

Performance Out-of-Nowhere Boy

*Nowhere Boy, the debut feature film from artist Sam Taylor-Wood, explores lesser-told elements of the John Lennon legend: his childhood and adolescence, his relationships with his mother and aunt and his first steps towards stardom. Thanks to its exhaustively researched period feel, as well as a brilliant performance from its young lead Aaron Johnson, the film avoids the mawkish nostalgia of previous efforts more clumsily and literally "about" the Beatles. By contrast, Taylor-Wood – successfully making the transition from her shorter films of the past to the cinema proper – now brings a sensitive and memorable coming-of-age story to the big screen. In *Nowhere Boy*, we watch as a gifted-yet-unknown Lennon gravitates slowly but surely towards his destiny. The boy becomes a man. Sam Taylor-Wood photographed Aaron for *Another Man* and here tells us about the genesis of the project.*

"I vaguely remember my dad playing Beatles records when I was a kid, so I guess that would be my earliest memories of Lennon – just hearing the music as a kid and – as a visual person – noticing and remembering the record covers, like *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. My parents were big fans – my mum was a very obsessive Lennon fan and I remember it being a really big deal for her when he died.

Nowhere Boy came about initially through my good friend, Joe Wright (*Atonement*). He was looking through a pile of scripts on an agent's desk. He read it, then called me straight away and said, 'Look, this is a fantastic script, it's a film you should do, it feels very you.' He said there were a couple of obstacles in the way, though, and that I had to try and get on to the production company and get them to give it to me. He also told me there was another director attached to the film, and that I would have to try and find a way of getting rid of them! (*Laughs*) So it was a challenge, but the minute I closed the final page after reading it I just knew – through the sobs and tears – that it was a film I had to do, it was the emotional content of the script and Lennon's history. There is a miscomprehension about the film I have to clear up –

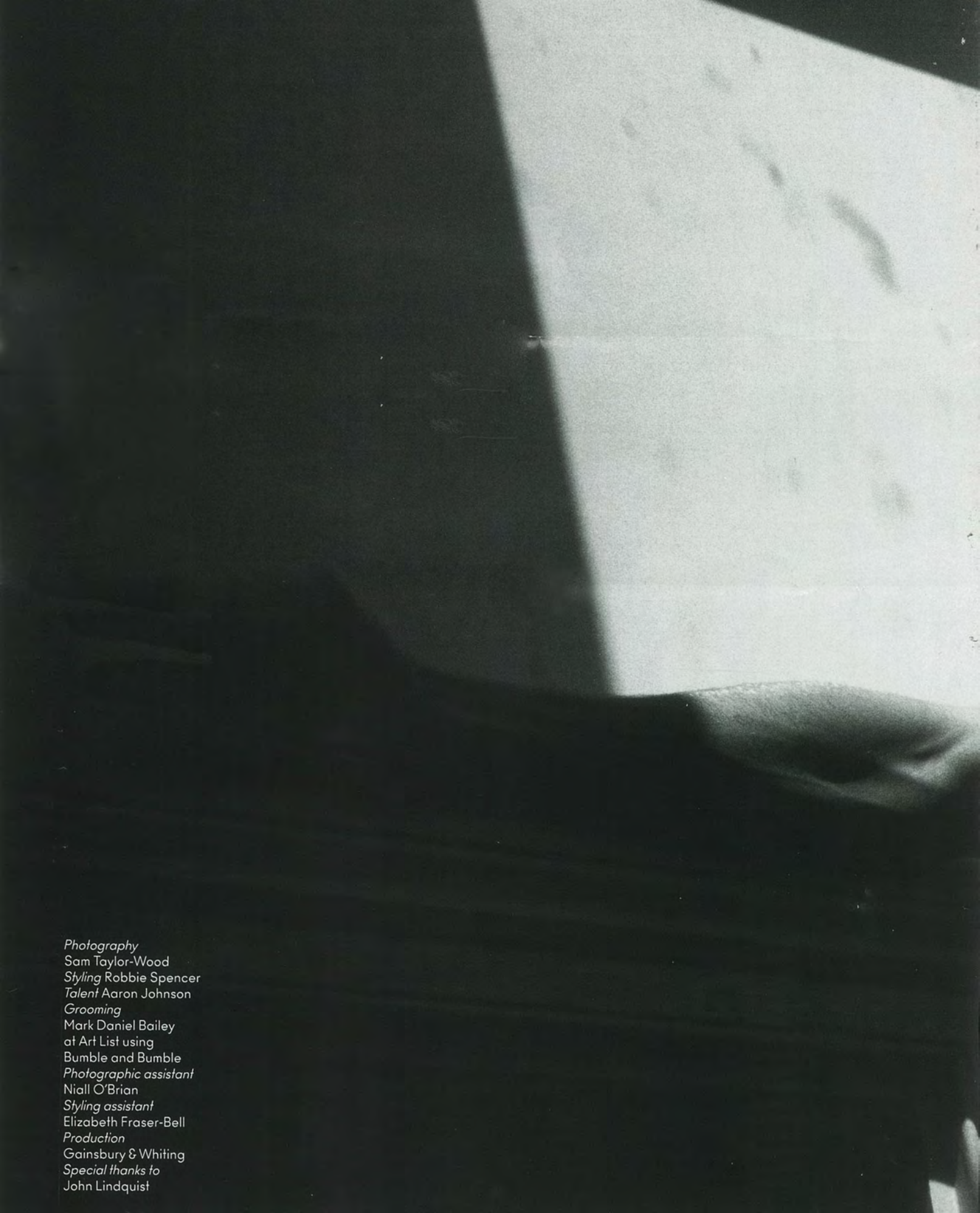
it's definitely not about the Beatles, it's very much about John Lennon and his childhood; a coming-of-age story, rather than being about the Beatles performing. So I have to make sure that people don't think they're coming to see a 'Beatles film'.

I spent a few weeks, if not months, before we actually started filming, completely immersing myself in research: going through photography books, film references; we went through masses of material and photography, put storyboards together, looks and colours and all of that sort of thing, so that each specific scene was really particularly crafted. That was one of the most fun parts of the process.

I wanted to get as much of Liverpool into *Nowhere Boy* as possible, because it's such a fantastically strong, architectural city, with amazing landmarks. It wasn't until I actually went to Liverpool, though, and first walked around the streets where Lennon grew up – just looking and taking it all in – that suddenly I thought, 'I am making a film about one of the greatest icons ever! Oh dear God!' And I remember thinking, 'Shit! I am really screwed if I fuck this up!'

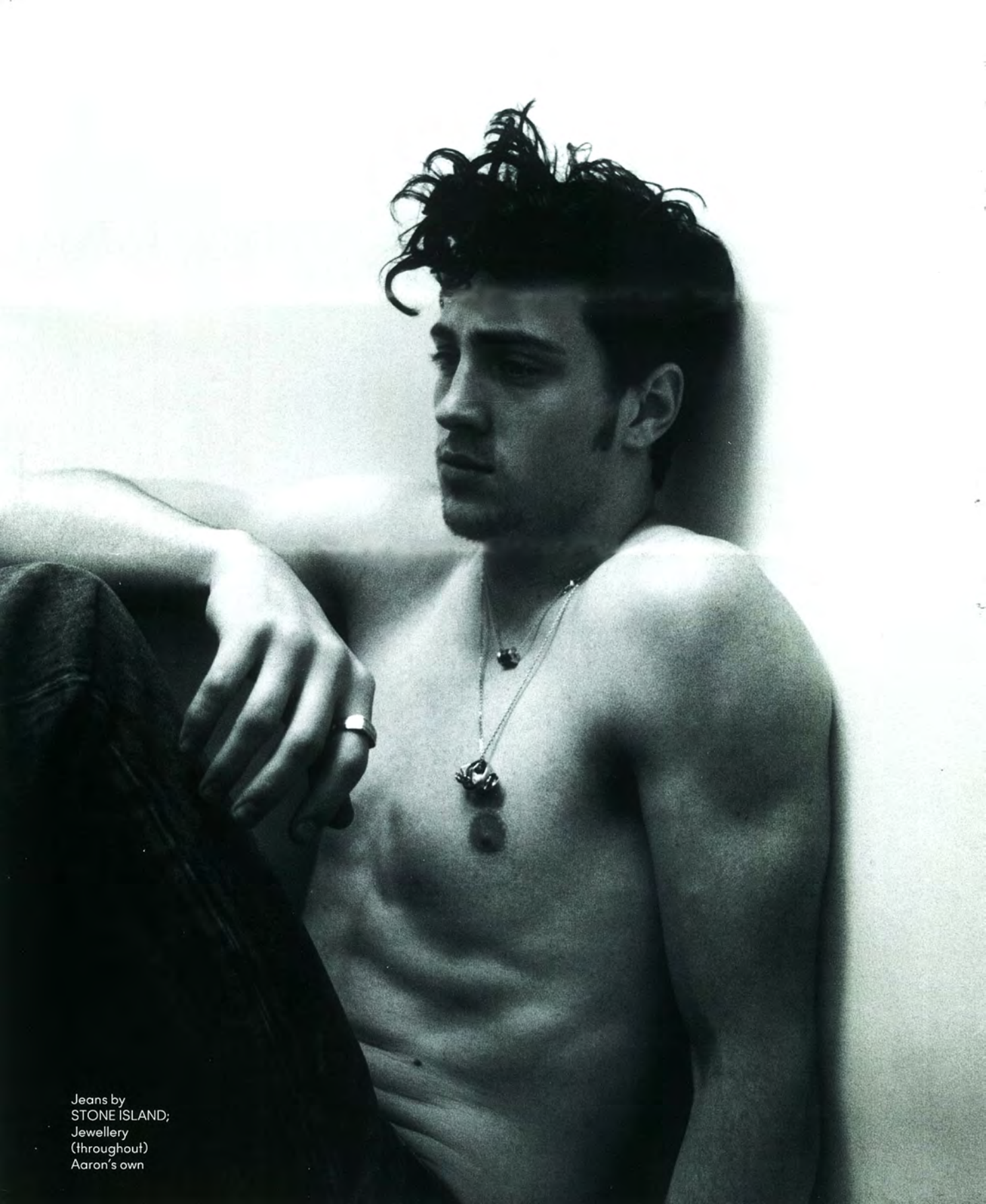
Having previously made short films, making my first feature film was, strangely, a very natural experience. A couple of nights before we started work on it, though, I remember I did start to break into a sweat at the prospect of walking on to a set of 150 people, all looking at me, wanting to know what to do. Yet the minute we started it was fine, because I had been so obsessed with the material and how I wanted to shoot it, and I'd done so much groundwork with the cinematographer, that I walked on set with very clear ideas about how I was going to make this film. I worked with an incredible bunch of people, and the atmosphere was always great, even when we were filming really tough emotional scenes. So, making *Nowhere Boy* was an incredibly intense but fantastic experience."

Interview Rosamund Witcher
Nowhere Boy is released on December 26



Photography
Sam Taylor-Wood
Styling Robbie Spencer
Talent Aaron Johnson
Grooming
Mark Daniel Bailey
at Art List using
Bumble and Bumble
Photographic assistant
Niall O'Brien
Styling assistant
Elizabeth Fraser-Bell
Production
Gainsbury & Whiting
Special thanks to
John Lindquist





Jeans by
STONE ISLAND;
Jewellery
(throughout)
Aaron's own