Charming, affable, and clever, Smith was an easy fit for his latest role: the young, glamorous Prince Philip in Netflix's new show *The Crown.* Created by Peter Morgan (*Frost/Nixon, The Queen*) and codirected by Stephen Daldry (*Billy Elliot, The Hours,* *The Crown* also stars Claire Foy as the young Elizabeth, Jared Harris in a standout performance as King George VI, John Lithgow as Winston Churchill, and Eileen Atkins as Queen Mary. “The moment I saw Matt in the room, lanky and dangerous and confident and a little wild, I thought he was our Philip,” says Morgan.

For anyone suffering costume-drama withdrawal after the end of *Downton Abbey,* this series offers castles and palaces, twisets and tweeds, and sailor-suited children galore. Underplayed and understated, and shot in gloomy English light as if under a veil of postwar austerity, *The Crown* feels like an authentic representation of royal life. “When Elizabeth became queen, the dynamic between her and Philip shifted. I think they both struggled,” says Foy. “Smith somehow makes Philip conflicted, loving, charming, strong, and exciting . . . and he looks really good in a blond wig!”

The show opens in 1947, just five years before Princess Elizabeth becomes queen. We watch as Philip gives up his birthright (he was born Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark) for his Duke of Edinburgh title. “He was a young man who had a great career in the making, and all that was stripped away from him,” observes Smith, who read biographies, watched archive film, and listened to recordings to try to capture that very particular “royal” accent. “I didn’t want to do a caricature.” On set, fiction did occasionally tip over into reality. He and Foy would “laugh at the absurdity of it,” he says, “because you stand there and people start to treat you like the prince and princess. We’d hear the crew saying, ‘Philip and the queen have arrived.’” —PLUM SYKES