

# GLASS MAN

ED MCVEY

# CROWNING GLORY



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**Glass Man** meets with newcomer **ED MCVEY** to discuss his breakout role as **Prince William** in Netflix's **The Crown**

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After climbing up three flights of steep stairs into the furnace-heated eaves of a Soho office, in walks Ed McVey, the star of the sixth and final season of Peter Morgan’s *The Crown*. He might be playing the role of Prince William, but on this drizzly October day, McVey feels less regal and more down to earth. Dressed in a muddy-coloured knit and donning round-rimmed glasses, we find him in a warm and jolly mood.

To gain a leading role in a wildly successful Netflix series with no prior on-screen experience is something of a fairytale, but McVey is living in the moment. After a close friend in the casting world advised him not to show up to the audition because he “looks nothing like him”, it wasn’t until his agent talked to him that McVey decided to give Prince William a shot. A month went by before he received his first call back among a room of towering Prince William look-a-likes. “It was one of those auditions that you come out of, and you’re just like, I didn’t cry, but I didn’t nail it. You know, they weren’t astounded.” Another month drags by and McVey is convinced the role has “gone” until his agent calls to tell him that he’s been invited to a read through of the entire script for two days at the iconic Elstree studios, a location McVey has long fantasised over as a big *Star Wars* fan.

Day one marked the reading of the first half of the season, where William isn’t present much. He used this day to “settle” himself into the vast team of 200 people, among them industry greats like Imelda Staunton, Dominic West and Elizabeth Debicki, as well as Morgan and his team. Day two was his chance to shine and was also the first time he met his co-star, Meg Bellamy, playing Kate Middleton. “I think the relationship between our two characters was definitely forged in that room because we were very much under a lot of pressure. I think we were just really locked into each other. It was one of those moments where you can feel the room liking what’s going on, which is really nice, and that was a great feeling.” After an excruciating two-week wait, McVey and Bellamy had a further chemistry test before learning they had finally got the parts. Most 24-year-olds would celebrate with a night out; McVey kept things low-key, sharing the news with friends and family, a close group who have long supported him throughout his early years in acting and drama school.

Growing up in inland South Devon (“not a cool surfer” type), McVey thrived in a school that “really championed art”, gorging on watching Spielberg movies, *Star Wars*, and Johnny Depp’s role in *Pirates of the Caribbean* and Ralph Fiennes as Voldemort in *Harry Potter*. While he found the rest of school “quite difficult”, he first caught the acting bug in year 5, flying through LAMDA exams. By secondary school, he was playing leading roles in school plays – his first was in the Noel Coward drama, *Cavalcade*, aged 13, playing a 53-year-old. This marked a tipping point in his career. “It was the first time when I really got invested in an emotional journey, and I realised that’s what I loved about it. There’s something more to this than just sort of making people laugh or just being happy that you got the applause. There’s something actually in the craft of it.”

McVey’s dedication to the craft saw him move to London for college before scoring his first role as an understudy in a two-man play at the esteemed Old Vic theatre. After weeks of not going on stage, McVey resigned himself to the idea he would remain the understudy for the entirety of the show. However, in the final week, Covid struck one of the actors, and McVey found himself on stage for the last three shows. His face lights up when describing the moment he steps out. “It was probably one of the freest I’ve ever been on stage, it was such a gorgeous experience and a beautiful script ... just the privilege of being able to tread those halls knowing who has worked there. It was very special.”

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Privilege and checking on it, comes up a lot in our conversation, from working with his award-winning co-stars to playing the part of one of the most privileged people alive, Prince William. McVey buzzes with excitement when discussing his fellow cast members. “None of them are doing it the same way. There’s Dominic, who is just such a playful and spontaneous actor, who’s completely present all the time. And then you have Imelda who’s the other end of the spectrum, who’s incredibly present, so precise and knows exactly what she’s doing. She’s a one-take wonder. You don’t really need to do anything more with Imelda, she just delivers and there’s no warm-up. She’s a queen in my eyes. I have so much respect for her and revere her as an actor.” He especially connected with Johnathan Pryce, who plays Prince Phillip, an actor who has won two Oliviers and two Tony awards. Most 20-somethings would shrivel in awe at the thought of working alongside such acting royalty, but McVey “definitely wanted to take the bull by the horns and make the most of this situation because they don’t come around often”.

From acting royalty to British royalty, McVey embarked upon his character, armed with PhD level worthy research up to 2005, where the show ends, as he didn’t want to “murky” his vision. After digging into the facts of his character, with help from the research team, he then embarked upon movement training and vocal coaching, working “with Polly Bennet and William Conacher, who are just absolute witches and wizards at what they do”. Transferring from theatre to film “was a learning curve”. After training in performance that stretches one vocally and physically up to “the cheap seats” of a theatre, on the set of *The Crown*, McVey had a “gear shift ... sort of letting everything melt away. I mean, good acting should be like that anyway”.

Surprisingly, his biggest challenge on set was breathing: “I realised that half the time I just wasn’t breathing. I’d be thinking, ‘Why do I feel so locked up?’” After a few deeps breaths, he felt “connected” to himself again. “You’re calmed down, you’re in the room, you’re not thinking about anything else, and you can just listen and react, and it was a eureka moment.



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It’s so simple, but it means so much.” McVey’s first experience in filming takes was also a big lesson for him: “It’s given me a big appreciation that a script can be, and a scene can be, a million and one different things. It should be a million and one different things because you never say the same thing twice in life.”

The only time McVey sits less comfortably during the interview is on the topic of how his life will undoubtedly change once the series is released. It’s a daunting prospect, but again, McVey returns to his enduring feeling of gratitude. “I think I’m lucky in

a sense. I’m very much sure I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it. I try not to think too much or stress myself out about what could [happen], if it’s not that way or if it’s worse or better. I’m not trying to put a label on what it’s definitely going to be. I have an amazing team and very supportive friends and family. I’m incredibly lucky in that sense. I’m looking forward to the next chapter. I just love doing it and want to do more of it.”

With a 17-year age gap between Prince William and himself, it seems McVey has come full circle, harking back to his school days and falling in love with transformation again.

The general public and the world at large have conflicting and very impassioned views on the royal family. Yet for McVey, the royal family hasn’t played a big feature in his life, thanks to his age. This enabled him to not “have any prior opinions ...I was able to objectively see the character, and Peter did such a good job at writing a human.”

Press junket season is upon him, and arguably, a new life is calling, but geared with a cheerful smile and a glass-half-full nature, McVey is sure to keep honing his craft, this time no longer from the wings but centre stage.



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Styling assistant ZAC SUNMAN, Talent ED McVEY

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