

Interview: 'Greatest Showman' Star Sam Humphrey Talks Working with Hugh Jackman

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FAN FEST NEWS



Remember this name: Sam Humphrey! You won't be disappointed. The Australian actor stars alongside Hugh Jackman, Zac Efron, and Zendaya in the Golden Globe-winning movie *The Greatest Showman*, which will have you moved and miming almost every single song throughout the fictional retelling of P.T. Barnum's life.

Humphrey, a vibrant, suave 23-year-old, plays a tiny, but mighty character in the movie, and although the role is one amongst many in this elaborate film– he’s not someone you’ll miss! Humphrey plays Charles Stratton, also known as Tom Thumb, and ironically enough, the actor with a rare genetic condition called skeletal dysplasia had to shave off (metaphorically, and ya know, in post production CGI) a whopping two feet of his four foot stature for this role. I bet he never thought he’d have to lose height for an acting gig.

Humphrey not only stole the show, but isn’t letting his disability get the best of him. In fact, his acting career is booming and we were able to discuss his upcoming roles, and talk about various doors that have been opened thanks to his first (but not last) stint on the Big Screen! From dating, to working with one of the biggest actors in Hollywood– Humphrey gets candid with Fan Fest News about his upbringing, his support system and overcoming even the toughest critics (aka himself).

Here we go!

MM: You starred in *The Greatest Showman*, one of the year’s biggest movies alongside Hugh Jackman and Zac Efron. How has that journey been from going from small screen to the big screen?

SH: It’s been pretty surreal going from doing TV to doing a major feature film. There are a few things that are different, the sets are pretty different. The sets on a feature film are huge and overwhelming and there’s always so much stuff happening on a major feature film set that you don’t have happening on a TV set. The crews on a TV set are smaller, you might have like five to ten people and then the actors and you have maybe five or ten extras. But on a feature film you have anywhere from 80 to 150 people at any one time watching you and watching your performance. It can be very daunting, not that your acting is being affected but it’s definitely different when you have that many people watching and you know that that many people are critiquing your performance.



MM: And obviously you are a huge Hugh Jackman fan so this role must have been something you were super stoked about when you got it. Was it difficult to be around him and not constantly pick his brain and learn from him?

SH: I will say that the day I met him I totally spazzed out a little bit inside my head because he's standing there and if it wasn't for him, I honestly don't know whether I would have become an actor. So being able to meet him, I've always wanted to meet him. Finding out he's the lead on the film I got cast in, and then most of my scenes were with him was quite a surreal moment, especially when I met him for the first time. There were definitely a lot of questions I wanted to ask him and things like that. I wanted to keep it professional and not be too much of a fan. I wanted to be a coworker rather than a fan. And that's definitely the relationship we have going now. He's a friend first and then he's a mentor and when I see him around at the Golden Globes and the Oscars we're able to sit down and chat. We're two good friends. It's cool.

MM: I hear that he's very supportive in terms of the cast. Did you expect that from him? Because I know when you think of movie stars and big time actors you don't know what you're going to get on the other side. Did you expect him to be humble and supportive of his colleagues?

SH: It's true that with movie stars you're not quite sure how their personality is. But Hugh has always had that thing said about him that he's very down to earth and nice and the sweetest guy you'll ever meet. Sometimes you're not sure if that's all rumors or not. It is true about Hugh. He's the nicest guy you'll ever meet. He's down to earth, funny, he gets along with everyone. He's supportive, always there for you if you need a chat or have something going on. He's there. He was on set every day even when he wasn't needed. He just wanted to watch and be supportive of the whole cast. And like his role in the film, he was like the father of our set, of our film. With him being my mentor, I like to call him like my acting dad. He's very sweet.

MM: That's great. This movie won a Golden Globe for best song. How cool was it to be a part of something that has really become so many people's anthems around the world, no matter who you are, sexual orientation, anything like that?

SH: It's very cool I have to say to be in the song that was nominated and won a Golden Globe. We were nominated for an Oscar as well. I have to say, it hasn't quite sunk in. Even now with the film being out for so long and coming up on the Oscars, it hasn't quite sunk in that I am a part of that song. The whole cast is a part of making it happen but I'm actually in the song and my character actually sings a line of a Golden Globe and Oscar nominated song. Yeah, I mean it's pretty cool to be a part of all that.

MM: Actually just a side note, the song, seeing that video of you guys doing that song on YouTube is what drove me to see the movie. I had heard about it but I didn't really get to the theater right when it came out but I saw that video and was like "oh man this is right up my alley."

SH: That's what we like to hear.

MM: So after seeing the movie, I googled the cast getting some more info on everybody and was surprised to learn you had to lose some height for this role from a technically and filming side. Can you talk about that process of making you into Tom Thumb and any challenges you'd face having to become shorter? Did you ever think you'd have to become shorter in a role?

SH: Honestly, no. I thought that if anything the challenge would be trying to make me taller for a role and the technical aspects of camera angles and shooting from balconies and things like that. But the very first thing the Director said to me when I met him, he literally said "we're going to make you shorter." And I was like "What?" And he said "you're too tall compared to Hugh and we want to have a bigger height difference between Hugh and you. Tom Thumb was only about two feet tall." I was like "okay," I honestly never thought I'd be too tall for a role but this is Hollywood so I went with it. While filming, I did the entire thing on my knees. They got me into costume and design and they made these special — honestly to start off with we did a lot of trial and error. The first design for my boots were horrible. They were horrible. They were a normal boot and they cut out the back of it and had me kneeling on the shoe platform and tried to get the shoe tied around my leg and had me walk like that. They were the prototype and they were the worst thing you could imagine. The boots were flapping out from under my knee and I had no support. It was bad. So we had about maybe five or six different designs. It was probably halfway or a quarter of the way through filming and all that that we perfected the design and the design ended up being amazing. Basically, in the end the boots were at the front of my knees, the boots came out and there was this really long platform that went down my entire leg that was cushioned and I would walk on it. But because we were doing sixteen to eighteen hour filming days, when you're on your knees and your legs that long, the cushioning becomes irrelevant.

MM: That sounds like it would be a little painful.

SH: In terms of the technical aspects to make it come out on screen, they CGI out the back of my legs and make it look more natural.

MM: Well it looked great on screen and I heard you didn't have to do any dancing so that must have been a perk.

SH: It was a little bit of a bittersweet moment because I did three months of rehearsal for singing and dancing and then when we got down to it, to actually do it — our first shoot days of dancing, they came up to me and it kind of clicked in their heads that I'm on my knees and it would be difficult for me to dance. And they were like "do you mind not being in the dances" and I was like "well, okay, if that's what you guys want." So it was bittersweet after painstakingly rehearsing those dances and having it just occurred to them when we went to shoot that I couldn't do it on my knees. I was happy that I didn't have to do the dances but I was also a little bit bitter because obviously they couldn't have realized it at the start of it and we went through all those hours rehearsing. It was a great experience regardless.

MM: That's too funny. And I know that in another interview you were on screen with your brother and you had said that you two are very supportive of one another but you're always in constant competition. Do you think having him by your side pushes you to be better and challenges you to be more successful in life?

SH: Yeah, definitely. Growing up we always had that friendly brotherly rivalry that goes on between siblings. Having been the older sibling and the older brother, especially with what he's achieved at such a young age, which everyone thought was impossible to achieve something that incredible as a young person — definitely set the bar quite high in our family. And then it pushed me to try and meet that benchmark. He's always hit that benchmark and pushed me and challenged me. We've had many chats that have gone on for hours where we're talking about why you need to push yourself and that I can achieve my goals and I've definitely come out of those chats going "it's definitely possible. Don't let society hold you back from achieving what they say is possible." Just as you're a young person and many people have found it impossible to achieve their goals, just because that's their mindset doesn't mean it's impossible for me to achieve what they think is impossible. Live outside your comfort zone. The only way to move forward is getting out of your comfort zone and doing what the world thinks is impossible.

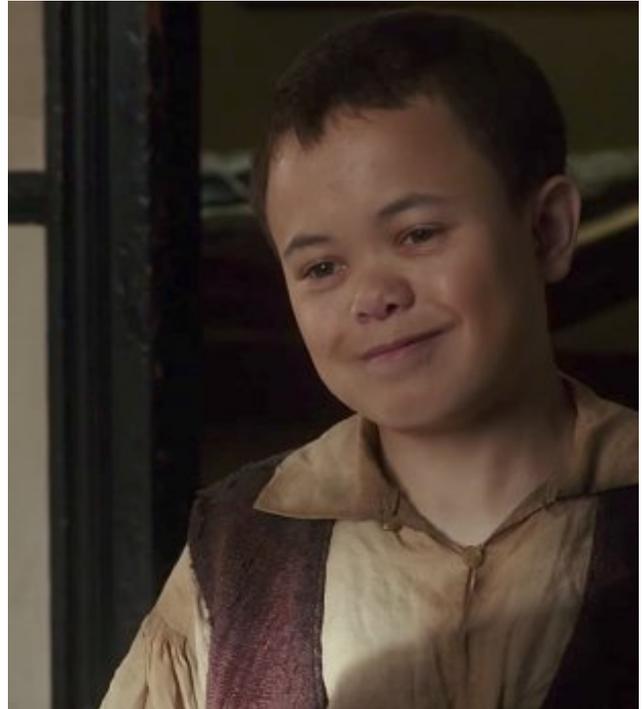
MM: And you never know until you try. The worst that can happen is that you fail and you try again.

SH: Exactly. It's definitely been a good thing to have someone like him in my family and to have someone around that's constantly challenging your preconceptions on what is and isn't possible. It's about facing the preconceptions in your mind about what you can and can't achieve which has always been something for me because of the disabilities that I have to face. A lot of people have said — there were some limitations that I had to face, what things can I do being a short statured person and having a disability, and not only am I short statured, I have my health issues and I'm hard of hearing as well. Some people set those limitations on me, that I can't do this and I can't do that. For them, it's something they've placed on me. It's not the limitations I've placed on myself.

MM: Of course, yeah. That's something good to remember. I feel like you're always your biggest critic so if you can overcome what you are telling yourself in your head, you don't have to worry about anyone else. You just have to make sure you're focusing on yourself and breaking down your own barriers that you've set in your own mind to think you can't do it.

SH: Yeah, exactly. And that's something that I had to overcome as a teenager to try and break through that and to ultimately come to a place of self acceptance which is what *Greatest Showman* is, that's definitely the message we're putting out there. And embracing who you are and bringing yourself to a point where you can accept yourself and accept the dreams that you have and try to strive towards those.

MM: Just from watching your interviews, you have such a fun, charismatic and down to earth personality yourself. I saw you're a big *Star Wars* fan and you rock those t-shirts under your suits when you're getting fancied up. Since I feel like you're a nerd at heart, have you ever been to comic con in Australia or plans to go to New York?



SH: I have been to — in Australia we have one called Armageddon which is a chance for our inner nerds to come out. I've been to that once or twice and I'm actually going to Comic Con in June/July in Las Vegas to do signings and photos.

MM: That's so amazing. Is that a surreal feeling to be someone who people are coming to see?

SH: Yeah. I get stopped on the street and at restaurants and stuff where people notice me and they ask me questions. The other day, my brother and myself we went out to lunch and we were waiting there for our food to come and all of a sudden this lady saw me and quickly googled Tom Thumb to see and she was looking at my brother and pulling out her phone and then she was like "Tom Thumb" and pointed and looked at me. And then she put her thumbs up and she was like "congratulations, you were really good." It was so cool to see her overwhelmed and excited to see me in a casual dining environment. It was amazing. People love seeing you out and about and really casual. They love it. Same when I like or comment on their things. They go absolutely crazy.

MM: As you near the end, I like to add my signature question to the interview. If you were to make a donut based on your personality in real life, what kind of donut would it be and what toppings might be on it?

SH: It would have to be a Krispy Kreme Donut, on the inside it would be gooey because on the inside I'm a bit of a romantic. On the inside it would be gooey. And then it would definitely be very sweet. It would be glazed because I'm fancy and shiny on the outside. I like my appearance very sharp. And then it would be covered with crushed bits of chocolate flakes just because I enjoy chocolate flakes. If I was to eat myself, I would want that on my donut. Maybe some mini M&Ms because I've got that weird, colorful flare about me sometimes. I think that might be it.

MM: That sounds delicious. You had mentioned that you're a romantic. If you were to make a dating video, what would your opening line be?

SH: Oh goodness, I don't know. It depends. This might be a little bit egotistical but I might start my video with "Hi I'm Sam Humphrey and I'm a movie star."

MM: No, I think you gotta have some confidence. I definitely think that would probably — you gotta own it. I think that's a great opening line.

SH: You think that's a great opening line?

MM: I do. I'm a shorter girl so I could say I'm fun sized or out of the box.

SH: I could say that too. I try to do something that's — I tried to get into the dating game and I've had one or two girlfriends in the past but it's definitely a hard thing for me because I'm short statured and people say I'm cute and adorable but that's not something I want people to see me as. I want people to see I'm cute and adorable but is that something if you're looking for a girlfriend or a partner? Is that something you want people to instantly see you as? Because that's not necessarily a partner feeling, I feel like and that's something I've struggled with. Especially in high school. All the girls would say "you're cute and adorable" and it's like are they saying that because they want to date you or because you're like a cute little kid. I struggled with that, in high school as a 15 or 16 year old, you don't want to be a cute cuddly little kid that the girls want to come up and kiss your cheeks. I want to be seen as dateable. It's challenging even now. Now people are much more understanding and realize I'm a 23 year old adult and have been in one of the biggest movies of the moment. That helps. It definitely helps.

MM: It might open some doors for you. I think you carry yourself very well- so one day you shouldn't have trouble finding love!

SH: I work very hard to present myself as mature and adult looking if you want to call it that. I definitely want people to know that. I mean even though I am fun and bubbly and charismatic and loyal, I'm an adult and I'm 23 and I don't want to be seen as a kid. I work very hard to present my image that way through the roles I play and how I present myself and how I talk.

MM: To conclude, what's next for you? Do you have any projects in the works or dream roles that you're chasing?

SH: I have a project coming up at the end of the year and I have another project pending at the moment for a show called "Jeremy the Dud." It's quite interesting. It's based on a world where everyone has a disability and the people who don't have a disability are the odd ones out. They're the ones that get ostracized and treated as though they're not special. So we've actually got — if you look on YouTube, you'll be able to watch our pilot episode. It definitely is — our idea is that we're trying to change people's preconceptions about how they look at people with disabilities. They're just like you and me. They're normal. And we're all unique in our own way and that's the same with people with disabilities.

MM: That's a wonderful concept. I think we need more of that in the world. So I look forward to seeing what's next for you!

SH: Thank you.

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