

# Born again star

Having clinched Oscar nods for his acting talents, and struck upon a box office smash hit for a directorial debut, Bradley Cooper might be forgiven for taking things easy — but the star sees his recent successes as just the first step on a new journey in Hollywood

**B**radley Cooper sets his standards high. As a young boy growing up in Philadelphia, he acquired a love of film from the moment his father began taking him to a cinema located one street over from their home. “He turned me on to all those 1970s auteur movies,” Cooper recalled.

“I was really young. I remember seeing *The Elephant Man* when I was like, 12, and *Apocalypse Now*, *Network* and *The Deer Hunter*.

“I loved those movies so much. I would just sort of live in the fantasy of whatever the feeling was after the movie was over. Living next to a movie theatre, that was utopia.”

That was the beginning of a journey that set him in pursuit of Hollywood. The latest zenith on that journey is *A Star is Born*, the 2018 movie which earned him three Oscar nominations for best director, actor, and best picture (as producer).

“The movie changed me,” Cooper observed.

“Everything one does that demands that you go to places in yourself and tackle things that scare the daylight out of you will do that... It’s a personal movie and after working on it for four and a half years it doesn’t belong to me anymore, it belongs to the public.

“I’ve enjoyed sharing it because I don’t want to create art in a basement with two buddies —

I do want to create art I can share with people.

“I’ve always been very ambitious and I’m aware that in this business you need to make the most of your time because success doesn’t last forever. I want to work as hard as possible and have a much fun as I can doing something I love very much. I always dreamed of having these kinds of opportunities and I want to achieve as much as I can for as long as I can keep working at this level.”

Cooper succeeded in investing in his remake of a classic Hollywood with the kind of screen magic that inspires audiences.

*A Star is Born* captured the spirit that has long driven him as an actor; even though he tried to learn as much as he could about the process of filmmaking before realising his other ambition — directing. “I’ve wanted to be a director since I was a kid,” Cooper said.

“I always knew, goddamn it, I’m gonna have to at some point put it out there and make my directorial debut. And then I was like, when am I gonna have the guts to do it?”

“On every film set I tried to learn everything I could by watching directors and trying to figure out what it takes to tell a great story.

“So when I had the chance to make [*A Star is Born*] I told myself that this was it.”

The 45-year-old Cooper paved his way to success by graduating from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. in 1997 with a degree in English literature. In the course of his studies, Cooper also spent six months as an exchange student in Aix-en-Provence, France where he became fluent in French. He then went on to earn an MFA degree in acting from Actors Studio Drama School at The New School in 2000.

He then slowly worked his way up the Hollywood ladder with a series of strong supporting roles until he attained stardom with the first of the *Hangover* films in 2009 followed by his Oscar-nominated performances in *Silver Linings Playbook* and *American Sniper*.

Directed by Clint Eastwood, the latter film saw Cooper star as Iraqi war veteran Chris Kyle and provided him with an opportunity to observe the veteran actor/director at work and gain the confidence he needed to embark on his own multi-hyphenate journey.

**“A STAR IS BORN WAS THE PERFECT SANDBOX TO EXAMINE ALL THE THINGS I WANTED TO INVESTIGATE AS A DIRECTOR”**

**BRADLEY COOPER**

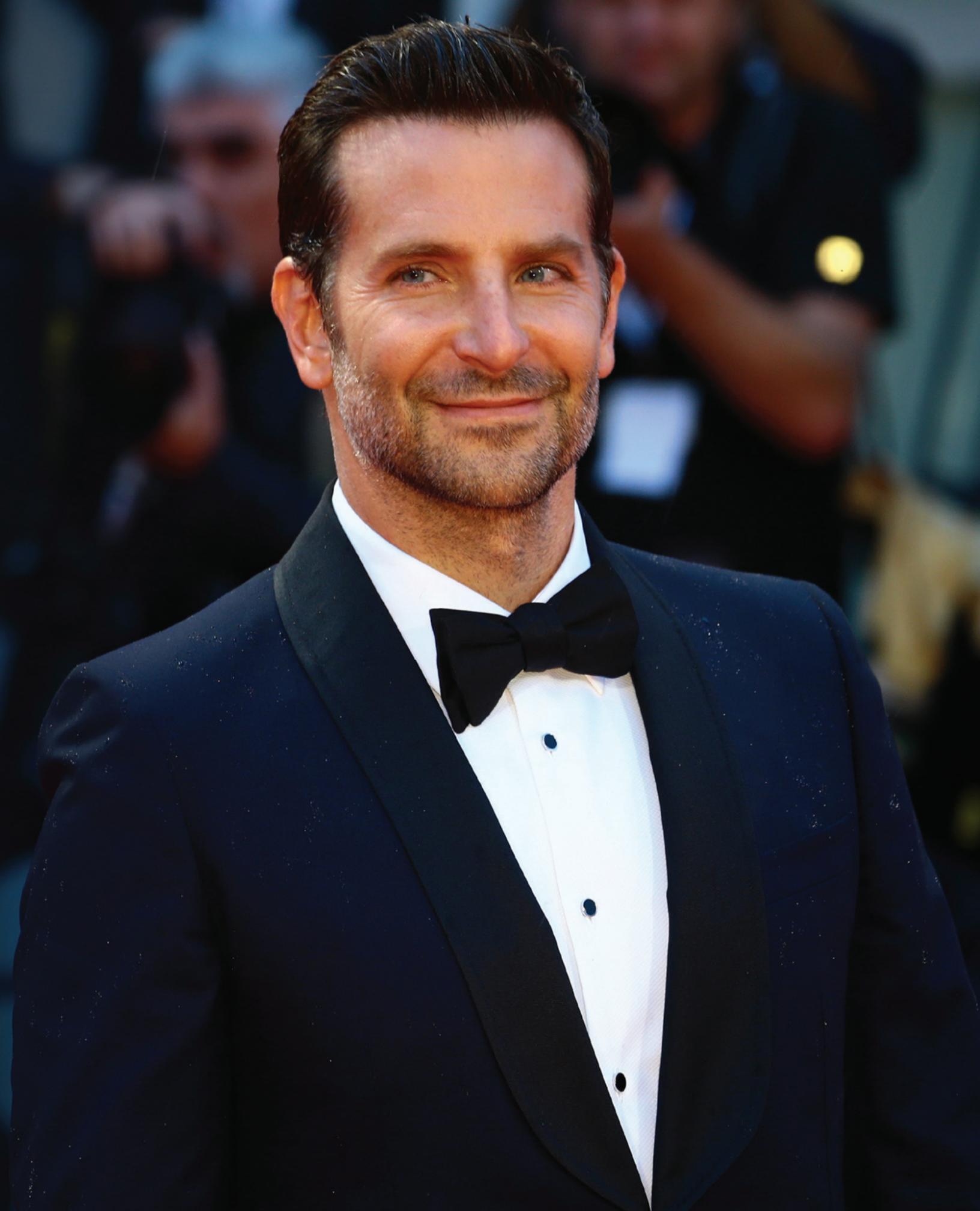
**Right: Bradley Cooper on the red carpet for the *A Star is Born* screening during the 75th Venice Film Festival in August 2018**

Interestingly, it was Eastwood who was originally set to direct *A Star is Born* until he decided to pass on the project, and it fell into the hands of Cooper. Bradley saw Eastwood as a role model in terms of how to take his career to the next level. “I love him to death,” Cooper says.

“Clint’s like jazz, even as he lives his life, stoic, very funny, doesn’t take anything too seriously. We had so many moments and we laughed a tremendous amount while making *American Sniper*, shockingly, actually, given the content. But I think that’s probably why he gets so many great performances out of people because he makes them really feel at ease.

“I look up to him so much. And I always had in my mind, ‘Well, he was 41 when he directed *Play Misty For Me...*’ So I always thought when I get around that age then I gotta just do it... *A Star is Born* was the perfect sandbox to examine all the things I wanted to investigate as a director — family trauma, addiction, the plight of being alive, dealing with love, finding your identity and your voice.”

Cooper’s portrayal of the doomed rock star Jackson Maine who enters into a downward spiral of alcohol and drug abuse also bore some uneasy parallels with Bradley’s own struggles with alcohol in his late twenties. But unlike his screen alter ego, Cooper managed to put his life back on track, and hiring Lady Gaga as the up-and-coming singer whose career eventually eclipses that of Maine proved to be an inspired casting choice. ➤





"We were both on this journey together. That was the unique aspect to it which really served the movie. We both had a lot at stake with this and I think that upped the game for both of us and I think that was why she committed so much time and effort to this project – it wasn't like she wasn't busy!"

One of the most interesting revelations coming out of the film – apart from Gaga's outstanding acting performance – was Cooper's formidable skill as a singer himself. His vocal talents shocked Gaga when she first heard him belt out a few tunes when he came to her house to do what amounted to an all-day screen test.

**Above: Bradley Cooper on the red carpet at the premiere of *A Star is Born* in Los Angeles' famous Shrine Auditorium**

"We spent the whole day working and what was really surprising for me is when I heard Bradley sing," recalled Gaga.

"I couldn't believe how good he was because I never even knew that he sang! We did a lot of harmonising and there was something that just clicked when we were singing together."

*A Star is Born* was a stunningly successful directorial debut for Bradley Cooper. The film grossed \$436 million worldwide on a relatively small budget of \$36 million, making it one of the most profitable films of the decade. As a result, Cooper, like Eastwood, now has the kind of clout in the industry that will allow him to call his shots in Hollywood for many years to come.

Netflix, which is becoming a rival to the major Hollywood

studios, has just given him the greenlight for his follow-up venture as actor/director – Bernstein – a biopic about the late great American composer/conductor, Leonard Bernstein.

Cooper will produce, direct, and star in the movie from a script he co-wrote with Spotlight Oscar winner Josh Singer.

The film spans 30 years in the life of Bernstein who, aged 25, became the youngest musical director of the New York Philharmonic and whose scores

for *On the Waterfront* and *West Side Story*, as well as his Bernstein Mass, turned him into a musical legend.

It's an ideal story for Cooper who has long identified with heroic figures in all walks of life and particularly appreciates "stories about redemption and overcoming failure – the fact is that humans are flawed, and we often need second chances to succeed.

Apart from the movies, Bradley Cooper's other great passion in life is food. His Italian mother and grandmother spent countless hours teaching him how to whip up all manner of pasta dishes and cakes. As a teenager, Bradley worked as Greek restaurant busboy, and later as a prep cook at an Italian eatery. "I was 15 when I started cleaning tables at a Greek restaurant in Philadelphia." ►

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"Then, at 18, just before I started at college I was working as a prep cook at an Italian seafood restaurant in Somers Point, New Jersey.

"At our house the kitchen was the centre of activity. I spent a lot of time watching my Italian mother and grandmother prepare these incredible dishes. I grew up in a world where everything was based on food and our conversations

revolved around what we are going to eat, what we have just eaten, and what we are going to put in the freezer to eat tomorrow.

"My mother made this incredible roast beef and my grandmother

**Above: Cooper and Irina Shayk just before they ended their four-year relationship Right: With Gerard Butler in 2010**

would prepare the most stunning cheesecake and the most unforgettable and delicious ravioli. Those were the kinds of dishes that inspired my love of cooking and also wanting to know how to prepare food myself. Cooking has always been a big part of my life!"

In his private life, Cooper has enjoyed several high-profile romances with a string of beautiful actresses including Jennifer Esposito, Isabella Brewster, Renée Zellweger, Jennifer Lopez, and Zoe Saldana. For the past four years, however, he has been living with Russian supermodel Irina Shayk with whom he has a three-year-old daughter, Lea de Seine. Their relationship dissolved late last year amid lingering controversy following Cooper and Lady Gaga's romantic duet at the 2019 Oscar ceremonies.

Cooper is well aware of the dangers inherent in celebrity, and following the sex symbol tag that has followed him around for most of the past decade, he has tried to avoid letting his private life overshadow his desire to make movies that will stand the test of time. "It can be very pleasant

and flattering but I feel more embarrassed by the attention rather than basking in it and trying to relish my fame. I'm pretty grounded and I don't allow myself the luxury of feeling that much more important simply because I've reached a certain level as an actor."

Bradley credits his late father Charles Cooper, who died from lung cancer in 2011, with having instilled in him a desire to excel in life. "When he took the last breath I honestly felt like it went into me, and I've never seen anything the same since... [I became] stronger, more open, more willing to fail because of him. It changed the way I was as an actor by, like, the next day, and I just started to live my life in a different way."

Cooper also hinted that there are moments when he looks at his daughter Lea and has the impression that his father's spirit has passed on to her: "I see my father in her quite often," he said.

"I can't believe I'm going to admit this, but I had moments when... I was just in the room with her I would just say 'Dad?'" ■

