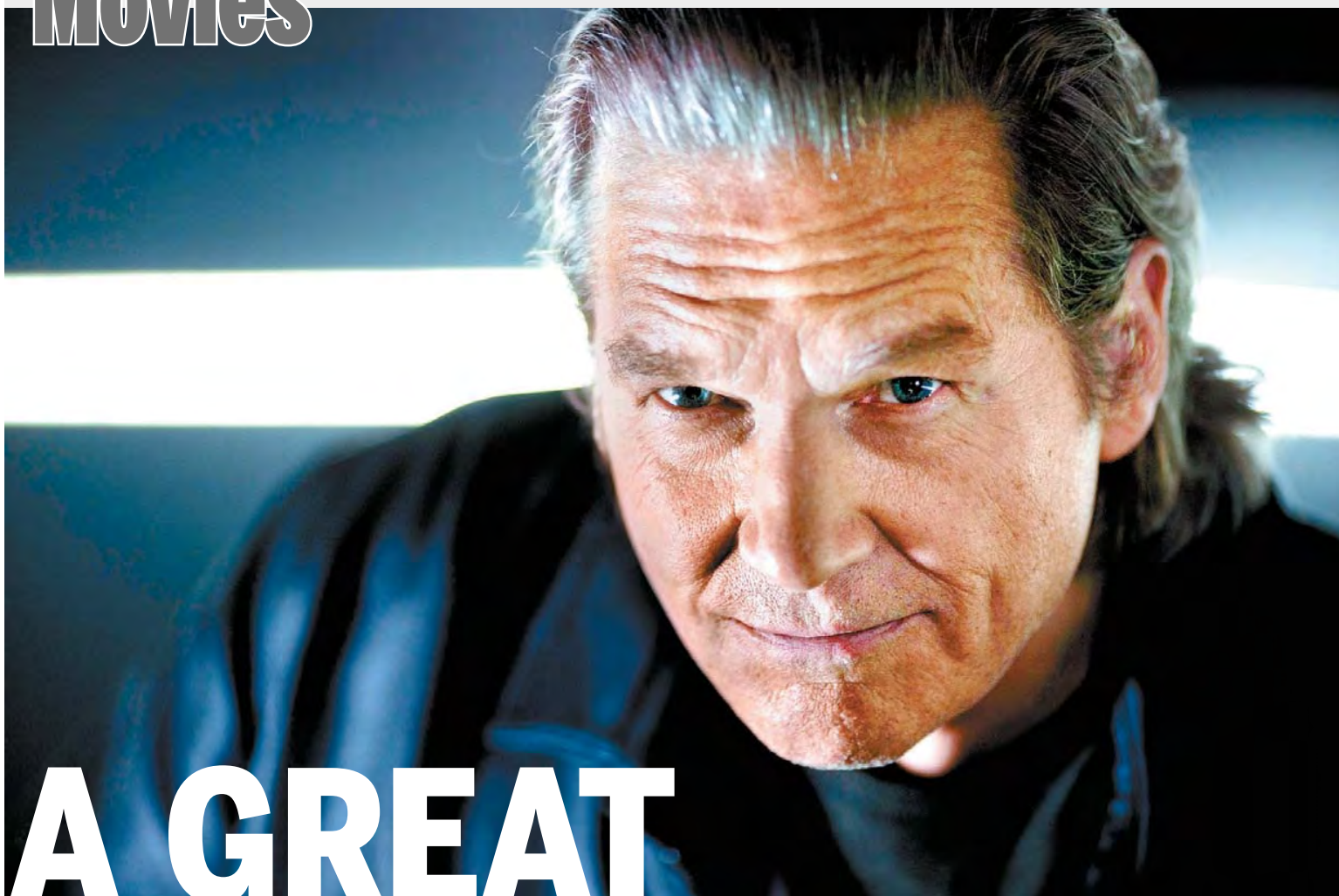


Movies



A GREAT LEGACY

An older, mellow Jeff Bridges, the star of *Tron* sequel, rolls with the good times

LOS ANGELES — To hear Jeff Bridges talk, it's like he has an angel on one shoulder and *The Dude* on the other.

"One is saying — and not in an aggressive way — 'OK, you're closer to your death, you're mortal, you only have so much time to do what you're going to do. What do you feel like doing? And let's go.' And there's all the things I want to do. And coming closer to your mortality makes you want those things to happen.



KEVIN WILLIAMSON
Movies

I find my plate very full, doing all kinds of stuff," says the 61-year-old Oscar winner.

"Then the other part of me is going, 'Will you just relax? Do you want to make the rest of your life a giant homework

assignment — just relax and enjoy your life.' So I have to balance those two sides. I don't want to push myself where it defeats the purpose."

In other words, Bridges — like Jeff Lebowsky aka *The Big Lebowski* — abides. Even as life continues to surprise him.

"It's cool to be young, but I'm enjoying getting older too," he says, laidback and guileless, in a Beverly Hills hotel suite. "I'm going through a particularly wonderful

time right now where stuff is starting to bloom."

Not that Bridges has ever been less than prolific. In addition to acting, photography, music and activism, he's also raised three daughters (now all in their 20s) with his wife of 33 years, Susan. But there's no question the last year has been especially rewarding — and consuming — in the wake of 2009's *Crazy Heart*, the drama about a washed-up

country warbler for which he won an Academy Award.

"It was great," he says of what most considered an overdue victory. "To be acknowledged by your guys, the people who do what you do, was wonderful. And especially for that particular film which was all about music."

Now Bridges, who has been playing music since he was a child, is recording an album "with T-Bone Burnett,

my old buddy," he reports. "That's what it takes — it takes time and being consistent. And not letting the music muscle get atrophied."

On the big screen, he's at least as occupied. In addition to *Tron: Legacy*, which opens Friday, he stars later this month in the Coen Brothers' redo of the John Wayne western *True Grit*, in which he plays a

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Tron: Legacy

Continued from previous page

hard-bitten U.S. marshall approached by a girl to track down her father's killer.

Both *Tron* and *True Grit* — one a sequel, the other a remake — are emblematic of Hollywood right now. They are films audiences have a history with.

And Bridges says that in the case of *Tron*, he was especially weary of exploiting the original's legacy. "I was concerned about that," he says. "I could see that it was kind of a no-brainer. They've got the technology now to make it look more fantastic and people love that eye-candy. But I didn't know if I wanted to do that particular movie. But there had been rumours there were going to be some kind of sequel. And I'm really glad Disney waited until all the elements fell into place and they got the right director and the right story."

In the sequel to the 1982 action-adventure, Garrett Hedlund stars as the son of Bridges' character, Kevin Flynn. Searching for his long-lost father, he promptly follows him down the virtual rabbit hole. Olivia Wilde, Michael Sheen and Bruce Boxleitner also star.

"When they came to me with *Tron: Legacy*, I saw Joe's reel and was very impressed with what he was able to accomplish and his sense of design and the fact he was an architect," Bridges says.

"I met him and he seemed like a very open and inclusive guy. That word rings true in all sorts of ways — this inclusiveness Disney has shown. Another outfit might have said, 'Let's cut the guy (director Steven Lisberger) who did the first one, we don't need him. Please don't complicate our thing.' But they brought him in, which was wonderful.

"While this movie does stand on its own, if you did see the original, it's going to flow; it's going to fit in the mythology.

"But there was the whole idea of creating a modern myth about our

technological situation right now and Disney was very open to my input about that and they wanted to do the same thing."

Still, the studio was hesitant. Bridges recalls how they shot a trailer for the sequel before the project had even been approved. The raucous response the preview received at 2008's Comic-Con in San Diego convinced executives to take the leap and reboot the long-dormant franchise. "The people dug that so Disney said, 'OK, we'll fund that. That's sort of the birth of it.'"

Bridges, if you hadn't guessed, is delighted. "The Dude would be happy with everything that's going on — the music, the partying with my friends. I'm having a good time right now."

kevin.williamson@sunmedia.ca



“It was great. To be acknowledged by your guys, the people who do what you do, was wonderful.”

Jeff Bridges on his 2009 Oscar victory for *Crazy Heart*.

GARY HERSHORN/REUTERS



Apart from reprising his role as Kevin Flynn, Jeff Bridges also plays the part of Clu (left) who is a computerized avatar modelled after his 35-year-old self (right) from the 1982 original.

Turning back time

LOS ANGELES — Meet the changing face of filmmaking. Literally.

In *Tron: Legacy*, Jeff Bridges reprises his role as cyberspace cowboy Kevin Flynn, now a white-haired, bearded exile in the neon netherworld he designed.

And acting opposite him? Bridges: as Clu, a tyrannical program modelled after his 35-year-old self.

The effect builds on the same technology that morphed Brad Pitt from a shrivelled senior to a smooth-skinned young man in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Bridges had 52 markers drawn on his face while he performed as Clu. His movements were then recorded and used to control a digital head constructed to

resemble the actor as he looked in the early 1980s.

The implications are dizzying. Does this mean a young Sean Connery might one day replace Daniel Craig as James Bond? Could Harrison Ford be de-aged so he doesn't look like one of the mummies in the next *Indiana Jones*? Might Clint Eastwood rent out his digital double to play a newly spry Dirty Harry?

Not so fast, cautions director Joseph Kosinski.

"You can never replace the performance. People ask, 'Will actors be replaced?' But that will never happen because the performance of Clu is completely organic and it originates from Jeff. What the technology affords, if you have the right people working on it,

it opens up new opportunities for actors — whether it's *Avatar* or this movie or *Benjamin Button*. If people continue to find stories that demand this technology, we'll see more of it. But it's just too hard and too expensive to do it just for the sake of doing it."

(And Clu benefits, frankly, from existing in a fantastical computer-generated arena that distances the audience from the real world.)

Regardless, Bridges seems pleased with the results.

"I was impressed with the rough version I saw," he says prior to seeing the finished film for himself. "But it's not that unusual for me. I'm used to seeing myself in different stages of my life."

— Kevin Williamson

THE ESSENTIAL JEFF BRIDGES *By Kevin Williamson*

LOS ANGELES — What was remarkable about Jeff Bridges finally winning an Oscar? That it took so long.

Fact is, whether he's a surfer dude or a starman, a gun-slinger or a boozy country crooner, Bridges has long been one of Hollywood's most consistent, compelling talents.

So how does one cite just five performances from a resume that includes *The Contender*, *The Fabulous Baker Boys* and *The Fisher King*?

With difficulty. But here they are:



The Last Picture Show (1971)

At the age of 22, Bridges scored his first best supporting actor Oscar nomination for Peter Bogdanovich's black-and-white drama about Texas townies in the 1950s.



Starman (1984)

John Carpenter's science-fiction tale offered a grown-up variation on E.T., with Bridges as the benign extraterrestrial who assumes the form of a dead man and winds up on the run with his widow (Karen Allen). Bridges, seamless and moving, was nominated for a best actor Oscar.



Fearless (1993)

Bridges gives what many consider to be his finest performance as the survivor of a devastating plane crash who walks away from the disaster with everything but a fear of death.



The Big Lebowski (1998)

When it was released, the Coen Brothers' deadpan comedy about a shaggy stoner and a case of mistaken identity divided critics. But in the years since, the movie — and particularly Bridges' work as "The Dude" — has entered the pop culture lexicon.



The Door in the Floor (2004)

Bridges is at turns monstrous and manipulative, charismatic and wounded, as Ted Cole, a children's author whose marriage (to Kim Basinger) was irreparably damaged by the deaths of their two sons. The film was criminally undervalued at the time, but deserves to be found.