



# Brothers in arms

MIXING BUSINESS AND BROTHERHOOD HAS NEVER BEEN A PROBLEM FOR JOEL AND NASH EDGERTON, WHO ARE RIDING HIGH ON THE BUZZ FROM THEIR FILM, *THE SQUARE*

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Joel and Nash Edgerton can't tear their eyes away from the tennis. They're both sports nuts and a journo's tape recorder proves no match for Venus Williams and the tiny TV hung in the corner of the beer garden in which we've met. It's also the tail-end of a sweltering summer day – the first day the boys have seen each other since Christmas – and it almost feels as if we're mates meeting for a few drinks and a holiday catch-up.

But there are no beers today, just cranberry juice and, as the questions flow, Venus is forgotten. It's easy to relax around such a charismatic double act – one they've played out in front of the cameras since the release last year of their Aussie crime thriller, *The Square*. Joel co-wrote the script and starred, while Nash directed, and their combined efforts earned them a good rap from critics. The film secured a spot on Hollywood's 2008 International Watch List and fan mail follows them around the world – even onto planes.

Nash, 36, was recently en route to India for his

muso pal Ben Lee's wedding when a flight attendant appeared bearing a cocktail and a note. "She said it was from a friend, but all my friends know I don't drink – I'm allergic," he says, rustling through his wallet before producing the crumpled scrap of paper he's clearly saved for sentimental reasons. "It says, 'Doing a rickshaw race across India. Hope we don't end up under a concrete square! Happy Baileys!'"

The adventurous female fans responsible for the note later cornered him at the airport to tell him they loved the film. Is this another sign that the brother who operates largely behind the scenes – as a stuntman and director – is losing his anonymity? "I guess so. Or maybe they thought I was him," he admits, nodding slyly at Joel, 34.

It's a cue for the boys to swap mistaken identity anecdotes, along with another round of wise-cracks at each other's expense. Generally, directors don't receive that kind of attention, explains Joel. But he feels Nash has a certain status. "And he's a bit handsome," he says. "If you were a bit wonky looking they might not want to photograph you."

"Settle down," Nash shoots back.

Up close, though, it's hard to see how anyone could possibly mix up the pair. Tall, dark and handsome, Nash is shyer and more softly spoken than his moviestar brother. Joel's familiar Aussie drawl booms in comparison and his scruffy sex appeal only seems to improve with age. Looks aside, the pair have an easy rapport. They laugh at each other's jokes and often finish each other's sentences. But surely, like all siblings – particularly creative ones who've lived together for the past seven years and co-run the production company, Blue Tongue Films – there's the odd bit of aggro? Nash looks bemused at the question.

"We get on really well," he insists. "Ultimately, we're both aiming for the same result."

The duo share a Sydney pad and admit they spend a fair amount of time together outside of work. Asked if they share the same mates, too, Joel dons his best poker face. "I don't let him have access to some of my friends. You have to have some separate life, you know," he says. "No, actually we have >

a lot of the same friends. Sh\*t, we do too much together. Once I hear myself say it aloud – we live together, we have an office together...”

“We go to the beach together,” Nash adds.

“And we didn’t have much time before, so we took a bath together,” Joel jokes.

But how about the ultimate act of mateship: the double date? Both look aghast. “I don’t think we’ve ever been on a double date,” says Nash. “No, you have to draw the line somewhere. It would be over pretty quick. He’d be like, ‘Did I tell you about the time that Joel...’ And she’d be like, ‘Bye.’ That’s how it would pan out. No, no double dates. The words sound frightening and awkward to me.”

It certainly isn’t all work and no play for the eligible Edgertons. However, both brothers are notoriously private about their personal lives, especially Joel, whose high-profile romances have always been tabloid fodder. He’s made headlines ever since his split from long-term partner, Olympian Cathy Freeman, in 2004, and, more recently, snaps were published of his public snogging sessions with Isabel Lucas, his co-star in *The Waiting City*. Despite this, the actor does his best to maintain a private life.

“Anything outside my work life is off limits to journalists,” he says. “Even doing the press with Nash becomes a grey area. I think it becomes a situation where I talk a little more about my past and my personal life than I’m usually comfortable with.”

study paper-mâché, they wouldn’t have cared. It was university, you know. I was going off to pretend to be a tree, and he was going off to jump out of them. So they were more worried about him.”

These days, it’s a different story. Dig a little and you’ll find résumés as impressive as they are diverse. Nash juggles stunt work with directing music videos for the likes of Missy Higgins. His short films are often screened at festivals, including Sundance, and he’s currently in talks to secure *The Square*’s release to US cinemas.

Joel, whose breakout role was in *The Secret Life of Us*, has dabbled overseas with parts in *Star Wars II* and *III* and Jerry Bruckheimer’s epic, *King Arthur*. He goes to auditions regularly, including a recent one for Owen Wilson’s best mate in *Marley & Me* – “I didn’t get it, obviously; it went to the guy from *Grey’s Anatomy*,” [Eric ‘McSteamy’ Dane] – and he’s also just wrapped on Australian drama *The Waiting City*, which was shot in India. Next up is big-budget Hollywood action flick *Warrior*, and a stint treading the boards opposite Cate Blanchett in the Sydney Theatre Company’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

house and enjoy where he wanted to be. I don’t feel as happy when I’m in the States as I do when I’m here, but there’s a lot more work there. So I don’t know how you can reconcile that except by spending a bit of your time there and a bit here.”

It helps that Joel’s a man of many talents. He enjoys writing as well as acting, and co-wrote the script for *The Square* with writer/producer Matthew Dabner. “I had the idea for the film a long time ago. Matt taught me a lot about screen-writing and really helped put the film in order,” he says. “Writing with someone else is good, except slower. You’re always saying, ‘What do you think about this?’ and they have to send their stuff to you and it’s like you’re marking each other’s homework.”

Clearly, each brother has respect for the other’s professional judgment. “I’m so attuned to Nash’s opinion, even to the point of choosing jobs,” says Joel. “Before turning up [to auditions] I’m thinking, what will Nash think if I do this?”

Nash feels the same. “If I’m sent scripts that I think are worth directing, I’ll always get Joel to read them. He’s read more scripts than I have because

“If I’m sent scripts that I think are worth directing, I’ll always get Joel to read them. He’s very talented. But I wouldn’t cast him in a film just ‘cos mum said I had to”



(from left) Nash filming *The Square*; siblings on set; conferring off-camera; with actors Claire van der Boom and Anthony Hayes; Nash with Peter Phelps, David Roberts and Kieran Darcy-Smith.

They’re now well into their 30s, so you’d think the brothers might have copped some heat over Christmas about settling down and furthering the family name. “I fall asleep during those conversations,” chuckles Nash. “I don’t have a set plan. But I’m all for it. I dunno, I hope in five years I’m just doing what I love doing. That’s a good plan. And if I get to make a mini-me...”

“A mini Nash?” Joel chimes in. “God forbid.”

They’ve come a long way from the days when, as kids, they mucked around making movies in the backyard of their Dural home, in Sydney’s Hills district. Their parents were supportive of their career aspirations, says Nash. “But they also said that while we were waiting, they’d like us to have a plan B.”

His decision to quit an engineering degree to become a stuntman almost 15 years ago probably wasn’t quite what the folks had in mind. “I took the heat off Joel for at least four years,” he says.

“Definitely,” says Joel, who was at the time studying drama at the University of Western Sydney. “Drama school on its own might sound bad to parents. But when you put it next to, ‘I’m going to become a stuntman’... If I’d decided to

“My whole life’s planned out for this year. I know exactly where I’m going to be every week,” he says. “I’m getting older, and I quite like being able to tell people where I’m going to be.”

Much as these boys love living in the Southern Hemisphere, both are philosophical, admitting the nature of the Aussie film industry means they may have to go further afield to make a living.

“Any film-maker in Australia would agree that if you focused just on money and profit, you’d maybe do what the *Saw* boys [co-writers Leigh Whannell and James Wan] did and go and make your first movie in the States,” says Joel. “I don’t think you’d be branded sane if you thought you could make a movie in Australia and definitely make money.”

“You really do it for the love of it,” adds Nash.

But as much as Hollywood and the promise of big bucks beckon, Joel is circumspect. “I don’t think making wads of cash is going to make you more comfortable about living somewhere else,” he says. “I reckon Guy Pearce has it right. When I worked with him years ago, I always remember thinking that. He’d scurry off and work, then scurry back and live in Melbourne and potter away on his

of the nature of being an actor and auditioning for things. I think he’s a much stronger writer than I am. And he’s very talented. But I wouldn’t cast him in a film just ‘cos mum said I had to,” he says, grinning.

His self-confessed workaholic streak obviously meshes well with Joel’s perfectionist one. However, both say that churning out a decent film is tough.

“Probably about 30 or 40 per cent of the time, you’re lucky if you’re proud of what eventuates,” says Joel. “Maybe my expectations are really high. But, you know, so many things can make a project work, or bring it down, and maybe going into it with such high expectations... you see it through your own framework.”

And the films he does admire? “A 10-out-of-10 film for me is something like *Fargo*, *Life is Beautiful* or *Slumdog Millionaire*. One that you watch from start to finish and say the way it was shot, the acting, the music, every component was brilliant. It’s pretty rare to end up in one of those films.”

“Where does *The Square* sit in that?” Nash asks.

“Spot on, mate,” Joel laughs. “Spot on.” **SM**

*The Square* will be available on DVD March 5.