



SERVICE WITH A SMILE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU COMBINE 2022 HORROR HIT **SMILE** WITH TAYLOR SWIFT'S ERAS TOUR? THE ANSWER IS ONE OF 2024'S MOST HOTLY ANTICIPATED SEQUELS... WORDS: **STEVE O'BRIEN**

IN A TIME WHEN AGE-OLD IPS ARE monopolising the movie box office, it's testament to the power of *Smile* that this wholly original story became the highest-grossing horror of 2022. Writer/director Parker Finn's chiller about a psychiatrist who becomes convinced she's being threatened by a supernatural entity was a breakout hit for the Ohio-born filmmaker.

It impressed Paramount enough that they've signed him to helm their Robert Pattinson-starring remake of cult classic *Possession*. In the meantime, however, there's the matter of *Smile 2*. Although – spoiler alert – Sosie Bacon's psychiatrist Rose burned to death at the end of

the first film, here we are again, with a sequel that promises to take this freshly minted franchise in a radically different direction. This time, as Finn tells *SFX*, it focuses on a Taylor Swift-like pop sensation by the name of Skye Riley (played by British actor Naomi Scott).

Did you know while you were making the first *Smile* that you'd be doing a sequel?

Not at all, I made the first one to be very self-contained. But when it became clear that there was excitement for a sequel, I wanted to make sure that if I was going to come back that I found a new way that sort of re-lensed things thematically inside of the universe of *Smile*. So

the new film is 100% a *Smile* movie, but it also has its own metabolism, its own identity. What I love about it is that people are going to go on this brand new journey that has that familiarity from the first one, but has got all-new ways to unsettle and scare them.

Obviously in the first film, you unmasked "the Entity", as it's called. Does the new movie reveal more about it?

There was information I had for myself that wasn't expressed in the first film that I took the opportunity to bring into the new one, so what *Smile 2* is doing is showing us new things. We felt like we'd uncovered the mystery in the first

Dylan Gelula, left, and Naomi Scott as Skye.

“What I wanted to make sure was that we didn’t do whatever was obvious or easy”

that this is a real pop star? We created original songs for the film and there’s breathtaking, original choreography. We love this idea of blurring the edges of where the movie ends and reality begins.

Kyle Gallner’s police officer character Joel is left alive in the first film, having been infected with the curse after witnessing Rose’s suicide. He’s in *Smile 2*, but it’s not centred on him...

In approaching the sequel, what I wanted to make sure was that we didn’t do whatever was obvious or easy or anything that people were necessarily anticipating. But at the same time, it was important for me to connect the two films and make sure that they share a universe and really that came down to Joel. It was so much fun to resurrect him and play with that character again. You’re going to see another side to him in this one.

Do you have any plans for a third movie?

There are some ideas that I think are very exciting. I think it’s really fun to imagine a lineage of *Smile* movies where each one becomes more off the rails than the previous one. What’s really interesting about *Smile* is that you can find yourself in different stories, different characters, different worlds.

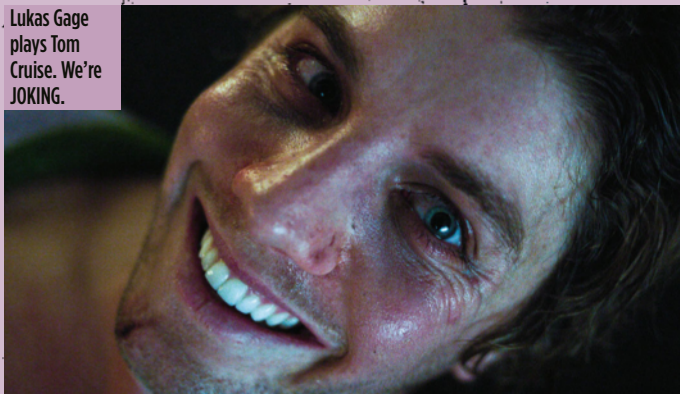
Your next directing job, however, is a remake of Andrzej Żuławski’s 1981 horror *Possession*. How that’s going?

It’s early days, but we’re incredibly excited about this completely bonkers movie. *Possession* is one of my favourite films of all time, and so what was really important to me was that we were honouring the original and staying true to its absolute frenzied, manic ferocity.

We want to make sure that fans of the original, who might be a little suspect of a remake, when they sit down to it are gonna realise, “Oh, this movie is for me, and it’s really embracing what I love.” At the same time, though, I want to be inviting new fans in. I think there’s a really wonderful opportunity that by reimagining this movie, people who haven’t seen the 1981 film will go and visit it, so hopefully it’ll spread the love. 🍷

Smile 2 is in cinemas from 18 October.

Lukas Gage plays Tom Cruise. We’re JOKING.



one, but we’ve maybe only scooped a single glass of water out of the ocean.

***Smile 2* is centred on a pop star named Skye Riley. How did that idea come about?**

I’m a big fan of pop music, and I’m endlessly fascinated by modern celebrity. It was kind of wild because we developed this story about a pop star and then, as we were starting to think about prep and production, the Eras Tour happened and then Beyoncé’s tour. And suddenly it felt like pop music and live events



were the biggest thing that anybody was talking about.

The marketing around the film is great – you’re releasing music videos and promotional material onto social media as if Skye Riley is a real person.

It was very important to me to make sure that this wasn’t a horror film where the character just happens to be a pop star. I wanted it to be part of the core of this film, and that meant we wanted to build a lot of credibility into her. So the challenge was, can we convince an audience