination just as much as the on-screen hijinks.

"It has been a big learning curve and a blissfully happy experience for all concerned. It really worked. It really is a people business and if you get that alchemy right, and choose a good, industrious, challenging and kind team, you make for a really good working environment which is very productive," he says.

"What is exhilarating is the chance to be creative in different ways. We are making the kind of content I would like to see and I am proud of – that is really thrilling."

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– BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH



Money, industry and drugs

President Clinton's health care plan is the focus of a bitter new battle.

By [Name]

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President Clinton's health care plan is the focus of a bitter new battle. The White House is trying to force a vote on the plan in the House of Representatives, but the House leadership is trying to delay the vote. The plan is a major part of Clinton's agenda, and it is expected to be a major issue in the upcoming election.

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