

Interview: James and Oliver Phelps The Weasley Twins from Harry Potter

The actors discuss Harry Potter: The Exhibition, life after the biggest movie franchise in history and why the hashtag #pleasegodnoscreamingchildrennexttotheplane works like magic.

What is it like to be part of the highest-grossing movie franchise of all time?

Oliver: We're pretty lucky Harry Potter was our first gig and that it lasted 10 years.

James: As Robbie Coltrane who plays Hagrid said, "It's like having a Rolls Royce for your first car. You're going to have to find a Lamborghini next." We had no idea Harry Potter would be the biggest thing going. We were 14 when we got the parts and still figuring out who we were. The film industry doesn't exist in Birmingham, our hometown, so acting wasn't even on our radar. Harry Potter was a wonderful place for us. The production crew was really good, in the early films especially. Chris Columbus (who directed the first two movies) had great tolerance for child actors, as attention levels would drop every now and then. Later on in the films, we all learnt how to process work on-the-go. On the whole, everyone was really supportive, so it was fairly easy going for the most part.

Do you miss playing the characters Fred and George Weasley?

Oliver: Definitely. We had great fun being pranksters. And since we're method actors, we just have to be method actors. Messing around on set was part of our job. There's a cool section in part 1 of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* where I get my ear blown off, and it was all bloody and nice. We're both very serious at that point. In the very next scene, we switched to a Fawcett Towers-like bit where I'm doing this over-exaggerated cartoon walk in the background. We loved mixing it up. It was quite fun to be able to stretch the characters, and you never know when you're going to get the chance to do that in a film.

What should fans expect from 'Harry Potter: The Exhibition'?

Oliver: It's the first time it's been here in Asia. It's the only place you'll see three Deathly Hallows (the most powerful objects in the wizarding world) all in one place. Singapore is also first to have all 6 Horcruxes (objects which contain a wizard or witch's soul) in one location. Nagini, Voldemort's snake is also making her debut. She's mostly computer-generated in the films, but now fans can see a model of her head. We are excited to see the fans' reactions. From our experience, they tend to be in awe of the time and effort which goes into the props.

James: What's cool is that so many of these props in the movie could have been easily rushed or chucked in, but weren't. As actors, we really took this craftsmanship for granted. People who've never seen any of the films have told us they appreciate the work that went into the sets. In the exhibit there's a Quidditch program from the World Cup that appeared in the film, and it's just held in someone's hands. But if you actually open it, you can read as an entire piece. I love the exhibit because it is very interactive. There's the Quidditch pitch, where you can throw balls through hoops. You can also pull Mandrakes out of a pot, and sit in Hagrid's oversized chair, which is always funny. But I'd have to say my favorite bit is still my costume. I wore that for quite a while. I really hope it's been cleaned.

If you had a chance to play another Harry Potter character, who would it be?

James: Am I allowed to play his character? (Points to his brother.) No? Ok, something completely different then. I'd say Dobby the house-elf. He was pretty cool. I've also always wanted to be a bad guy who gets blown up at the end of a movie.

Oliver: Voldemort. He's a bad guy with no good in him at all. Besides, as fun as it is being one of the the nice guys, you can always play up an evil character. During filming, I let an intern bleach my eyebrows, and it's amazing how different your head looks if you don't have them. If I shaved my head to be Voldemort, it wouldn't be too much worse. I think we'd both like to play a baddie. Totally polar opposite to Fred and George, and we'd like to do it separately. As actors, I think it's important James and I take on individual jobs. But yes, a bad guy. A very calculating bad guy like the Blowfeld-super villain type.

This is your first visit to Singapore and Asia. What is your impression so far?

James: Singapore Botanic Gardens was pretty sweet. It was nice to walk around there, and for the most part we've just enjoyed soaking up the sun.

Oliver: We wanted to check out the Underground (MRT or subway) system and see what it's like going around town, so I got a few funny looks from people saying "it's him!" It's a good Underground, really clean. Mum and Dad came out to Singapore a few years ago, and they were always saying how friendly everyone was. Now I understand. It's been a great chilled out time.

James: We've got some really cool photos. I did a time lapse video of the sun going down from the (Marina Bay Sands Infinity) Pool which was really amazing.

Oliver: That pool is just amazing. I've never seen anything like it in my life.

James: It doesn't look real. It should be on a set or something.

Oliver: And we met Edgar Davids (the retired Dutch footballer). That was very cool.

What is everyday life like for you?

Oliver: On the whole, very normal. We're very fortunate to travel the world. We know we've done a lot of things that most people aren't able to. So I make sure I use those experiences to grow my understanding of the world. Some people think we live this far out life all the time, and that's just not the case. I like running. I go for walks in the countryside near where I live, stuff like that.

Any Brit expressions you think Southeast Asian fans need to know?

James: I use 'useful as a waterproof tea bag' which means something is not very useful.

Oliver: They actually make those. I've got one. I've been saving it but I just don't know how it works.

James: It probably doesn't work for suckers like me.

You have worked on dramas and done production work post-Harry Potter. What's next?

James: I'm actually in talks about a potential project. But I can't say much more because I don't want to jinx it. Not knowing when the next job is coming out is something I still haven't gotten used to as an actor. I'm still adjusting.

Oliver: It took some time not to play the same character and walk around with a big smile on my face. I just wrote a screenplay and it's a Western. A friend of mine who actually teaches scriptwriting has been showing me how to restructure it. He's been great and we're on our fourth draft. Soon it'll be time to pitch it to buyers.

Do Brits write Westerns?

Oliver: This one does. I can't set it in Birmingham though. Maybe Gloucester.

So back to the UK after this trip?

James: Yes, it should be quite fun to get back home to watch the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics. Hope the plane ride goes well though. I've got this hashtag #pleasegodnoscreamingchildrennexttotheplane which I tweet each time I fly. The one time I didn't do it, a couple of weeks ago coming back from Japan to LA, there were two hyperactive kids right behind me and my seat mate was snoring so hard he was sucking all the air from the room.

I was sitting there the whole time going "why me?"

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James (standing) and Oliver Phelps
Photo credit: Eliza Leung

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