HOW TARON EGERTON BECAME ELTON JOHN

ROCKETMAN!

AND THE ADVICE (AND SPECIAL KEEPSAKE) THE SUPERSTAR GAVE HIM

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Ron Howard Goes to the Opera

Howard, 65, follows up his documentary The Beatles: Eight Days a Week by bringing music icon Luciano Pavarotti’s life to the screen. Pavarotti (in theaters June 7) includes interviews with the Italian tenor’s family and friends, history-making performances and never-before-seen footage. “I wanted it to be an opera about Pavarotti using the arias that he performed so brilliantly,” says Howard of the global superstar, who died in 2007 of pancreatic cancer.

SOPHIE TURNER

The Game of Thrones actress, 23, and wife of pop star Joe Jonas segues from the firebrand Sansa Stark on the HBO series to reprise her role as the telepathic Jean Grey in the new X-Men franchise movie, Dark Phoenix (in theaters June 7).

You were cast as Sansa when you were very young, but Jean is a choice that you made as an adult. I loved the complexities of Jean. She is tempted to go over to the dark side occasionally, simply because it feels euphoric when she does. I loved that the X-Men start off not hailed as heroes but as outsiders who embrace their unique abilities. They realize that they are not broken but are in fact special, and their difference is what makes them powerful.

How did you prepare to play Jean this second time around? I studied schizophrenia for the role. It taught me a lot about the struggles of mental health and addiction and what it can do to not only the person afflicted with the illness, but also the people surrounding them.

How hard was it to say goodbye to Game of Thrones? So hard! It has been my adolescence and nearly half of my life, so to say goodbye to a character that I love so dearly, the sets that I have grown up on and the crew that I love so dearly, that is probably the hardest part for me.

Dynamic Duo: Mindy Kaling & Emma Thompson

A talk-show host (Thompson) makes a big change in Late Night (in theaters June 7) by hiring a fresh new writer (Kaling, 39, who also wrote the screenplay). “I was astonished and honored that Mindy had written it with me in mind,” says Thompson, 60. “I hope we’ll be able to work together again.”
The Star Wars worlds we’ve loved on-screen will be brought to life in Galaxy’s Edge, the new parks coming to Disneyland (May 31) and Walt Disney World (Aug. 29). Don’t have your fast pass yet? Console yourself with these goodies. —Jeanine Cameron

DROID FUEL
You’ll “BB” charged wherever you go with the portable BB-8 Car Charger, which includes two USB charging ports. $30, thinkgeek.com

TAKE A TUMBLE
Keep your drinks cool and your Jedi encounters icy with this ceramic Stormtrooper Helmet Tumbler. $23, shopdisney.com

ODE TO A ROAD
Arguably as iconic as the mop-topped foursome, Darth Vader and his troopers reimagine the cover of the Beatles’ Abbey Road on this Death Star Road T-shirt. $19, amazon.com

SOLO ON ICE
Chill out with this Silicone Ice Cube Tray depicting Han Solo’s famous stint in carbonite. $12, hottopic.com

LEIA LOOKS
We didn’t see any bikinis in the character costume reveal for Galaxy’s Edge, but no worries: You can emulate Leia’s iconic Episode VI look in this Metallic Bikini. $35 for top, $30 for bottom, express.com

REBEL REBEL
Show your insurgent pride with this Rebel Alliance Special Forces Ruck-sack—a perfect fit for your Ewok companion! $80, thinkgeek.com

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Alaska is host to trillions of mosquitoes. How do they survive so much cold weather?

—Ed Lindsay, Fort Worth, Texas

Dozens of species of mosquitoes thrive in Alaska. Those that survive the frigid winter depend on “supercooling,” a process by which they rid their body fluids of impurities that would otherwise trigger the formation of ice. Is there any way you can avoid mosquitoes without repellent while you’re exploring this majestic land? Of course! Avoid June and July. But if that’s when you simply must visit, your options are limited. You can go out when it’s raining. (Mosquitoes don’t like rain.) Or take a cow along. Mosquitoes like to bite cows much more than humans.
t’s a little bit funny, as Elton John’s classic “Your Song” goes, to hear about the first time actor Taron Egerton met the superstar singer. It was back in 2016 on the London set of Kingsman: The Golden Circle, the rollicking spy-romp movie sequel that featured Egerton in a lead role and the rock star in an extended cameo.

The two Brits were gathered in the ready room off the set of a scene in which Egerton’s character was about to marry a princess. As they made small talk, the veteran entertainer playfully flirted with the young actor, joking about the wedding scene Egerton was about to play. “If I was five years younger,” John ribbed him, “it would be me you’d be marrying.” As Egerton recalls, “We both laughed, and I thought that was it.”

But not quite—Egerton, 29, is playing rock ’n’ roll’s Sir Elton himself in Rocketman (in theaters now). The highly anticipated film, which John co-produced, traces the music icon’s wild trajectory from shy piano prodigy (born Reginald Dwight) to outrageously famous hitmaker, as he grapples with self-doubt, identity and drugs along the way. Jamie Bell portrays his longtime musical collaborator Bernie Taupin, and Bryce Dallas Howard plays his mother, Sheila.

But don’t call it a biopic, at least in the traditional sense. Egerton dubs it a “musical fantasy” about the Grammy-winning singer, songwriter, piano player and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer who’s sold more than 300 million albums worldwide and charted more than 50 Top 40 singles. Egerton admits the movie takes several creative liberties and flights of imagination—for instance, Elton John didn’t literally float into the air while banging out “Crocodile Rock,” or plunge into a backyard swimming pool and find his own Mini-Me playing a tiny piano on the bottom.

“We had our eyes on integrity, but we also wanted to make it a celebration,” the actor says. “We’re telling a story that’s
innovative, non-conventional, fun and non-naturalistic. It was Elton’s idea, and it’s in his spirit.”

And you won’t hear John’s distinctive voice, either. Unlike Rami Malek’s Oscar-winning turn lip-syncing Queen hits in Bohemian Rhapsody, Egerton supplies 100 percent of the vocals in Rocketman, putting his own stamp on more than 20 Elton John staples, including “Your Song,” “Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me,” “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road” and, of course, the title track.

Egerton also did a rendition of John’s “I’m Still Standing” in the animated 2016 musical pic Sing.

“The movie is a theatrical experience, so it’s an absolute prerequisite that Taron [sing] live,” says Rocketman director Dexter Fletcher, who also worked with Egerton on the 2015 skiing bio-drama Eddie the Eagle. “I know I’m biased, but he’s an amazing singer.”

THE ROLE OF A LIFETIME

Egerton had only a few notable credits to his name when he learned about the Rocketman script. But a more established actor was already “attached” to the role. Then the other actor dropped out, and Egerton moved in.

“It sounds absurd to say, but I’m told Elton and [his husband] David [Furnish] were fans of mine and knew I could sing because they heard me in Sing,” he recalls.

After Egerton snared the role, he had to delve into the heart and soul of the part—and the man. He got help when John, 72, invited him to his home, where John debunked many of the falsehoods about his childhood (turns out he never got beat up walking home from school) and gave Egerton an early copy of his upcoming, as-yet-untitled memoir, a no-holds-barred autobiography set for release in October. And later, during one sunny afternoon at John and Furnish’s house, Egerton spent the day outside reading John’s handwritten diaries from the 1970s.

“They’re so unflowery and economic,” he says with a laugh. “Honestly, it’s ‘Woke up, did the laundry, wrote a song called ‘Honky Cat.’ That’s the day!”

Now the two speak at least once a month. Egerton has traveled on John’s private plane. They email, they text—yes, John is listed in Egerton’s phone as “Elton”—and share inside jokes. Last year, John reached out to his young friend during some of his lowest moments. “My girlfriend [actress Emily Thomas] and I spent a little bit of time apart last year, and I was not in a good place,” he says. “And he’d call me just to check how I was doing. I asked him, ‘How did you know to call me?’ and he said, ‘I just felt like it.’ ”

John also gave him a special gift, a heart-shaped diamond earring, the first John ever bought back in the early ’70s. Egerton wears it in Rocketman and keeps it in a safe in his London home. “It’s like a little talisman,” he says. “It anchors me to him and makes me feel close to him.”

DEEP CONNECTIONS

Egerton and John are connected in other ways as well. Like John, Egerton comes from a working-class British background. He was born near Liverpool and grew up mostly in Wales. Among his earliest childhood memories? Watching The Lion King as a 5-year-old and seeing John’s music video to the Oscar-winning song “Can You Feel the Love Tonight.” As a preteen, he and his stepfather would regularly play one of John’s greatest-hits CDs in the car and sing along to “I Guess That’s Why They Call It the Blues.”

The acting bug hit when he signed up for drama at his school. “I knew it was where I wanted to be and there was never going to be anything else,” he says. He auditioned for London’s prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Art by singing... Elton John’s 1970 classic “Your Song.”

Though Rocketman is poised to launch him into the stratosphere, Egerton says he still considers himself a blue-collar British bloke. “I have nightmares that it’s all going...continued on page 10
to be taken away,” he confesses. “I worry that I won’t be able to maintain this career. I’m not from an affluent background, so I have this fear because I have no money to fall back on.”

“I’VE BECOME BRAVER”

His journey as Elton John—and with John—has had an impact on his outlook. “I’ve become braver playing someone as extroverted as he is,” he says. “I’m not as precious as I was before—I messed my hair up, I got my ear pierced, I wore hot pants. Knowing him has been profound and quite surreal.”

He even got the nerve to duet with John at his annual AIDS Foundation Oscars viewing party in February, on “Tiny Dancer,” John’s 1972 piano-ballad hit. The song’s full-octave falsetto leap into the chorus provides its signature hook—and an extra level of vocal challenge. “I was so emotional and terrified,” Egerton says. “After that, I thought, If I can do that, I can do anything.”

And he’s already paid John back for his gift of the earring: Of all the flamboyant costumes in Rocketman, he only held on to the pair of oversize, decorative glasses he wore during the scene.
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**Grilled Watermelon Salsa**

Nothing screams summer like watermelon, and it’s extra delicious when grilled and combined with tomatoes, cucumber, jalapeños and lime juice in this flavorful salsa. Try it over grilled chicken, fish, pork or steak.

Preheat grill.

Cut 1½ lb watermelon into ¾-inch-thick slices. In a small bowl, combine 1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil and ½ tsp ground chili powder. Brush on both sides of watermelon; sprinkle with kosher salt. Grill watermelon 3–5 minutes per side or until grill marks form. Transfer to a cutting board. When cool enough to handle, remove rind and seeds; coarsely chop.

In a large bowl, combine watermelon, 1 cup cherry tomatoes, coarsely chopped, ½ cup chopped English cucumber, 2 Tbsp chopped fresh cilantro, 1 Tbsp chopped red onion, 1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil and ½ jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped. Stir in 1 Tbsp fresh lime juice. Refrigerate 1 hour to let flavors meld. Just before serving, season with salt and black pepper. Makes about 3 cups.

*Add a zip of color and flavor to grilled chicken—or fish, steak or pork—with these easy, summery sauces from Parade chef Jon Ashton.*

**Blueberry Wine Sauce**

Brush this fruity sauce over chicken or salmon during its last few minutes on the grill; pass extra at the table.

In a medium saucepan, combine 12 oz fresh or frozen blueberries, 1½ cups sugar, ½ cup white wine, ¼ cup chicken broth, ¾ cup fresh lemon juice and 1 Tbsp chopped fresh rosemary. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-high. Cook, stirring frequently, 20 minutes or until mixture is thickened and reduced to a jamlike consistency. Makes 2 cups.