

# There's something about Carey

Or how Carey Mulligan wowed the Academy, became Hollywood's new Kate Winslet and stole *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* from Michael and Shia...

WORDS MATT MUELLER PORTRAITS BEN WELLER

annes, 2010. There's no better staging ground for an actress to score a splashy global slam-dunk than the French Riviera's annual shindig. And that's precisely what Carey Mulligan did, whipping the world's paps into a flashbulb frenzy as she strolled elegantly up the red carpet with Michael Douglas, Shia LaBeouf, Josh Brolin and Oliver Stone for the world premiere of *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*.

It's little wonder she looked in her element: Mulligan deserved to be there, not least because she's the best thing about Stone's 22-years-in-the-making sequel, giving the strongest performance in a robust film full of strong performances. And though festival juror Kate Beckinsale did her flesh-exposing best to upstage her fellow upstart Brit, Mulligan's effortless sophistication won the day. It capped a year that has already encompassed one Best Actress Oscar nomination and a Bafta victory for her role in Lone Scherfig's *An Education* as the bright, mildly pretentious Twickenham lass looking to escape suburban claustrophobia in the suave embrace and sleek roadster of Peter Sarsgaard's charming grifter.

It was after watching her star-making turn that Stone offered Mulligan the role of Gordon Gekko's estranged daughter Winnie. He didn't even audition her and his trust was rewarded by an actress who not only knows her own mind but is willing to speak it. "I didn't want to be the token girlfriend," the 25-year-old declares to *Total Film* as she shades her eyes in the rolling gardens of the Hôtel du Cap. "I said that to Oliver when we met and he agreed, so we worked to make sure that didn't happen. >>

CAREY MULLIGAN

**SPOTLIGHT**



I was nervous about working with him. But I thought, 'I don't want him to mess with me so if I go in and pretend to be really strong and not afraid, he won't be able to treat me like a girl.' So I went in trying to be like a boy – and he treated me like one of the boys."

Bolstering her obvious steel and razor-sharp intelligence are angelic looks and a vast emotional skillset... She's the complete package, in other words, which is why Mulligan is entrancing industry and audience alike and being linked to a steady stream of megawatt projects. Not bad considering few people had heard of Mulligan prior to Sundance 2009, where *An Education* first bowed. After Cannes 2010, few haven't. But, as she displayed on the Croisette, while her rise may be rapid, she seems to be handling it with the serene composure of someone born to her position. Is she frightened by her skyrocketing profile? Hardly...

"A little bit sometimes, but mainly not," she states matter-of-factly. "It's been an amazing year, an unexpected year, but I think that it's scarier for my family to see – they're more nervous about it than I am. I feel fine in it. When I'm not at festivals and I'm not at awards, my life is relatively normal..."



**'My first job was with Judi Dench and Donald Sutherland. It's why I don't get starstruck; I just get excited about working with people I admire'**

**I**t was a chilly spring night in 2008 that *Total Film* first met Mulligan. Barely a week into *An Education*'s shoot, she was filming the sequence in which her 16-year-old ingénue has her first proper date with Sarsgaard's smooth criminal, the couple meeting Dominic Cooper and Rosamund Pike for a classical music recital in St. John's Church in Westminster.

As the film's four stars settled down in the church crypt to chat with *Total Film* on a break, mugs of hot tea warming their hands, Mulligan was content to sit back and let her more experienced co-stars do most of the gabbing. Not shy, exactly, or even overawed – just quietly observing, fiddling with the overcoat draped around her shoulders but happy to chip in when she felt she had something worth saying. At one point, Sarsgaard was explaining how he and Cooper had established the easy onscreen rapport that two best friends would have, when Mulligan suddenly chimed in mischievously, "You were flirting outrageously with each other, is what Roz and I think..." "That's what you think," retorted her co-star. "No, I love it when men flirt!" Mulligan added quickly, in case Sarsgaard felt bruised.

Later that evening, Mulligan pulled *Total Film* aside, apologising for her earlier reticence. "I was so cold so I just let Peter and Roz talk a lot!" she smiled, before chatting 19 to the dozen

about her resolve to make Jenny a dreadful, spluttery smoker "so my cousins don't watch it and think smoking's cool", her preference for the original title ("*The Time Of Her Life – much better than *An Education*, I think...*") and giddy delight at being allowed to play the character: "I'm just buzzing all the time, because I feel so lucky to be playing such a brilliant girl. She's got proper fiesh about her and she's so much fun to play because there are soooo many dull, weepy girl parts."

As anyone who'd already seen Mulligan play Sally Sparrow in the exceptional *Doctor Who* episode 'Blink', or Ada in the BBC's Dickens adaptation *Bleak House* could attest, Mulligan had something special – for one thing, a natural, easily tapped expressiveness. On set, Danish director Scherfig summed it up as "truth... she can be sweet without being sugary and innocent

without being phoney. It's an ingenue part but she's doing it with such purity. She's also very brainy and has good taste in her choices as an actress even though she's so young – the transformation from being a young girl to being someone who is very sophisticated and beautiful is completely believable." On their eighth day of filming, Scherfig confidently declared, "Now I know that I can set aside my main worry: can she carry a film? She definitely can."

As footie dramady *Bend It Like Beckham* proved for Keira Knightley and Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* for Kate Winslet before her, *An Education* was a lightning-in-a-bottle showcase for Mulligan – a movie so perfectly attuned to her talents that it swept her up into that mysterious zeitgeist where new stars are spawned. In hindsight, it's as though the role of precocious school girl Jenny was made for her (even though the filmmakers initially feared that at 22 she was too old to play a teenager).

Fully justifying the It Girl hype, Mulligan dashed tirelessly through the awards season grind like she was on a lap of victory, even if she didn't win everything (she lost out on the Oscar to Hollywood favourite Sandra Bullock) and even as she came to grips with the spotlight's pitfalls, her every mistake pounced upon and magnified... "I screwed up so badly at the Baftas when I won," she admitted in Cannes. "I got up and forgot to thank the director, for which I should be shot."

**B**orn in London to a Liverpoolian father and Welsh mother, Mulligan spent a vast chunk of her childhood living in posh hotels, thanks to her father's corporate consultancy job with the Intercontinental chain. By her own admission, she was a shy, strait-laced tomboy whose interest in acting was nearly extinguished by three drama-school rejections and massive pressure from her parents to go to university. But bold and fiercely determined from the off (or, in her words, "irritating and desperate"), Mulligan was a student at the exclusive Catholic girls' boarding school Woldingham when she penned a letter to Kenneth Branagh after seeing him in *Henry V*, asking him to be her mentor. Later, she cornered Julian Fellowes when he came to speak at her school to ask for advice. Taking a shine to Mulligan, the Oscar-winner eventually made the introductions that led to her being cast as the youngest Bennett sister in Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice*. "My first job was with Judi Dench, Donald Sutherland and Brenda Blethyn," Mulligan enthuses. "It's why I don't really get starstruck; I just get really excited about working with people I admire."

Before she shot one frame of *An Education*, Mulligan was out in LA being courted by high-powered agents and filming small roles opposite Susan Sarandon and Pierce Brosnan in *The Greatest* and Natalie Portman and Tobey Maguire in *Brothers*: "I cry a lot in that film... It's so funny because I always get this crying thing in all my parts. I should stop crying." After her Sundance '09 eruption, the head honcho of 20th Century Fox suggested her for the starring role in weepie *Never Let Me Go*, the adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's devastatingly bleak novel about a world where human clones are raised to be organ donors. And get this – Mulligan nabbed the lead role of Kathy, while Knightley accepted the smaller, supporting role of best friend/love rival Ruth. Freshly crowned Spider-Man Andrew Garfield rounds out a starry Brit trio whose combined stature has secured Mark Romanek's eerie tearjerker the opening night slot at this year's London Film Festival. As if Mulligan's year wasn't exceptional enough, she now has a double-whammy October to look forward to (*Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* opens five days before the LFF kicks off on the 13th).

Handling her catapulting celebrity with aplomb, she even takes dating a bona fide superstar – Shia LaBeouf, whom she got with on *Wall Street 2* – in her stride. "The private side of our life is separate," she says, firm but friendly. "We would have worked well together regardless of our personal relationship." And she's still >>

## SPOTLIGHT



## Who's who?

From Tardis to tentpole. Five more Whovian sidekicks making it big...



### Noel Clarke

**Mickey Smith (2005-2006, 2010)**

Rose's boyfriend, later the first black companion, Clarke wrote urban drama *Kidulthood*, wrote/directed sequel *Adulthood* and will write and star in sci-fi flick *83*.



### Andrew Garfield

**Frank (2007)**

Garfield starred in a Dalek two-parter. He's already done features with Terry Gilliam and David Fincher, but will become a Hollywood player as the new Spider-Man.



### Tahulah Riley

**Miss Evangelista (2008)**

Nibbled at by microscopic carnivores in *Who*, she's a two-time *St. Trinian's* girl and will next appear in Ron Howard's *The Dilemma*.



### Nia Roberts

**Ambrose (2010)**

Got into trouble for killing a Silurian on *Doctor Who* and looks set for more, starring in drug-trial horror *Guinea Pigs* next year.



### Karen Gillan

**Amy Pond (2010-present)**

*Who* scribe Steven Moffat said the "game was up" when sexy Karen auditioned for the show. You'll be able to catch her on the big screen soon in Brit horror *Outcast*...

a grounded middle-class girl who takes public transport, lives in a tiny London flat with her best friend and gives her family her undivided attention whenever she can. Phoning post-Cannes for a chat about *Never Let Me Go*, Mulligan rings from her mobile while driving with her mum to Wales to visit her Alzheimers-afflicted grandmother.

After we shoot the breeze about her character Kathy, her close friendship with Knightley and the origins of her first name ("Mum, where did my name come from?... Oh! It was the name of my brother's babysitter and my dad just liked it"), Mulligan reflects on the kind of roles she's seeking next. "I'm not saying I'll never do a big, big film but I don't know if they'd want me to and I don't know if I'd be any good in it," she says, deliberating out loud. "I love seeing those enormous films like *Iron Man*, *Star Trek* and *The Dark Knight* - I loved them all - but I want to try and find real, real tough things right now. You know, play someone who's got no morals



'I want to try and find real, real tough things now - play someone who's got no morals... just completely polar to other things I've done'

or some really tough person... someone just completely polar to other things I've done."

Someone like *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo's* Lisbeth Salander? At the time of our talk, the web was boiling over with frenzied conviction that the role was her's. "It would be marvellous if the internet were the casting director," Mulligan laughs. "She's unlike any other female character I've ever read. But I haven't even met David Fincher so I don't know... I'll audition for it if I'm allowed to audition but I haven't had the phone call. And I wouldn't want to be miscast. If you're not the right person, you're not the right person."

As it turned out, Mulligan wasn't the right person, for reasons unspecified. Perhaps after Sony had settled on Daniel Craig as male lead Mikael Blomkvist, they worried that two Brits in a remake of a dark Scandinavian thriller was a bridge too far. Mulligan confirmed recently that she has indeed been passed over ("It's not going to be me, I'm afraid") and

while it's a shame - Stieg Larsson's bisexual punk heroine would have been the perfect role to dissipate the scent of delicate English Rose lingering about her person - if there's anything we know about Mulligan by now, it's that she will have taken the news with poise and grace. She will, simply and sagely, look elsewhere.

"It's an awesome part," she agrees. "But there'll be more..."

**Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps opens on 8 October and will be reviewed in the next issue. Never Let Me Go opens on 14 January.**