

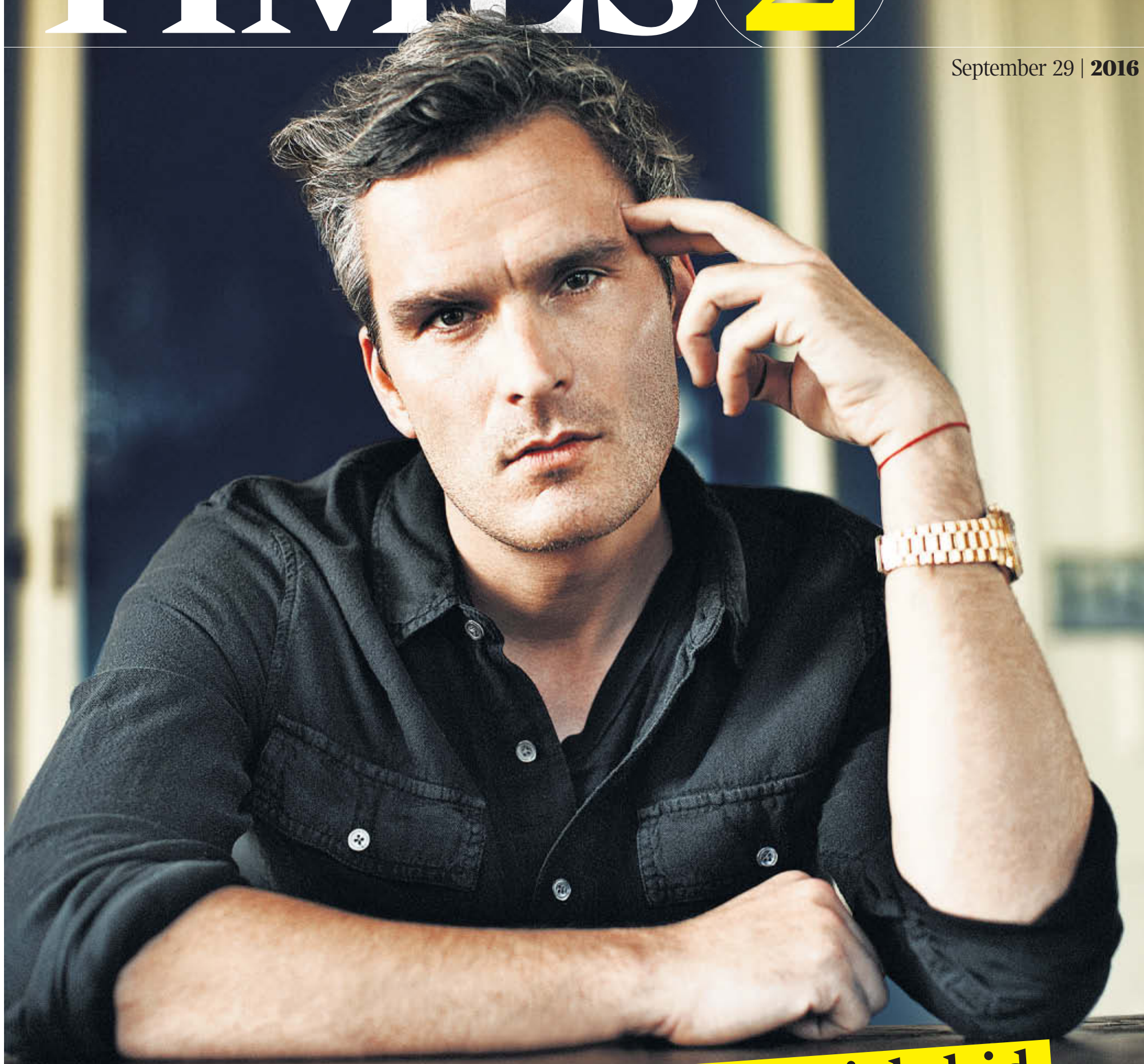
Deborah Ross
When a woman's age is secret

How posh is your dog's diet?
The pooches going paleo

Hooray for Kate's red dress
Finally the duchess gets edgy

TIMES 2

September 29 | 2016



I'm no screwed-up rich kid

Balthazar Getty on life with

a £150 million fortune

‘Every family

Oil heir Balthazar Getty tells Helena de Bertodano about the struggle to escape his family’s torrid past

Balthazar Getty is at great pains to make himself sound grounded: “I’m not your screwed-up rich kid,” he says emphatically. “There’s a big misconception about our family. We’re not flashy, we don’t have chauffeurs and handlers. We prefer a beat-up old Fiat Panda and a dusty road in Tuscany.”

The only word that gives away the game here is Tuscany, where the extended Getty family have a cluster of villas, at which they gather every summer. As for the beaten-up Panda, it is rather offset by the shiny Porsche parked in the driveway of one of his two Los Angeles homes.

Getty, 41, is chiefly famous for two things: first, of course, his membership of the Getty clan with its concomitant wealth and glamour and tragedy. And second, his affair with the actress Sienna Miller in 2008, which almost wrecked his marriage to Rosetta Millington, the fashion designer and mother of his four children, now aged between eight and 16.

He is also quite well known as an actor — he starred in *Lord of the Flies* aged 13 and later had a lead role in the American television drama *Brothers and Sisters*, which propelled him to something approaching heart-throb status. After the Miller episode, in which pictures of the canoodling couple circulated in an almost Hiddleswift frenzy, Getty dropped off the radar, stitched his marriage back together and is now resurfacing as a DJ.

We meet in the wake of a recent magazine article that earned Getty widespread ridicule for its glimpse into his privileged lifestyle. In it, Getty talked about the maid who brings him breakfast in bed every day at Ilam, the “six-stage procedure for my face with toners, exfoliators, moisturisers and serums” and the parties he throws to which “anyone who is anyone has been: Al Pacino, Jack Nicholson...”

Getty, who is the great-grandson of the oil baron Jean Paul Getty, seems perplexed by the fallout. He was, after all, just telling the truth. “I don’t want people to think this guy’s just sitting back and getting facials all day and being cooked meals. I also work hard.”

It is true that Getty has not always lived a life of luxury. Although now worth an estimated £150 million, he grew up with his hippy mother in San Francisco. “I lived in a tepee with my mom on a fully vegetarian diet. The irony is I had much less than many people around me because at the time there was no access to the money. I think that’s had a huge hand in why I’ve ended up OK.”

Whether or not he has ended up OK is a subjective viewpoint. After the recent press he has received, I do not have high expectations of our meeting. (I was not even sure he would show up, he had cancelled so many times.) So it is something of a surprise when he strolls into the Chateau Marmont restaurant in West Hollywood almost on time and without a PR retinue. It is even more of a surprise when he turns out to be courteous, friendly and relaxed, launching into a self-deprecating story about his children, who, he says, find him embarrassing, not cool, “because I dress like a child and I do a lot of childish things”.

Today he is a picture of studied cool in his purple camouflage baseball cap, purple bandana, reflective Ray-Bans, grey flannel T-shirt, black baggy trousers and leaf-print canvas trainers. His arms are covered in fading tattoos: NMDZ on his inner left arm, a nod to his former membership of a “musical gang”, and BZAR across his knuckles, an abbreviation of his name. The only hint of wealth is his solid-gold Rolex. He also wears a chunky

“**I don’t want people to think I’m just getting facials all day**”

gold-link wedding ring, which he pulls on and off his finger as he talks.

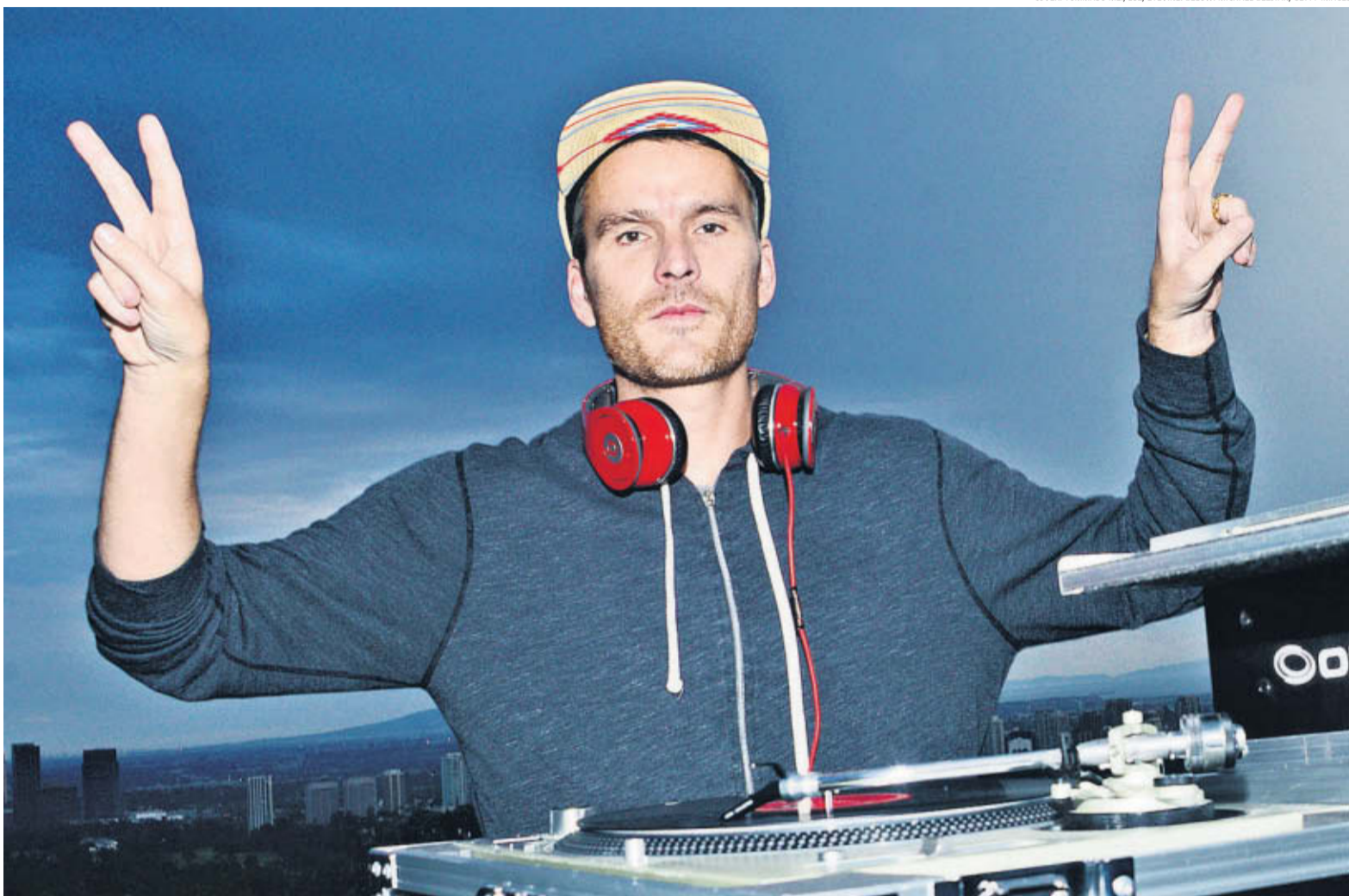
The impression I get is of a man who is guileless and determined (at least today) not to be defined by his wealth. He realises that there is no point trying to explain the Miller affair. “I keep getting burnt on that subject,” he says with a rueful smile. He stresses how happy his family life is now: “We see ourselves as a big loving unit. My kids are my best friends. We love to be festive. Every Sunday we have an open-door policy with lots of friends and dinner and music. It’s what I always wanted.”

The sudden notoriety he experienced with Miller seemed to prompt his retreat from mainstream acting. “Don’t like acting no mo,” he announced recently on Instagram. Nonetheless, he says he still considers projects that “have good pedigree” and has upcoming roles in the new *Twin Peaks* series, directed by David Lynch, and a miniseries about gay rights directed by Gus Van Sant.

For most of his life, it seems, he has wanted to blend in rather than stand out. “I can remember crying when I was very young because I had wild curly hair and this wild name. I wanted one of those American names like Chad or Brad. And a bowl-cut.”

The combination of glamour and misfortune that underscores the Gettys means that they are inevitably compared with the Kennedy clan. I ask Getty what he thinks about the comparison. “I suppose to the extent that there has been tragedy and high-profile relationships...” He looks pensive as he takes a sip of iced tea, then quickly clarifies — in case it sounds like he is referring to his

I know has dysfunction’



COVER: TOMMASO MEI/LUZ/EYEVINE. BELOW: MICHAEL BEZJIAN/GETTY IMAGES

extramarital affair — “With my grandfather, I mean [who divorced the mother of his four children to marry Talitha Pol, who later died of a heroin overdose]. But every family I know has dysfunction. I’m sure if we looked at your family, we’d see plenty of interesting things...”

He has a point, although I think he’d have the edge on most families. His great-grandfather Jean Paul Getty was married and divorced five times. His father was John Paul Getty III, who was kidnapped in Italy aged 16 and chained to a stake in a cave for five months while his family argued about the ransom.

Jean Paul Getty, despite being named as the world’s richest private citizen in the 1966 *Guinness World Records*, refused to pay up, apparently saying: “If I pay one penny now, I’ll have 14 kidnapped grandchildren.”

After the teenager’s decomposing ear was sent to an Italian newspaper, Getty reconsidered and gave the ransom money to his son, John Paul Getty Jr, but only as a loan repayable at 4 per cent annual interest. Two years after his release, John Paul Getty III married Balthazar’s mother, Gisela Schmidt, a German film-maker, then spiralled into a drug addiction so all-consuming that in 1981, when Balthazar was five years old, he fell into a coma after taking a combination of methadone, valium and alcohol. He emerged a partially blind paraplegic, confined for the rest of his life to a wheelchair. He died aged 54 in 2011.

So Balthazar’s childhood was anything but normal. “Look, I didn’t have a dad who threw the ball in the backyard with me... Even when he could, that wasn’t my reality. I was

raised primarily by my mother. She gave me a lot of love and support and understanding. And I had two strong grandmothers who had a big hand in raising me. I’ve had great women in my life.”

Nevertheless, Getty started taking hard drugs himself as a teenager and was close to the actor River Phoenix, who died of an overdose in 1993. “I’ve known many great talents that unfortunately have passed,” says Getty today. “I had my wrestle with [drugs], but I was always able to clean up quickly and get back to work.”

His paternal grandmother, who disapproved of his hippy upbringing, stepped in to send him to the Scottish boarding school Gordonstoun. The experience did not last long; not because he didn’t like the school — he says he loved it — but because he landed the role of Ralph in the 1990 film adaptation of *Lord of the Flies*.

“It changed the direction of my life,” he says of the movie. “It was wild and transformative.” Footage from the making of the movie shows an ebullient Getty trying to bite the finger of the poor make-up artist who is prepping him. He continued acting throughout his teenage years and took on a lead role in the Lynch movie *Lost Highway* (1997) with Patricia Arquette.

The novelist David Foster Wallace wrote a scathing report of Getty after spending several days on set, describing him as “uninteresting and puerile and narcissistic as only an oil heir who’s a movie star just out of puberty can be”. Just for good measure, he added: “As a hot young male actor, Balthazar Getty

Balthazar Getty and, below, in 1975 with his father John Paul Getty III, mother Gisela and sister Anna

Balthazar Getty recently released a single, *DSPRT 2.0*, which will shortly be followed by an album, *Solar Drive 2*, a fusion of blues, funk and electronica

is to Leonardo DiCaprio roughly what a Ford Escort is to a Lexus.”

Getty says he has become used to the negative comments. Indeed, he spends more time trying to defend his ancestors than himself. Referring to a famous story about his great-grandfather — that he was so tight-fisted he installed a payphone in his home — Getty insists: “He wasn’t some curmudgeonly old cynical detached person. He was a very hardworking, very bright man. You have to remember that it used to be a big deal to make a long-distance call. He was only thrifty in the sense that nothing should be given to you — you should earn what is yours.”

Which is no doubt why he is at such pains to emphasise his own working credentials. “I started working when I was 13, and soon I was supporting my mother and other family members. I basically haven’t stopped.”

Now, most of his energy is focused on developing PurpleHaus music, which he describes as a multimedia powerhouse, releasing music in a variety of genres. Twice a week he DJs at Los Angeles clubs until 3am (hence the late breakfasts). “I love the instant gratification of music. You don’t get that as an actor.”

Indeed, music is the one place where he feels that his heritage is irrelevant.

“It doesn’t matter if you happen to have a name or be semi-famous. Ultimately you have to do a good job. I have never wanted to just sit back and enjoy what was created by my family before me.”

