



Tom Hanks in his most difficult role yet: director. Below: A scene from *That Thing You Do!* Hanks plays the manager of a rock band called The Wonders.



Videography

Toy Story (1995) Available on Video October 29
 The Celluloid Closet (1995)
 Apollo 13 (1995)
 Forrest Gump (1994)
 Philadelphia (1993)
 Sleepless in Seattle (1993)
 Fallen Angels—Volume 2 (1993)
 A League of Their Own (1992)
 Radio Flyer (uncredited) (1992)
 Joe Versus the Volcano (1990)
 The Bonfire of the Vanities (1990)
 The 'Burbs (1989)
 Turner & Hooch (1989)
 Punchline (1988)
 Big (1988)
 Dragnet (1987)
 Nothing in Common (1986)
 The Money Pit (1986)
 Every Time We Say Goodbye (1986)
 The Man with One Red Shoe (1985)
 Volunteers (1985)
 Splash (1984)
 Bachelor Party (1984)
 Mazes and Monsters (1982)
 He Knows You're Alone (1980)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: UNIVERSAL; EVERETT; COLUMBIA TRISTAR; EVERETT

BY MICHAEL GILTZ So what does a superstar do for an encore

after he's won two back-to-back Oscars, received every accolade, and is among the most sought-after leading men in Hollywood—all by age 40?

If you're Tom Hanks, you climb "onto the back of a flatbed train that's going 60 miles an hour." Figuratively, not literally. That's how the celebrated actor describes directing his first feature film, *That Thing You Do!*, at the breakneck sprint of "full-tilt boogie." The movie, a dramatic comedy set in 1964, is about an Erie, Pennsylvania, rock band called The

Wonders. Their signature song soars on the charts and sends its four young musicians on a personal and professional journey from spaghetti joints to stardom.

"You're hurtling from one station to the next because of all the things that have to be done," says Hanks. "We opened production offices in July '95, and I've been working full-time—24 hours a day, seven days a week—ever since."

Not that he's complaining. After his string of successful films—*A League of Their Own*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Philadelphia*, *Forrest Gump*, *Apollo 13* and *Toy Story*—Hanks could have chosen to sit quietly at home reading scripts, readying for another role, or reliving his Academy Award moments. But which script? Which role? Just how do you top success?

"There was the requisite amount of depression after *Apollo 13*," Hanks admits. "Creatively, I needed something new." It was *Philadelphia* director Jonathan Demme who put the idea of directing in Hanks's head. "I was with Jonathan in New York, and we were talking about my doing this role or that, and he said, 'You know, the coolest thing you could do

continued on page 25

HANKS

continued from page 17

now is say, 'Forget it; I want to direct.' And I said, 'You're right.'"

So Hanks joined a growing list of celebrated actors fortunate enough to peak before their first gray hair, like Mel Gibson, Kevin Costner, Robert Redford, Clint Eastwood, and Warren Beatty, who all turned to directing not just for a new challenge but also for the thrill of that heart-racing, fear-provoking "first-time" feeling. "I ended up directing this thing because it was the most bodacious thing to do," Hanks explains. "There wasn't a single moment on the movie that my experiences as an actor prepared me for. Not the first read-through, not the first day of shooting, not any big scene. You don't have time to celebrate any sort of achievement because the clock is running. You do not get so much as a nanosecond to say, 'okay, let me sit back and enjoy the vista.'"

Though he's legendary for his laid-back manner on- and offscreen, Hanks kept a more frenetic pace for this film. Not only did he direct, he also conceived the story, penned the screenplay, and cowrote some of the original songs on the soundtrack.

Given the movie's subject matter, it would be natural to assume that Hanks, like many baby boomers, once had a garage band. But he's not a trained musician (though he did take up the guitar on the set of *Turner & Hooch* on the advice of costar Mare Winningham so he'd "always have something to do" in his trailer). In fact, he'd always regarded rock stars with awe.

What fascinated Hanks even more were movies about guys in bands, most notably Richard Lester's two Beatles classics, *Help!* and *A Hard Day's Night*, and John Boorman's *Having a Wild Weekend*, with the Dave Clark Five. Two of his other favorites were the Talking Heads concert film *Stop Making Sense*, directed by Demme, and the comedy about Beatles fans, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, by Robert Zemeckis, Hanks's director on *Forrest Gump*. But it wasn't until he saw Alan Parker's *The Commitments*, chronicling the make-or-break struggles of a young

Irish band, that Hanks thought about an American version.

Initially, he was worried that doing a '60s period musical came loaded with perils. In his view, too many were "just a bad version of Elvis Presley movies." He decided to first try his hand at a screenplay and "write something that was relatively familiar, yet had all sorts of new stuff in it." In 1994, he fleshed out an idea that had been "percolating for some time" into a nine-page outline. "Working on the screenplay was a test to see if I had the concentration, and the stomach, to start on page one and continue on to page 121," Hanks recalls.

"I was waiting for it to fall apart. On page seven? Page 27? Page 67? It took three months to do a cohesive draft that sort of worked."

Hanks also wasn't sure if he wanted to direct—or if he could. "For years, I wouldn't have considered myself qualified. I didn't have the social skills, the business acumen, or the ability to communicate that is necessary," he says.

Nor, until recently, the Hollywood clout.

Back in 1990, Hanks's career, which had sparked with the 1984 sleeper *Splash*, almost went up in smoke because of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. That movie was ripped apart by critics and audiences; a book was even written about its many missteps. After that debacle, Hanks fired his handlers and hired the town's most powerful talent agency, CAA, to rescue him from the brink. From the moment *Forrest Gump* passed the \$300 million mark at the box office in 1995, Hanks had carte blanche. When he brought his screenplay to 20th Century Fox, where he had a first-look deal, executives gave him the green light to direct.

"A guy like me directing his first movie is going to garner attention," Hanks admits. "So the question was, Are we going to do this right? Or are we going to do this in a cheap, incredibly abbreviated way? That was the studio's call." But to create the right look (he once had driven through Erie and thought it was a cool town) and feel (the summer of '64 was "modern enough, goofy enough, and yet removed enough, and the music is still

pretty good") of the place, the actor asked for \$25 million.

Two Oscars helped him get it.

Hanks cast four unknowns as the male leads—Tom Everett Scott, Jonathan Schaech, Steve Zahn, and Ethan Embry—and Liv Tyler as the female lead without knowing she would steal the thunder from the other cast members of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Stealing Beauty* ("Hey, I just thought I was casting that girl in the Aerosmith video"). He also offered parts to Rita Wilson, his wife, and Peter Scolari, his co-star on the 1980-1982 TV series *Bosom Buddies*, which had catapulted Hanks from a college drama major and New York stage actor to network comedy star.

Finally, Hanks cast himself as Mr. White, a cynical-about-show-business record executive for Playtone Records who signs The Wonders to his label. "The role doesn't require a huge amount of emoting—it's not like his dog dies or something. But it was nice to impact scenes," Hanks says. "There were times when I was directing and I'd think, 'Man, it'd be fun to be an actor in this movie.' When I got to be an actor, it *was* fun."

As for the directing experience, Hanks calls it "constant crisis management." Aware that he was working with young, inexperienced actors, Hanks tried to create a "no pressure, open set" where they wouldn't be afraid to experiment. "The thing I always tried to say is that you cannot do wrong. The worst thing that will happen is we won't use the take. No one's going to get punished." He credits those who've directed him—Demme, Zemeckis, Ron Howard, Nora Ephron, Penny Marshall, some of the best in the business—with teaching him that "there's no one way to do anything."

The only thing Hanks did insist on is that his actors were prepared. He made his cast watch a lot of *Shindig* and *Hullabaloo*, TV programs from the early '60s, to pick up the way people talked and carried themselves during that period. For the music scenes, Hanks says, "We were going for that energy and excitement, but also simplicity. You're watching these guys perform and that's the hallmark."

continued on page 30

HANKS

continued from page 25

Hanks's song-writing ability will be hard to judge since what he wrote for the film was *supposed* to be "cheesy." For the "good" songs, Hanks wanted original music, and he and producer Gary Getzman sifted through about 400 submissions before selecting two Nashville tunesmiths to write the bulk of the numbers.

Only after the movie was edited to a 2½-hour rough cut did Hanks feel bold enough to invite his close friends to see it. And the first time he showed it to an audience, in Phoenix, it was "a bona fide surprise. I was anticipating, 'Oh my god, it's a screening. I'll have to throw up in the car on the way to the theater.' But I couldn't wait to see what they were going to tell me!"

Wanting an "honest reaction" to his film, he sneaked into the theater once the lights went down. "It's a problem when you're a celebrity. If nobody knows who you are, you can sit back and it's no big deal. But if the crowd knows you're there, which most of them probably did, it's going to affect the process."

Naturally, Hollywood is holding its breath, waiting to see how the film is received. Hanks's next possible project may be as an actor—in the World War II drama *Saving Private Ryan*, a joint effort by Paramount/Dreamworks SKG, which he might make with director Steven Spielberg. Asked whether he'd consider directing again, Hanks responds, "If the opportunity comes, I'll look forward to it because I'll know better what to worry about and what not to. I'll know where I can truly manage and where I'd be wasting my time trying to micromanage. I'd know how to shoot things better, too."

"But in all honesty, it would be hard to have any enthusiasm to direct again if this movie tanks because I like the way it came out. If I'm so totally wrong, well, then, you know what? I had a pretty good movie star gig going, and I ought to stick with that." □

Michael Giltz has written about movies for *Premiere*, *Out*, and other magazines.

A large black and white photograph of Tom Hanks standing in shallow water, splashing. He is wearing a dark, long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants. The water is splashing around his legs, creating a dynamic scene. In the background, there's a bright, hazy sky.A smaller, black and white inset photograph in the top right corner showing a film set. It features a large professional video camera on a tripod, with various cables and equipment visible. A person's arm is partially visible on the right side of the frame.

Take Two

With That Thing You Do!, Tom Hanks joins a growing list of celebrated actors who have moved behind the camera to direct.

THE LATEST RENTALS • TOP HALLOWEEN MOVIES • THE BEST VIDEOS TO OWN

blockbuster entertainment feature™

OCTOBER 1996 \$1.95

Helen Hunt

Twisting to
Movie Stardom?

Richard Gere

A Case Study

Tom Hanks

Directs "That Thing You Do!"

