

**FACED WITH HELL ON EARTH  
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**



# **PAINTING ROCKS**

**BASED ON A TRUE STORY**

WRITTEN BY  
CHARLIE GRAVE & SIMON RAE



# INTRODUCTION

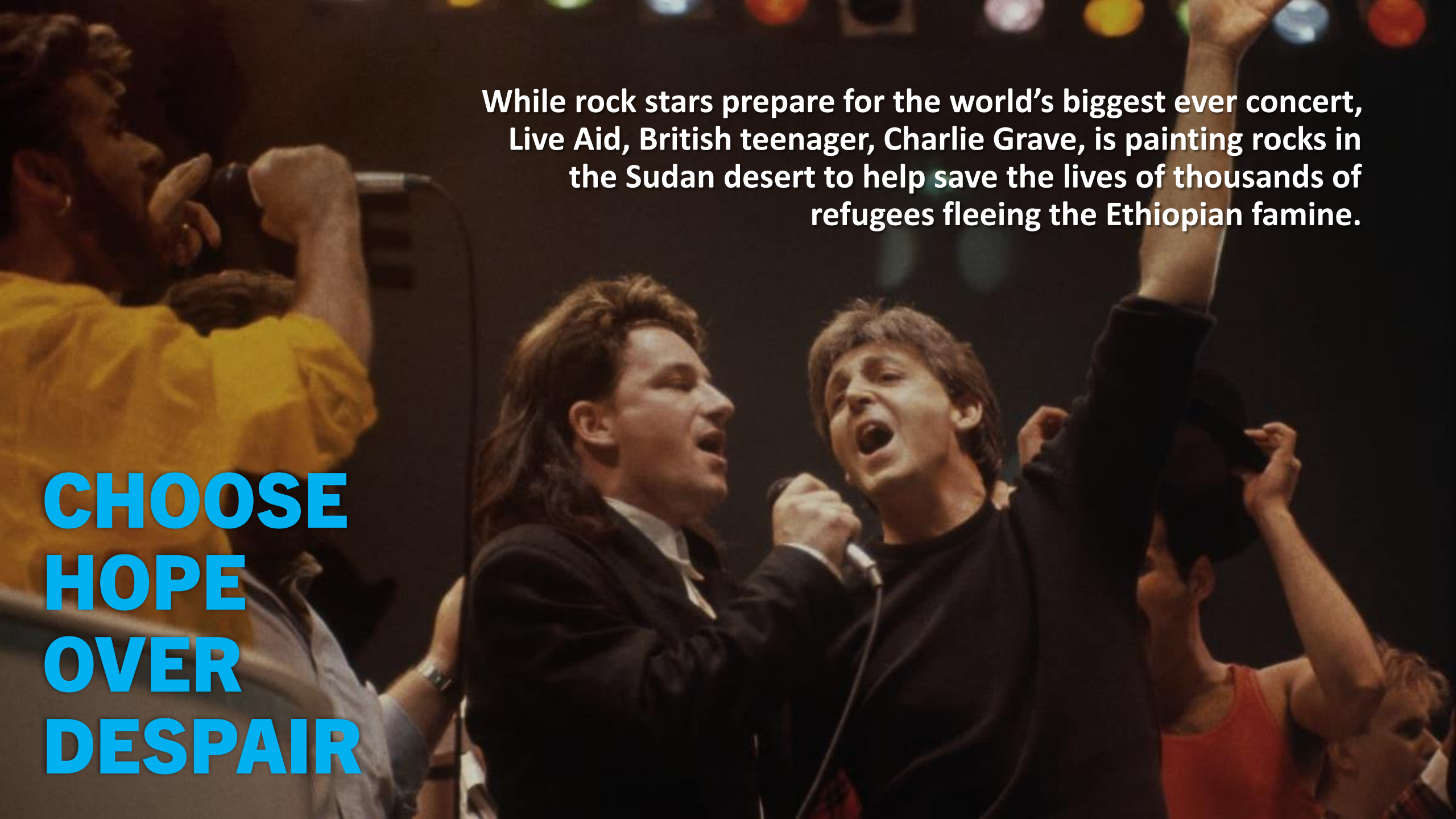
**PAINTING ROCKS** is a coming-of-age, buddy-adventure film set against the Ethiopian Famine of 1984-1985. It is inspired by the true story of a young English volunteer, Charlie Grave, who travels to Sudan to teach at a secondary boys' school in the village of Medina Arab.

This is an inspirational story of courage and determination against all odds and the perfect way to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the global effort to raise awareness and funding to relieve Ethiopia's 'biblical famine'.

After unconventional training on the Scottish island of Coll, the eighteen-year-old Charlie is sent to Sudan but, after his first term, leaves his teaching post to set up and run a UNHCR transport depot to receive thousands of refugees escaping the famine.

In London, Bob Geldof is setting up Live Aid and in the film's dramatic finale, involving a race against time across the desert to save a single precious life, the two stories collide on Wembley Stadium's big screen on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1985.





While rock stars prepare for the world's biggest ever concert, Live Aid, British teenager, Charlie Grave, is painting rocks in the Sudan desert to help save the lives of thousands of refugees fleeing the Ethiopian famine.

**CHOOSE  
HOPE  
OVER  
DESPAIR**





When successive annual droughts cause the worst famine for decades, the country simply cannot cope. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are forced to leave their homes, but their only hope of survival lies beyond the borders.

# THE WORLD

Sudan has its challenges in 1984, with drought creating food shortages and political instability. There is a military coup to replace the democratically elected president, Gaafar Muhammad an-Nimeiry. But Sudan's problems are nothing compared to those of neighbouring Ethiopia, whose Marxist government, The Derg, are engaged in conflicts with liberation factions in both Tigray and Eritrea as well oppressing their own people.



# THE STORY

A dark, blue-tinted photograph of a Ford van parked in a field. In the background, several people are visible, some standing and some sitting. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn. The van is a light-colored, older model with a prominent front grille and headlights. The overall mood is somber and documentary.

While teaching at a secondary boys' school in Sudan, Charlie has a bruising encounter with the ruthless reporter, Duke, who questions the value of teaching when the world's worst humanitarian disaster is just over the horizon. Charlie leaves his post and heads east, accompanied by his friend and best pupil, Faize. Looking for a role in the relief effort, the two boys are rebuffed at first. But then they meet Fred, the head of the region's UNHCR who is desperate for front-line volunteers.

Charlie persuades him to give them a chance and Fred tasks them with setting up then running one of the transit centres where the thousands fleeing the famine can break their journey and are given food and medical support before travelling on to better supplied refugee camps nearer Khartoum.





At the same time, Bob Geldof and Midge Ure are raising funds with Band Aid for Christmas 1984 and then the Live Aid concerts of July 1985, while Duke continues to haunt the unfolding tragedy in his search for The Story. With over 1,000 refugees coming into the camp per night, Charlie is overwhelmed by the increasing number of deaths. Conditions worsen with an outbreak of cholera. Charlie has to log the death of a young girl which leads to a dark night of the soul and the conviction that he has over-reached himself and should give up his post. Faize and others talk him round and later, when confronted by another seriously ill child to add to the death list, he decides on a mercy mission to the distant hospital.

Accompanied by two Ethiopian women - Aida, the mother of the child and Binuk - who have made the tortuous journey from the notorious Korem camp, Charlie and Faize set off into the night. When they have a tyre shredded by a rock hidden by sand, they find the spare wheel has been stolen, so they are stranded. The surprise arrival of Duke and Jeff in a light aircraft seems like the answer to their prayers, but the reporter's cynical intervention - in the interests of The Story - seriously jeopardizes the race against time. In a highly dramatic sequence, the mission is accomplished and Duke's film makes it to London to be shown at the Live Aid concert on 13 July, 1985.



# CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

**PAINTING ROCKS** will have universal appeal, combining a thrilling story with a haunting reminder of one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters in living memory. A strong and diverse cast, brilliant cinematography and a powerful soundtrack will make for an unforgettable cinematic experience.





# TONE & VISUAL STYLE

**PAINTING ROCKS** combines elements from films such as **SCHINDLER'S LIST**, **THE RED SEA**, **THE COVENANT**, **THE SWIMMERS**, **ARGO** and **THE BOY WHO HARNESSSED THE WIND**, with a visual style that feels innovative and modern.





# THEMES

## HUMILITY

**PAINTING ROCKS** focuses on humanity and the extraordinary capacity for love that people of all nations, creeds and colours generate when working together for the collective good.

## HORROR

The Ethiopian Famine affected millions of people and hundreds of thousands died. Because the human brain is overwhelmed by such numbers, the film focuses on individuals, but there is no saccharine evasion of the stark realities they face.

## HUMOUR

But for all its horrors, the film does not lack humour. Charlie is like a fish out of water in his first weeks in Sudan, the subject of embarrassing attention. However, joking with the impish Faize is a constant bond between them, while back in England mild tensions in the Grave family, Duke's rudeness and Bob Geldof's press conferences and phone calls, generate comedic relief from the on-going catastrophe.



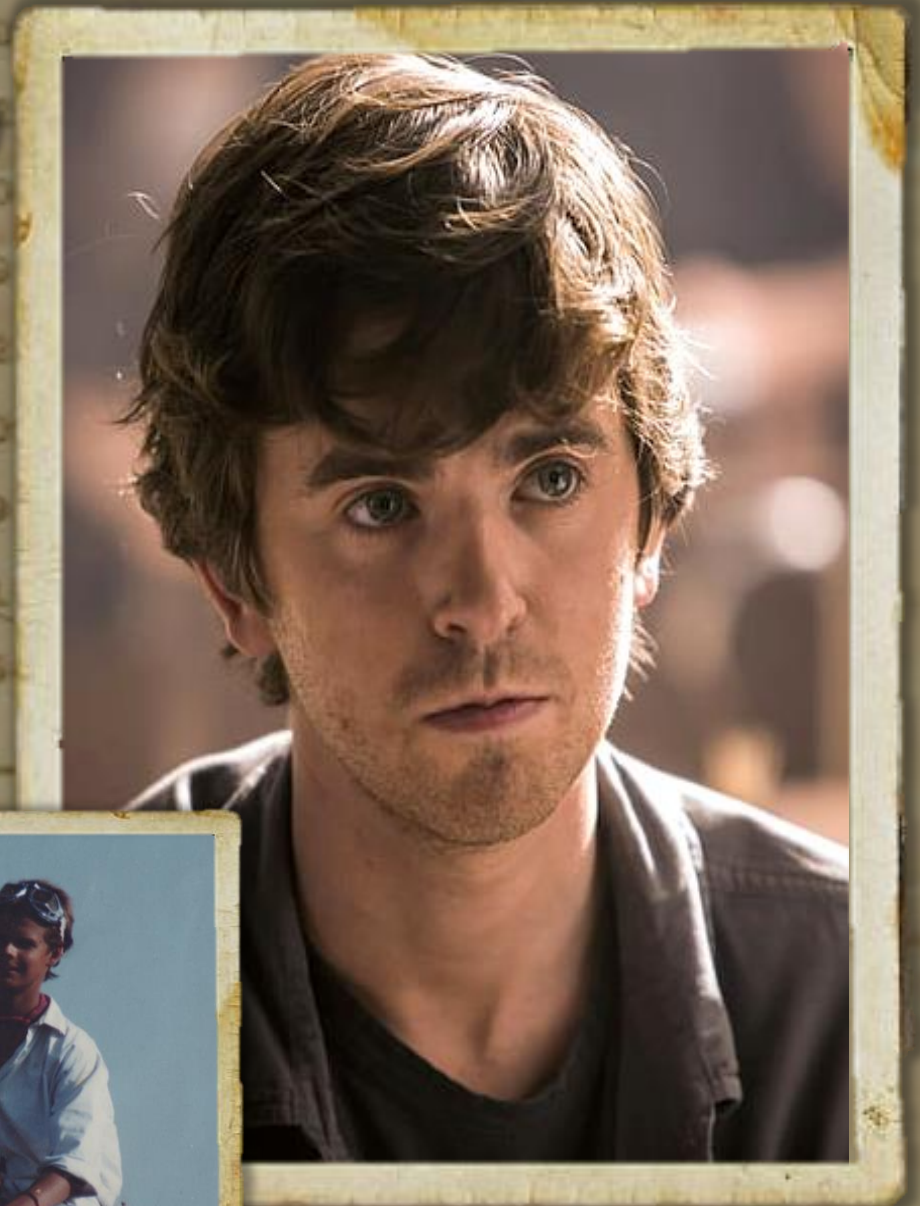
# CHARLIE GRAVE (18)

## THE HERO

Charlie leaves school and spends his gap year as an overseas volunteer. He applies to Project Trust and passes their stringent selection process. He is sent to teach English at a boys' school in Sudan.

Charlie finds teaching hard, but enjoys endless games of football with Faize, who introduces him to the wider community.

A chance encounter with reporter, Duke, prompts him to leave his post to help with the refugee crisis. His departure from the village is marked by a party at which Charlie is required to take the life of a goat.

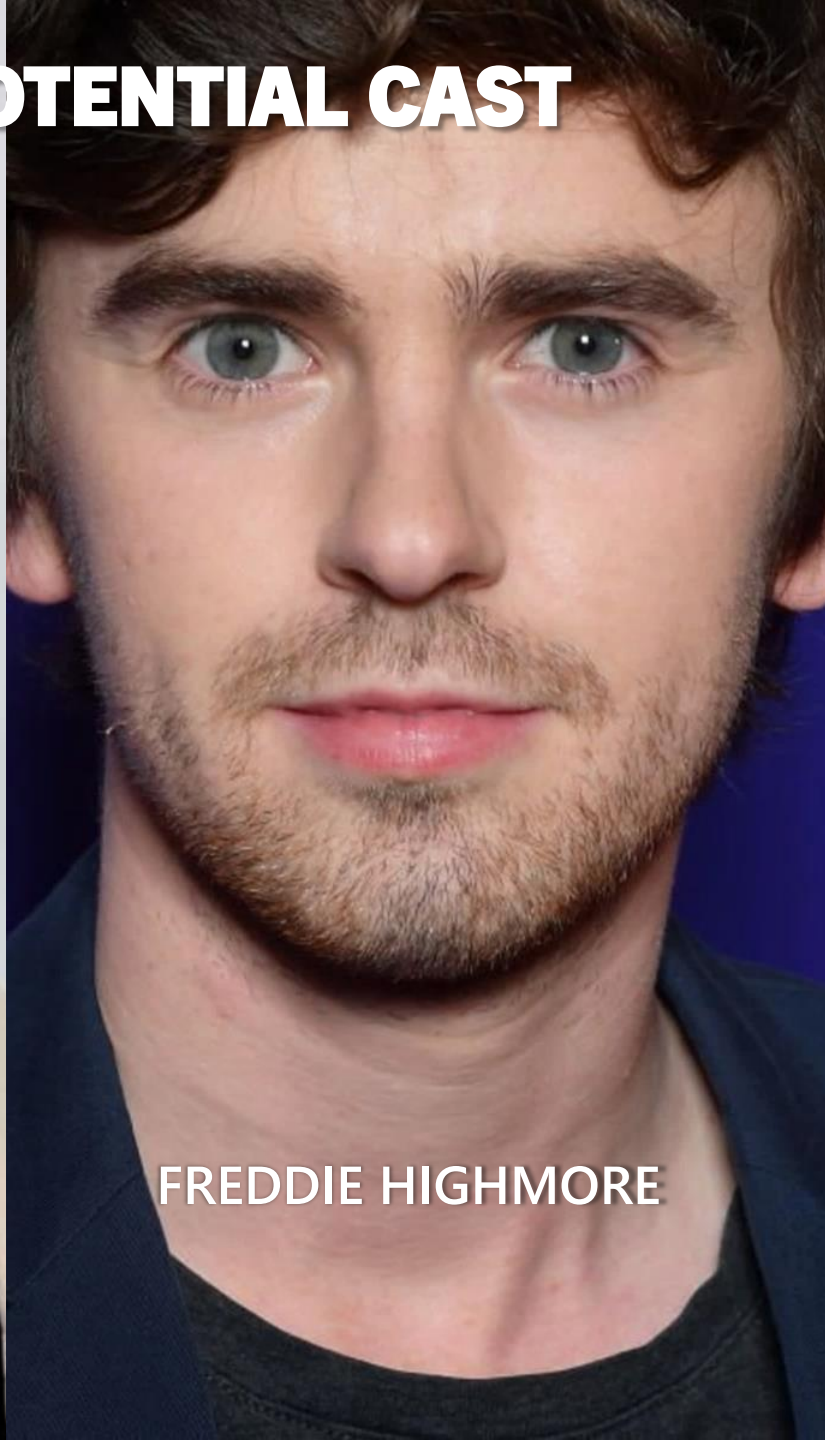




# CHARLIE GRAVES | POTENTIAL CAST



WILL POULTER

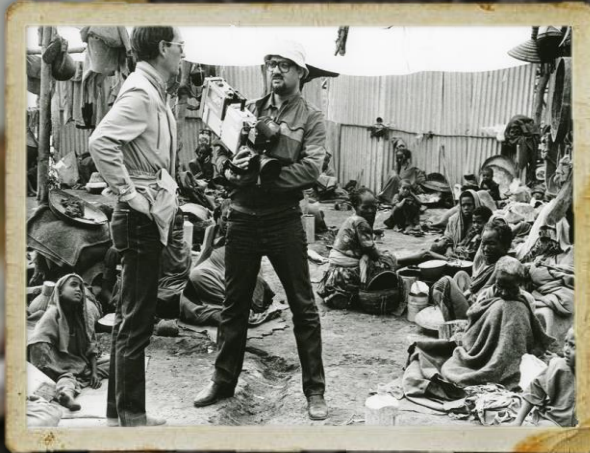


FREDDIE HIGHMORE



HARRIS DICKINSON





Duke is a veteran foreign reporter who got his reputation covering the Vietnam war.

Referred to as 'Il Duce' by colleagues, Duke is respected, feared and loathed in equal measure.

Duke's backstory, however, reveals the reason for his appalling stance on life.

# **DUKE** (50s) **HIS NEMESIS**

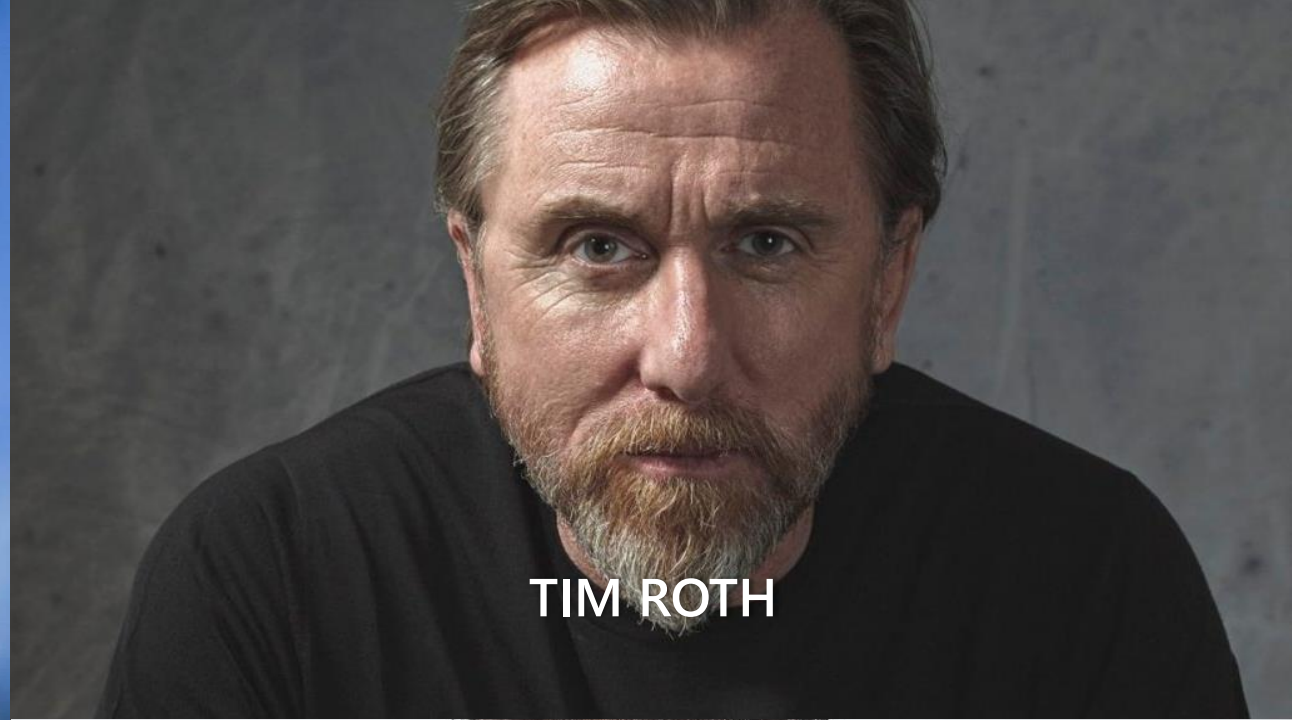




# DUKE | POTENTIAL CAST



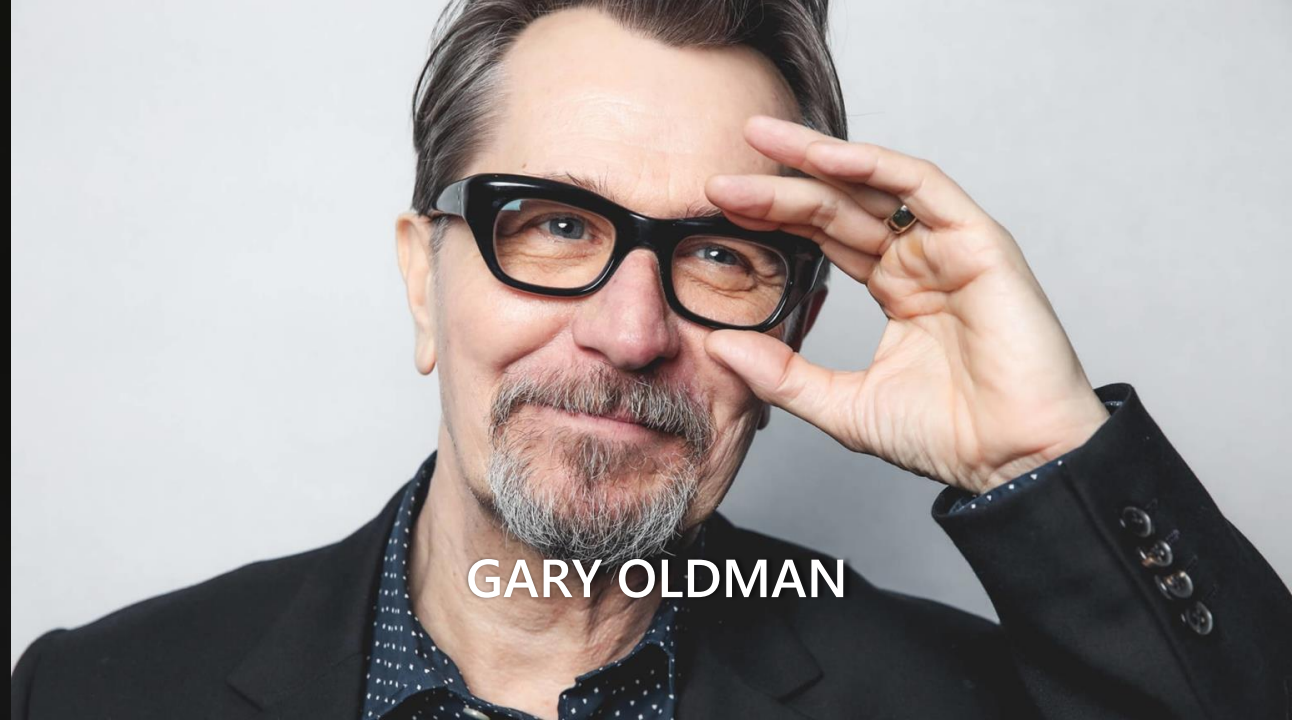
JOHNNY DEPP



TIM ROTH



WILLEM DAFOE



GARY OLDMAN





Faize is bright and mature for his age. He comes from a large family in Medina Arab and speaks relatively good English. Faize befriends Charlie, taking him to parties, weddings and other community events.

He also organises trips to other villages where Charlie is a stand-out attraction.

Faize's quick wit is vital in securing to the two young men the job of running the transit centre and his enthusiasm and sense of humour help sustain Charlie throughout the project.

# **FAIZE** (16) **THE BUDDY**



**FAIZE | POTENTIAL CAST**



**CALEB MCLAUGHLIN**



**ABRAHAM ATTAH**



**MUSTAFA SHEHATA**



# **BOB GELDOLF (33)** **HUMANITARIAN**

Bob is the lead singer of the Irish band The Boomtown Rats. Appalled by television footage of the Ethiopian famine, he recruits Midge Ure, a fellow musician with Ultravox, to persuade other rock stars to form Band Aid and produce a chart-topping single, 'Do They Know It's Christmas?'

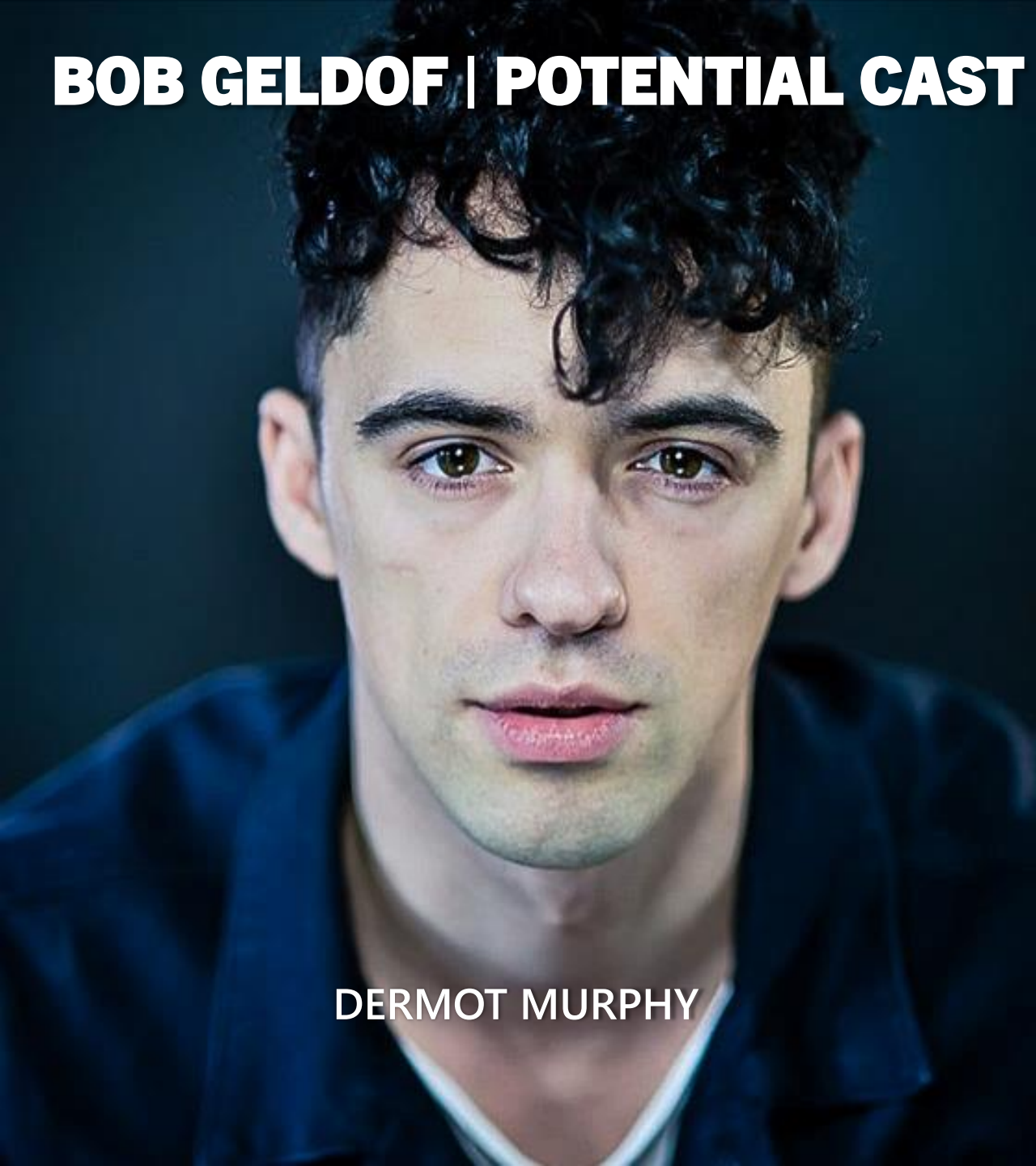
Realising the crisis is worsening, they plan the world's biggest musical event, Live Aid, producing sell-out concerts at Wembley Stadium in London and JFK Stadium in Philadelphia.

The event was watched by a billion and a half people in 100 countries, raising millions of dollars for the cause.

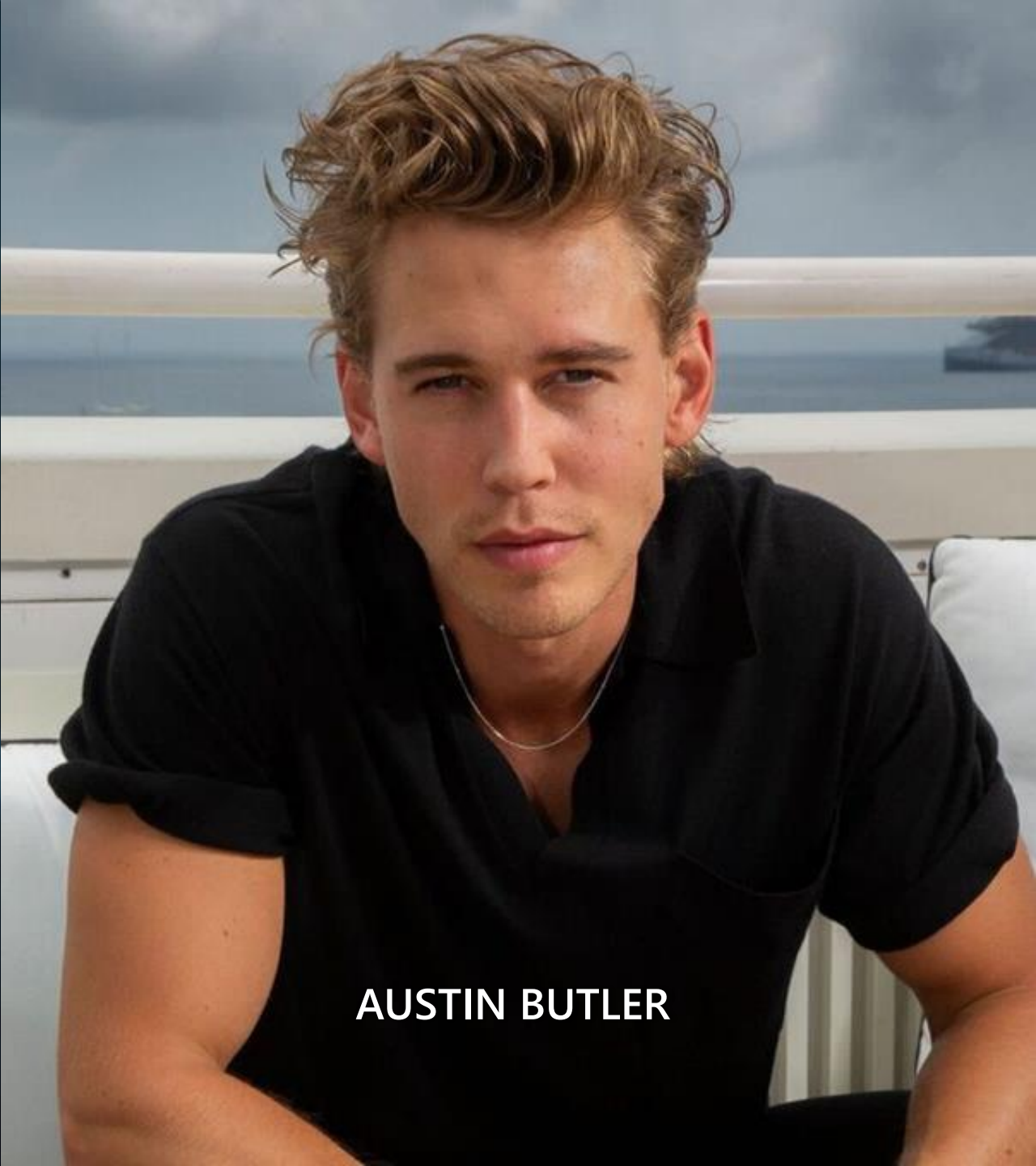




**BOB GELDOF | POTENTIAL CAST**



**DERMOT MURPHY**



**AUSTIN BUTLER**





Jeff has been a cameraman throughout his adult life, and he is very good at it. He is a loner, used to being on the road and working in dangerous environments.

Jeff and Duke first worked together in Vietnam. Jeff keeps to himself and seems impervious to whatever horrors he is asked to film, without question or complaint.

He is a patient man and the only person who can work with Duke.

*Think: Joel Edgerton*

# **JEFF** (40s) **DUKE'S RIGHTHAND**



# SUPPORTING CHARACTERS



**BILL** (late 50s)

Bill is Duke's long-suffering editor who is impervious to his rudeness, stubbornness and his endless stream of demands. To return to Africa, Duke insists on double the pay, a private plane and a handgun. Bill simply sighs, shrugs and agrees.

*Think: Eddie Marsan, Sean Bean*



**GLENN** (mid 40s)

Glenn is a tough Scotsman. He is also a loner, a drinker and gnarled after years of aid work around the world. But friendly enough. He can mend anything mechanical, and he is a hard worker. Apart from letting Charlie down very badly on one occasion, he is a father figure to the two boys.

*Think: James McAvoy, Gordon Kennedy, Martin Compston*



# SUPPORTING CHARACTERS



**DAVID  
GRAVE** (mid 50s)

David is Charlie's father. He works in commodities in India and also covers Iran and Libya.

*Think: Michael Sheen, Martin Freeman, Hugh Bonneville*



**CAROLYN  
GRAVE** (late 40s)

Carolyn is David's wife and Charlie's mother. She is both proud of, and worried for, Charlie. She is more than annoyed by her husband's breezy confidence that their son will be safe in Africa.

*Think: Sally Hawkins, Sally Phillips, Nicola Walker*



**DANIEL  
GRAVE** (16)

Daniel is Charlie's only sibling and they have a strong relationship. Daniel sends news from home, plus cassettes of the latest release 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' Despite his father's dismissal of the pop world's fund-raising efforts, Daniel gets tickets for Live Aid.

*Think: Billy Barratt, Bill Milner*



# SUPPORTING CHARACTERS



**BINUK** (late 20s)

Binuk lives in an impoverished village in the Ethiopian countryside, crushed by drought and vulnerable to raids by bandits. She loses her husband, who is shot while watching over his diminished flock and has had to bury her only child. Despite these terrible blows, Binuk remains strong, determined and courageous.

*Think: Sharon Duncan-Brewster*



**AIDA** (mid 20s)

Aida would not have survived without Binuk's support. The two are neighbours in the village, suffering the same extreme food shortage, jeopardy and poverty. Aida lost her husband, but still has her infant son, although she can barely muster the energy to look after him.

*Think: Mahder Assefa*



# SUPPORTING CHARACTERS



**MOOSE** (late 40s)

Moose is head of the US base for long-term development projects. He is not impressed when Charlie turns up having hitched a lift from some of the base's staff. He is even less impressed when he finds Faize has been a stowaway in the truck and says he will send them both back on the next transport going west.

*Think: Eric Stonestreet*



**KEN** (mid 30s)

Ken is Moose's sidekick. He is told to find jobs for Charlie and Faize. While awaiting their return to Medina Arab, he sends Faize to clean out the latrines while keeping Charlie to help with some filing. Charlie refuses the filing and joins Faize in the latrines.

*Think: Asa Butterfield*



**FRED** (mid 40s)

Fred is the regional director of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. He is a huge man who carries the weight of the world on his shoulders and his heart on his sleeve. He addresses Moose's staff, appealing for Arab-speaking volunteers to set up and run a transit camp to break the journeys of thousands of refugees from across the border in Ethiopia.

*Think: Gerard Butler*



# CREATIVE TEAM

## CHARLIE GRAVE | Story

After his amazing experiences in Sudan in 1984-1985, Charlie skipped university and went on to work in the sports marketing industry. He created and produced numerous events including the Champions Tennis at the Royal Albert Hall, coaxing past champions John McEnroe, Bjorn Borg, Boris Becker and others out of retirement to thrill their fans all over again. Charlie has kept his Sudan adventure to himself for decades until he felt the moment to share it had finally come - and he found the right person to help him.

## SIMON RAE | Screenplay

Simon is a broadcaster, poet, novelist, playwright and award-winning biographer of England's greatest sports star, W.G. Grace. Simon saw the potential of Charlie's story immediately and has revelled in the collaborative process of turning it into a powerful film script.







# LIVE AID

July 2025 marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Live Aid Concerts. The recent announcement of a stage musical celebrating Live Aid is proof that this iconic event, and the tragedy behind it, retains its magnetic interest, even for generations who weren't actually born at the time. Bob Geldof has given the musical his blessing, saying he hoped it would inspire people to have a positive impact for the better. "Band Aid is good, but that's not the point," he said. "Will there be a kid who comes to this and leaves saying, 'I can do something like this...'"





# THANK YOU

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