



“THIS MIGHT JUST BE MY FAVOURITE PART”

He was unrecognisable as Lord Voldemort, a surprising replacement for M in *Skyfall*... and now, **Ralph Fiennes** tackles two new roles – in front and behind the camera

THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL

New Release Sessions from
Wednesday 3 September **HD**

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

IP release from Wednesday 3 September
Available from Store/Box Office

Regarded as one of the greatest actors of our time, Ralph Fiennes is a man of many faces. Hopping from his villainous turn in the *Harry Potter* series to *Skyfall* to his directing follow-up (*The Invisible Woman*) and now *The Grand Budapest Hotel* in the span of just three years, he seems to be both anywhere and everywhere.

A noted Shakespearean actor and two-time Oscar nominee, for a while Ralph seemed the go-to guy to play emotionally tormented characters, whether it was the sadistic commandant Amon Goeth in *Schindler's List*, the disfigured, tragic Count Almásy in *The English Patient* or the damaged, vindictive titular character in his directorial debut *Coriolanus*.

This month, 51-year-old Ralph stars in his critically lauded comedic role as antihero Monsieur Gustave H – the meticulous, perfumed, octogenarian-bedding concierge of Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* – and also as a lovesick and philandering Charles Dickens in *The Invisible Woman*.

WORDS: KARA BYERS

How would you describe Gustave H?

He's essentially a good guy, although a little snobby, vain and precious. He's not just a pompous concierge, but has a great, campy sense of humour.

Is it true you were the only actor Wes Anderson considered for the role?

That's what I've been told anyway.

Wes is well-known for repeatedly working with the same actors and crew – did you feel like one of the gang?

There's no studio-style special treatment for anyone and that creates a great atmosphere. Everyone's the same.

Have you ever had a bizarre experience with a hotel concierge?

I was a house porter at a hotel before I went to drama school. Occasionally, when they were short-staffed, I was promoted to getting people out of taxis. I remember I took Jack Palance's suitcases to his car once. He then fastidiously counted coins into the palm of my hand, which I found a bit humiliating. And Leonard Nimoy once walked underneath me as I cleaned some windows.

The Invisible Woman is about the love affair a 45-year-old married Charles Dickens embarked on with 18-year-old actress Nelly Ternan. Was Dickens a lech?

Some people say he was a predator, but I don't believe he was. There was something sacred about Nelly for Dickens. Essentially, this film is about the intimacy between these two people. The age difference isn't an issue.



Ralph had great expectations for his role as both star and director of *The Invisible Woman*



Why did you choose this story?

I was enthralled by Abi Morgan's (*The Iron Lady*) script. I didn't know about [the relationship between] Dickens and Nelly and I'd only ever read *Little Dorrit*. I think it was so vivid to me; the love affair was so real.

Why had you steered clear of Dickens' vast collection of written works?

I blame an overexposure to a recording of *A Christmas Carol* we listened to as a family when I was growing up, it made me think Dickens' novels were too cosy.

This is your second time in the director's chair, following 2011's Coriolanus. What do you love most about directing?

I like having the problems. You're always thinking of the next thing to be done. You never stop learning, that's the thing.

Did you originally cast yourself as Dickens?

I offered the part to someone else, but they turned it down, which made me do it. I like Dickens – I can see he behaves cruelly but I think he's a vulnerable boy with many layers.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

I was auditioning for drama school with a *Hamlet* soliloquy and acting my socks off. When I finished, the principal said to me, "Don't make it happen, let it happen."

Which of your characters has been your favourite to play?

It meant a lot to me to play Coriolanus, but I have to say I absolutely loved Gustave H. That might just be my favourite part.

Both The Grand Budapest Hotel and The Invisible Woman deal in part with the divide between public and private life – did that strike a chord with you?

Of course. I think there'll always be curiosity surrounding anyone in the public eye. Whether you're a politician, pop star or actor, you want an audience, so the line between public and private isn't well defined.

Do you often get approached in the street?

People often mistake me for Liam Neeson. I've been praised on my performance in *Taken* many times.

Tell us a secret about yourself...

I love doing the washing up. And I'm always putting things in straight lines. **F**



It's a who's who in *Budapest Hotel*, which also stars Tom Wilkinson, newcomer Tony Revolori and Owen Wilson