

LINCOLN WEARS (this page) TOMMY HILFGER blazer and pants, autommy.com; VENROY shirt, venroy.com.au; singlet, stylist's own; ZARA shoes, zara.com.au; (opposite page, top) VENROY shirt, as before; ADIDAS pants, adidas.com.au; (opposite page, bottom) VENROY shirt, as before; P. JOHNSON pants, pj.com; belt, stylist's own; ZARA shoes, as before



If he isn't on set, you'll probably find Lincoln Younes at the gym. The Australian actor, who turns 31 this week, showcases his active lifestyle on Instagram – there are beachside photos revealing washboard abs, and in one video, he does a pull-up using nothing but his middle fingers. Younes knows that maintaining his body takes work. But, he tells *Stellar*, his commitment to his physique is directly related to his body of work.

"I do find the entry point for a character is the physicality," Younes says. "I've always been that way: my mental follows my physical. I feel mentally grounded if I'm using my body and if I'm exerting energy, in whatever shape or form that takes."

For his starring role as Sydney nightclub baron John Ibrahim in the upcoming drama *Last King Of The Cross*, Younes undertook an intensive regimen of boxing and weights sessions spanning 90 minutes each, five or six times a week. Younes put on about 6kg of muscle and leaned out in the sweat-fuelled process, usually set to the songs of his idol, US rapper Kendrick Lamar.

"Normally, I wouldn't do that much [in the gym], I don't think," Younes says with a laugh. "And in the middle of it, I was training for a marathon. It was a lot. It's such a brutal world that this character is from – such a muscular, masculine, testosterone-fuelled world – where fighting is its own language."

"For the months I was [training] leading up, I did have to put on quite a bit of muscle. You can't inhabit a character like that without understanding the danger and the fighting and the kind of... You're always on a precipice of dying and living. And that was the world back then."

Younes has always been active. During his childhood in the regional Victorian city of Bendigo, he played soccer. But he credits his mother, a journalist who raised him on her own, with encouraging his interest in film, writing and fashion.

At 16, he was cast in the Melbourne-set drama *Tangle*, as the son of Ben Mendelsohn and Justine Clarke's characters, and soon after secured a regular role as River Boy Casey Braxton on *Home And Away*. A move to Hollywood followed, and Younes scored a part in the short-lived US drama *Grand Hotel*, which was produced by Eva Longoria. In the middle of the Covid pandemic, he relocated to Sydney, where he landed a key role in the ABC drama *Barons* and is also set to appear in the upcoming Sean Penn-produced satirical comedy *C'A'U'G'H'T*.

But like many other young actors, Younes found his unpredictable profession yielded both challenges and rewards. "[Early on] I had work quite consistently, and I had the best training ground with *Tangle*," he reflects. "To start with that and go through *Home And Away* and other network jobs

after that, and then for work to kind of stop, I did have some really lean years and I remember how difficult that was. That's where the most growth came from.

"The growing comes from not working, not from the job. When you're on a job, you learn different things but you stagnate as a human – wherever you started the job, you kind of remain as that until the end of the job. When you return to life and the hardships that it has, [that's] when you grow as a human being. Those years I credit with making me who I am."

His latest role has proven to be his most challenging and most talked-about yet. In *Last King Of The Cross*, the \$50 million series based on Ibrahim's best-selling 2017 memoir of the same name, Younes depicts Ibrahim's ascent from Lebanese immigrant to club mogul amid tensions with his older brother, Sam (played by Claude Jabbour).

Known for his boyish looks, Younes, whose heritage is Lebanese-Australian on his paternal side, reveals a much more brooding look as Ibrahim: seriously jacked, and sporting darker hair, brows, and contact lenses for the role. "We have a very similar work ethic," John Ibrahim tells *Stellar* exclusively of why Younes was cast.

Ibrahim was also moved at how true-to-life Younes and Jabbour's performances were, leading him to feel like he was reliving his own life on screen. "Both Claude and Lincoln portrayed Sam and myself extremely well; sometimes it was difficult to watch scenes play out as though it was happening all over again," Ibrahim confesses.

Ibrahim also spent time on set, which included a shop-front recreation (built in a western Sydney car park) of neon-lit Kings Cross in its notorious heyday, featuring Porky's strip club, the Love Machine brothel and the music venue Club 77.

Younes and Ibrahim developed a close friendship as a result, though Younes adds, "I'm not doing an imitation of him. There's an essence I wanted to capture, the loneliness of being an immigrant, of being successful, of paving a path that hadn't been done before. And then, what comes from that. It's lonely at the top."

As for their meetings, Younes says of Ibrahim, "He invited me around to his house a couple of times. You can learn a lot about a person just by being in their space. He's charismatic, he's open, he respects that I know what I'm doing. And that's all I need."

The series features strong depictions of violence – in the same vein as landmark crime drama *The Sopranos* – but the cast embraced shooting the confronting scenes head on, Younes says, and being on streaming platform Paramount+ means the use of expletives wasn't capped, so the show can reflect the "volatility, the propensity for things to turn on a dime," he adds.



CROSS ROADS (from top) Lincoln Younes (left) and Claude Jabbour on the set of new series *Last King Of The Cross* with John Ibrahim (front); with Stephen Peacocke (centre) and Dan Ewing (right) on *Home And Away* in 2011; with Justine Clarke and Eva Lazzaro in the series *Tangle*.



"We lean into it completely. There's no point pulling punches on a show like this. If we're seen to be pulling back, then it's not indicative of the world in itself."

Last King Of The Cross is billed as a story about brothers, and Younes says he forged a sibling-like bond with Jabbour. "It's the heart of the show," he explains. "It was really important for Claude and I to capture the love and the protection between the two. All the other stuff is peripheral."

As for Younes' next move, he has a busy year ahead. *Stellar* can reveal that he's writing and producing his own show, which he hopes to shoot by the start of 2024.

"The project is about different personifications of anxiety and how they all interrelate," he says. "This is the longest I've been anywhere for a consistent amount of time. I left LA unexpectedly [during Covid, but] I genuinely do want to produce and create more, and move into that."

But before then, Younes is leaving his mark on the *Cross*. "The biggest compliment I could ever receive is, 'I didn't recognise you [in a role].'" he says. "I know intimately how difficult and unpredictable this industry can be and I know you can be the most talented, kind, hardworking human being, and do all the right things, and you can still not work. Even though I do feel I have worked for this [success] and earned the roles, I'm deeply aware of how fortunate I am." ★ *Last King Of The Cross* starts streaming on February 17 on Paramount+.

The man who would be king

For his dark and complex role as infamous nightclub kingpin John Ibrahim, **Lincoln Younes** has forgone his boyish charm and thousand-watt smile for a brooding and brawny vibe. And if viewers don't initially clock him, well... he will be thrilled. Because, as he tells *Stellar*, he will have achieved his main goal as an actor: "The biggest compliment I can receive is, 'I didn't recognise you'"

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