

Aussie Adonis

From Elvis in *Priscilla* to Oxford student in *Saltburn*, the latest Hollywood hot talent to come from Brisbane in Queensland “Down Under” is the real deal, writes *Harold von Kursk*

Impossibly handsome, charismatic, and talented, Jacob Elordi has exploded onto the Hollywood scene like few other actors. With the release of the incendiary psychological thriller *Saltburn* last November, the 6’5” Australian Adonis has emerged as the hottest actor on earth. His magnetic turn as Felix Catton, the blue-blooded Oxford student who reeks of wealth and privilege, marks the kind of breakthrough screen role that is the gateway to major stardom. “This film means everything for me,” said Elordi.

“It came at a creative turning point in my life. Something divine. I feel so lucky that it’s happening to me right now.”

Directed by Emerald Fennell, the Oxford alumni who made her name with *Promising Young Woman* in 2022, *Saltburn* is a raucous satire of upper class privilege that relies heavily on Elordi’s erotic appeal. Produced by Barbie star Margot Robbie’s LuckyChap company, *Saltburn* is one of the most provocative films in recent memory and has become a cult favourite ever since it began streaming on Amazon Prime Video in January.

Right: Jacob Elordi’s self-belief shines through in the preparation and execution of his Hollywood roles

The film revolves principally around Felix’s capricious relationship with a fellow collegian, Oliver (Barry Keoghan), a working-class outsider and manipulative social climber bent on becoming part of the in crowd.

Raised in modest circumstances, Elordi relished the chance to dive into a rarefied aristocratic setting and indulge in the Catton family’s innocuous desuetude and manifest eccentricities.

“That world is very far from where I’m from,” says Elordi.

“I grew up pretty blue-collar and I went to an all-boys Catholic school. That was the first time I really noticed there were distinct social and cultural differences between families, but not to the extent that you see in [*Saltburn*]... But it was really fun to investigate that and be a part of it in some way.”

The film paints a surrealist and often lacerating portrait of British high society – more *Withnail and I* than *Brideshead Revisted* or *Downton Abbey* – and gives Elordi ample room to seduce audiences with every chiselled expression.

It’s little wonder that Oliver is besotted with Elordi/Felix’s palpable sexual aura, a level of obsession that is captured most tellingly in a scene that has since become a viral sensation.

Having been invited by Felix to spend the summer at his family’s sprawling estate, we find Oliver secretly watching Felix masturbate while taking a bath.

Apart from its calculated shock value, the sequence serves as a pointed, albeit lurid illustration of the erotic subtext between Felix and Oliver and is reminiscent of how Matt Damon’s Tom Ripley lusted after Jude Law’s Dickie Greenleaf in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

Elordi prepared for the role by reading Evelyn Waugh’s classic novel *Brideshead* which also centres around an Oxford student. He then isolated himself at a California desert retreat, attempting to imagine himself as someone accustomed to the life of leisure. “I went to Palm Springs for two weeks, rented a house with a swimming pool and tried to live like a super snobbish English lord,” Elordi explained.

“And a month before I started shooting I went to London, found myself a little place in Chelsea

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where I spent my days in cafés ordering flat whites and listening to a lot of posh conversations to make my Australian accent more British.”

Adding to the hype surrounding Elordi is his appearance as Elvis Presley in Sofia Coppola’s *Priscilla*, released shortly after *Saltburn*. Although the film proved to be a box-office flop – global revenues of barely \$30 million (against a budget of \$70 million) vs the \$290 million earned by 2022’s hit Elvis film that starred Austin Butler in the title role – Elordi still earned good reviews for his performance.

In fact, many critics have favourably compared the Australian actor’s darker, more complicated portrait of Elvis to Butler’s more audience-friendly, upbeat take on the musical legend. Coincidentally, Coppola handed the role to Elordi the same day he signed on to *Saltburn*, and he flew to Toronto to begin shooting *Priscilla* barely three weeks after he had finished work on *Saltburn* in London.

“I watched and read everything about Elvis. Above all I spoke with his wife Priscilla,” said Elordi.

“One interesting thing that I discovered was that Elvis was very fond of bacon, he ate it almost burnt, and so, since I had to put on weight for the part, I ate a pound of it a day. I put the pounds on everywhere, despite my mother’s disappointment!”

“My approach to Elvis was to ignore the mythology and go as much behind closed doors and reveal as much about his inner self as possible... Rather than go over what was already well known about him or what his ►





public persona was like, I tried to learn as much about how he behaved in private, looking at a lot of Super 8 movies of him with his family, and try to make my performance more grounded.”

Certainly, Elordi seems very level-headed as he climbs the Hollywood ladder. He grew up in a home where his parents endowed him and his three older sisters with a sense of pride and desire to be overachievers. (Elordi’s eldest sister Isabella is an accomplished ballerina.) That support helped him deal

Above: Elordi with his Priscilla co-star Cailee Spaeny and the film’s producers Lorenzo Mieli and Youree Henley at a New York Film Festival screening in 2023

with the serial bullying he endured at the hands of his high school classmates after he started getting involved in acting.

“As soon as I started performing in school plays most of my friends started making fun of me and telling me how it wasn’t the kind of thing a real guy does,” said Elordi.

“Luckily I had plenty of self-esteem that I could do both: I did well at sports and reasonably well in theatre, too. And at a certain point, I no longer worried about what other people thought. I loved rehearsing for plays with girls and I would spend the weekends reading very romantic Shakespearean verses with some very beautiful girls from the neighbouring all-girls’ school.”

Elordi even decided to make

a point of standing up to the abuse from some of his all-boys’ school mates by wearing heavy makeup to play the part of Oberon in a production of William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

“I distanced myself from the culture of beer and sport and if this made me less of a man in the eyes of some people at my school I didn’t care, I wanted to be faithful to who I was, a straight guy who loves the arts.”

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“When I was growing up I did nothing but devour books on film and I would even study actors’ audition tapes that I found on YouTube... And I suppose it didn’t hurt that I was always very ‘dramatic’ in my behaviour. From an early age I was always seeking the attention of both my parents and my friends. I started acting in school plays when I was 12, and then I moved on to musicals because I really like dancing. I also began taking acting lessons and by the time I was 15 I had fallen so much in love with film that I knew I had to be part of that world.”

Against all odds and his parents’ doubts, his fearless attitude saw Elordi arrive in Los Angeles at age 19 with barely \$400 in his pocket and ▶



a duffel bag of clothes. For almost one year he would survive, crash at friends' places and sometimes be forced to sleep in his 2004 Mitsubishi at a parking lot on Mulholland Drive. Not that his parents didn't warn him of the risk he was taking. "My very practical-minded mother and especially my father kept telling me: 'Be careful, because only a few actors are successful, maybe one in a million...'. And each time I would tell them, "Why can't I be that one in a million...?"

To his credit, Jacob had stacked the odds in his favour when at age 18 he was cast in the Aussie comedy *Swinging Safari* co-starring Guy Pearce and Kylie Minogue. That minor

Above: Elordi and Priscilla co-star Spaeny on a promotional shoot – the Australian actor spoke to Elvis' ex-wife Priscilla Presley as part of his preparation Right: Elordi arriving on the red carpet for the Priscilla gala screening at the 80th Venice Film Festival in 2023

but attention-grabbing role led Netflix to cast him in 2018's *The Kissing Booth* which in turn helped him win the part of Nate in the *Euphoria* TV series that began shooting the following year. Landing that role was a Godsend for Elordi who otherwise would have been forced to move back to Brisbane.

"It's incredible how things have worked out... I didn't have a specific expectation, I just knew that acting would be something I would love all my life. I just wanted to feel free to do what I like."

Today, Elordi is sitting on top of the world. In January, he received a form of celebrity benediction by hosting the immensely popular SNL comedy show. Meanwhile, he's apparently still dating rumoured girlfriend Olivia Jade – the daughter of actress Lori Loughlin – after having previously spent two years in a relationship with Kaia Gerber, the runway model and daughter of former supermodel Cyndi Crawford



and multi-million dollar entrepreneur Randi Gerber.

In both cases, Elordi has stayed true to his low-key nature by maintaining strict silence as to his love life, yet another indication that he is in no danger of becoming "big-headed" no matter how much success comes his way and even with 14 million Instagram followers lustling after him.

"I think that if we get lost on social media, we risk losing so many precious things that we have around us. So I guess that's why it's important for me to make films that I believe in and that it's an honour to be a part of. I have nothing but the highest respect for artists who pursue their vision of the world and try to really grasp the moment." ■