



Robert Downey Jr.

Robert John Downey Jr. (born April 4, 1965) is an American actor. Known for portraying charismatic and intelligent characters over a versatile range of films, he was named one of the greatest actors of the 21st century by *The Independent*. He was the highest-paid actor in Hollywood annually from 2013 to 2015, and is one of the highest-grossing actors of all time; his films as a leading actor have grossed over \$14.3 billion worldwide.

At the age of five, Downey made his acting debut in his father Robert Downey Sr.'s film *Pound* (1970). He rose to prominence by working with the Brat Pack for the teen films *Weird Science* (1985) and *Less than Zero* (1987). His portrayal of Charlie Chaplin in the biopic *Chaplin* (1992) earned him the BAFTA Award for Best Actor and an Academy Award nomination. After serving time at the Corcoran Substance Abuse Treatment Facility on drug charges, Downey joined the television series *Ally McBeal* in 2000, earning a Golden Globe for his performance. In 2001, he was dismissed from the show following further drug-related arrests. He entered a court-ordered rehabilitation program and has remained sober since 2003.

After Mel Gibson paid his insurance bond, Downey made his film comeback with *The Singing Detective* (2003). He portrayed the titular detective in *Sherlock Holmes* (2009)—which earned him a Golden Globe—and its sequel, subtitled *A Game of Shadows* (2011). Downey gained global recognition for starring as Iron Man in ten Marvel Cinematic Universe films, from *Iron Man* (2008) to *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). For his acclaimed portrayal of Lewis Strauss in Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* (2023), he won an Academy Award, a Golden Globe, and a BAFTA Award for Best Supporting Actor. In 2024, he was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award for the miniseries *The Sympathizer* and made his Broadway debut in the title role of Ayad Akhtar's *McNeal*.

In a career spanning more than five decades, Downey has won numerous accolades, including an Academy Award, a Daytime Emmy Award, three Golden Globe Awards, two BAFTA Awards, and three Screen Actors Guild Awards. *Time* named him one of the 100 most influential people in 2008, and *Forbes* featured him on the Celebrity 100 in 2013 and 2014. Downey has pursued music, releasing the jazz-pop album *The Futurist* (2004), which charted on the US Billboard 200. Divorced from Deborah Falconer, he has been married to Susan Levin since 2005, with whom he co-founded the production company Team Downey. He has three children: one with Falconer and two with Levin.

Early life and acting background

Robert John Downey Jr. was born in Manhattan, New York City, on April 4, 1965.^[1] His father, Robert Downey Sr. (né Elias), was a filmmaker,^[2] while his mother, Elsie Ann (née Ford), was an actress who appeared in Downey Sr.'s films.^{[3][4]} His father was one-half Lithuanian Jewish, one-quarter Hungarian Jewish, and one-quarter Irish, while his mother had Scottish, German, and Swiss ancestry.^[5] Downey's sister, Allyson, is two years older than him.^[6]

Due to his father's film projects, Downey moved frequently during his childhood, living in places such as Woodstock, New York, London, New Mexico, California, Connecticut, and Greenwich Village.^{[7][8]} From a young age, Downey was exposed to drugs: his father struggled with addiction, and his mother battled alcoholism.^{[7][9]} He has said that his father introduced him to marijuana at age eight,^[10] for which he later expressed regret.^[11] Downey mentioned that using drugs with his father created an emotional connection between them, explaining that, "When my dad and I used drugs together, it was his way of showing love for me in the only manner he knew."^{[12][13]} During his childhood, Downey appeared in small roles in his father's films. He made his acting debut at the age of five, portraying a sick puppy in the absurdist comedy *Pound* (1970), and at seven, he appeared in the surrealist Western *Greaser's Palace* (1972).^[14] Aged eleven and twelve, he attended Stagedoor Manor, a summer acting camp in upstate New York.^[15]

In school, Downey was a hyperactive child who "tried to be cool", often teased by the older boys but popular with the girls.^[15] His parents divorced in 1977 when he was twelve; afterward, he lived with his mother in a fifth-floor apartment in New York,^{[16][17]} while his sister stayed with their father, who later took her to a boarding school.^[17] He attended Lincoln Junior High School for eighth grade and then Santa Monica High School for ninth and tenth grades, but dropped out in 1982.^[18] At age 17, Downey relocated to New York City to pursue acting full-time,^[19] working various jobs such as clearing tables at a Central Falls restaurant, working in a shoe store, and performing as "living art" at the nightclub Area to support himself during auditions.^{[20][21]} During this period, he also appeared in local theater and off-Broadway productions.^[22]

Robert Downey Jr.



Downey in 2014

Born	Robert John Downey Jr. April 4, 1965 New York City, US
Occupation	Actor
Years active	1970–present
Works	<u>Filmography</u>
Spouses	<u>Deborah Falconer</u> (<u>m.</u> 1992; <u>div.</u> 2004) <u>Susan Levin</u> (<u>m.</u> 2005)
Partner	<u>Sarah Jessica Parker</u> (1984–1991)
Children	3
Father	<u>Robert Downey Sr.</u>
Awards	<u>Full list</u>

Signature

A handwritten signature of Robert Downey Jr. in black ink. The signature is stylized, with the first letters of the first and last names being large and prominent. It is written on a white background.

Career

1983–1995: Early work and critical acclaim

Downey made his stage debut in 1983 with a three-week run in *Alms for the Middle Class* at the Geva Theatre Center.^[23] He then appeared in the short-lived off-Broadway musical *American Passion* at the Joyce Theater, produced by Norman Lear.^[24] Downey's first credited film role was in *Baby It's You* (1983), though most of his scenes were cut.^[25] In his early film roles, he frequently portrayed misfit characters,^[26] and his portrayals of punk-like figures in several 1980s coming-of-age films led to his occasional association with the Brat Pack.^{[19][27]} In the drama film *Firstborn* (1984), he played a supporting role as the teenage friend of the protagonist.^[26] Downey then traveled to Los Angeles to film James Spader's *Tuff Turf* (1985), in which he played Spader's sidekick and a punk drummer.^[25] Later that year, his role as a bully in John Hughes's *Weird Science* (1985) marked his breakthrough.^[28] Downey starred as a more likeable radical socialist in the Alan Metter comedy film *Back to School* (1987).^[26]



Downey at the premiere of *Air America* in 1990

In 1985, Downey joined the new, younger cast of *Saturday Night Live*, securing the audition with help from his *Weird Science* co-star and friend Anthony Michael Hall.^[25] After a season of poor ratings and criticism of the cast's comedic ability, he and most of the new members were dismissed.^{[19][29]} Downey's first leading role came in *The Pick-up Artist* (1987), which faced criticism for being "sexually irresponsible" because of its portrayal of promiscuous sex during a period of heightened AIDS awareness.^{[30][31]} He earned critical acclaim for his role as Julian Wells in the drama film *Less than Zero* (1987), the film adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis's 1985 novel.^{[32][33]} For portraying a drug-addicted rich boy whose life rapidly spirals out of control,^[34] his performance was widely praised: Roger Ebert called it "so real, so subtle and so observant that it's scary",^[35] while Janet Maslin, writing for *The New York Times*, deemed it "desperately moving".^[34] Downey said that the role felt like "the ghost of Christmas Future" for him, as his drug habit led him to become an "exaggeration of the character" in real life.^[36]

Shortly after completing *Less than Zero*, he entered rehab for the first time, beginning a decade-long cycle of interventions and treatment stints that culminated in his 1996 arrest.^{[37][38]} Downey starred alongside Kiefer Sutherland and Winona Ryder in the teen drama *1969* (1988).^[30] The film saw mixed reviews,^[39] though his performance garnered good reviews from writers at *Variety* and *Deseret News*.^{[40][41]} Downey went on to star in the films *Chances Are* (1989) with Cybill Shepherd and Ryan O'Neal, *Air America* (1990) with Mel Gibson, and *Soapdish* (1991) with Sally Field, Kevin Kline, Cathy Moriarty, and Whoopi Goldberg; each saw varying critical success.^{[42][43][44]} To prepare for his portrayal of comic actor and filmmaker Charlie Chaplin in the biopic *Chaplin* (1992), Downey trained extensively, learning to play the violin and tennis left-handed, and working with a coach to replicate Chaplin's accent and mannerisms.^[45] Although the film was a box-office bomb,^[46] critics praised Downey's performance,^[47] for which he earned the BAFTA Award for Best Actor, as well as Academy Award and Golden Globe Award nominations.^[48]

In 1993, Downey starred in *Heart and Souls*, playing a man possessed by multiple characters—a performance that Peter Travers praised as revealing his "explosive talent for physical comedy".^{[50][51]} In *Only You* (1994), co-starring Marisa Tomei and Billy Zane, Downey played Peter Wright, a professional dancer who poses as the soulmate Tomei's character Faith.^{[30][52]} Norman Jewison—the film's director—cast him because he reminded him of Tony Curtis: "charming with great comedic timing".^[53] In preparation for his role of reporter Wayne Gale in *Natural Born Killers* (1994), Downey shadowed Australian television shock journalist Steve Dunleavy, which helped him develop an Australian accent.^{[54][55]} The film proved successful at the box office, grossing \$110 million on a \$34 million budget.^{[56][57]} Throughout 1995, he took on a string of diverse roles, including the period drama *Restoration*,^[58] the Shakespearean adaptation *Richard III*,^[59] and the family ensemble *Home for the Holidays*.^[60]

Oh come on—that's too much! You're going too far, Robert, [...] you're ruining my movie! Forget the dumb dick idea. [...] This isn't some slapstick bullshit

— Oliver Stone recalled shouting at Downey during the filming of *Natural Born Killers* (1994)^[49]

1996–2001: Addiction-related setbacks and *Ally McBeal*

In early 1996, concerned for Downey's well-being, Sean Penn and Dennis Quaid went to his residence, took his keys, and brought him to a rehab center in Tucson; however, Downey left the facility and checked himself out a few days later.^[37] In June 1996, he was arrested for possession of heroin, cocaine, crack cocaine, and an unloaded .357 Magnum handgun while speeding down Sunset Boulevard. A month later, while on parole and under the influence of a controlled substance, he entered a neighbor's home through an unlocked front door and fell asleep in one of the beds.^{[61][62]} The family declined to press trespassing charges.^[38] The 911 call made by the neighbor was later circulated online and became known as the "Goldilocks incident".^[63] In November 1996, following a period in court-ordered rehab, Downey was sentenced to an additional six months of live-in rehabilitation, three years' probation, and compulsory drug testing.^[38] Downey starred in *Two Girls and a Guy* (1997), portraying a duplicitous man who convinces each of two women that she is his only love.^[50]

After missing a court-ordered drug test in 1997, Downey spent six months in Los Angeles County Jail.^[64] In January 1998, he was temporarily allowed out of jail to star in the *U.S. Marshals*.^[65] Upon his full release, he entered a court-mandated 120-day rehab program and then starred in *Black and White* (1999), playing Terry Donager, the gay husband of a documentary filmmaker.^{[38][66]} That year, after maintaining sobriety during the filming of *Wonder Boys* (2000), Downey relapsed. At the time, he was facing financial difficulties and had lost his house in Malibu.^[37] Later that year, after missing another court-ordered drug test, he was arrested again. Despite his lawyer, Robert Shapiro, assembling the same legal team that had successfully defended O. J. Simpson in his criminal trial, Downey was sentenced to a three-year prison term at the California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility and State Prison in Corcoran.^{[67][68]} At the time of his arrest, all of Downey's film projects had been completed and were nearing release. He had also been hired to voice the devil in the NBC animated series *God, the Devil and Bob*, but was dismissed after failing to attend rehearsals.^{[69][70]}

After spending nearly a year in the Corcoran prison, Downey was unexpectedly released in 2000 on the condition of posting a \$5,000 bail, when a judge ruled that his cumulative time in incarceration facilities—from his initial 1996 arrests—qualified him for early release.^[11] A week after his release, he joined the cast of the television series *Ally McBeal* as a new love interest.^[71] For his performance, he was nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series and

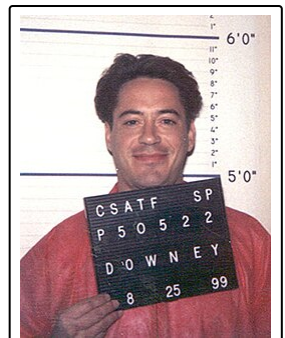
won the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor – Series, Miniseries, or Television Film.^{[72][73]} In retrospect, Downey described his performance as overrated, deeming it his "lowest point in terms of addictions".^[36] Before the end of his first season on *Ally McBeal*, Downey was arrested on Thanksgiving in 2000, after police responded to an anonymous 911 call and searched his room at Merv Griffin's Hotel and Givenchy Spa in Palm Springs, California. He was found under the influence of a controlled substance and in possession of cocaine and valium.^{[74][75]} Despite facing a potential prison sentence of up to four years and eight months if convicted, Downey committed to appear in at least eight additional episodes of *Ally McBeal*.^[76]

In April 2001, while on parole, Downey was found wandering barefoot in Culver City by a Los Angeles police officer. He was arrested on suspicion of being under the influence of drugs but was released a few hours later, even though tests confirmed the presence of cocaine in his system.^{[77][78]} After the arrest, the producers of *Ally McBeal* ordered last-minute rewrites and reshoots before dismissing him from the series, despite his character having boosted the show's ratings.^[79] In July 2001, Downey pleaded no contest to the Palm Springs charges, avoiding jail time. Instead, he was ordered into drug rehabilitation and sentenced to three years of probation under California Proposition 36, which had been enacted the previous year to direct nonviolent drug offenders toward treatment rather than prison.^{[11][80]} He spent a year in a court-mandated rehabilitation facility. By this time Downey was homeless, considered too great an insurance risk to be employable, and facing bankruptcy.^[37]

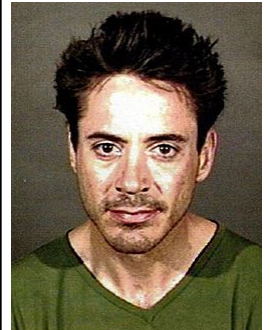
In a December 2000, Downey's stepmother, Rosemary, told author Alex Tresnlowski of *People* that Downey had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder "a few years ago", adding that this was "the reason he has a hard time staying sober. What hasn't been tried is medication and intensive psychotherapy".^[81] Los Angeles psychiatrist Dr. Manijeh Nikakhtar said she had received a letter from Downey in 1999 during his incarceration at Corcoran II, asking for advice regarding his condition. She stated that "no one had done a complete [psychiatric] evaluation [on him] [...] I asked him flat out if he thought he was bipolar, and he said, 'Oh yeah. There are times I spend a lot of money and I'm hyperactive, and there are other times I'm down.'"^[81]

2001–2007: Recovery and comeback

After five years of substance abuse, arrests, and relapse, Downey began working toward a full recovery in 2001.^{[83][84]} His first acting job after rehabilitation came in August, when he appeared lip-syncing in the music video for Elton John's single "I Want Love", directed by Sam Taylor-Wood.^[85] Two years later, he returned to film with *The Singing Detective* (2003), directed by his *Back to School* co-star Keith Gordon, after Gibson paid his insurance bond, allowing him to be cast.^{[86][87]} He played Dan Dark, a paralyzed, suffering pulp novelist who hallucinates and drifts between reality and fantasy.^[50] Although the film received mixed reviews, Downey regarded it as a personal



Mugshot from his arrest in August 1999



Mugshot from his arrest in April 2001

I said, 'You know what? I don't think I can continue doing this.' And I reached out for help, and I ran with it. You can reach out for help in kind of a half-assed way and you'll get it and you won't take advantage of it. It's not that difficult to overcome these seemingly

achievement.^{[50][88]} For *Gothika* (2003), producer Joel Silver withheld 40 percent of Downey's salary until production was completed as protection against potential issues related to his addiction.^[89]

ghastly problems [...] what's hard is to decide to do it.

— Downey speaking to Oprah Winfrey in November 2004^[82]

Silver secured him the lead role in Shane Black's directorial debut, the comedy thriller *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005).^[90] Downey received positive reviews for his performance: Mike Russell, writing in *The Oregonian*, deemed it "one of [his] most enjoyable performances",^[91] while a *The Age* writer deemed it a "terrific comic performance".^[92] Downey appeared in a range of leading and supporting roles, gaining particular recognition for his performances in several semi-independent films. In *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005), he portrayed a CBS journalist and editor secretly married to a coworker, a relationship concealed due to the network's policy prohibiting employees from marrying one another.^[93] His role as a drug addict in Richard Linklater's dystopian, rotoscoped film *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) was praised:^[94] Travers called his performance "the film's flashiest and most ferociously entertaining",^[95] and J. Hoberman regarded it as "the performance to beat" that year.^[96] Downey's character in Steven Shainberg's fictional biographical drama *Fur* (2006) was a composite representing the two most significant influences on Diane Arbus's professional life, Lisette Model and Marvin Israel.^[97] *Fur* was poorly received by critics,^[98] who conversely lauded Downey's performance.^{[99][100]}

In 2005, Downey returned to television, providing voice work for an episode of *Family Guy* titled "The Fat Guy Strangler".^[101] The producers created the character Patrick Pewterschmidt—Lois Griffin's long-lost, mentally disturbed brother—specifically for him.^[102] That same year, Downey signed a deal with HarperCollins to publish a memoir, which he described as a candid account his life and career. In 2008, however, he returned his advance and canceled the project without explanation.^[103] In 2007, he appeared in David Fincher's mystery thriller *Zodiac*, based on true events, portraying San Francisco Chronicle journalist Paul Avery, who covered the Zodiac Killer case.^{[104][105]} Downey's performance was critically acclaimed:^[106] a *Tuscaloosa News* writer deemed it one of his best,^[107] and Manohla Dargis remarked that he was at the "top of [his] performance game".^[108]

2008–2019: Stardom with Iron Man



Downey at an event for *Iron Man* in 2008

In 2006, Downey was cast as the titular character in the superhero film *Iron Man*.^{[109][110]} Director Jon Favreau explained that while Downey was not the most obvious choice, "he understood what makes the character tick. He found a lot of his own life experience in 'Tony Stark'."^[111] Favreau strongly advocated for Downey's casting, believing he could elevate the film's quality and generate widespread audience interest, much like Johnny Depp had done for the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series.^{[61][112][113]} To prepare for the role, Downey gained more than twenty pounds (nine kilograms) of muscle over five months to achieve the physicality required for the part.^[114] *Iron Man* was released on May 2, 2008, in the US.^[115] It became the eighth-highest-grossing film of 2008, earning more than \$585 million worldwide against a production budget of \$130 million.^{[61][116][117]}

In *Iron Man*, Downey portrayed Tony Stark, a wealthy industrialist who is kidnapped and forced to build a deadly missile, only to instead construct a suit of armor that transforms him into the superhero Iron Man.^[118] Both the film and Downey's performance were acclaimed by critics,^[119] many of whom considered his portrayal the standout element of *Iron Man* and credited it with catapulting him to global stardom.^{[120][121][122]} Ebert wrote that "it's Robert Downey Jr. who powers the lift-off separating this from most other superhero movies",^[123] while, in a retrospective *Variety* article, Zack Sharf credited Downey's charisma with making *Iron Man* both a critical and commercial success.^[124] By October 2008, Downey had signed on to reprise his role in two sequels to *Iron Man* and in *The Avengers* (2012), which featured the superhero team that Stark joins, based on Marvel's comic book series of the same name.^[125] He first reprised the role with a brief appearance as Stark in the film *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), as part of Marvel Studios' initiative to depict the same Marvel Universe on film by providing continuity among the films.^[126]

Downey starred alongside Ben Stiller, who also directed the film, and Jack Black in *Tropic Thunder*.^[127] The three actors portray exaggerated Hollywood archetypes, with Downey playing Kirk Lazarus, a self-absorbed, multi-Oscar-winning Australian method actor starring in an overblown Vietnam War film titled *Tropic Thunder*.^{[128][129]} To embody his character, African-American platoon sergeant Lincoln Osiris, Lazarus undergoes a controversial skin pigmentation procedure, requiring Downey to wear dark makeup and a wig.^{[130][131][132]} Released in August 2008,^[133] *Tropic Thunder* opened atop the American box office and retained the number-one position for three consecutive weeks, eventually grossing \$195 million worldwide on a budget of about \$90 million.^{[134][135]} For his portrayal of Lazarus, Downey was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor.^[136] He then portrayed Steve Lopez in the biopic *The Soloist* (2009), a *Los Angeles Times* columnist who discovers a homeless man playing a violin with virtuoso skill.^[137]

Downey played the titular detective in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009).^[138] *The Times* praised the lead performances, describing Downey as "terrific" and commending Ritchie for eliciting "a career-best performance from [Jude] Law", though it noted that their double act struggled to sustain "an overlong film".^[139] *Sherlock Holmes* became the eighth-highest-grossing film of 2009 and won Downey the Golden Globe Award for Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy.^{[140][141]} Downey reprised his role as Stark in *Iron Man 2*, the first of two planned sequels to *Iron Man*.^[142] Released in May 2010 in the US,^[143] the film grossed over \$623 million worldwide, ranking as the seventh highest-grossing film of the year.^[125] Set six months after *Iron Man*,^[144] the film follows Stark as he rejects government demands to share his technology, while facing the vengeful scientist Ivan Vanko.^{[145][146]} Ebert called Downey's performance "intriguing" and "unexpected", stating that "he doesn't behave like most superheroes: he lacks the psychic weight and *gravitas*".^[147]

Downey's other film role of 2010 was in *Due Date*, which was filmed across various locations in the US, including Georgia, New Mexico, Arizona, and Los Angeles.^[148] In it, he played an architect trying to get from Atlanta to Los Angeles in time for his wife's scheduled Caesarean section.^[149] The film was a box-office success, earning over \$211 million on a budget of \$65 million.^{[150][151]} That same year, Downey and his wife Susan opened their own production company called Team Downey.^[152] Downey reprised his role as Sherlock Holmes in *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), the sequel to the 2009 film.^[153] In *A Game of Shadows*, he investigates a conspiracy led by his nemesis, Professor Moriarty, and works to prevent an impending world war.^{[154][155]} Todd McCarthy of *The Hollywood Reporter* lauded the film's "more mannered shenanigans", whose action-oriented antics "play straight to modern audiences' tastes".^[156]

Downey reprised the role of Stark in *The Avengers* (2012). In the film, the Avengers assemble to stop *Loki* from conquering Earth using the Tesseract to open a portal for an alien invasion.^[157] The film was both a critical and commercial success; grossing over \$1.52 billion, it became the third-highest-grossing film of all time.^{[158][159][160]} In *Iron Man 3* (2013), Stark faces threats from a terrorist known as the *Mandarin* while dealing with the aftermath of previous events and developing new technology to confront his enemies.^[161] *Iron Man 3* grossed \$1.215 billion, making it fifth-highest-grossing film of all time upon release.^{[162][163]} He reprised the role as Tony Stark in the MCU films *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015),^[164] *Captain America: Civil War* (2016),^[165] *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017),^[166] *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018),^[167] and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019).^[166] Three of his scenes from *The Avengers* and *Avengers: Endgame* were used as archive footage in the first episode of the *Disney+* series *Loki*.^[168]



Downey speaking at the 2019
Disney Legends Awards

2020–present: *Oppenheimer* and expansion

In 2020, Downey starred in Stephen Gaghan's *Dolittle*, portraying the titular 19th-century Welsh veterinarian who can communicate with animals.^{[169][170]} The film, the second produced by Team Downey, was a box-office disappointment and received largely negative reviews, with critics citing its excessive length and lackluster execution.^[171] In 2023, Downey portrayed the antagonistic bureaucrat Lewis Strauss in Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*.^{[172][173]} He accepted a pay cut for the role, earning \$4 million instead of his usual \$10–20 million upfront salary.^[174] Downey later called *Oppenheimer* "the best film" he had appeared in.^[175] Both the biopic and his performance received widespread critical acclaim.^{[176][177][178]} For his role, he won the Golden Globe,^[179] BAFTA,^[180] Screen Actors Guild,^[181] Critics' Choice,^[182] and Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor.^[183] That same year, Downey hosted the television series *Downey's Dream Cars*, in which he and his team converted several of his vehicles from gas to electric.^[184] The show won Downey the Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lifestyle Program.^[185]

Downey next starred in a 2024 television adaptation of Viet Thanh Nguyen's historical satire novel *The Sympathizer* on HBO, portraying five supporting antagonistic roles representing the American establishment.^[186] His multi-role performance earned him an Primetime Emmy nomination for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie.^[187] Downey made his Broadway debut in *McNeal*, from playwright Ayad Akhtar, playing Jacob McNeal, a gifted novelist with a difficult family life and a potentially problematic interest in artificial intelligence. Previews began on September 5, 2024, and opened on September 30 at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theatre, playing a strictly limited engagement through November 24.^[188] In July 2024 at San Diego Comic-Con, it was announced that Downey would return to the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Victor von Doom / Doctor Doom in the upcoming films *Avengers: Doomsday* (2026) and *Avengers: Secret Wars* (2027).^[189]

Other ventures

Music

Downey has ventured into music. He has sung on several soundtracks for his films, including *Chaplin*,^[190] *Too Much Sun*,^[191] *Two Girls and a Guy*,^[191] *Friends and Lovers*,^[192] and *The Singing Detective*.^[192] On November 23, 2004, he released his only studio album, titled *The Futurist*.^[193] A jazz pop-infused record,^{[194][195]} *The Futurist* was produced by Jonathan Elias and Mark Hudson; Downey played the piano on some of the tracks.^[196] The album debuted at number 121 on the *Billboard 200* chart, selling 16,000 copies in its first week.^{[197][198]}

While promoting *Tropic Thunder*, Downey and his co-stars Ben Stiller and Jack Black were back-up singers for the Pips to Gladys Knight singing "Midnight Train to Georgia" for the season 7 finale of *American Idol* in 2008.^{[199][200]} Downey has repeatedly collaborated with English musician Sting. In addition to their 2001 duet of the Police's "Every Breath You Take" on an episode of *Ally McBeal*, the two performed "Driven to Tears" together live at Sting's 60th birthday concert in October 2011.^[201] That same year, both appeared on Jonathan Elias's *Prayer Cycle 2: Path to Zero*, a benefit album supporting the anti-nuclear organization Global Zero.^[202]

Social activism

In a 2008 interview, Downey said that his time in prison had shifted his political perspective, explaining: "I have a really interesting political point of view, and it's not always something I say too loud at dinner tables here, but you can't go from a \$2,000-a-night suite at La Mirage to a penitentiary and really understand it and come out a liberal. [...] [I]t was very, very, very educational for me and has informed my proclivities and politics ever since".^[203] When asked about the quote in a 2015 interview to promote *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, he denied that his previous statement reflected any longstanding beliefs on his part, explaining that he does not identify as either a Republican, liberal, or Democrat.^[204]

Downey has expressed support for the Democratic Party throughout his career. He donated to Barack Obama's 2012 presidential campaign and, two years later, attended a Democratic Party fundraiser while contributing to the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.^{[205][206]} In 2016, he appeared in an online video encouraging Americans to vote against Donald Trump in the then-upcoming presidential election.^[207] Four years later, he joined fellow *Avengers* cast members and Vice Presidential nominee Kamala Harris for a virtual fundraiser supporting Joe Biden's 2020 campaign.^[208] In 2024, Downey and his *Avengers* castmates once again came together to endorse Harris in her presidential bid that year.^[209]

Downey serves on the board of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, a nonprofit organization that advocates for criminal justice reform to reduce incarceration, improve the outcomes of formerly incarcerated individuals, and build healthier communities.^[210] In 2020, he founded the organization Footprint Coalition, which aims to use advanced technologies like robotics and nanotechnology to help clean up and restore the environment.^[211] The coalition supports and promotes environmentally sustainable technologies, including the French insect-farming company Ÿnsect, bio-based plastic alternative

manufacturer RWDC, and bamboo toilet paper producer Cloud Paper.^{[212][213]} Downey co-wrote the book *Cool Food* with climate advocate Thomas Kostigen providing guidance on making climate-friendly food choices.^[214]

Personal life

Downey started dating actress Sarah Jessica Parker in 1984 after meeting her on the set of *Firstborn*.^[215] They moved in together after eight weeks of dating.^[216] The couple separated eight years later, in 1991, due to his drug addiction.^{[217][218]} Downey married actress and singer Deborah Falconer on May 29, 1992, after a six-week courtship.^[59] Falconer gave birth to their only son in September 1993.^[59] However, Downey's repeated stints in rehab and jail placed significant strain on their marriage, and in 1996, Falconer left him. She filed for divorce in early 2001, citing "irreconcilable differences".^[219] The divorce was finalized in 2004, with Falconer receiving custody of their son.^[220]

In 2003, Downey met producer Susan Levin—then the executive vice president of production at Joel Silver's company, Silver Pictures—while filming *Gothika*.^{[221][222]} Although Levin was initially unsure about Downey, the two quietly began a relationship during production.^{[221][223]} Their relationship continued after *Gothika*'s production ended, and Downey proposed the night before her thirtieth birthday.^[221] The couple married on August 27, 2005, in a Jewish ceremony in Amagansett, New York.^{[224][225]} They welcomed their first child, a son, in February 2012,^[226] followed by a daughter in November 2014.^[227] Downey has maintained a close friendship with Mel Gibson since they co-starred in *Air America* (1990).^{[228][229]} He publicly defended Gibson amidst the controversy surrounding his 2006 DUI, saying that he was "caught in the act of being an imperfect human being".^[230] Gibson, in turn, spoke fondly of Downey, recalling, "He was one of the first people to call and offer the hand of friendship. He just said, 'Hey, welcome to the club. Let's go see what we can do to work on ourselves.'"^[230]



Downey with wife Susan Downey at the 2010 Academy Awards

Downey says he has been drug-free since July 2003 and credits his wife with helping him overcome his drug and alcohol habits, along with his family, therapy, meditation, twelve-step recovery programs, yoga, and the practice of Wing Chun kung fu.^{[231][232]} In December 2015, Downey was chosen as one of 91 people to be pardoned by the Governor of California, Jerry Brown, for his prior drug offenses. The pardon does not erase Downey's criminal record, but it does allow him to serve on a jury.^{[233][234]} Reflecting on his sobriety during an appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Downey said, "It's really not that difficult to overcome these seemingly ghastly problems. What's hard is to decide to do it."^[235] In 2014, Downey described his religious beliefs as "Jewish Buddhist". Earlier in his life, he had also explored Christianity and the Hare Krishna movement.^[236] After initially adopting a vegan diet to address concerns about the climate crisis, Downey revealed in 2024 that he had transitioned to a pescetarian diet after experiencing low levels of vitamin B12, calcium, and iron.^[237]

Artistry and public image



Downey at the *Avengers* film premiere in London in 2012

Downey is known for taking on an eclectic range of roles spanning drama, comedy, and action, and has become one of Hollywood's most bankable stars.^{[238][239][240]} He typically plays characters who are intelligent, charismatic, complicated, and often flawed,^{[241][242][243]} such as geniuses^[244] and eccentrics.^{[245][246]} Critics have noted his ability to fully embody a role, making the character seem real.^{[247][248]} Early in his career, a *Rolling Stone* writer noted that Downey's acting style differed from many of his contemporaries, describing it as "not brooding or intolerably self-absorbed" but in "a semiconstant state of amusement".^[31] Analysing his roles in *Mussolini* (1985) and *Less than Zero* (1987), Stephen Schiff wrote that he managed to "shrug and bubble his way past every obstacle".^[249] He extensively rehearses and prepares for his film roles:^[250] for example, for his portrayal of Charlie Chaplin in *Chaplin* (1992), he spent months training with experts to perfectly mimic Chaplin's movements,^[45] and he remained in character off set to portray Kirk Lazarus in *Tropic Thunder* (2010).^[251] Keith

Gordon, who directed Downey in *The Singing Detective* (2003), remarked that Downey could "take a two-minute scene and take you through five different arcs of emotion as he takes himself through that".^[252]

Downey is a self-described "incredibly gifted faker" who knows "very little about acting".^[253] In a 2010 *Rolling Stone* article, Walter Kirn praised Downey's ability to "refuse to follow any kind of script, never quite coming into focus, always in thrall to another idea", describing it as the "essence of his mind and spirit, and, arguably, of his genius as an actor".^[254] He has described his approach to acting as intuitive and improvisational rather than methodical, stating that "the goal is to make a well-written scene seem like it's improvised" and "try to improve things as you go along".^{[253][255][256]} Downey's films as a leading actor have grossed over \$14.3 billion worldwide, making him the third-highest-grossing actor of all time, according to *The Numbers*.^[257] He was named Hollywood's highest-paid actor by *Forbes* from 2013 to 2015.^{[258][259][260]} The publication has included him in its annual Celebrity 100 list, which ranks the most powerful people in the world, placing him twentieth in 2013 and tenth in 2014.^{[261][262]} *Time* magazine featured him on its list of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2008, honoring his talent as an actor and career resurgence as Iron Man.^[263] *The Independent* named Downey the forty-fourth-greatest actor of the 21st century in 2025.^[264]

Acting credits and accolades

According to Rotten Tomatoes, Downey's most critically acclaimed films include *Tropic Thunder*, *Oppenheimer*, the *Sherlock Holmes* film series, and several Marvel Studios films, including *Captain America: Civil War* and the *Iron Man* and *Avengers* series.^[265] He has received various accolades, including an Academy Award, two BAFTA Awards, three Golden Globe Awards, three Screen Actors Guild Awards, and a Daytime Emmy Award, as well as nominations for two Primetime Emmy Awards.^{[266][267][268]}

Discography

Studio album

- The Futurist (2004)

Soundtrack appearances

Year	Song	Soundtrack	Notes
1992	"Smile"	<i>Chaplin OST</i>	On <i>The Futurist</i>
1993	"The Star-Spangled Banner"	<i>Heart and Souls OST</i>	With <u>B.B. King</u>
2000	"White Christmas"	<i>Ally McBeal: A Very Ally Christmas</i>	With <u>Vonda Shepard</u>
	"River"		
2001	"Every Breath You Take"	<i>Ally McBeal: For Once in My Life featuring Vonda Shepard</i>	With <u>Sting</u>
	"Chances Are"		With <u>Vonda Shepard</u>
	"Snakes"		
2003	"In My Dreams"	<i>The Singing Detective OST</i>	
2005	"Broken"	<i>Kiss Kiss Bang Bang OST</i>	On <i>The Futurist</i>

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