

Craig Fairbrass

The Footsoldier has Risen By Matt Duddy

From humble beginnings in East London, Craig Fairbrass has fought his way through a series of gangster roles to become one of Britain's hardest working actors.

Born in Stepney in 1964, Craig got the acting bug aged 15 and worked as a roof labourer and doorman to support himself through drama school. Working on such TV series as Prime Suspect and London's Burning led to Craig being cast in the Stallone film Cliffhanger.

A role as Dan Sullivan in Eastenders soon followed but it was the role of Pat Tate in 2007's Rise of the Footsoldier that cemented Craig's hard man image.

Combat Film caught up with Craig to discuss his latest film and his career so far.

Your latest film "Dead Cert" where you play a gangster fending off a hoard of vampires has been described by some as Lock Stock meets From Dusk Till Dawn, what can you tell me about the film?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: In respect to the budget we had it's a very ambitious film, I would describe it as a contemporary modern London thriller with vampires! We shot it in East London with a really amazing cast whom it was a pleasure and a privilege to work with. It's very hard to emulate a film that is as successful and well made as From Dusk Till Dawn and would say that it's more attune to Lock Stock. Personally I would have liked it to be alot darker as I am a massive horror fan but at the same time I think it is a very entertaining take on vampires versus gangsters which the audience will really go for as it is a very commercial action/horror film.

What attracted you to this project?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: As a horror and action fan, the whole premise of the film, the one man against the world type of stuff where a person gets pushed and has to do what he does best, I just love those scenarios. The concept of the film, when we were discussing it was really exciting and just seemed to get better and better, we ended up filming it within 12 weeks of having the idea so it was get in there, dig deep and shoot.



With a cast of actors you had worked with many times before (Billy Murray, Dexter Fletcher, Steven Berkoff, Jason Flemyng) Dead Cert seems like it was a fun production, do you find it easier to work with your friends?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: Definitely 100%. You know the guys who you click with and look forward to doing scenes with them. When you are working with a group of people who are perceived in the business as "actors" it's fantastic to be in scenes with them and it's a dream come true for me.

There is a cameo from Danny Dyer in the film which has been spoiled by his inclusion on the DVD artwork, what are your thoughts on this?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: I'm a massive fan of Danny's work and there is a huge market out there so the marketing and distribution needs to reflect this hence why there is a spoiler on the artwork. I have just finished working with Danny on a film called Devils Playground and it is great to work with a real bona fide actor who is always prepared, switched on and loves his craft. As far as I am concerned he is "Bulletproof Dyer"!

Without giving too much away the film is kept open at the end, is there a possibility of a sequel in the works?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: We did it for that specific reason and I would love to do a sequel. I would love to have some more input on any sequel and make it alot more visceral, violent, darker and grittier, as much as I love the original I think there is scope to take it in a different direction.

You have your own production company (Point Blank films) and have worked with Jonathan Sothcott's Black & Blue Films on your last few features, what can you tell me about some of the films that are in the pipeline?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: I have another action film coming out called Freight where I play an ex mercenary against some Eastern European gangsters who try to muscle in on the London sex scene. Devils Playground as I mentioned earlier, which is an amazing film and a really classy piece of horror cinema. I have a very action orientated role but the character was interesting to play as there are definite chinks in his armour and a real Achilles heel.

You have also written, produced and are about to star in "Gunned Down", what can you tell me about your transition from actor to writer and producer?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: After Rise of the Footsoldier, I was told that I came out of the film well and had a chance of establishing myself in genre films. One of the major problems we have today is lack of quality product. As a writer I can presently only write about what I know and I'm at an age now where I thought that maybe I could use some of the things that are up my sleeve and put them forward. Gunned Down was that project. It's a hard hitting violent film set in London and Marbella that is a cross between Heat, Sexy Beast and Point Blank

It seems that you are enjoying a huge rise in popularity at the moment as you have worked on around 10 films this year, what's your secret?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: I don't know! I had a rough time in the early 2000's when I came out of Eastenders, I was offered every reality show going but I made a conscious decision to walk away from that type of thing. I decided that I needed to reinvent myself and went over to the states and worked on a couple of films and TV series there which helped me get my confidence back and realise that I could walk into a room and nick a job. Julian Gilbey then saw me and cast me in Rise of the Footsoldier and that film rescued my career. Since then Jonathan Sothcott has seen that there is a brand that can be built around me and has taken me under his wing and we are getting there slowly but surely.

Another person seeing their career return to form is Sylvester Stallone with whom you worked with on Cliffhanger, what can you tell me about this experience?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: One of the greatest experiences of my life, but if I won the lottery I would go back and reshoot all of my scenes! The main scene between myself and Stallone had just been rewritten that morning and as I was young I was just happy to be there. When I hear the opening credits now I just run as it is on TV almost every night!

Could there be a role in his next film for you? Maybe The Expendables 2?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: Funnily enough another critic has just said that I am action star material and should be in the line up with all these other guys. I'm really happy with what we are doing at the moment and want to keep the fans happy and treat them with respect and hopefully make films they will want to see

With a lack of British action films and people like Jason Statham working in the states, would you agree that you are the only credible action star working in Britain today?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: Thanks for saying that! Of course I would love to do that and it is my dream, I'm looking at the likes of Liam Neeson and there is a market for me and I would like to think that I am a pretty good actor in those roles. I don't want to do chop suey films with jumping and kicking as that is not my style; I'm more of a left hook and a head butt!

Which actors would you cite as your action influences?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: I love Stallone as he was always someone that I looked up to. I watch the odd Steven Seagal film & I think that Jason Statham is great. When I watched Taken I decided that these were the sort of action roles that I wanted to do, something with a little gravitas to it.

There was talk several years ago about Lenny Mclean wanting you to play him in a film of his life, do you think this will ever see the light of day?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: Looking back it was a blessing in disguise as the script wasn't very good, it was a rushed project and I think I was too soft looking and young for the role back then and it didn't look right. Please God, I hope the film gets made purely for his family.

How do you feel to be typecast as the hard man gangster in films? Given the opportunity what other roles would you like to play?

CRAIG FAIRBRASS: I love being typecast as there is only one thing worse and that's not being cast! So I would rather be working in my little niche than sitting at home watching Jeremy Kyle!



With thanks to Craig Fairbrass. Dead Cert is on DVD on the 27th September. Devils Playground and Freight are both released in October.

Craig Fairbrass' Top 5 Action Films;

Die Hard 2
Cliffhanger
On Her Majesty's Secret Service
Taken
Predator