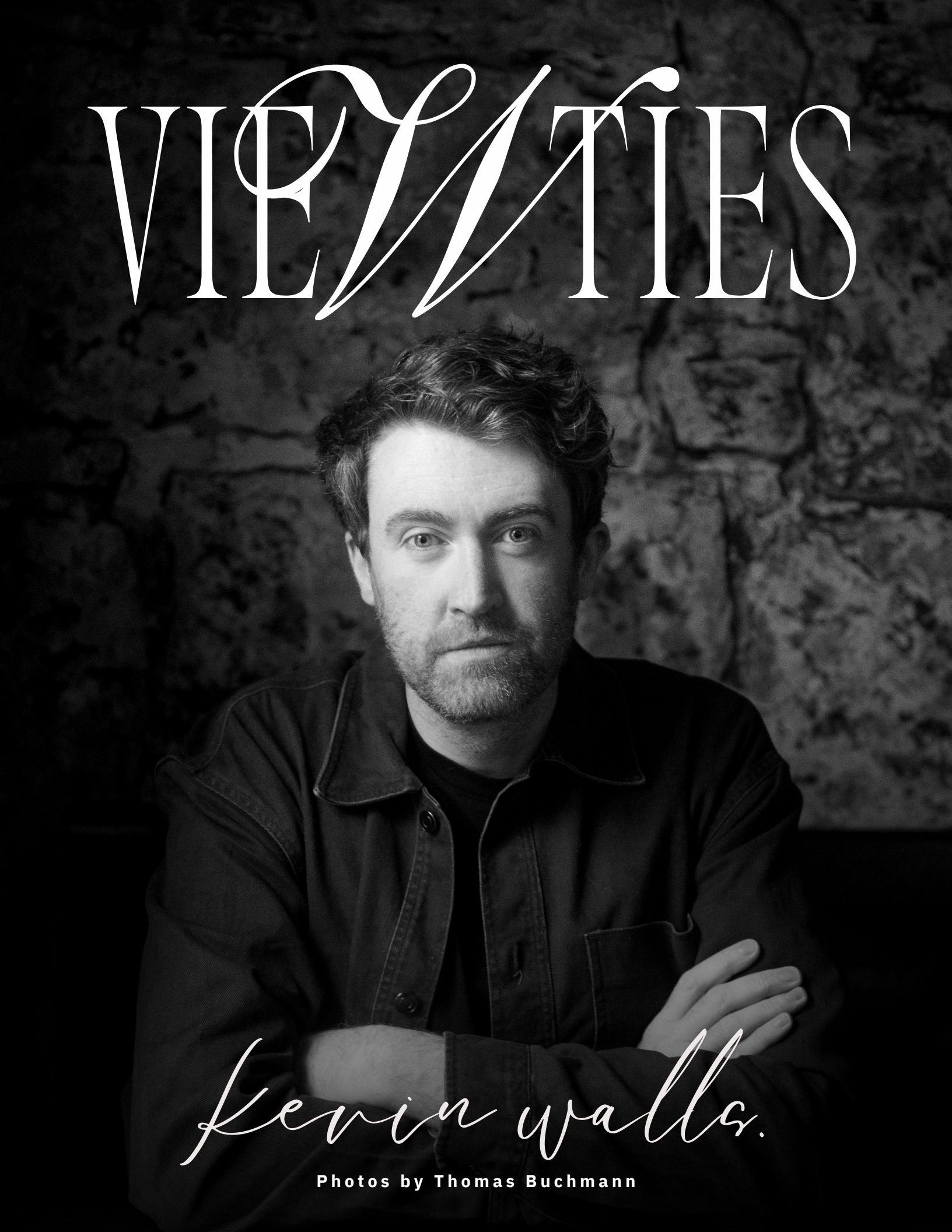


VIEWS



Kevin Wallis.

Photos by Thomas Buchmann

Credits.

Talent. **Kevin Walls**

Interview. **Vanesa Miraglia**

Photography. **Thomas Buchmann**

With Thanks to.

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VIE & TIES

- MAGAZINE -



KEVIN Walls.

Some actors are brilliant at what they do, but few can say they've got a handle on the whole filmmaking process. Meet Kevin Walls, a creative powerhouse who's spent years crafting cinematic worlds behind the scenes, from the sound studio to the cutting room. Now, he's taking centre stage in *Happy as Larry*, a film that bagged the Audience Award for Best International Feature at the Dallas International Film Festival.

In a sit-down chat, Walls opens up about his one-of-a-kind journey and the lessons he's picked up along the way. We take a closer look at his varied career and what it really means to step into a role after years working behind the camera. It's a proper glimpse into an artist's way of working — full of raw honesty, realness, and a spark with co-star Calvin Crawley that critics have called “magically awkward, sincere, and utterly believable.”



V: Having spent a decade mastering the technical and artistic demands of filmmaking—from winning a BAFTA for sound design to writing, directing, and editing your own projects—what was the catalyst for stepping in front of the camera and training in acting? How does that holistic understanding of a film set inform your approach to a role, and how did it affect your work on *Happy as Larry*?

K: I've always had an interest in acting. I remember, when I was young, hearing about people my age who would go to theatre schools at the weekend and I thought that sounded like so much fun. But it was expensive. So, I didn't really get to properly try acting until I was 15 or 16, when I was in high school. At that point, I just threw myself into it. I was originally planning on applying to drama school when I finished high school, my drama teacher encouraged me to apply, but I had a bad experience with another teacher who told me I wouldn't have a chance of getting in. It totally damaged my confidence, so I didn't bother applying. I went off and studied music and sound production for a while, but I was always drawn to film and television. When I started working in the industry in other capacities, I got to see all these great actors doing their thing and it made me really miss it. So, I enrolled on a series of night classes at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow and eventually auditioned to study for my BA in Acting. I didn't think I was going to get accepted, but I did, and I spent three amazing years training alongside wonderful actors who really ignited my passion again.

When I approach a role, as someone who's had experience behind the camera, I understand that my character is only one part of this complex process, and everyone on the set...

is working together to make the best film or show they can. So, I tend to focus on the job I've been hired to do and attempt to do it to the best of my ability. And I trust the director to steer me back on course if what I'm doing isn't working with their complete understanding or vision for the project. And I also trust that I've been cast for a reason, and they want me to be there. I know from experience of casting actors in my own work, that if I've asked an actor to play a character, they are one hundred percent the person I want in that role. I feel like that allows me to feel more comfortable and confident on set, which hopefully leads to a better performance.

V: Your character, Dale, is described as a "relentlessly cheerful stranger" who disrupts the protagonist's somber plans. He is the film's unexpected light. What was your process for finding genuine sincerity in Dale? How do you prepare to inhabit a character whose entire presence is a form of disruption and levity in a film that handles such a weighty topic?

K: I don't think I had to find Dale, I think Dale was really present in the text. When I first read the audition sides, I felt like I instantly understood who this guy was. I think it was all there in Hugo's script. I don't like to over-intellectualise the process too much. I just like to read the script and follow my instincts. When I first read the script, it reminded me of the relationship between Steve Martin and John Candy's characters in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*. That film deals with a weighty topic too, but it does so with authenticity, sincerity, and loads of humour. I knew it was possible to combine comedy with heavy themes, so I think having that in the back of my mind was useful.

V: The film's strength lies in the authentic, human interactions between Dale and Larry. Did your experience as a director and writer influence how you collaborated with Hugo Andre and Calvin Crawley to build that on-screen dynamic? Can you speak to how the creative team shaped those moments of "existential humor" and quiet connection?

K: Again, I think that relationship and dynamic was really vivid in the script. Calvin and I shared a cottage (with Izzy who plays Yasmine) so we spent a good amount of time together hanging out and running lines, and we developed a natural chemistry as a result of that. The characters are on a journey together, and so were we as actors. I think being co-leads in a feature was a first for both of us. So, there were parallels that I'm assuming influenced our work. But in terms of my writing and directing experience, I don't think I really thought about it much. I was hired as an actor, so I just focussed on the job at hand.

4: Hugo's work is described as having a "distinctive visual style", and the film was shot "entirely outdoors using natural light" against the backdrop of the Isle of Skye. As a filmmaker who understands the language of sound and cinematography, how did working within this specific aesthetic influence your performance? Did the vastness and quietude of the Scottish landscape, and Hugo's reliance on it, become an unspoken character in your scenes together?

K: I'm super afraid of heights, so I struggled getting to some of the locations! The views were amazing, but getting to the locations was not fun. But I powered through with the help of the crew. Dale isn't afraid of ...

heights, so I really had to put on a brave face for some of the scenes. The locations were stunning. It was my first time on Skye, and I was really blown away. I'm not sure how much it influenced my performance. If it did, I wasn't conscious of it. But it wasn't always as quiet as it seemed. One of our locations was a bit of a tourist hotspot, so you just had to try to block that out as best you could. But Haris (cinematographer) and Joe (sound recordist) did such a beautiful job capturing everything, and all the work in post-production really brought it all together. It looks and sounds stunning! Again, you just trust everyone is doing their part and you do your best to do your part.

V: You've shared that filmmaking can be "transformative" and has the power to "change people's perspectives". The journey of Happy as Larry is all about finding unexpected meaning and connection in the face of despair. How has the process of making this film, and embodying a character like Dale, transformed you personally and professionally?

K: I think Dale's optimism has really made me aware of the beautiful things that people are capable of. We all came together to make this film and now something new exists in the world that I hope will make audiences discover, or re-discover, the beauty of life, of friendship, and looking out for each other. The world could really use a few more people like Dale.

V: With your own debut feature, *Premature*, on the horizon, how do you think your recent experience as an actor will influence your approach as a writer and director in the future? Will you be a different kind of leader for your



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cast and crew having lived the experience on the other side of the lens?

K: I tried to create a fun and safe environment on *Premature* that allowed everyone to do their best work. I'm not sure if I always managed it, but that was my aim. I think people do their best work when they know they can make a mistake and it's not the end of the world. We're not surgeons. If an actor forgets a line, it's not a life-or-death situation. And it's not about complacency, it's about taking the pressure off and allowing the actor, or the crew member, to focus being present in the moment, rather than being stuck in their head. Going forward, I just want everyone to look forward to coming to set and enjoy being there.

7: To wrap up this lovely interview, I'd like to ask a reflective question about courage. I feel that your career requires a certain bravery. There are the struggles with the instability of the industry and the limitations imposed by the environment, but what I find most courageous about your journey is the decision you made to pivot from a decade of mastery behind the camera to a new path in front of it. There is also, of course, the courage it takes to...

step into someone else's shoes and portray them authentically, to open yourself up to the audience in a way that feels so deeply personal. With all of that in mind, could you share an anecdote about a moment in your career when you had to be the most courageous, whether it was a difficult decision you made or a challenge you faced in a particular role?

K: I think there's an element of courage required in every creative pursuit, especially when you're sharing it with an audience. It's a really vulnerable position to put yourself in. You open yourself up to the possibility of rejection, criticism, and embarrassment. I was terrified of playing Dale in *Happy as Larry*. I hadn't even finished my training when I was offered the part, and I honestly didn't think I was capable of doing it. Thankfully, Hugo managed to convince me otherwise. Taking that initial leap, agreeing to play the role, was the hardest part. Once I got on set and completed the first day of filming, I was so glad that I took the leap. The decision to create something, or to perform, isn't really a choice, in my opinion, it's an impulse. If you're creatively inclined, you're going to create something. It's going to take courage, sure, but I also have a feeling it's inevitable.

"HAPPY AS LARRY"
screening at film festivals, worldwide



VIEWS

DIGITAL MAGAZINE