

MEDIA STA *to* MELTDO

After making a warlord famous, Jason Russell steals the spotlight with a

When the Kony 2012 campaign was at the height of its viral frenzy on March 12, with millions having viewed the charity video that brought Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony into the world's crosshairs, it wasn't enough for its creator, Jason Russell. "I think the new goal is to beat the 'Charlie bit my finger' video," said San Diego-based Russell, citing a YouTube family video that has so far amassed more than 250 million hits. "We hope it keeps swelling and swelling." As that wish was granted—*Kony 2012* has since had more than 80 million views—there came a bizarre twist in the 'Make Kony Famous' narrative. On March 15, in a leafy San Diego suburb, the married father of two was arrested after allegedly parading naked

on the street, vandalising cars and masturbating. He was later hospitalised "suffering from exhaustion, dehydration and malnutrition," read a statement from Ben Keesey, the CEO of Invisible Children, the charity that Russell co-founded. Russell's wife, Danica, denied claims the apparent meltdown was fuelled by drugs or alcohol, while Keesey blamed the criticism that Russell, 33, received after the release of the video, which aimed to shed light on Kony's alleged crimes (see box). Some questioned how the fund spent donations, while others said the video oversimplified a complex issue. In a revealing interview a week before the incident, Russell, an

"This is my life and my job—they're intertwined"

evangelical Christian whose parents ran a Christian youth theatre, shared with WHO his inspirations, his former Hollywood dreams and his relentless drive. school [at the University of South California] I would go to where genocide was occurring, which was in Sudan at the time. I asked a lot of people to come with me and only two guys were crazy enough to go with me. We went to Sudan and ended up in northern Uganda, documenting the Sudanese refugees. [While on the road], the car in front of us got shot up by child soldiers from the Lord's Resistance Army [Kony's Ugandan guerrilla group]. We'd never heard of the war, we didn't know we were in a war zone.

That night, we documented commuters who slept in the street. After spending months with them and Jacob [a Ugandan boy who appears in the video and whose brother was allegedly killed by the LRA] he broke down and we made a promise to do everything we could to find who killed his brother.

My background is actually musical theatre, and I want to bring back the Hollywood musical. I wanted to do Broadway shows. That's what I'm most drawn to. Right out of college my best friend from film school and my wife and I sold a screenplay [*Moxie*] to Steven Spielberg. It was a musical. But *Kony 2012* is a calling for my life and I feel blessed and honoured to be a part of this.

The mission has always been to stop Kony.



CHASING KONY

On March 5, Invisible Children released a documentary to "Make Kony Famous," referring to the Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony (left), who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. The video has had more than 80 million views on YouTube alone. "Our intention is to bring Kony to justice," said Jason Russell.

"At the age of 21, I was inspired by a journalist named Dan Eldon. He was in 40 countries in 22 years of life, documenting things that were powerful that were saving people's lives. At 23, I made a promise to myself that after film

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SPLASH NEWS (4); PICTURE MEDIA; INVISIBLE CHILDREN; WIREIMAGE; INVISIBLE CHILDREN



'YOU'RE
THE DEVIL'

During his naked, public display on March 15, Russell strutted back and forth on a San Diego street, clapping, cursing, slapping the sidewalk and yelling, "You're the Devil." Of the criticism he received over *Kony 2012*, he told *Time*, "People are calling me the devil."

R W N

very public meltdown

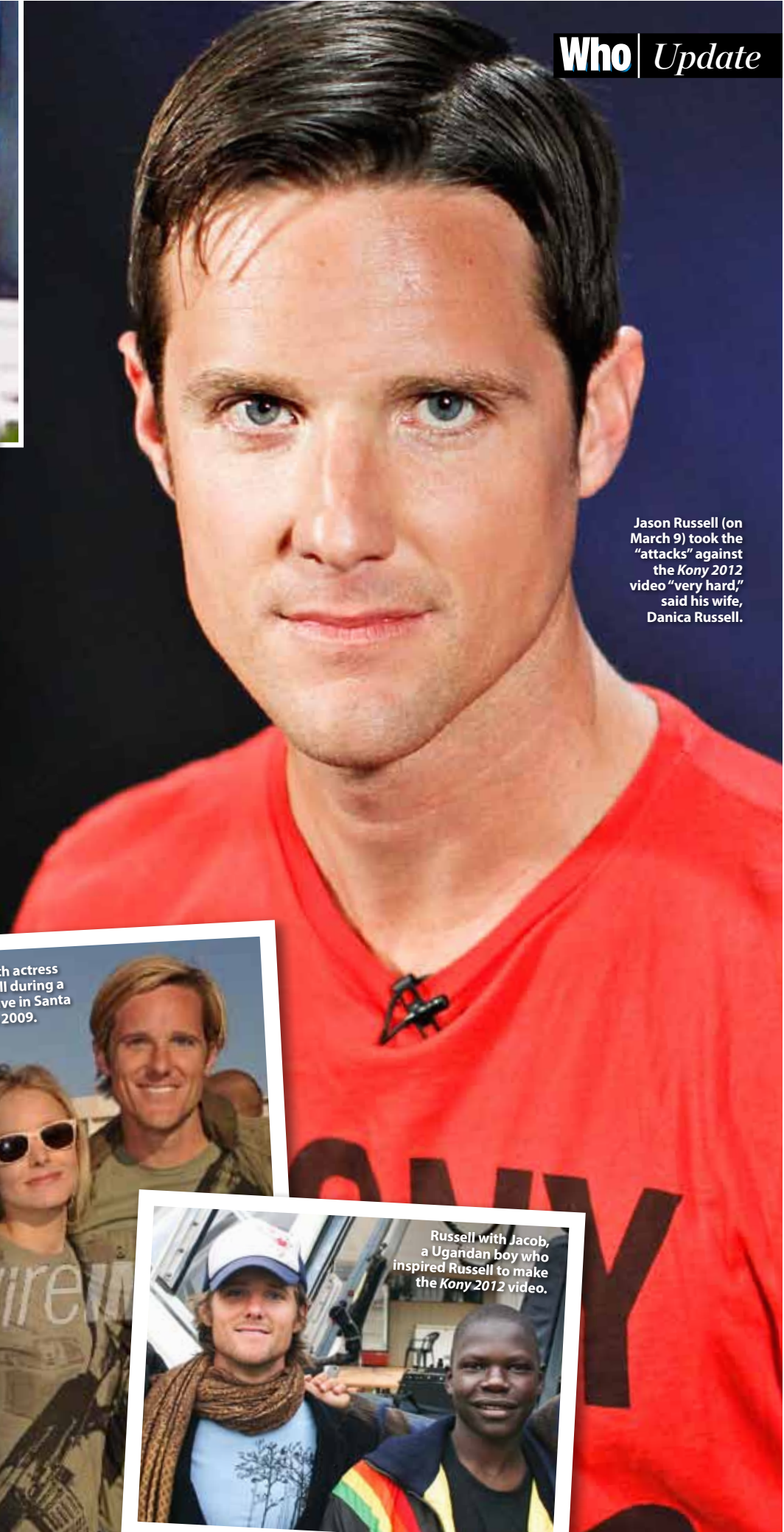
And to rehabilitate the children who have been affected. I'm not surprised by the criticism. As anything gets big people are going to want to poke at it. I don't want to be known or be a celebrity and I don't want to profit off this at all. My son Gavin [who appears in *Kony 2012*] knows he's in a movie, [but] we're doing all that we can to make sure that it doesn't become silly.

I just heard that Justin Timberlake is trying to get hold of me because they want to get the whole of MySpace's 50 million users committed to *Kony 2012*. Rihanna is on board and so is Jay-Z. The biggest donation we've had was from Oprah Winfrey. She gave us \$2 million.

Last I heard the video was over 50 million [views]. We don't know when it will end. Is it 100 million? 200 million views? I think it would be beautiful if we were up there in the top 5 or top 10 [YouTube] videos.

I live in a dream world. My job is to dream what humanity is possibly capable of doing. It's just full-time. I've never calculated the hours. It is my life and my job—they're intertwined. It's never not on my mind. Ever."

■ Reported by Johnny Dodd



Jason Russell (on March 9) took the "attacks" against the *Kony 2012* video "very hard," said his wife, Danica Russell.

Russell with actress Kristen Bell during a charity drive in Santa Monica in 2009.



Russell with Jacob, a Ugandan boy who inspired Russell to make the *Kony 2012* video.

