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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Sebastian Stan: The Person Behind the Performance

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On craft, quiet kindness, and what it means to genuinely show up - on screen and off. With Cannes 2026 now behind us and Sebastian Stan having returned to the Palais with Fjord, his first collaboration with a Romanian director, it felt like the right moment to start this series with him.

Almost back-to-back Cannes appearances, which is, honestly, a lot. The man deserves a break. But it also says something about where his career is right now, and why this felt like the only place to begin.

This series is called Beyond the Credits, and the idea behind it is pretty simple: there are real people behind the films we watch, and they deserve more than a Wikipedia summary or a press junket clip. I am not interested in digging into anyone's private life - that's not what this is. What I am interested in is the human being that comes through the cracks, the parts of a person that press through everything they do whether they intend it or not. Because I think that's where the most honest picture lives.

And Sebastian Stan, for me, is a very clear example of that.

If you're not familiar with him yet: Stan trained at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts and spent time working in connection with Shakespeare's Globe. That foundation matters more than it might seem. It's visible in the way he holds a scene, the way he can communicate something enormous while saying almost nothing at all.

Most people found him through Marvel, as Bucky Barnes and later the Winter Soldier, across more than a decade of films.

What's interesting about that, in retrospect, is that it could have been a ceiling. For a lot of actors it would have been. For Stan, it became a kind of long-running workshop, a place to quietly refine restraint, physicality, and psychological layering, while everyone's attention was mostly on the spectacle around him.

Because alongside Marvel, he kept making different kinds of choices. A volatile Jeff Gillooly in I, Tonya. Something genuinely unsettling in Fresh. A full-body disappearing act as Tommy Lee in Pam & Tommy. And then The Apprentice, portraying a young Donald Trump and directed by Ali Abbasi, which brought him to Cannes in 2024 and announced, pretty loudly, that he was operating in a different league now.

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Now Fjord got him back to Cannes in 2026, this time with a Romanian director, which carries a quietly personal significance given his own roots.

“This is going to be a movie that will be talked about for years to come. I mean, it can really make me cry. These things about our parents, they’re doing their best, but then it’s our turn. That’s going to happen for all of us. A movie like that should never be taken for granted.” - Sebastian Stan, visibly emotional in conversation with Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas (Interview Magazine, February 24, 2026)

That kind of openness, the willingness to sit in something real on camera without flinching away from it, isn’t incidental. It’s part of who he is. And it connects directly to everything else I want to talk about.

But before we get there, there’s one more thing happening in 2026 that deserves a mention, because it says a great deal about him and it’s easy to miss.

This year also sees the release of *A River’s Gaze*, a Romanian film that Stan helped produce. Not star in, produce. He didn’t do it for the visibility. He did it because the script, written and directed by Andreea Cristina Bortun, touched something personal in him, and he wanted to help bring it into the world.

The film sits at the center of something very close to his own story: an intimate relationship between a mother and a son, growing up in Romania under particular conditions. Stan was raised by his mother, Georgeta, alone. She had him young. He has spoken about what that shaped in him, the understanding of struggle, of trying to figure out who you are before life gives you the space to do so.

“I’ve wanted to act in a Romanian film for a very long time. I tried and it didn’t happen, but I realized that I could also help behind the camera. Andreea Cristina Bortun’s script touched me on a personal level. At the center is this very specific, intimate relationship between a mother and a son growing up in Romania under special conditions, which I feel isn’t always reflected much in the rest of the world. I had my own journey with the mother who grew up there and left the country. I felt that there were things that felt very true to me, and that was wonderful, because it stimulated me to want to get even more involved in helping her create this vision.” - Sebastian Stan, Variety

He also shared that his mother watched the film, and that her reaction meant something specific to him.

“It was really interesting to share that with her. There are certain moments that only people who have faced such things can understand. My mother lived a lot of hard truths after the revolution. Part of her understood the struggles of the main character. She also gave birth to me very young. People have children when they are older now, and we have more time in the West to get our lives in order before having a child. A lot of

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people don't have that opportunity. They are still trying to figure out who they are. Andreea captured that for me in a very authentic way."

- Sebastian Stan, Variety

There's something very grounding about this. He didn't step behind the camera to expand his brand or tick a box. He did it because the story deserved to exist and he was in a position to help make that happen. That's a different kind of motivation than most, and it points toward the same thing everything else points toward: a person who takes seriously what he has been given and tries to use it with intention.

Anyway. That's the career. And that's still not really why I started here.

Here's the thing about the world right now. It has always been hard. I don't want to pretend otherwise, or act like previous generations had it easy. But there's something particular about this moment, especially for young people. Social media has seeped into every corner of life in a way that makes everything feel both more visible and more isolating at the same time. The destruction of public figures through fabricated narratives, the cancel culture, the relentless negativity from people who seem to exist solely to tear things down.

It's genuinely scary out there. And in the middle of all of that, we're not exactly drowning in public figures who take the responsibility of their visibility seriously.

Who offer something real rather than just riding whatever trend is moving fastest.

That's what drew me to want to write about Sebastian Stan in the first place.

When I research professionals I admire, I'm not interested in the curated version. I want to see what comes through the surface, the human being underneath the image. And I think the most honest view of a person is almost always found in how they are with other people. Not in prepared statements, not in managed appearances, but in actual moments of contact with other human beings.

In all the research I've done on Sebastian Stan, and I have genuinely filled pages with this, I have never come across a negative account of who he is in those moments. What I keep encountering instead, over and over, is a very specific thing: people describing the feeling of being accepted. Of being met without judgment. Of arriving in his presence, even briefly, even just through a screen, and feeling like nothing is wrong with them.

And I mean that last part seriously. There are accounts of people who found their way through speech and language therapy, years of difficult and humbling work, and who credit his presence, his interviews, his

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way of moving through the world, as part of what kept them going. People who struggled with their bodies for years and found something in the fact that he has always been openly and uncomplicatedly vocal about body acceptance, not as a brand moment, not as a campaign, just as something he genuinely believes, and felt for the first time like maybe it was okay to exist the way they existed.

People who worked through anxiety and depression and wrote, quietly, that his interviews were something they returned to when things got heavy. That his movies were a comfort. That he encouraged them, in some indirect but very real way, to tell the people in their lives how they actually felt.

One person put it simply: “Him having the courage to be open about himself and talk about his problems to the world makes me feel so much better, knowing that if he can do it, so can I.”

That’s not a small thing. That’s exactly the kind of thing we should be paying more attention to.

And when you listen to him speak, really speak, not just promote something, you understand where it comes from. At a Comic Con panel in Liverpool, someone asked him about resilience and creative life, and he said something that has stayed with me.

“Is it bringing you joy or is it torturing you? If it’s torturing you, then maybe it’s not for you. Maybe there’s something else you’re meant to do. But I believe that we all come into this life as creatives. Children are the most creative. The older we get, the less freedom we get, because we’re constantly being told how to be, and we’re looking at different people.”

If you’re going to look at someone, steal from the best. Make sure you’re looking at the right people. The support around you matters. My closest friends are people I’ve known for fifteen-plus years, because they can tell me the truth, and they’re not afraid to support you. They’re not competing with you. Resilience comes from inside, from not being afraid to accept the things that are different about you. That actually is your way. Go down that way, not the way everyone else is going.” - Sebastian Stan, Liverpool Comic Con 2024

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There's a reason people hold onto words like that. He's not performing wisdom. He's sharing something he actually lives by. And you can feel the difference.

I know the parasocial element exists, and it's worth being honest about that. But what's interesting about the effect Stan seems to have on people is that it isn't entirely parasocial. It's not just projection onto a distant figure. People who have actually been in the same room as him describe the same thing as people who have only ever encountered him through a screen. There's a consistency there that feels like character, not image management. Something that comes from the inside out, rather than the outside in.

There are a lot of these accounts. But one stays with me in particular. It happened at Tokyo Comic Con, and it was shared by a fan who had traveled there alone, navigating a country where she didn't speak the language, managing anxiety the whole time.

On her second day, she arrived to find the photo op line already closed. She'd missed it by minutes. Staff, struggling with the language barrier, told her she'd missed it and would have to give up her ticket. She was about to panic.

Then Sebastian stepped out of his photobooth, spotted her, and called her over.

He reached out his hand, walked her in, asked her name, and told her not to worry about it. He mentioned he remembered her from the day before, from a brief and unremarkable interaction she hadn't expected anyone to notice or hold onto.

"He jumped into the situation so quickly that I didn't even have the chance to panic," she wrote. "He radiates such a calm and comforting aura. The world definitely felt so much lighter. Being alone in a country where I do not speak the language was hard and a little scary, but Sebastian had my back."

He had no reason to help her. No one was watching, no one was keeping score. He just did it.

What gets me about this isn't just the kindness of the act, though it is genuinely kind. It's the attentiveness it required. He held onto a face from a brief exchange the day before. He read a situation quickly enough to step in before anxiety could take hold. He made someone feel, in a foreign country where she was completely alone, like she had someone in her corner.

And I think that quality, that particular way of noticing people, is connected to what makes him so compelling on screen and behind it

The same thing that lets him sit in front of a camera and actually cry talking about a film, or choose to

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produce a quiet Romanian story because it felt true to his own life, is the same thing that makes him look at a stranger at the edge of a crowd and choose to do something about what he sees. It all comes from the same place.

It's not performance. It's disposition. And I think in a world that is increasingly good at making people feel invisible, that is worth naming.

Worth writing about. Worth making the subject of a whole series, if we're being honest, because this is exactly the kind of thing we should be paying more attention to.

Not what people fabricate about public figures, not the noise and the takedowns, but the quiet and consistent reality of someone who actually makes others feel like they matter.

That's rarer than it should be. And it's the whole reason this series exists.

There was really only one place to start.

Beyond the Credits is an ongoing series exploring the people behind the performances, not to invade, but to acknowledge. There is always more than what we're shown.

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https://chriskoll.en-a.at/kunst_kultur_und_musik/sebastian_stan_the_person_behind_the_performance-93741/

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