

“LA is going to be a very HARD place to LEAVE”

Riffing with Justin Bieber, dinner with Bono and workouts with a personal trainer. Have we lost James Corden to Hollywood? By Tim Walker

Portraits by Boo George

It's three o'clock on another postcard-blue June afternoon at CBS Television City, a cluster of cubic soundstages at the southern edge of West Hollywood – but inside Studio 56, dusk is forever falling. Rehearsals are under way for tonight's edition of *The Late Late Show with James Corden*, and at the back of the air-conditioned set the last pink shards of fake daylight linger permanently over a miniature replica of the Hills.

The studio's design is a pot-pourri of places where you might find yourself at 1am on a weeknight, were you out on the town, not at home on the sofa: a blues club here, a movie theatre there, a Bud Light neon guiding the way to the bar. Corden's writers sit scattered through the stalls, lobbing suggestions back and forth, honing jokes for tonight's broadcast. Black-clad production >





James Corden in
the American Bar at
the Stafford London.
SW1. Grooming:
Ben Jones. Sittings
editor: Fiona Golfar

staff circulate purposefully with clipboards and head microphones, while a CBS executive loiters near the wings, keeping watch over his network's new prized asset.

Corden could easily pass for another crew member, mingling and mooching his way across the polished parquet floor in tan Nike trainers, blue jeans and a casual navy sweater, sleeve-ends bunched around his fists. Finding his way to the host's swivel chair, he drums his palms on the desktop absent-mindedly, as if bored at the back of a classroom. But then, at a nod from a producer, the studio goes quiet, the lights and cameras swing his way, and all of a sudden he's precisely where he's always wanted to be: slap-bang in the centre of attention.

On this side of the Atlantic, the late-night talk show is a national institution. Many questioned the wisdom of handing such a coveted slot to an all-but-unknown Englishman, but since his debut in March, Corden has silenced his hecklers. In a show that blends equal parts Jay Leno and *TFI Friday*, he's played dodgeball with One Direction and performed "carpool karaoke" with Mariah

solicitous manner, his first concern is for my wellbeing; he is also anxious about tonight's opening sketch, a faux game-show riff on Donald Trump's recent presidential campaign launch. As a rule, Corden says, he prefers to leave the political satire to experts such as Jon Stewart, "especially being a Brit", although he has offered every presidential candidate the opportunity to appear on the show for three uninterrupted minutes to deliver their stump speeches – "as long as they do it over a banging Nineties techno beat."

Last year Corden starred alongside Meryl Streep in the big-screen adaptation of Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, a surprise box-office smash. With a serious Hollywood acting career in the offing, why spend the next half-decade hosting a talk show four nights a week? At first, he admits, he was "very reticent" about the idea. "But then I thought, actually, there's a chance that it'll be the very thing I'm best at."

Before accepting the gig, he took a straw poll of friends and fellow professionals. Theatre folk said he'd be a terrible loss to the stage; comedians said he'd be nuts to refuse. "I told him that his gifts as a stage actor are extremely unusual," says Nicholas Hytner, who directed Corden in *The History Boys* and in *One Man, Two Guvnors* at the National Theatre, a whirlwind comic performance that won him a Tony Award and the approval of CBS president Les Moonves. "James has a huge and winning personality, but he's also extraordinarily accomplished," Hytner says. "His craft and precision are second to none. He has all the skills that the great variety and vaudeville artists used to have."

On the other hand, argues Jimmy Carr, a regular on Corden's Sky panel show, *A League of Their Own*, "James has a great ability to make people feel welcome and warm, and to get the best out of them, and that's exactly what this job is. Late-night hosts are normally stand-up comedians, and you couldn't find a more self-obsessed group of individuals than stand-up comedians. But if you were writing James's school report, you'd say, 'Plays well with others.'"

We retire to the backstage green room. Recently refurbished at Corden's request, it resembles an outpost of Soho House: mid-century modern furniture, Farrow & Ball walls, scented candles. He has time for a quick breather before rushing off to tweak the script, edit a video segment, shower,

change, submit to make-up, and host the show, which is taped at 5pm. He munches a tortilla chip from the vast catering spread and points out the table-football game that was a gift from Jimmy Fallon, host of NBC's *Tonight Show*. One team wears the colours of Corden's beloved West Ham – a nice touch. Hardly surprising, since Fallon is known as the nicest guy in late-night. Or at least he was, until Corden arrived.

Los Angeles agrees with the erstwhile Londoner, who still owns a place in Primrose Hill but now lives in a house with a pool in Pacific Palisades, a leafy, tony neighbourhood between the mountains and the ocean, where the neighbours include Bradley Cooper and Ben Affleck. He commutes to Television City in his Audi S8 – anything flashier "would feel like a waste of money" – and begins the working day at 9am sharp, with an hour-long brainstorm in the writers' room.

His staff is the smallest in late-night, 10 writers in all. "I like to point out that's 16 less than Jimmy Fallon," jokes Corden. As a sign of how seriously CBS took its new signing the company hired executive producer Rob Crabbe from *The Tonight Show*. Among the writers is David Javerbaum, the man behind the brilliant satirical Twitter account Tweetofgod (and who recently authored the hit Broadway comedy *Act of God*).

Corden splits the morning in half with a 45-minute workout at a nearby Crossfit gym, "with a trainer called Brian, who's so big he looks like he's carrying carpets. I hate every second of it." Now 36, he's no longer the "chunky unit" he once was, although he has little intention of sculpting a Californian beach body. "Vanity is not attractive, and male vanity is the worst," he says. "LA has a lot of dudes who have the same chiselled face!"

For Corden, whose thick portfolio of performance skills does not include stand-up, it's his opening monologue that, after three months, remains the most daunting part of the show. "I forget I'm wearing a microphone. I'll watch it back and think, 'Just bring it down a touch, yeah?'" His laugh on stage is a high-pitched, hysterical cackle; they can probably hear it in Malibu.

Tonight after the taping, he'll host a screening of *Kill Your Friends*, a pitch-black satire of the Britpop-era music business that he shot before moving to California. He plays the first murder victim of a psychotic A&R man, in what he says will be one of his last film roles for at least a year; he also has a cameo as a market trader in Hytner's new film of Alan Bennett's *The Lady in the Van*.

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Carey; he's modelled underwear with David Beckham, and Burberry with Naomi Campbell... His broadcast audience – the night-shifters and insomniacs who watch it as it goes out, at 12.35am – is in the ballpark of 1.3 million. But fortunately for his home-grown British fans, Corden's antics with his star guests are preserved as Youtube clips, many of them gaining millions of views. His summertime carpool skit with Justin Bieber hit 25 million within a few days. Obscenely confident but not conspicuously vain, and blessed with infectious, boy-next-door charm, Corden may just turn out to be America's new best mate. And our greatest loss.

The rehearsal complete, he trots from the stage to introduce himself. Sandy-blond and stubbly, with sky-blue eyes and a

For now, though, he has almost no time for anything but the show and his young family. Most days he's free to head home by 7pm, to wife Julia and their children, Max, four, and nine-month-old Carey. The couple haven't had a chance to make many new LA friends yet – which is not to say Corden hasn't been socialising. "I had a really great dinner with Bono and Sean Penn the other day," he admits, a little sheepishly.

In the lead-up to his *Late Late Show* debut, publicists were wary of the unknown Brit, fearing another sarcastic curmudgeon in the Simon Cowell mould, so Corden embarked on a solo tour of Hollywood's PR agencies. There are two dominant styles of American talk, embodied by Jimmys Fallon and Kimmel (the host of ABC's *Jimmy Kimmel Live*). Fallon is unrelentingly earnest and agreeable, while Kimmel can be caustic, even snarky. Corden wanted to take the Fallon approach: "I just think it's nice to be nice."

Salvation arrived in the shape of Tom Hanks, who had seen and admired *One Man, Two Guvnors*. The double Oscar-winner had no new project to promote, but nevertheless he agreed to be the show's first guest, and to take part in a skit recreating his 35-year film career in less than seven minutes – Corden's first late-night viral hit. "Suddenly Michael Douglas was confirming, Russell Crowe was confirming," says Ben Winston, Corden's longtime best friend and his *Late Late Show* executive producer.

Famous he may be, but Corden remains a fan, visibly in awe of his most venerated guests. One of his prized possessions is a framed photograph of himself and

Hanks in rehearsal. On a recent show, he bounced from his chair to bust a move for Jane Fonda, earning himself an invitation to one of the actress's legendary dance parties. That unconcealed adulation is disarming.



"I'm one of those guys who made a choice aged 26: 'OK, this is what I'll wear until I die'"

With tonight's show wrapped, Corden withdraws to his office, the only room in his late-night fiefdom yet to be fully redecorated. One of the bare walls will soon be filled by a Banksy, he tells me, after changing from the Tom Ford two-piece (he recently sat front row at one of Ford's shows) he wore for the taping back into his jeans, trainers and T-shirt. Casual is his natural state. "I love clothes," he says, "but I'm one

of those guys who made a choice aged 26: 'OK, this is what I'll wear until I die.'"

He is, however, awaiting a consignment of new Burberry suits – which seems like the least the brand can do after he strutted the catwalk during a Burberry show at Hollywood's Griffith Observatory in April. The Youtube footage is Corden at his self-deprecating best. "It was one of those things you say yes to, thinking it will be fun and easy," he grimaces. "But that catwalk was very long!"

Away from the cameras, Corden tones down the nervous stage energy. He pours us both a glass of top-shelf tequila Avión, complaining that Noel Gallagher made off with the last bottle of the good stuff when he was a guest a couple of weeks back. The office cabinet is well stocked, although its owner insists he's not much of a drinker. He slumps into a sofa with a self-critical sigh. Tonight's show was not a classic, he suggests. "But that's the nature of it. You always think, 'Could we have done that better? Could that have been funnier?'"

By now it's almost dinner time. His wife calls, on her way to join him at the screening. She's bringing take-away sushi, the

quintessential Californian convenience food. Corden remains close to his own parents, who still live 5,000 miles away in High Wycombe, where he grew up. His father is a salesman of Christian books, his mother and younger sister are both social workers, his older sister runs a youth group. "I don't quite know where it comes from, my want and need for attention," he says. "But at least I'm honest about it." > 408

At school, his ambition was to form a boy band. "I love showmanship; I love effort. My friends laughed when I said, 'Robbie Williams is going to be the biggest star in the country.' But I'd been to a Take That show and I couldn't take my eyes off him." When Corden arrived in LA, Williams sent him a welcome gift: one of his lyrics framed to look like an eye-test chart. "It's in our hallway. It blows my mind that I know him now."

During the Justin Bieber carpool karaoke, the unlikely pair banter and croon like a late-model Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis as they cruise the boulevards in an SUV, even switching clothes, while Corden expertly teases out the cracks in the megastar's studied cool – getting Bieber to admit that he wears his Calvin Klein pants just once before throwing them out, and that he only used the word "fondue" in one of his hit singles because it rhymed.

The funny segment, I remark, gave a boost to Bieber's ongoing image rehabilitation. "I don't think Justin Bieber has ever done anything worse than half my mates did at school at the same age," Corden fires back. "Go to Magaluf this summer and you'll see people behaving a lot worse – and this is a kid who's had to deal with being unbelievably famous and wealthy. That can warp your mind."

His defence of Bieber brings to mind Corden's own brief unpopularity when, after his multi-Bafta-winning BBC sitcom *Gavin and Stacey* became a sensation, he tarnished his rep with a bad sketch show, a worse film (2009's *Lesbian Vampire Killers*) and some boorish public behaviour, for which he has done lengthy penance in the British press. At times, he says, the criticism was "relentless". Then again, since his transatlantic promotion was announced, "I've felt incredibly supported by people at home, which is lovely. I've felt it like a wave."

A few days after our conversation, he'll jet home to London for a three-week break from the show: just enough time to record a new series of *A League of Their Own*, spend the weekend at Glastonbury and pick up his OBE from Buckingham Palace accompanied by his family. It was as he emerged from his unruly phase in 2009 that Corden met Julia, a charity worker and childhood friend of his *History Boys* co-star Dominic Cooper. "Jules just floored me," he says. "She's kind and funny and warm and friendly and caring and beautiful and sexy and unbelievably bright. I sort of feel like the only wrong choice she's made in her life was marrying me." He proposed atop Primrose Hill, early on Christmas morning, 2010. "Do it at Christmas so you only have to get one present, that's the trick. You have to buy the ring anyway – might as well double up as a gift, right?"

One compelling reason to take the *Late Late Show* job was the chance to spend more time with his family. During production of his recent BBC2 sitcom *The Wrong Mans*, he recalls, "We were filming at a prison in Johannesburg, I was Skyping my son on my birthday, and I realised leaving him was only going to get harder. No one ends up in a therapist's chair saying, 'My father was around too much. He gave me too many cuddles and it fucked me up.'" Having children diminished Corden's own desire for attention "a little bit", he concedes, with an impish grin. "But it's still very good for me to get a standing ovation every night."

Before I leave, he wants to show me his favourite spot at Television City: the studio roof. By this hour, with the sun low over the Hollywood Hills, the view from the top looks a lot like the phoney one downstairs on the *Late Late Show* set. It was as he stood up here alone, pondering the skyline, that the idea for that triumphant Tom Hanks sketch came to him.

"If your job relies on being creative every day, there's no better place on earth to step out under these big blue skies and let your mind go," he says. His current contract with CBS will keep him in the States until at least 2020. Is he ever going to go home? "I think so," he replies, pauses – and then thinks again: "But I have a hunch LA will be a difficult place to leave." ■

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Korean fashion buyers are marvelling over one of the biggest men's week reveals, an old-fashioned silver fob chain attached to an Apple pocket watch. It is a thing of beauty, at once looking forward and back, and it's testament to the momentum of London Collections Men that this American-born designer should choose to showcase a Victorian gizmo to Pacific customers in London.

Launched by the Prince of Wales in 2012, London Collections Men has an increasingly international aspect and is transforming the roles of models. Stars such as David Gandy, Oliver Cheshire and Robert Konjic are now elevated by the British Fashion Council to ambassadorial status, and I saw them all out working the room at a reception at the Corinthia hotel, spreading stardust or, in Robert's case, his "white shine" smile. "It's my trademark."

Across town, wide-eyed, Bambi-like boys and girls were thronging the Storm Models and House of Vans LCM party, held in an underground skate park in Waterloo. "Come and pick up your bottle of water before the photo shoot," calls Paula from Storm. "They're like your mum and dad," grins Ryan Murphy. Charlie Ayres-Taylor, an engineering student on an extended gap year, introduces himself: "I turn up on time. I don't do drugs. I used to think I was ugly. I thought I was ginger, and ugly, and freckly. And then I was booked to Prada on an exclusive." He is reading a book he thinks will help with modelling – the ancient Chinese manual *The Art of War*.

But next to these young ones is Rob Evans – huge, handsome and world-weary as only a 26-year-old model can be. "I made friends with so many bookers and agents, but the truth about this business is they're not your friends, and once you can't make them money, they're going to drop you." He is talking fast and from the heart. It's hard for me to keep track of what he's saying, not least because his physical presence is distracting me. I'm not surprised Riccardo Tisci "flipped" when he first set eyes on him. He is vastly more imposing in person than the skinny fashion boys who photograph so well. Rob was a champion amateur boxer when he was spotted, aged 22. "I'd never left the country before; I didn't even have a passport." His first show was Givenchy in Paris but he was soon in New York, modelling for Calvin Klein and Jeremy Scott. He was a judge for two seasons on *America's Next Top Model*. "I was one of the biggest models in the world at one point. I had girls throwing themselves at me, la la la. I don't like that any more. I like a girl who's a little more respectful. I'm looking for different qualities in a female. All those girls who were giving me attention then, where are they now?"

I could tell that it hadn't been plain sailing, but what Rob didn't mention was that at the height of his success, he had a run-in with the law over allegations that he assaulted fellow male model, Landry Macedo, on the pavement outside his modelling agency. In *Zoolander*, this guy-on-guy rivalry would be cause for a "walk-off" – adjudicated by Cara Delevingne, perhaps – but in reality the idea of lives blighted by brawls is just really, really ridiculously sad. "Every time I go home to my family in Oxford it re-motivates me," says Rob. "I need to own a property one day."

All male models are told that this will not last, yet how can they believe it? David Gandy is paid more at 35 than he ever has been, and Brad Kroenig has a mini-me son, Hudson, who appears with him on the Chanel catwalk. But these survivors are rare. Most male models will have to get a proper job (shudder) and re-learn to tie their own shoelaces.

"The main thing," says Arthur wisely, as we say goodbye, "is not to think you are important because you're modelling. A lot of models change so much. Like so many girl models, they become... Not bitches but..."

"Less nice," interjects Tim.

"They forget they are just lucky."

"Just good genes?" I suggest. The guys look down at their legs, innocently. Their jeans are great.

Later that day, at my last stop, the Tom Ford men's collection, I notice that the security guard on the door is suspiciously handsome. "Are you a model?" I ask him. "I was once," he says. ■