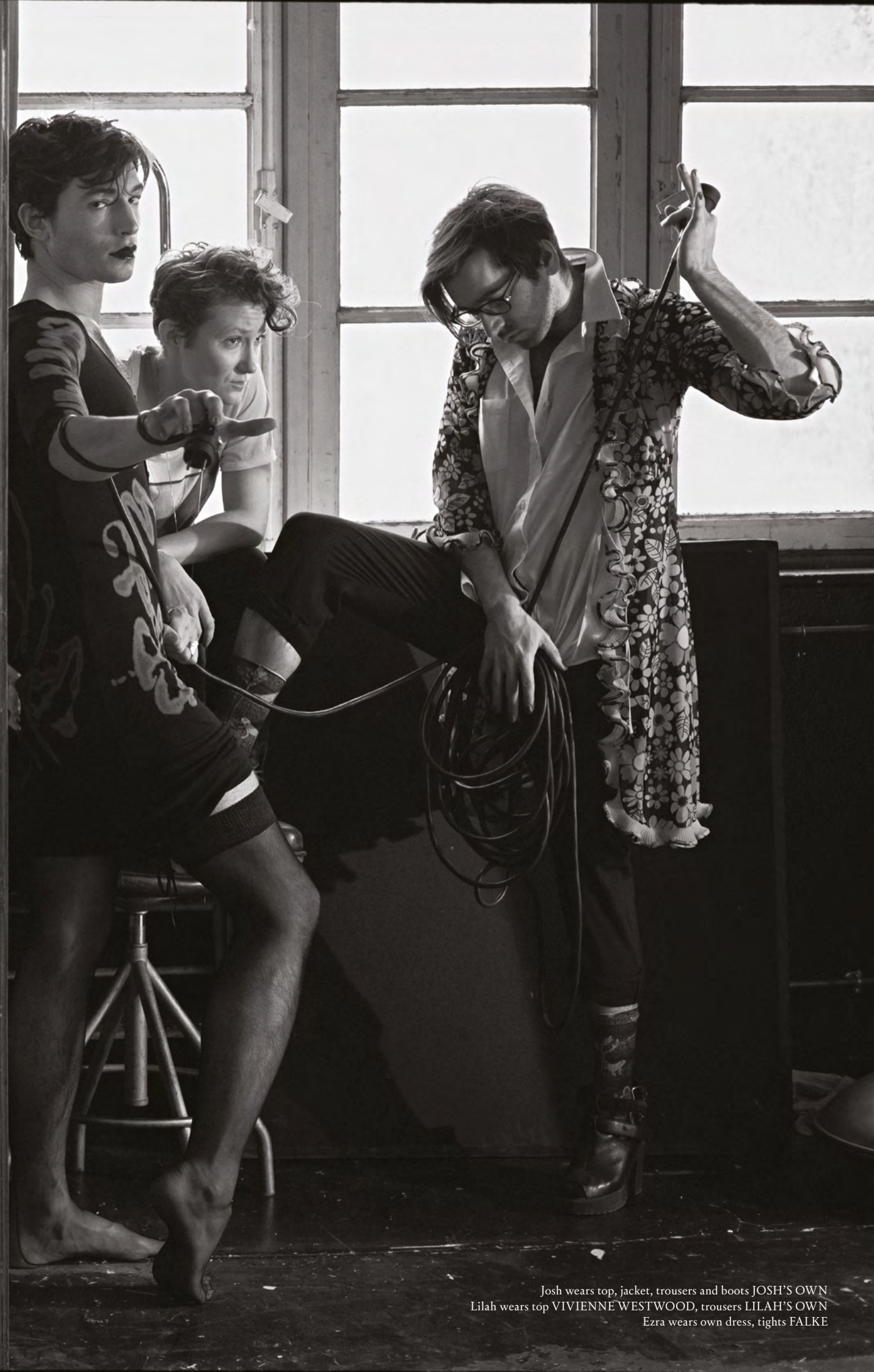


# DEFINING THE

Photographer TOMO BREJC  
Stylist ALESSIA ANSALONE

*Sons of an Illustrious Father are turning  
harsh realities into cultural gold*

# IN— DEFINABLE



Josh wears top, jacket, trousers and boots JOSH'S OWN  
Lilah wears top VIVIENNE WESTWOOD, trousers LILAH'S OWN  
Ezra wears own dress, tights FALKE





“We never want to feel inhibited”, states Ezra Miller of Sons of an Illustrious Father, the gender-queer group formed with childhood best friend Lilah Larson and their more recently found kindred spirit Josh Aubin.

The trio have recently completed their first European tour promoting their second LP *Deus Sex Machina: Or, Moving Slowly Beyond Nikola Tesla*. The album is imbued with social resilience and is championing the values that we should uphold as a society. By drawing references from the 2016 Orlando shooting, refusing to identify with any gender binaries and promoting sexual fluidity, the band has become a symbol of hope to their loyal fan base and within the LGBTQ+ community.

In December last year, they kicked off their tour with a sold-out show at London’s Omeara. The atmosphere in the crowd was palpably tense before the band took the stage. Undeniably, Miller has increased their media exposure. However, it was not the catalyst that sent them on the road to success. As the show started, it was blindingly obvious that Miller had simply transformed himself into the vehicle that was needed in order for the band to be able to shed light onto the poignant facets of today’s political and social climate.

Taking the stage, the group swiftly formed a synergy, a palpable symbiosis with their fans. It was the sense of kinship that brought them together. And through that mutual feeling of belongingness, their fans were swift to reciprocate in a

demonstrative manner. “One thing that took us by surprise was that we were offered a queer history tour of Amsterdam by this most incredible human glory named Bear,” Miller recalls. “We got what ended up being a nine-hour all night tour of the history of resistance, the history of free-loving living and the work that was put into creating and protecting the space for it. All throughout Amsterdam.”

It was precisely that selfless back and forth, the unending support from their fans and their own self-proclaimed unidentified identity that propelled the band to the forefront of the public’s attention. In a bid to channel the generational turmoil of growing up in a post 9/11 era, their track *Extraordinary Rendition* borrows its name from a CIA-practised form of abduction. The song taken from their latest LP is one of their most emotional ones to date - both lyrically and visually. The music video sees the trio clad in esoteric symbols conceptualised by the Oscar-winning costume designer Colleen Atwood (with whom Miller has previously worked on the Harry Potter spinoff *Fantastic Beasts*). The music video takes the viewers on a ritual-esque experience and invites them into a surreal existence. The intentionally bleak cinematography and summoning movements choreographed by Miller’s mother take centre stage. Speaking of their creative process, Larson explains that “the video was primarily conceived by the videographer, editor and director. They came in with a concept that we gave a little bit of our feedback on. It was very much

informed by Colleen and Martha’s work as it developed.”

Infused with complex symbolism, both intentional and unintentional, the track cultivates a sense of family, unity and affirmation - all of which are the pivots of the band’s core sense of identity.

When it comes down to their organic creative process, however, democracy is always at the forefront. In a formulaic world, Sons of an Illustrious Father provide fresh air for a polluted society. The group continually nurture a mentality based on freedom of speech and creation, both publicly as well as privately. “This is what we do with each other in the band too, we try to create space for one another to simultaneously receive input and to be able to give as much input as possible,” states Miller.

Their collaborative process extends its way to the audience as well. “We want to be careful not to dictate what people should see and what people should take away. I think that the process of collaboration continues in the relationship with the viewer. A very important part of art is allowing the viewers to experience it as a mirror and learn about themselves,” Larson explains.

On tracks such as *Narcissus*, they confront ego and heteropatriarchal violence (“Apollo didn’t care about Daphne / And something broke inside of Tom Dooley / Abraham forsook his progeny / Narcissus drowning in vanity”). In *U.S. GAY* they shift the primary focus from themselves onto other people as storytellers for the songs, stripping themselves of their own self-importance. “I think ego for me is a process,” Miller explains. “Often we toss around a lot of negative connotation at it, and ego is a character that has to go through a journey. It is when the ego is in deficit, or when it is in need, that it acts out in the way that we often experience it in our lives. And in our society, because I think there are a lot of characters that come from deficit.”

On the subject of music, however, Miller believes that the concept of ego takes on different dimensions, as it becomes a primordial means of channelling the self. “Music and any sort of expression require the vessel, the vehicle for that expression, to not be in so much deficit that it cannot allow for the expression of self. If you’re trying to control something that you’re making, it seems to reduce its ultimate potency,” Miller expands.

The relationship between art and ego has long been argued to be one of codependency, in spite of the desired end product. “It’s about the higher self putting that lower self-identified self into submission but while still being in contact. A lot of people are obsessed with the idea of killing the ego,” Miller says. “But to completely kill it - I think it happens but it must be reborn at some point, that’s just the truth of it. You can kill it, but at one point it will find root again. It’s cyclical.”

The mindfulness and awareness that the



Lilah wears coat LEA PECKRE, trousers PIHAKAPI  
top DE LAURENTIS PARIS, gloves D’HEYGERE, boots MARGIELA  
Ezra wears all clothing PRADA, glasses ACNE STUDIOS, boots EZRA’S OWN  
Josh wears coat and boots ERNEST W BAKER, shirt ACNE STUDIOS  
hat SAINT LAURENT BY ANTHONY VACCARELLO, ring D’HEYGERE





Josh wears jacket SAINT LAURENT BY ANTHONY VACCARELLO  
top DE LAURENTIS PARIS, trousers JOSH'S OWN, chain D'HEYGERE  
Ezra wears dress HAAL, glasses EZRA'S OWN, tights FALKE  
Lilah wears cape LILAH'S OWN, shirt SAINT LAURENT BY ANTHONY VACCARELLO  
trousers LILAH'S OWN, boots ACNE STUDIOS

trio put forward in a seemingly organic way could be what today's society is in dire need of. Self-describing their album as a "funeral march for the world that we have lost", their shows are paradoxically a celebration for the world that we still have some ability to save. "In a lot of cultures and for a lot of people, funerals are celebrations of life, or celebrations of the life that continues. It's true that we can be in touch with loss by being in touch with our own vitality, and truly celebrate the sacredness of that vitality," Larson says.

However, it's not without suffering that you reach certain conclusions. On June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old security guard, killed 49 people and wounded 53 others in a terrorist attack inside Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. This has been recorded as the deadliest incident of violence against LGBTQ+ people in US history.

The band has previously stated that the incident was a pivotal point of reference in their work. The statement resurfaces evidently in their track *U.S. GAY* ("To spread wings and fall / I don't want my friends dead at all").

The group managed to turn their own grief into awareness and further on into power. "I think any human experience can be an access point for power with zero exception," Miller explains. However, the group is aware of how important their point of privilege is. "It depends on what you do with it and what resources you have access to that allow you to optimise an experience into something productive, positive. We're very lucky that we have the medium of music and the privilege of making it to turn our grief into something else," states Larson.

But does their own mindfulness play a part or are they simply winging it? "I don't know about any of that. I think everyone is just working on it. I don't know if there's a hierarchy of access. There are cycles of mindfulness and roads for all beings," Miller says, reinforcing once more the band's overarching message of inclusion.

Significant efforts have been made in order to nurture a safe environment for the LGBTQ+ community after the Orlando Pulse shooting. From the onePULSE Foundation to the OneOrlando Alliance, the public finally became aware of what queer people had been going through for decades. In spite of the significant changes in attitude, fear and heteropatriarchal oppression still exist within the queer community. "I feel like there's never going to be a best way to build and nurture a safe environment for an entire community. Everyone can assign that in different ways. It's more about creating enough empowerment in those communities to allow people access to the resources that they need," Aubin explains.

And with empowerment is how society should move forward. For a group of people that have gone through oppression themselves, the band is still grounded in the belief that the world can be merciful. On January 4 this year, newly elected Congress members and senators were sworn in by Mike Pence - including the first two Muslim women, the first two Native American women and the first openly bisexual woman, senator Kyrsten Sinema. "Today, in this day and age, mercy is the new Congress. All morning I've been watching videos and looking at pictures of queer women, women of colour, women in hijabs being sworn in

and Mike Pence having to do it on Qurans and on Torahs. This is a small mercy that I am currently appreciating," Larson says.

Progress is ultimately the sum of small victories. Despite outside victories, however, the most important one for a queer person is the victory achieved within one's own self, according to the band. "The most important message of self-care is defining the self-first mentality against the selfish mentality. Understanding that you have to care for your own vessel to begin with, before you can be an effective vehicle for others. And don't let the muggles get you down! Resisting the oppression that happens on a very subtle level is crucial," Miller elaborates.

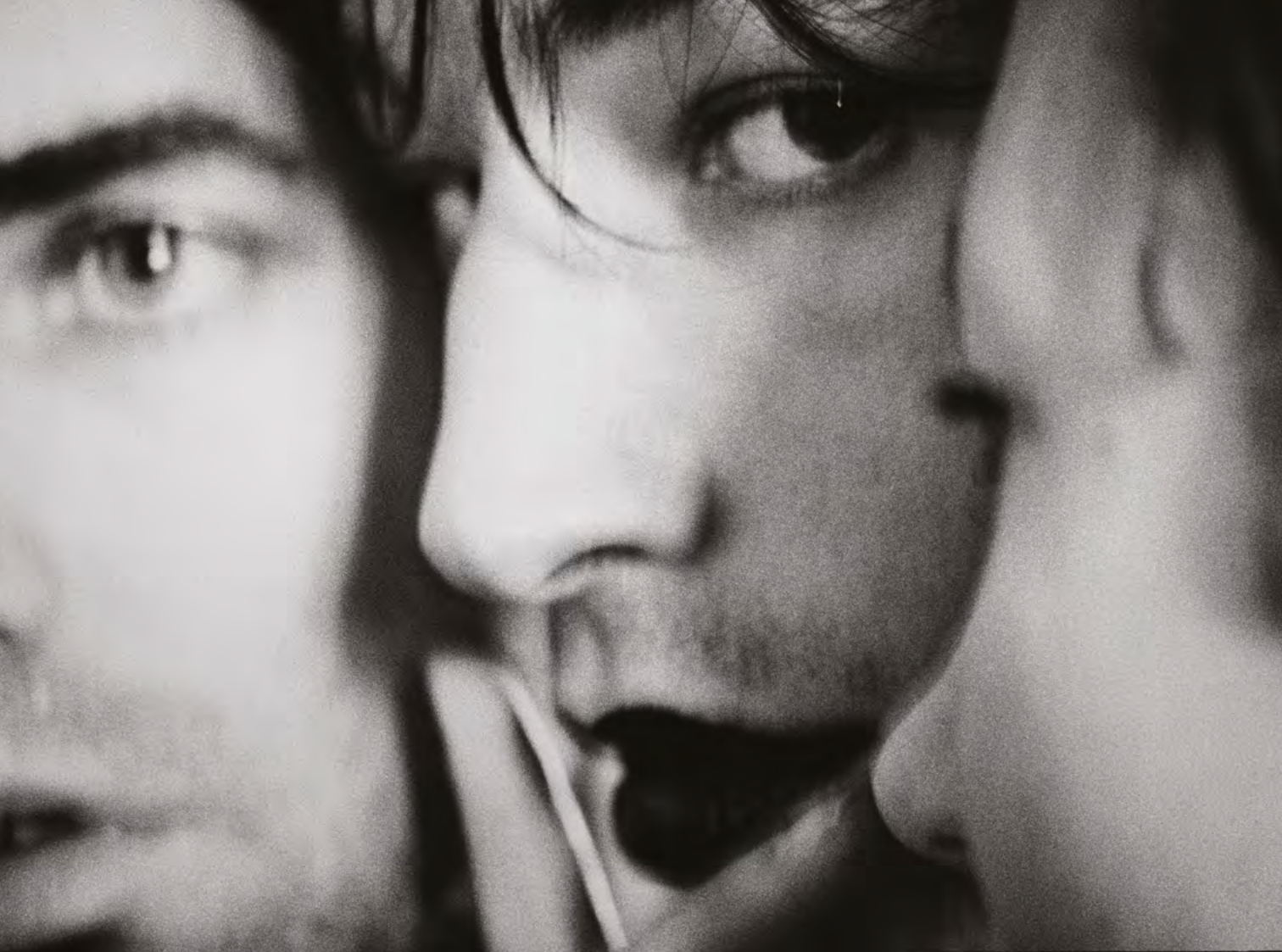
But do they personally feel like they've got a higher sense of self now? "A higher sense of doubt?!" Aubin asks in confusion. "No, a higher sense of self!" I reply slightly baffled by the situation. "It's funny that we understood the word 'doubt'. If that's not a depressing indicator, I don't know what is," Miller replies in amusement. But as per usual, it's Larson that brings the conversation back to its original root. "I think we are blessed to be continually affirmed and continually humbled. It's a dynamic realm of selfhood that I am comfortable dwelling in, as it shifts and changes."

What is the way forward then? Through kindness, as beautifully put by Miller. "There's a need to listen to others. To be attentive. To care is to attend. To be tender. Tenderness."

by Adina Ilie

[www.sonsofanillustriousfather.com](http://www.sonsofanillustriousfather.com)

Hair SEBASTIEN LE COROLLER  
Make up BEATRICE HAN CHING  
Producer MAXIMILIEN DUPONT at ADB AGENCY  
Photography assistant ALEXANDRE SALLE DE CHOU  
Talent SONS OF AN ILLUSTRIOUS FATHER – EZRA MILLER, LILAH LARSON and JOSH AUBIN



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