# 'A kind, goofy, beautiful person': Drew Starkey on Queer co-star Daniel Craig



A fresh chapter in the world of cinema unfolds as Luca Guadagnino’s much-anticipated film Queer premiers at the Venice International Film Festival. The film, an adaptation of William S. Burroughs' 1985 novel, features the unlikely yet fascinating duo of Drew Starkey and Daniel Craig in leading roles.

Queer narrates the story of William Lee, portrayed by Craig, who becomes infatuated with Eugene Allerton, played by Starkey, a discharged Navy serviceman navigating the underbelly of 1940s Mexico City. Starkey’s casting story is as compelling as the film’s narrative itself. The 30-year-old Outer Banks star didn’t audition traditionally; instead, the project serendipitously found him. Starkey was sending self-tapes for various projects when a producer friend showed one to Guadagnino, prompting the acclaimed director to request a breakfast meeting with Starkey.

Reflecting on the unexpected opportunity, Starkey explained, “I was like, ‘OK, that’s insane.’” Over numerous meals, Guadagnino shared his vision for Queer, and after taping for the role of Allerton, Starkey secured the part. Describing the organic casting process, Starkey emphasized Guadagnino’s desire to deeply understand his actors beyond their performances.

This marks Starkey's first major film festival circuit appearance, a significant leap in his career which gained momentum with his role in Netflix’s Outer Banks. The surreal nature of his rising fame, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed him a gradual adjustment. Starkey, now stepping into the film industry spotlight, brought a unique blend of personal ambiguity and guarded emotion to his portrayal of Allerton.

On his collaboration with Daniel Craig, Starkey admitted to initial starstruck feelings but quickly found Craig’s congenial nature disarming. “He’s an incredibly kind, goofy, beautiful person and very giving actor and a good friend,” Starkey noted, attributing the seamless chemistry on set to Craig’s light-hearted yet professional approach.

Reflecting on their characters’ dynamic, Starkey recounted, “We had a handful of table reads and Luca was the guiding factor in the way these two operated. He always said, ‘There has to be love there,’ so we always had that in mind.” This directive helped shape their performances, particularly in the film’s intimate scenes.

Adding to the film’s ensemble, singer Omar Apollo discussed his transformative preparation for his role, including significant weight loss, underscoring the physical demands of portraying such intensively vulnerable characters. Apollo's dedication highlights the team’s commitment to authenticity and raw emotional depth in these portrayals.

Guadagnino, known for his evocative storytelling in films like Call Me by Your Name and the forthcoming Challengers, has previously addressed critiques concerning the casting of non-LGBTQ+ actors in LGBTQ+ roles. In a 2020 interview, he stated, “I honestly don’t believe I have the right to decide whether an actor is straight or not. Who am I to know what somebody is thinking of himself or herself within themselves?”

Queer stands as a testament to Guadagnino’s distinctive vision and storytelling prowess, promising to carve its own niche in cinema. For Starkey, this role is an important milestone, one that he hopes will open a new dimension in cinema for audiences, akin to how There Will Be Blood had impacted him as a young film enthusiast.