

FROM THE HEART

Gerard Butler opens up about a beloved role, his late mom and his path to Tinseltown



CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN: NIWERE DAVID/SHUTTERSTOCK; MATT BARON/SHUTTERSTOCK; WARNER BROS. PICTURES/APPLE ORIGINAL FILMS; FX; DISNEY+; UNIVERSAL PICTURES

When Gerard Butler had the chance to screen his latest movie – a live-action remake of the animated blockbuster *How to Train Your Dragon* – he barely recognized himself, which is understandable considering his transformation with costume and makeup. But the actor’s reaction? “That’s not even me – that’s my mom.”

“Normally, I’m watching me and I’m criticizing me, but I was like, ‘Is that even me?’ I almost saw more of my mom in there.”

Reprising his epic character of Stoick the Vast in the reimagining of the DreamWorks film was a bittersweet process for the Scottish star, who couldn’t help but have his mom in mind.

“She was very, very ill in the middle of [my making] this movie,” Gerard, 55, revealed during a press event attended by *Hello! Canada*. “I was in Belfast, so I would go back a lot of weekends to see her. That was very emotional, and it brought a lot of stuff up for me as Stoick.”

Shortly after the film wrapped, Gerard’s mom passed away at age 81, and writer-director Dean DeBlois added an acknowledgment in the credits: “Dedicated to the loving memory of Margaret Coll.”

A TRANSFORMATION

The *How to Train Your Dragon* series has been a winner among children and adults alike, with the first trio of movies – about Stoick’s son, Hiccup, going against years of tradition as he bonds with dragons – taking audiences on an emotional journey in 2010, 2014 and 2019. Six years later, Gerard eagerly returned to the role he famously voiced all along, this time suiting up under an incredibly taxing wardrobe.

“I had a lot of love for this character, for this franchise,” he said. “When I got a chance to wear that [90-pound] costume, wear that beard... You’re spending all day like that! [It

Gerard transforms to become Stoick the Vast (right) in the live-action reboot of *How to Train Your Dragon*. Above right: With his longtime love, interior designer Morgan Brown, at the movie’s Los Angeles premiere.



wasn’t just] a couple of hours at a time in the recording booth. Now, I was living and breathing it, Stoick, and making that kind of physical commitment and transformation.”

Indeed, the film lets Gerard deliver a more substantial portrayal of the warrior than ever. “I had a chance to go much deeper,” he noted. “You get to see those contradictions, those quiet moments,

the pain – a man kind of bound by traditions. It’s almost like a held breath with him. And then, a vulnerability and an unravelling that I don’t think I could give as much to in the [animated] movie.”

‘ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS PLEASE MY MOM’

Gerard

FINDING HIS CALLING

Connecting to the stubborn, short-tempered character came somewhat easily to Gerard, who likened the experience to that of his brief time practising law in Scotland. “I trained as a lawyer, and it felt like that was my Viking time. I was surrounded by other lawyers who were my Vikings.

I was terrible at it, I was miserable... Yet I did have the pressure from my family ‘cause they were like, ‘Oh my God, my son’s gonna be a lawyer!’”

While he knew the legal profession wasn’t his calling, Gerard was still afraid of what those closest to him would say about squandering such an opportunity. “All I wanted to do was please my mom because I had no dad,” he confesses. “My mom was my mom *and* my dad.” Eventually, the firm decided to let him go – just one week before he was meant to qualify. Recalls Gerard: “I had to call my mom that night and say, ‘For years, you thought I was gonna be a lawyer. And I’ve just been fired.’ I thought she was gonna kill me!”

Luckily, he had an understanding parent. “She wrote me a letter shortly after and she said, ‘I’m just proud of you as long as you’re doing what you believe in.’”

“And that’s this movie – it plays on the strength, on the masculinity, but it’s really quite the opposite. It’s about being a leader but being willing to let go of that and have some compassionate empathy for those around you.”

INTERVIEW: SUSAN HORNIK

How to Train Your Dragon is in theatres now

FILM F1

Start your engines! Brad Pitt climbs into the cockpit for a high-octane adventure that casts him as Sonny Hayes, a retired Formula One driver coaxed back to the track to mentor and partner with a rookie (British actor Damson Idris). “It gave me a feeling like I’ve never had before,” the actor, 61, told *Extra* of his first racing movie. Fellow Oscar winner Javier Bardem also stars. **June 27**



MUSIC THE SECRET OF LIFE: PARTNERS, VOLUME TWO

There’s something for everyone on Grammy winner Barbra Streisand’s 37th album – a project that teams her with other music legends, from Sir Paul McCartney to Mariah Carey. “I’ve always loved singing duets with gifted artists,” said the iconic songwriter, 83, of her starry sequel to 2014’s *Partners*. **June 27**

STREAMING THE BEAR

Jeremy Allen White and Ayo Edebiri are back in the kitchen as the acclaimed TV series returns. Word is that the staff at the restaurant will need to “adapt, adjust and overcome” amid a flurry of challenges in this fourth season. Also on the menu: a reported return appearance by Oscar winner Jamie Lee Curtis as matriarch Donna Berzatto. **June 25, Disney+**



TV IRONHEART

The Marvel Cinematic Universe puts a new hero in the spotlight with a series built around Riri Williams – or Ironheart – “a genius inventor who creates the most advanced suit of armour since Iron Man.” Faced with a technological threat, Riri is forced to summon her high-flying potential. Dominique Thorne reprises the role she first brought to the screen in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. **June 24, Disney+**

BOOK THE WOMAN IN SUITE 11

Travel writing is a dangerous business! Journalist Lo Blacklock is back on the job in British author Ruth Ware’s followup to her 2016 bestseller, *The Woman in Cabin 10*. This time, a decade has elapsed and Lo is a happily married mom of two focused on re-establishing her career. It’s all going to plan as she’s invited on a press tour of a lavish new hotel in Switzerland – until the trip brings her face to face with a woman from her past who pleads for help in a life-or-death dilemma. **July 8**

