

Australian actor Travis Jeffery is spreading his wings.

Born in 1989, Travis Jeffery was raised on a cattle farm in the Yarra Valley of country Victoria. The son of a VFL player, he grew up with sport in his blood, whether it was kicking a football, playing tennis or dabbling in karate. Performing didn't enter the equation until his older sister developed a passion for acting, and he was introduced to a whole new world. When some friends at the Yarra Valley Youth Theatre Group roped him in for one of their productions, he got his first taste of life on the stage. The production was a satire of *Dracula* called *The Bride Of Spatula* and the role comprised just a single line. Sung. "I've got no singing ability," he jokes. "But pushing through that fear every night, was just such a rush. And making people laugh is still why I do this now."

After high school, Jeffery applied to drama schools around the country and was accepted into the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA). He learned so much during his time at the prestigious institution, including the importance of doing the work, always being prepared and recognising the value of lifelong learning. WAAPA was also the first time he found a place where he truly belonged, alongside peers who were just as passionate about the arts and acting as he was.

Within a year of graduating from drama school, Jeffery found himself on the set of a blockbuster film, cast as the young Scottish prisoner of war in Angelina Jolie's 2014 war epic *Unbroken*. He would go on to play a number of soldiers – starring in celebrated Australian series including *Gallipoli* and *Anzac Girls* – and he believes in the importance of honouring the story and its real-life inspirations first and foremost. Jeffery remembers soaking up the experience of being on a major movie set, watching legendary cinematographer Roger Deakins at work or seeing how Jolie, as director, always led with kindness. A year later, while starring in *Gallipoli*, Jeffery once again got the opportunity to see masters of their craft at work, among them series director and Australian filmmaker Glendyn Ivin. As the soldier Stewie Watson, a man brimming with anger that masks his deep fear of the situation he finds himself in, Jeffery relished the challenge of tackling a complex character; it was a role he could really sink his teeth into. *Gallipoli* remains the work he is most proud of to date.

From here, Jeffery collected diverse roles, from the comedy of 2016's *Spin Out* – a larrikin role he believes is closest to his true, class clown personality – to the television adaptation of cult horror *Wolf Creek* and the acclaimed 2019 series *The Heights*. In 2020 came the comedy *Bloody Hell*, which was a lesson in how far he could push himself – playing Finnish twins, one a perfect angel, the other a deadly serial killer. Jeffery has just wrapped production in Western Australia on two upcoming projects: the starring role in *Birthright*, a dark comedy about the cost-of-living crisis, and *Frederickstown*, a crime caper set in Albany about three brothers who band together to save their mother's house from foreclosure. Jeffery is incredibly grateful for the opportunities he's had so far, and his ambitions for the future are simply to keep learning and growing as an actor.

Every role thus far, however, has been leading to this: Jeffery's performance as Anaya in the *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*, his dream role. One of cinema's most beloved franchises, the film was shot in Sydney, and presented Jeffery with the acting exercise of a lifetime. To perform as the ape Anaya, he had to partake in six weeks of 'Ape School' to understand this different kind of physicality and mentality, wear a motion capture suit and use his imagination like never before, some of the time having to conjure whole cinematic worlds with nothing but a grey carpet and other actors to help. It took him back to his youth, leaping off hay bales on the farm, or to acting movement classes, always his favourite part of drama school. Motion capture work is something he is keen to explore further, and he namechecks the field's pioneer, actor Andy Serkis, who mentored Jeffery and the other cast members in the lead-up to production. "To get to do a full transformation into a chimp was just the most fun I've ever had," he says. "It really was a dream come true to play this role."

In 2019, Jeffery began trying his hand at writing as another way to flex his creative muscles. As a profession, acting involves a lot of waiting around for someone to choose you for a role; Jeffery wanted to take control over his career. Over the course of a year he penned a short film called *Dusty*, which began as a meditation on his own grief after losing someone very close to him. It's a dark comedy, full of gallows humour, starring Jeffery and directed by Jeremy Lindsay Taylor. Producing, writing and starring in *Dusty* felt like the culmination of all of life's lessons: always being prepared, never shying away from hard work, and celebrating the community of a creative team. This was the communion Jeffery craved when he landed at WAAPA, and the thing he believes is the best part of his job. "You get to bring people together," he says. "And when everybody's working and putting their heart and soul into one objective, you're gonna make something really, really beautiful."

These days, he calls Sydney home, where he lives by the beach and spends as much time as he can in the water. He plays the ukelele – the world's happiest instrument, he says – and reads memoirs and biographies. He cherishes the balance that he has found in recent years between work and leisure. A few mornings a week, he wakes up at dawn to work out with friends, ending with a sunrise swim. "During winter it's horrible," he laughs. "But then the sun comes up and it's just amazing."

Travis Jeffery is represented by ROAR , Sophie Jermyn Management and Kirrilly Sams.