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# CIGAR & SPIRITS

THE GENTLEMAN'S LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

INTERVIEW

## PIERCE BROSNAN

THE ACTOR, ARTIST  
AND ACTIVIST BRINGS  
HIS A-GAME



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# Piercing The Surface

by Elisa Jordan  
portraits by Brett Erickson



## Pierce Brosnan Brings His A-Game as Actor, Artist and Activist

**I**NTerviewing Pierce Brosnan is like talking with an old friend. He speaks with sincerity and takes a genuine interest in others and what's going on around him. During the course of our chat, for instance, it comes out that his wife, Keely Shaye Brosnan, and I grew up just a few miles apart from one another. "It is a small world!" he exclaims delightedly. It's almost hard to imagine that this humble man is part of a very elite group of actors who have portrayed one of cinema's most iconic and most debonair roles—James Bond. But Bond is only part of Brosnan's artistic legacy. His acting resume boasts a roster of varied and diverse characters. He's also used his talents to draw attention to important social and political issues, such as the documentary he made with Keely, *Poisoning Paradise*, about chemical companies setting up test sites in Hawaii. In recent years, his passion for art, his first love, has come to the forefront. In 2018, his painting of Bob Dylan sold for \$1.4 million at a charity auction.



With so many accomplishments to be proud of, it would be easy for Brosnan to rest on his laurels. Instead, he continues to challenge himself. The little boy who was raised in part by his grandparents in Ireland, then moved to London at age 11 to join his mother and stepfather and find his way in the changing world of the 1960s and '70s, is never too far away. Brosnan is keenly aware of his origins and continues to give back. (As an example, he remains a patron of Ovalhouse, the theatre company that helped him discover his passion for acting.) Perhaps most tellingly, he remains grateful and humble about a career that has allowed him to support his family and that he still enjoys.

Brosnan is now the spokesperson for Don Ramón Tequila. His role as a spirits brand ambassador provided us with an opportunity to chat about his life before Bond and beyond.

**"I think the music played the biggest role in my life. I think the musicality of the times, the culture, it was palpable that anything was possible. Love and peace were in the air. I was not an outrageous hippie by any stretch of the imagination, but there was the music."**

**Cigar & Spirits Magazine:** *You've been really creative from an early age. Where do you think that comes from?*

**Pierce Brosnan:** Well, I suppose it comes from having lived a solitary life on the banks of the River Boyne in Southern Ireland, being an only child and coming from a broken family, a father who left and being brought up in the company of grandparents and living in a very rural setting. One relies on one's imagination and that in a world that you have as a child. My father, Tom Brosnan, I know very little of him. He was a carpenter and he was very good at drawing. I suppose there's some DNA involved there, but the arts, and the art of painting has always captivated me and it was my first source of employment when I left school. I left school with nothing more than a cardboard folder of drawings and paintings, and I got my first job in a small studio at Putney, South London. That's where my artistic life started.

**You had an interest in art before acting?**

Yes. Well, like I said, I really had no idea what I was going to do. My shortcomings were my windfall in life, really, in the sense that I was aware that I was behind the eight-ball academically. Yet I had strong sensing and intuition of creative life. I found a wonderful studio, small studio, and I started as a trainee commercial artist. Then from there, three years in, I discovered the world of acting.

**You walked into Ovalhouse [formerly called Oval House Theatre] in 1970 when you were 17. What brought you there, and what were you expecting?**

Well, I had strong passion for films and movies—they just captivated my imagination. I certainly wasn't dreaming of becoming an actor when I walked through the doors of the Ovalhouse back then, but I discovered on that particular night this life force of creativity and the theatre then, the experimental theatre, was in full glory. Musically, the '60s were over and the '70s were just beginning, and for me, it was just this hothouse of creativity.

I would go along and do workshops every night, whether it be acrobatics, mime, Martha Graham dance classes, improvisation, so this world of the arts and the whole youth tableau of friends and creative life force just blossomed for me. Eventually, I gave up the job and joined the theatre company, and we rehearsed in the afternoons and the evenings. And in the mornings, we all held jobs. The company was about eight players, and they were all supply teachers and had high qualifications.

I went off and cleaned people's homes and worked in a factory and dug ditches and earned some money, so we could put on our first show. We got an arts council grant and we became a theatre company. I did that for a number of years, and then I decided to really train as an actor. I wished for that qualification so I studied. I got into one of the great drama schools, the Drama Centre. I studied for three years, came out with honors in '76 and I've worked as an actor all my life.

**You ventured to London in the '60s into the '70s, a time known as Swingin' London, which gets a lot of attention even now because it was such a happening place. You were there during your formative years. What was it like and how did it shape you?**

I think the music played the biggest role in my life. I think the musicality of the times, the culture, it was palpable that anything was possible. Love and peace were in the air. I was not an outrageous hippie by any stretch of the imagination, but there was the music.

For me, it was really being an artist, devouring books, catching up on an education, trying to find my way through the landscape of creative life. But the music was the one that caught hold of my imagination and was the one that led me down many

paths to the Ovalhouse. The writing of the time, I would be versed in the work of the Black Panther Movement because the Black Panthers would have their gatherings at the Ovalhouse. As an Irishman and knowing something of the prejudice and having felt the sting of prejudice as a foreigner, as an Irish boy, the Panthers and their words were very intoxicating, and there was a passion there. It was all coming from learned sensibility. It just kind of broadened my horizons. So there were so many aspects of life that was coming at me in those early days in the '70s, out of the late '60s.

**Do you think that helped shape your consciousness about social issues?**

I think the seed was sown without question, yes. Because the community that I was in was ostensibly a black community and Oval, Brixton. The Ovalhouse now is actually moving and has a new theatre. I'm a patron of the Ovalhouse. It's moving to the heart of Brixton called Harbor Lane. I, as a young man who was trying to find his way in a society and a culture cleaved to the creative life, if I wasn't an actor I probably would have been a social worker, because my initial days were the theatre and education and going around schools, and putting on performances.

We had two performances, we had the speeches by Dr. Seuss, and we had a socially relevant play that we created about a young woman who stole a baby. That was called Family. We had those two productions. For me, I was just kind of consumed with the community and the possibilities of finding my way through this community and becoming an actor. So yes, I think it stayed with me throughout, to greater or lesser degrees.

**You mentioned some of the music in that era. Who were you listening to? Who were your favorite artists?**

I was very much a fan of the Who. Then along came Pink Floyd and West Coast music and The Eagles and Spirit. There was a venue called the Lyceum, and there was a group of us that would go. *Melody Maker* the magazine and *New Musical Express*, *Rolling Stone*, *Timeout*, they were my bibles. They were my go-to sources of information on literature to read, whether it be Marshall McLuhan, or Ken Kesey, or Syd Arthur to the art world of Kandinsky and Monet, or Rodin. Again, because I had to catch up, my learning capabilities were just all of my own making. The art was always there. William Blake was a strong influence. I remember doing a mural on a friend's living room wall of a William Blake god-like figure. Salvador Dali was a huge influence to me.

One of the first books I bought with the meager allowance I got from my job was Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*. I discovered existentialism. Again, coming from the kind of rural country background, solitary, and then at 11 living in a metropolis like London, I had an identification with these writers. It gave me a very strong sense of identity.

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**Which actors have influenced you?**

Marlon Brando is pretty high on the list. Robert DeNiro, Anthony Hopkins, Daniel Day-Lewis. In those initial days, Clint Eastwood, Steve McQueen. These stoic cool men of few words, with a very strong cinematic presence. I found that to be absolutely captivating. It's well documented that my first week in London, I went to see with my mother and my step-father-to-be, *Goldfinger*. Having been brought up on a staple of cowboys and Indians and black-and-white British comedies, on that summer's day in August to go into a very large plush ABC cinema and sit in the royal balcony or whatever they called it and the curtains drew apart and on came this just magnificent movie called *Goldfinger* on a man called James Bond. The gold almost-naked lady to my 11-year-old Irish innocent eyes—this was bedazzling.

The movie theatre became my refuge and I started with the *Carry On* movies that staple of British comedies, but then came Clint Eastwood. Then came Steve McQueen and then came a vocabulary for much more nuanced movies, like [Akira] Kurosawa.

**Were your folks supportive of you when you wanted to be an actor?**

My [step]father, God bless him, he was a working man. The lovely Glaswegian man and he wanted me to get a trade and he was okay but it was my mother really. She said just follow your dream. "You just do what makes you happy." She was extremely supportive. Not that he wasn't, he was just a little bit more wary. I finally gave up the job and struggled by but in the most glorious way and in the landscape of experimental theatre in the early '70s and then went to an academy and really set sail on being an actor.

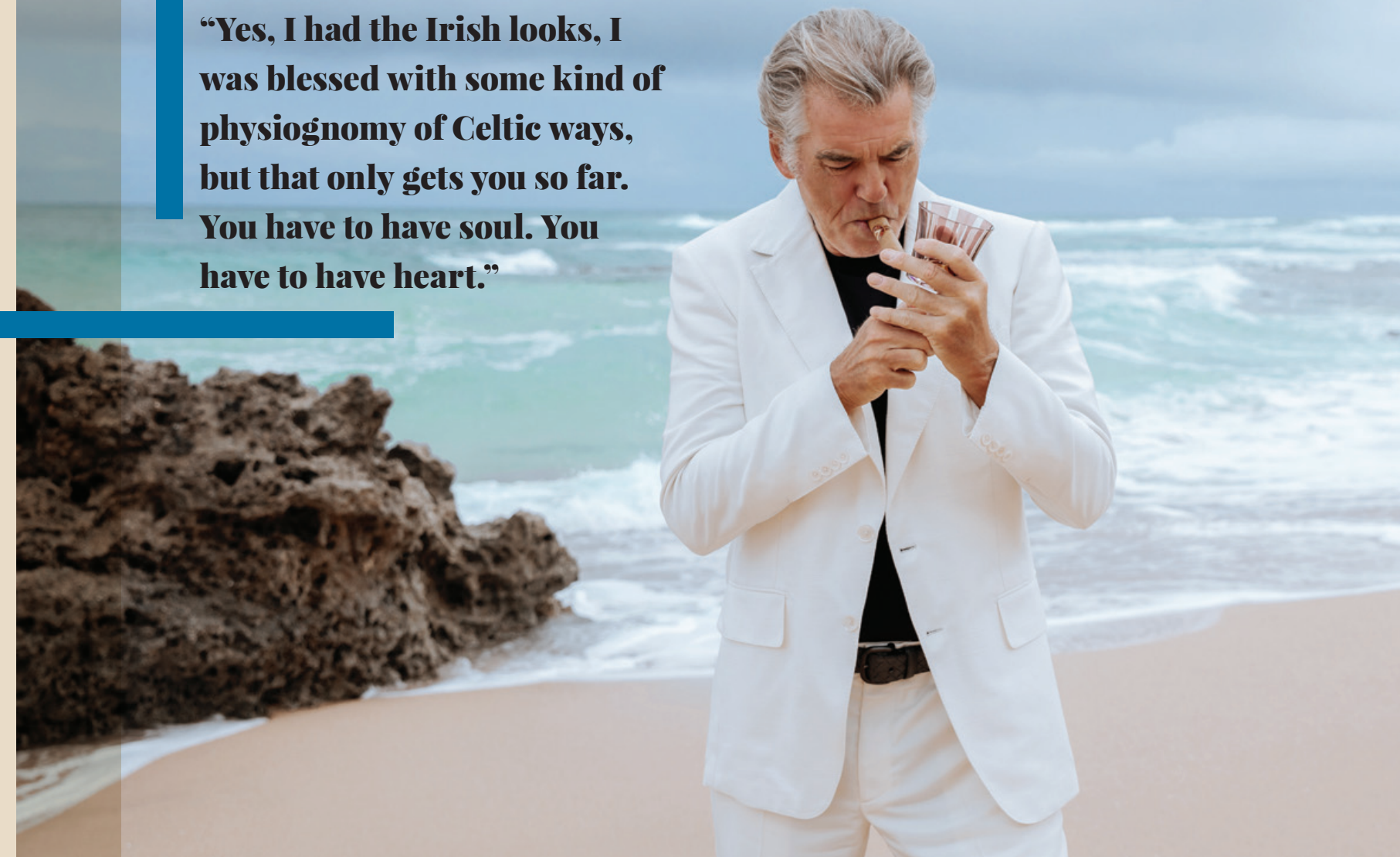
The school that I found was very much a method-orientated school. It's produced the Colin Firths and the Tom Hardys. I found what I was looking for. I found a real passion and it still remains that to this day just this is what I do. I don't know what else to do. I could become a painter. I'm a painter and an actor.

**When you were 27 you moved to America, which was another big move for you. You went from Ireland to London to America. What brought about that change or that decision?**

I was cast in an ABC mini-series called *The Manions of America*, which was a six-hour mini-series about the Irish potato famine. I got the lead role and my late wife, Cassie [Cassandra Harris], said we should go to America for the opening of the series on TV. I said well that sounds like a great idea but how the



**“Yes, I had the Irish looks, I was blessed with some kind of physiognomy of Celtic ways, but that only gets you so far. You have to have soul. You have to have heart.”**



heck are we going to do it? We've just bought this house with the proceeds from the mini-series. She'd just been in a James Bond movie, *For Your Eyes Only*. She said, "I'll find a way," and she did. She saw an ad in the newspaper that you could get a second mortgage on the central heating. She sent me off to the bank manager to get a £2,000 overdraft saying that I had a job in America, which was an untruth.

We hopped on Freddie Laker, who was an English entrepreneur in those days and he had cheap flights to Los Angeles, £100. Bring your own sandwiches. We hopped on the plane with our sandwiches and stayed at a friend's house up there on North Havenhurst [Drive] in the shadow of the shadow of the Chateau Marmont [Hotel]. And stayed there with Ruby Wax and Trevor Walton. They had a place and my wife, Cassie and I, had a room in the back and a mattress. I went out the next day, and I rented a car from Rent-a-Wreck, and it was a lime green Pacer. [laughs]

**I remember Pacers. [laughs]**

Ugliest, ugliest, saddest looking cars, and this one was not very charming at all. The next day, I went for my first interview over Laurel Canyon to CBS Studios. The car blew up at the top of Mulholland [Drive], and I had to wind my way down to the studio—late. They were looking for this character, *Remington Steele*, and I got the job.

*It was meant to be.*

It was meant to be, yes. There was a great sense of, "I'm in the right place, this is my time. I want to be here. I can be anything I want to be here." Being an American citizen was always a dream—and to work as an actor. It was my first interview on that day, and for the next two weeks, I went to visit everyone all over the town. I got a new car, and my agent pushed my tapes around the town.

At the end of the two weeks, they called me back in for this series, *Remington Steele*. They said, "Would you be prepared to come back and move here?" They knew I had a wife and two stepchildren. I said, "Yes." I went home to London, and then they called up and said, "Come back out and test." I did. I got the job, and then we went to look for the female role, and Stephanie Zimbalist was cast as Laura Holt. I came back to America, with my wife and children, and got a house in the Hollywood Hills, overlooking Sunset [Blvd.] and La Brea [Ave.] and that was it.

That was 1982, and my life changed. It went from nine episodes to 13 to 22. Then a second season, and five seasons.



#### CIGAR OF THE DAY

Cigar & Spirits Magazine selected the Diamond Crown Classic Robusto NO. 4 for the photo session. The handsome cigar with notes of creamy coffee and spice paired perfectly with Don Ramón Extra Añejo Tequila. The combination enhanced a thoroughly enjoyable photo shoot with Mr. Brosnan in Kauai, HI.



#### *That's what led to your playing James Bond, correct?*

It was, yes. Yes, in 1986, they were looking for the next James Bond. It had been off the map for some time. They offered me the role. Then I couldn't get out of my contract with *Remington Steele*, and so the part went to Timothy Dalton. Then I got on with my career and I've always managed to work. Then it was dormant again for another six years, and it came back into my life. *Remington Steele* had a strong play in my casting as James Bond.

#### *What did you enjoy most about James Bond?*

There were so many aspects to enjoy. I mean, it's bloody hard work from the get-go. You have enormous shoes to fill and expectations to uphold. Then you have to find your way into that big house and make it your own. I think the exhilaration was to read the script and to know that you were playing this iconic, mythical character...and seeing how they made it come to life. The joy of being on that set every day, the camaraderie of the people around you, and the enormous responsibility, the weight of that on one's shoulders was tremendous for Martin Campbell, who directed *GoldenEye*, and for myself, and for the Broccolis [producers].

Then the joy of seeing it being released into the world and to carry on to honor the contract of four movies, endorse a lifestyle and you become an ambassador to this small cinematic domain. One that is unique, the landscape of movie-making. So yes, it's the joy of being able to provide and have the security in such a capricious game as acting. Also, then also to go on and create my own company [Irish DreamTime], and to produce and star in my own movies. That was a very rich, fertile time.

#### *The characters you've played have been so varied, and you have a big range. Is it difficult to switch from say, James Bond, to your role in Mrs. Doubtfire to The Son? What do you look for when you're selecting a project, for characters to play?*

I look for good writing. I look for writing that is meaningful, and that sustains my imagination, and my intellect, and my passion for storytelling. I look for strong emotions that feed my creative impulses,

and that will ground me in some reality each day that I go to work. I look for creative people who are sincere, genuine, kind, and exhilarating, and unpredictable in ways that don't harm anyone. You look for good storytelling. The three projects that I've lined up for next year—hopefully, I'll get to make them—when I pick them up, they excite me. They are a challenge.

I was trained and led to believe that I could play many different roles. Most actors, good actors, just have one role. Great actors have three roles in their repertoire. I don't know where I fall into that. My teacher told me that a long time ago, and he was a good teacher. You try to be an unexpected surprise. I'm stamped as a certain character of suave, sophisticated, and all of that, which I do adore, and which I do love. When I came to do *Remington Steele*, I immersed myself in the world of Cary Grant movies, which I was very familiar with.

One of my favorite actors is Spencer Tracy. He was my grandfather's favorite actor. Those actors, they played with such a panache. You just don't see that kind of, well, maybe you do, but I tried to be Cary Grant as *Remington Steele*.

#### *He's a good example if you're going to be like someone.*

Yes, I had the Irish looks, I was blessed with some kind of physiognomy of Celtic ways, but that only gets you so far. You have to have soul. You have to have heart. You have to have genuine intellect of curiosity and passion, and technique and courage to be able to bring it all together, and patience, and humility. Those are constant lessons that still stay with me today.

Have I challenged myself? Probably not enough, but I'm happy with the body of work that I have. A small bead of films there, a string of films that I can say, "No, that's good work. That's a transformation, that's a really strong performance of the heart." Then there's a lot of could-have-done-better. It's just the nature of being an actor. In fact, I love them all.

I love them all because they're all kind of haikus of my life. A chapter of my life, a period of my life where I had to work, I had to pay the mortgage as a single father. I had to take care of the kids. How many choices do you have on the table that day? Well, which one pays the most? Which one can I get away with it? It's not the greatest piece of material, but maybe we could make something magical out of it. So you set forth.



**“A cigar can sometimes make a day's painting rather enjoyable, especially at day's end with a lovely glass flute of tequila.”**

*You mentioned some projects that you were hoping you can work on for next year although that's kind of up in the air. Could you talk a little bit about what you have coming up or is it still under wraps?*

No, two of them have already been announced. The first one is called *The Last Rifleman* and it's a true story. [It's about] a second World War veteran who was in the Royal Ulster Rifles. The Ulster Rifles landed on the beaches of Normandy, these young men of 1920. It opens with these young men charging across beautiful golden fields on a summer's day, and being annihilated. You cut to this old man, his name is Artie. He's in an old people's home with his wife who is slipping away, slowly. They've been married 65 years, and she passes.

*(continued on page 106)*