

Interview: Jack Lowden & Ophelia Lovibond of ‘Tommy’s Honour’

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CHICAGO – Combining the history of golf with a heartbreaking romance seems like a contradiction, but the new film “Tommy’s Honour” does it fluidly, in part because of the two young actors portraying the romance. Jack Lowden and Ophelia Lovibond are the actors who anchor the film, and also are breaking out as performers.

The film – directed by Jason Connery – tells the story of Tommy Morris (Lowden), whose star burned brightly in the game of golf in its 19th Century roots in Scotland. His father, “Old” Tom Morris (Peter Mullan), was an innovator who helped to bring the game into the modern era, and the father/son dynamic is part of the story. The other element is the relationship between Tommy and his eventual wife Meg Drinnen (Lovibond), a pairing that has its own passionate destiny. With the backdrop of Scotland, the couple start their life together while Tommy becomes one of the best early golfers in history.



Jack Lowden and Ophelia Lovibond in ‘Tommy’s Honour’

Photo credit: Roadside Attractions

Both Jack Lowden and Ophelia Lovibond are actors on the rise. Lowden almost specializes in portraying men of the past, with roles in the mini-series “War & Peace” and films “A United Kingdom” (set in the 1950s) and the upcoming World War II drama, “Dunkirk.” Lovibond has an eclectic character resume with TV’s “Elementary,” and diverse films roles in “Nowhere Boy,” “Guardians of the Galaxy,” and “The Autopsy of Jane Doe.” HollywoodChicago.com interviewed both of them together in anticipation of the release of “Tommy’s Honour” in Chicago on April 14th, 2017.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you portray characters from the 19th Century like this, what did you try to understand about their times that

wasn't necessarily in the script?

Jack Lowden: Certainly the age in which Tommy achieves everything. I'm always struck, when I play characters from previous centuries, how young they were when they did what they did. That's what I need to get used to – for example, when I portrayed a Russian cavalry soldier in 'War & Peace,' he was in his teens. When I do a period piece, that's the hardest thing for me to get my head around.

Ophelia Lovibond: Meg is a bit older than Tommy in the film, and the fact that she is still unmarried is huge during those times. She has a so-called 'scandalous' past, which wouldn't even be considered like that today, and she achieved the head server status in the 'big house,' after coming from abject poverty. It reflected her character and tenacity, which was huge for someone who came from nothing. Knowing those facts is what mattered about her, and understanding how she got there as well.

HollywoodChicago.com: Jack, you obviously had to learn to swing a club convincingly. After you got the coaching for the film, what fascinated you about the game of golf that you still keep with you?

Lowden: I totally appreciated that it wasn't as simple as just swinging at a ball with a club. It was about body control, and the connection to that control, it's unbelievable the discipline that is in that control. If you compare it to hitting something with just your hand, the loss of control when you add a long club to it is part of the discipline. It was amazing to me, the movement of it, and I find sport like that beautiful.

Lovibond: I compare it to horse riding and dressage, which I used to do when I was younger. It was about the placement of the hips and shoulders in relationship to controlling the horse's direction. The horse follows you, so it was necessary to learn to relax with it – for example, if you were tense the horse would be tense. I liked the fact that the body was communicating with the animal.



Lowden and Lovibond on Set with Director Jason Connery for 'Tommy's Honour'

Photo credit: The Daily Mail

HollywoodChicago.com: Ophelia, women had a different role in society in those days, one that your character challenges. What do you still recognize about the perceptions and roles of women today that still resonate within the context of Meg's character?

Lovibond: It still exists in several ways, like the term 'woman doctor.' Why would you have to put that prefix there? It's the implication that doctors are typically male. Also, it's still remarked upon if a woman is a 'working mother' or a 'boss lady.' There is still slut-shaming and the idea that a woman would bring something as heinous as rape upon herself. Meg had a baby out of wedlock, and she was named and shamed. There was no mention of the man involved, and that kind of thing still is perpetuated today.

HollywoodChicago.com: Jack, you were asked to age from 15 to 24 in the film. What changes did you and Jason want to directly make sure audiences would notice about the character of Tommy, especially as he gained confidence as a golfer?

Lowden: Well, obviously you do things like stick a mustache on, [laughs] but the key word is confidence. It went from brash arrogance, to solid confidence, all the way to where golf became of no consequence. That journey shows his growth, and fortunately I maintained the height of six-foot-one through the entire process. [laughs] When Tommy first won the British Open as a teenager three years in a row, it's done in a few second montage. I loved that, because he grew up when he first meets Meg after that period. He changes and relaxes into himself, because of that love.

HollywoodChicago.com: Ophelia, you've done a bunch of different character roles in your career, seemingly doing a different type of person in each film or TV role. Is that by design, or do you think you don't necessarily have a type or persona as an actress?

Lovibond: It’s not something I actively pursue, but I am attracted to the diversity of different characters, but it’s not like I’m thinking, ‘right now I have to play this type of role.’ I like doing things that test the boundaries of character and genres, outside the comfort zone.

HollywoodChicago.com: Jack, you seem to specialize in portraying men in the past. What is it about your look and type that attracts period roles for you, like the golfer in ‘Tommy’s Honour’?



Jack Lowden & Ophelia Lovibond of ‘Tommy’s Honour’
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Lowden: I’ve portrayed a lot of soldiers as well, so I guess you’d have to ask the people who have cast me. [laughs] As far as men of the past, I guess I’m comfortable looking at those roles and thinking that I want to be like them for the period of filming. I genuinely hold the belief that the characters are more interesting than who I am, when I approach them. I feel comfortable under that veil, and I think it shows. And basically, these are the roles that have come around.

HollywoodChicago.com: Ophelia, I’m a big Beatles fan and loved the film “Nowhere Boy.” What was the atmosphere on that set, in getting the legend of John Lennon correct, and what was most fun about recreating that time?

Lovibond: I had a small role in that film, but the atmosphere was brilliant, because it was the young guys playing their instruments live, which gave a sense of what it might have been like. We shot the entire film on location at the sites in Liverpool where Lennon grew up, and the recreation of the time with the costumes really put me into it. Sam [Taylor-Johnson] was a great director, who told a legendary story that people wanted to experience, and that gave it a sense of privilege to be a part of it. My Dad was also from near there, so I loved doing the Liverpulian accent.

HollywoodChicago.com: For both of you, this is a movie about golf, but it also is a strong film about family. What do you both think the film says about the dynamics of relationships within families?

Lovibond: That they are complex, but inalienable. There is that moment where Old Tom tells his wife [regarding her rejection of Meg], ‘he loves her, so must we.’ It sunk in, and I heard a ripple of acknowledgement from the audience, because it was about family.

Lowden: There are the two loves, right? The one where you fall in love, and the love that is expected regarding your family, your siblings, your parents. ‘Tommy’s Honour’ tackles that succinctly, as to which ones become important at what times in your life.

Lovibond: I observe that one of the difficult things with parents is that when they’re successful, the children fly away on their own. You know you’ve done a good job if your children want their own agency. On the child’s side, they want to provide in the world what had been given to them. That’s ultimately what the parent trains the child to do.

“Tommy’s Honour” opens nationwide on April 14th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Jack Lowden, Ophelia Lovibond, Peter Mullan and Sam Neill. Screenplay adapted by Pamela Marin and Kevin Cook. Directed by Jason Connery. Rated “PG”



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