

Acting Up

Actress Séainín Brennan is determined, committed and hugely talented as Margaret Connolly finds out when she recently caught up with her in Belfast.

I have met Séainín on a few occasions in the past but I've never had a chance to interview her and really get the measure of who she is as a person. I know her work as an actress of course. Séainín is currently "Woman of the Year in the Arts" for her breakthrough performance in the BBC primetime drama "Hidden". She is also the creator and organiser of the highly successful star-studded White Sapphire Ball which raised £72,000 for NI Children's Hospice back in 2009 but this is the first time I've got the chance to sit down face-to-face with her for a chat.

For someone who has appeared on stage and screen alongside some of the best known names in British acting circles, Séainín possesses no airs or graces, and as we settled down with our skinny cappuccinos, she is open and approachable. Yet there is a strong and hugely determined side to Séainín's personality.

One of Séainín's most recent projects is the hugely anticipated primetime drama, "The Fall", which is based, and was filmed, in Belfast. It has been hitting the headlines over the last lot of months thanks to the casting of US actress Gillian Anderson, most notable perhaps for her role in the "X-Files", and of course, the of a wealth of Northern Irish acting talent, including Séainín who will be starring alongside her.

Not to give too much away, but "The Fall" follows the story lines of serial killer Paul Spector played by Jamie Dornan, who hails from Hollywood Co. Down, and the policewoman brought in to track him, Gibson, who is played by Gillian Anderson.

"I heard that "The Fall" was casting and that Allan Cubitt had written the scripts. I knew that this was going to be a fantastic project and I wanted to be part of it. I immediately phoned my agent, Lorraine Brennan, who I have a great relationship with. I told her that I wanted the role of Liz Tyler. Lorraine informed me that she had put me forward for consideration but the feedback was that I was too young for the part of Liz. In my head I was thinking - Liz doesn't really exist yet! Why does she have to be a certain age? Why am I too young? I had just been cast as Frances in the BBC primetime drama, "Hidden" and she was originally Polish and called Ivanka, but was rewritten as English and renamed to accommodate me, so if you're the one they want nothing is impossible," explains Séainín.

"So Lorraine, being the great agent that she is, pushed for an audition regardless and I got one. The auditions for "The Fall" were some of the most emotionally charged and toughest I have ever had to do. You have to trust that you are fully prepared and believe in yourself at all times. I knew I had given it my all. In the end, if they wanted somebody older or someone taller then there's nothing I could have done about that. I knew I had given a great performance. That's all I can do as an actor."

Séainín did secure the role of Liz Tyler.

"Liz is a highly charged emotive character. Her journey will take the audience on an emotional roller coaster. "The Fall" will appeal to all lovers of quality drama. I won't give away anymore than that. You'll just have to watch for yourself when it airs!"

"I only ever go for parts that I truly want. Primarily, I look for a great script. I need to be drawn to the character. I need to know that I will learn something from working with the creative team involved in the production. You need to be surrounded by great actors, directors and writers to learn and to evolve as an actor."

Séainín has received rave reviews for her theatre work, which have brought her to some of the most respected theatres including the Lyric in Belfast, the Gate Theatre in Dublin ("Death of a Salesman") and the Bristol Old Vic.

"When I got offered the role of Regina in "Ghosts" I was over the moon. Not only was I on stage in the Bristol Old Vic, a theatre where I'd always dreamt of performing, but it was an Ibsen play, the world premiere of Frank McGuinness' new translation, and I was playing opposite British acting royalty, Sian Thomas (Mrs Alving) and Simon Shepherd (Pastor Manders). I learnt so much from Sian and she was one of the most amazing influences on me because she is so secure in her own talent."

"It's not easy to turn work down, believe you me. It's a fact that for every ten acting jobs, only two are for females and if you earn over 15,000 dollars, yes dollars, in a year you're earnings are in the top ten percent of actors worldwide. Fortunately, I front a lot of high profile voiceover campaigns and I secured two large commercial campaigns last year. This is bread and butter work for actors, even the A-listers put their voices and faces to



advertising campaigns nowadays, in these current credit-crunching times you have to be adaptable as an actor!"

While Séainín can be seen sashaying down the red carpet looking every inch the Hollywood glamazon, it's the less glamorous roles that really interest her. "I love playing real women, with real lives. You want characters with meat on their bones, for me Charlize Theron's character in "Monster" is the ideal role. I love playing women with conviction, whether I share their views is unimportant. On stage, I would really love to play Elizabeth Bennett in "Pride and Prejudice", she reminds me a bit of myself and this is one of my all time favourite books."

Currently hoping to pencil in some much needed time off, Seainin leaves to pack for a flight to London for a couple of important meetings. So, whatever lies ahead for her in 2013, you can guarantee Séainín will only be taking the jobs that truly excite her and allow her to keep learning from the best in the business.

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