

# An extraordinary gentleman

Jason Flemyng, 46, is a successful English actor and star of Hollywood hits such as *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. He and his wife, actress Elly Fairman, live in south London with their one-year-old twins.

## On becoming a dad at 45

I'm very lucky with my work; I can spend a lot of time with my kids. Having twins at 45 [Noah and Cassius were born on 20 June last year] was wonderful. The only downside is that I'd rather have just a little more energy, but I'm pretty fit and well put together. My brother's kids are about 21, so both my mum and dad met those grandchildren. My dad is no longer here and my mum is too old to get massively involved in childcare, which makes me aware of my role in the circle of life.

On the plus side, I'm very blessed. Many friends of my age are trying for children and spending a lot of money on IVF treatments, so we've been lucky. Ellie used things such as Chinese herbs and it was the classic thing where, just when we were about to give up and resign

ourselves to IVF, we relaxed – and of course that's when it happened naturally.

## On his health

I go swimming in a local cold-water lido at least three times a week. I've run four or five marathons and I still try to keep in shape. I'm involved with the TV Times Leukaemia Research running team, which consists mostly of old actors. It was put together by a man called Ken Lomas, who's raised millions for the charity. He does all the legwork – no pun intended – and we just turn up, put on the T-shirts and run. There's an old gag that goes: "Why don't actors pull their curtains in the morning? They want to have something to do in the afternoon." So it's good to be able to use the downtime to do something valuable and give something back.

## On forthcoming projects

I'm doing a film called *King* about a little kid who's being bullied and copes with it by believing he's Elvis. Straight after that I'll be shooting in Georgia for a little independent film about the transition of power from Russia. It's about freedom fighters – or terrorists, depending upon your point of view.

And then I'm selling my soul to the devil and doing *X-Men 4* [reprising the role of Azazel]. That said, I loved doing *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Any day you get up and find yourself working with Sean Connery is a little like going diving and ending up swimming with dolphins. I'm not saying I'm the equivalent of Van Gogh, but if you're an artist you don't hide your paintings under the bed, so sometimes it's good to do a film

that you know a lot of people will see. Hollywood is good for that, but I live in Los Angeles only as long as I need to. The day I finish shooting over there I'm on the plane home – to hang out with sincere people and feel part of a community.

## On volunteering

I became an ambassador for Barnardo's about a year ago. It sounds funny, but I sometimes have this karmic notion that I've been too lucky and have been too blessed, so that something bad is going to happen to me along the line if I don't give something back. I had this great life jetting around the world while childhood mates were builders or estate agents – but they had kids and a family life, so it seemed like a fair trade-off.

Then the twins came along and it made me rethink. I had already done some work with Barnardo's, such as prize-giving days at some of its residential schools. I thought that I'd been given such great opportunities and that such opportunities – plus, of course, the self-belief to make the most of them – are not there for everyone. A lot of what's called talent is mostly the confidence to go for what you want to do. So I realised that I had a fantastic chance to instil in these kids a sense of self-worth, to encourage them to fulfil themselves.

If I can help these young people by telling them that I got lucky through my family's belief in me, then perhaps I can do the same for them. We're doing a project at the moment working with fathers from other cultures who've been absent from their children's lives. We talk with them about their upbringing and culture, and we record the conversation to give to their children as a link to their background, to try to help them make more sense of it.

I'm lucky to have the chance to do this, and, if anyone reading this feels that they could spare a little time to get involved, I would urge them to look on the Barnardo's website to find how they can do so.

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## COULD YOU HELP BARNARDO'S TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Barnardo's runs more than 800 projects in the UK, helping to improve the lives of some 190,000 children and young people every year.

In support of this effort, the charity is campaigning for a fortnight (from 20 October to 4 November) to promote this year's Make a Difference Day on 27 October. This is a nationwide initiative that aims to increase the number of charity volunteers in the UK by raising the profile of volunteering in general and



encouraging people to donate their time and expertise to benefit others.

If you are interested in volunteering with Barnardo's, the charity is seeking people who are flexible, creative and, most crucially, keen to make a real difference to the lives of the country's most vulnerable youngsters.

To find out more, go to [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk) or visit your nearest Barnardo's shop.