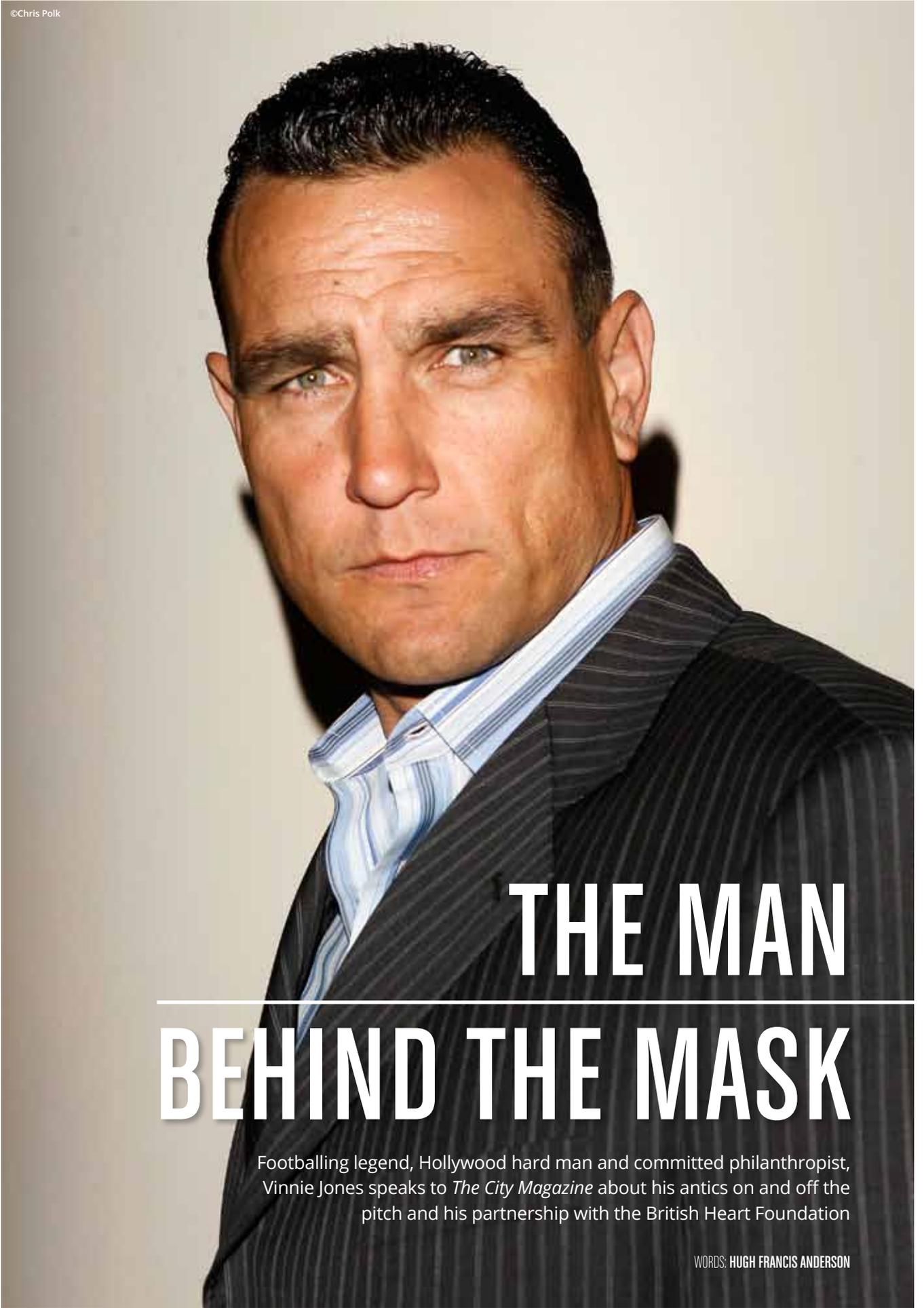


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THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK

Footballing legend, Hollywood hard man and committed philanthropist, Vinnie Jones speaks to *The City Magazine* about his antics on and off the pitch and his partnership with the British Heart Foundation

WORDS: HUGH FRANCIS ANDERSON

“A llo mate, 'ow ya doing?” says Vinnie Jones in his raspy London accent. His eight years in sunny LA haven't changed his demeanour; it's like I'm talking to bullet-tooth Tony; I continue pensively. Next month, event promoters Simply Prestige will be hosting two exclusive guest nights in support of Jones' charity of choice, the British Heart Foundation, a charity Jones has supported since his wife Tanya had a heart transplant in 1987.

Playing on his hard man image, Jones' 2012 'hands-only' CPR advert proved highly successful in raising heart attack awareness. “We are well into double figures with the number of lives we've saved with the CPR commercial,” Vinnie explains. “It's a massive achievement.”

Vinnie Jones' football career spanned 15 years, seeing him captain the Welsh national football team and, most notably, winning the 1988 FA Cup Final with Wimbledon as part of the infamous Crazy Gang. Some have accused the recent BT documentary *The Crazy Gang* as portraying Vinnie and his teammates as bullish thugs, who used violence to intimidate the rival team. I ask Jones how he feels about the depiction: “It made me feel a bit sick in the stomach because we thought we were telling the fairy-tale story of where we came from to win the FA Cup. But the way it was edited, they just took all the violence as the way the club was run.”

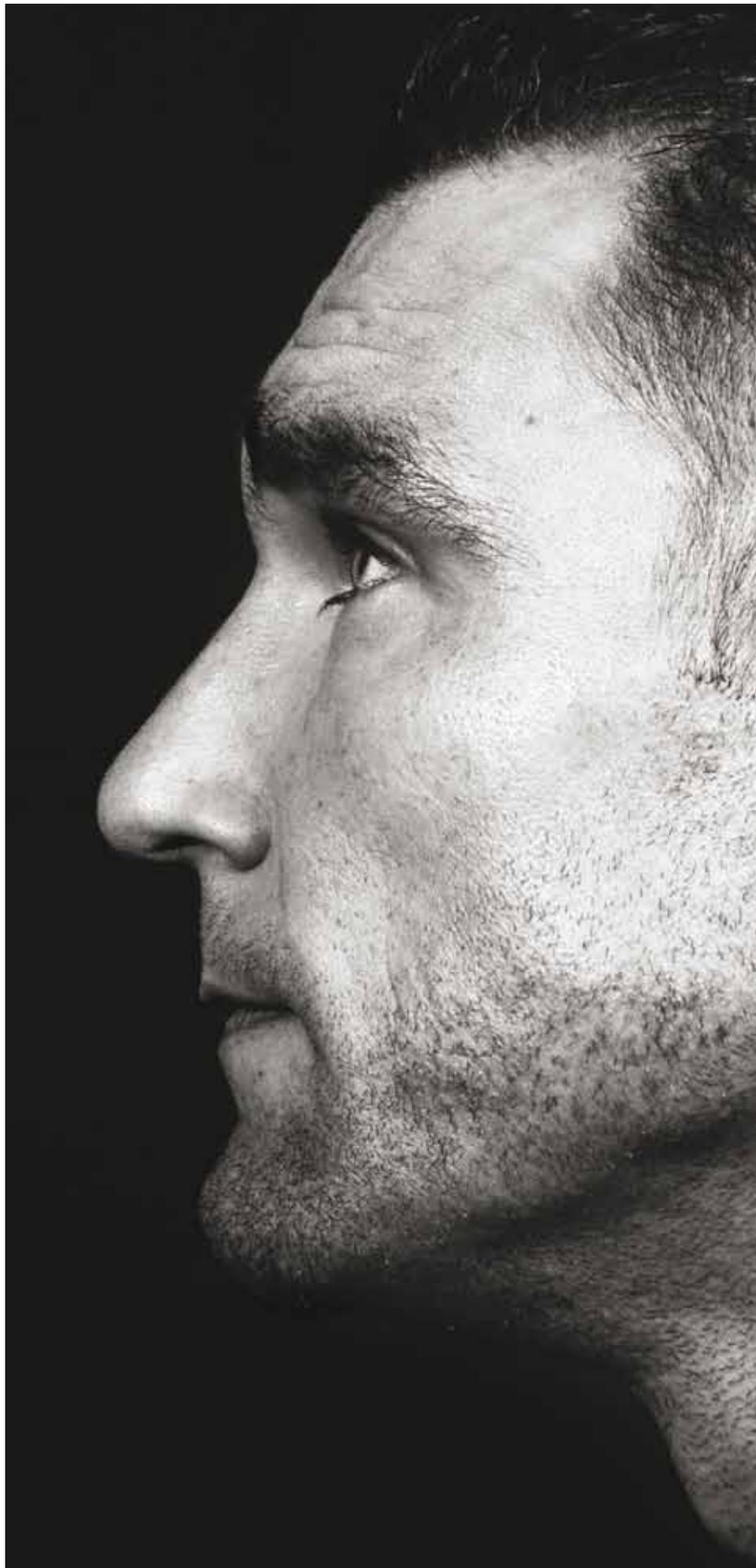
That said, it was, of course, Jones' on-field reputation that landed him his first acting role as Big Chris in Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. The list of violent roles continued with *Gone in 60 Seconds* and *Snatch*. It's become a stereotype that Jones wants to leave behind. “I love comedy,” he explains. “I'm making a conscious effort to be in more comedy films and comedy TV.” With *Galavant* being a number one comedy hit in the US, it looks like he's moving in the right direction.

“I work very hard, it's constant, you've got to be constantly on it, you can't sit back for one minute out there or else you're quickly forgotten. You've got to be on your toes.”

What's more daunting, acting or football? “Acting, because when the camera's on you, you've got to deliver the lines, especially when you've got people like Hugh Jackman or John Travolta looking down the lens at you. When you're on the football pitch with your mates, if someone pisses you off you can just grab them by the bollocks.” It's this sort of humour that America seems to be lapping up.

Off the pitch, which achievement is Vinnie most proud of? “The progression I've made in acting. At the beginning a lot of people knocked me down and said I'll be back playing football in three weeks. I've sort of cracked it now. *Galavant* is a fantastic TV show, which has been received fantastically by the US and I can't wait for it to come out in England.” Jones' voice is softer now, more relaxed. Perhaps the LA sun has softened him after all.

Vinnie has, in the past, been vocal on the 'state of Britain.' He may now live on the other side of the pond, but does he harbour plans of a return to Blighty? “No, LA's my work place. We're here, we're permanent. You know I love England; I've got a big Union Jack flying outside my house and I'm very





©Steve Pyke

RIGHT Jones lets Paul Gascoigne know he's there during the 1988 FA Cup tie between Wimbledon and Newcastle

BELOW Steve Jones, Jimmy Jean-Louis, Frank Leboeuf, Vinnie Jones and Jason Statham at the Soccer for Survivors Celebrity Showcase Match, Beverly Hills High School, Beverly Hills, 2007



Monte Fresco / The Daily Mirror



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This Brit has certainly found his feet in America, a legal alien who's loving the LA lifestyle

patriotic. I do have views on a few things, but they're best kept to myself, otherwise they'll get blown out of proportion."

Jones is most likely worried about a repeat of the *Radio Times* interview he did back in 2013, where he slated the state of British immigration policies, which, according to Jones, had made the country "unrecognisable." Tentatively, I ask if he'd consider going into politics. "No. Never."

This Brit has certainly found his feet in America, a legal alien who's loving the LA lifestyle. "Oh I like the weather. I get up in the morning, get the golf clubs out and away you go. Every spare minute I'm playing golf." Has he ever been starstruck on the streets of LA? "Oh yeah," he replies, "many times. It's quite amazing, but they're the people I've got friendly with. I get a lot of respect from a lot of people for my achievements in football; once you've got 70 movies under your belt, you get a lot of credit for that too."

With a mansion on Mulholland Drive, Quentin Tarantino as his neighbour and a golf course at his back door, Jones couldn't be happier. So what's next? "Hmmm, I just want to get my handicap down to single figures," he laughs. **Ⓢ**

Simply Prestige presents An Evening with Vinnie Jones on 8 (London) and 9 (Essex) May. For tickets, call 020 8709 8089 or visit simplyprestigeevents.co.uk.