

RHYTHM & BLUES

From one hit television show to another, Josh Hopkins goes from guitar-strumming on *Cougar Town* to suiting up as an FBI agent in *Quantico*

Words by Vanessa Pascale

Montreal's bone-chilling weather has been an adjustment for Josh Hopkins—a Los Angeles-based, Lexington, Kentucky-native. The tall (6'3"), handsome actor, known for playing Grayson Ellis on *Cougar Town*, is in Montreal filming the rest of season one of the hit ABC drama, *Quantico*. Josh and I met through my friend and his *Quantico* costar Jake McLaughlin last October while I was in Canada on vacation, which is where he is when we jump on a phone call in February.

"I like Montreal, don't get me wrong, I like it a lot, but not for 10 months. Last weekend, it got to -20°F and it stayed like that for two-and-a-half days," he tells me. To keep the cast and crew from freezing, they've tried to rewrite the script so that some of the interior shots could be filmed inside, but sometimes it just can't be done. "I've done my share of running through the snow with a gun." *Quantico*, in which Josh plays troubled FBI agent Liam O'Connor, vacillates back and forth between present day (where Alex Parrish, played by Bollywood star-Miss World 2000 Priyanka Chopra, has made it her mission to find out who bombed Grand Central Station) and back to when the FBI agents were recruits training at Quantico.

"The writers have done such a good job of making you believe... No one is who they seem. But you can tell when someone has heartfelt emotion, like when it's true. So it's hard to know who the bad guy or guys are here. It's someone who's been around from the beginning. It might be a couple of them, is kinda my theory 'cause I still don't know. I can't wait to see what happens, and I'm on the show," he laughs. "Expect more of the unexpected—the build towards a finale that should be really great."

Right after the pilot was filmed, Josh serendipitously replaced Dougray Scott as Liam. "I was on a plane ride back from NYC, and I decided to go ahead and pay for the internet about halfway through—I was *that bored*." It was then a flood of text messages came in from his agent telling him about the offer. "It was kind of a pretty long time until I got the call that they wanted me. I forgot about it—they offered it to me a few weeks later." With its good-looking cast and sexy, exhilarating storyline that keeps you on the edge of your seat, *Quantico* seems to possess all the elements of a show with staying power. From the start, Josh believed it "had all the right parts, but there's so many variables: What time it comes on. What it's before. What's after it? What's against it? Do



people care about the name? Do they remember it? I've been on so many good and bad shows that have gone different ways just because of marketing and luck... Once I met Priyanka, I knew. She could definitely carry a show. She's got it."

Quantico came a few months after *Cougar Town*'s final episodes finished airing, leaving little downtime for Josh—which is how he likes it. *Cougar Town*, which followed a circle of idiosyncratic, wine-obsessed, penny-can-playing friends, filmed from 2009-2015 (on ABC from 2009-2012, then TBS from 2013-2015). "That's a homerun in our business. I've done so many pilots and shows, for something like that to happen—you don't expect it. You're really grateful for it though," says Josh of *Cougar Town*'s successful six-season run.

In television and film for over twenty years, Josh has 57 acting credits to his name, including roles in *Brothers & Sisters*, *Private Practice*, and *Ally McBeal*

—the latter is where he met longtime, good friend James "Jimmy" Marsden. A few years later, Josh and Jimmy would take the stage at Lollapalooza 2007 to perform, "Feigning Interest"—a song written by Josh, birthed from boredom and to make his friends laugh. "I actually was scared to death. I was like, 'I have to say yes to this. Right?' I mean, that's a cool thing to say you've been able to do. I had to do it," Josh says about performing at the popular music festival. Josh also released a satirical music video of "Feigning Interest," that went viral. "It got some amazing amount of hits on one of those things that was popular then, Facebook or Myspace," says Josh. A showcase of his bawdy-silly brand of humor, the video depicts Josh bored with his date's conversational skills until she tells him she French kissed her friend, then "he's gaining interest..."

At 30, Josh decided to replace video-gaming with a more productive hobby — guitar-playing (who doesn't love a guitarist?). Naturally, his honed

WHO ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

"I can't download the new Kanye album, I'm having Canada problems. You gotta do it through title and I can't figure it out. I'm waiting till that gets easier."

strumming skills and knack for creating humorous songs found its way into his day job. "I think that would be something that people don't know. That sometimes when they're watching my shows, I'm actually playing and singing an original song in the background," laughs Josh, who has written over forty songs and performed them on a number of television shows he is in "purely for fun." Take the TBS commercial for *Cougar Town*, "We're Back," with Josh crooning away—that is a Josh original.

"It got to the point where we'd get scripts [on *Cougar Town*] and it'd be like, 'Now Josh wakes up and sings a song about eating breakfast with your best friend.' He laughs. "That's what it said in the script. I was like, 'OK, how long is this song?'"

Josh also likes to compete in triathlons and has been participating in these athletic competitions for about six years now. It's something I like and right up my alley. Not like 'Oh, I almost won!' he laughs. "I enjoy having something to train for to break



Photo Credit: ABC

WHAT ARE YOU WATCHING ON TV?

"I just started watching this Netflix show, *Love*. It's fantastic! Judd Apatow's writing and producing — it's fantastic.. Aziz Ansari has a show on Netflix, *Master of None*. I binged all of those and they were really good. And like everyone else, I'm waiting for *Game of Thrones* to come back."

the monotony." If Josh can get away, he plans to migrate to Florida for the South Beach Triathlon on April 2nd to swim, bike and run for a good cause with buddies Geoff Stults and Jimmy Marsden. "I was doing this triathlon in L.A. and there's like, I hate to say, a *Celebrity* division. But they ask you to do the stuff 'cause you can bring a certain amount of press to it and awareness," he says humbly about how he got involved. "They run it really well. It's for great causes, Children's Hospitals and it's a wonderful thing that I always do."

What you won't find Josh doing is cooking — who jokes that he can't even make toast. Recently on *The Chew*, the family-oriented guy (evident in his

shout-out to his parents who are fans of the show and from his family-photo-filled Instagram page) whisked up some ingredients with the culinary cast. "Here's the problem with me cooking, it's a planning thing. And, I'm sure I'm lazy, but when I'm sitting around, I'll never be like, 'Hey, I'm going to be hungry in about two hours, I should run down and get the ingredients and start cooking something up.' No. I'm sitting there and I'm like, *Oh! I'm starving right this second. What can I eat right now?*" Josh quips dramatically.

His mother, on the other hand, is quite skilled in the kitchen. "My mom's a great cook, a great southern cook, too. When I get back

IF THERE WAS A FLOOD AND YOU COULD SAVE ONE THING FROM YOUR HOUSE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

"God, I mean, you would say pictures, that kind of thing, but now it's all backed up. This is a different time, so you'd be stupid to do that. Let's say your computer so you get your pictures, but now there's a Cloud." He sighs. "I'd have already drowned by now. I would just take (laughs)... I don't know if there's anything I couldn't replace. My dog died so I don't have to grab my dog. I would just drive off in my car; it's the most expensive thing (laughs). It's the sensible thing to do as well as economic, let's just take the means to get away from the flood the quickest and also, it's probably the most expensive thing I own. Right? Besides the house, that's a big loss."

[to Kentucky] I usually gain about 8 pounds in a week, so I have to leave." Josh often returns to his hometown and looks forward to indulging in her noteworthy pimento cheese and BLT sandwiches. "We just cut out the lettuce. It's like tomato and bacon on some really good toast. And the tomatoes you get in the summer in the south are so good. It makes the sandwich. It's just fantastic. I'm dying for it right now. Why did I start talking? I'm hungry! I'm hungry!" And like a true blue Kentuckian, Josh enjoys his bourbon on-the-rocks. "You don't want to pollute it," he says with a laugh.

Later this year, Josh's movie *Car Dogs* with good friend Octavia Spencer and George Lopez — which he produced and acted in — will be released. "It's really fun, because it gives real insight into behind-the-scenes of the car business and how they get you, how they pull the little scams on you. It's about the power play in this particular car lot between the father and the son." Josh plays Mike Reynolds, the "ultimate car dog," who does and says anything for a sale. "Cutthroat cat!"

Acting may soon take a backseat to directing and producing though. "I don't know how much more TV I'd like to do. I enjoy the TV directing [he directed several episodes of *Cougar Town*] but it really is a writer's medium, television is, whereas movies are more a director's medium, so it'd be fun to have more of the power that way. But it's been a great learning experience, all the TV stuff. Being on set so many hours, and working with so many different directors. Every week we get a new director. You see different techniques, styles, and demeanors — it's been a great education for that," says Josh, who also owns the rights to a book. "I got a lot of balls in the air at different times." **ML**