

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Red Eye to eye shadow

Acting's no drag

■ "Men have the same products," says Murphy, who cross-dresses in his new film. They call it scrub instead of exfoliator.

Hot off rave reviews from summer hits *Batman Begins* and *Red Eye*, Irish actor Cillian Murphy does drag for *Crying Game* director Neil Jordan in *Breakfast on Pluto*
By Michael Giltz

JOHN HERNIMAN FOR THE ADVOCATE

Most men do serious grooming the day before their wedding. But it was the day after his wedding that actor Cillian Murphy began some serious primping—namely eyebrow-plucking and chest- and leg-hair removal worthy of *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*. "My wedding time was quite fraught," admits Murphy, who first drew attention in the United States playing the lead in Danny Boyle's tensely clever horror flick *28 Days Later*. All that manscaping was done to embody Kitten, the Irish transvestite with a wispy voice but steely resolve to find the mother who abandoned him in Neil Jordan's new film *Breakfast on Pluto*.

Murphy is already bored by questions about his method of acting, the rigors of ►

■ Murphy as cross-dresser Kitten in *Breakfast on Pluto*



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—Cillian Murphy

high heels, or even the implication that women spend more time in front of the mirror than men. "The thing is," says Murphy, "men have the same products; they just have a different name. They call it scrub instead of exfoliator."

Audiences certainly aren't bored by Murphy. His striking blue eyes and intriguing on-screen presence have turned the Irish actor into one of the hottest talents in the United Kingdom. Though he's never taken an acting class in his life, Murphy landed the first role he ever auditioned for—in an acclaimed play called *Disco Pigs*—and set aside dreams of playing rock and roll for a career that has included *Cold Mountain* and two big hits this summer—the blockbuster *Batman Begins* and the Wes Craven thriller *Red Eye*.

Based on the Booker-nominated novel by Patrick McCabe (whose *The Butcher Boy* also became a Jordan film), *Breakfast on Pluto* follows a determined drag queen dismissive of the political turmoil and violence engulfing the small town he grows up in during the '70s—"Serious, serious, serious. There's that word again," says Kitten—but enraptured by the treacly pop songs that promise love and affection.

When Kitten isn't searching for his mother, he stumbles into one strange world after another, performing as a

"squaw" in a glam-rock band led by Gavin Friday, tricking with a creepy Bryan Ferry (never trust a man who praises the song "Feelings"), dancing with a British soldier back from Ireland, and working as an assistant to magician Stephen Rea.

Murphy's a huge fan of music—most of his friends are musicians—and he gets more jazzed meeting artists like Stevie Wonder than meeting movie stars. And he's always writing songs; Murphy was thrilled to record songs in the studio with Friday and to be involved in a movie soaked in vintage pop tunes. He also absorbed the world of London transvestites by going clubbing with a group of them.

"It became clear to me how transvestites would develop that quick wit," says the 29-year-old actor. "You get shouted at on the fucking street all the time. How the fuck are you that clever that quickly? Because you have to be."

He adds, "Kitten is so fundamentally good. All she's looking for is to be loved and accepted. When I was out with those people, I found they didn't want to change the world; they just wanted to look pretty. It's that simple." ■

Giltz is a regular contributor to several periodicals, including the New York Post.