Film Close-Up: Heather Graham

by Joey_Berlin

Heather Graham was a fixture on magazine covers a couple of years ago, when show business insiders were proclaiming her to be Hollywood's newest "It Girl."

In 1999, the nation's theater owners named Graham their "Female Star of Tomorrow", in light of her featured roles that year in "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me" and "Bowfinger." Even in the midst of the hoopla, Graham was aware that the Hollywood spotlight can burn out fast.

HEATHER GRAHAM - In 'Gray Matters,' Heather Graham is an advertising executive who doesnâ€™t realize that she is gay until she falls for her brother's fiancee. CNS Photo courtesy of Yari Film Group. Sure enough, her next several films did not ignite the box office. Although it has been six years since her last starring role in a major Hollywood movie ("From Hell" with Johnny Depp), Graham has been working steadily and happily, appearing on television and in smaller films such as her new comedy, "Gray Matters." In this offbeat romance, 37-year-old Graham demonstrates how to do one of the hardest things on screen - be funny and sexy at the same time.

She stars in "Gray Matters" as Gray, a woman who lives with her brother in a cool New York apartment. Her character is an advertising executive, very smart and beautiful. Yet she does not realize that she is gay until she falls for her brother's fiancee, an attractive woman played by Bridget Moynahan.

Q: You and Bridget Moynahan have a brief kissing scene, but maybe your bravest scene in "Gray Matters" is when you get up onstage in Las Vegas and sing "I Will Survive" with Gloria Gaynor.

A: I loved it. I'm a huge ham. I was watching the film with a friend and the Gloria Gaynor scene came up, and I just said, "I love this so much." Singing that song with Gloria, I'm milking it big time. I was worried if I was hurting Gloria's ears.

Q: Back to that kissing scene, would you ever kiss and tell? How was it kissing another woman?

A: It's softer. More gentle. No beard burn.

Q: "Gray Matters" is a "coming out" story, which most films so far have shown from a man's perspective. The female angle is refreshingly different.

A: I loved it! I can relate to it even though I've never done the exact same thing. It's about someone saying that this is who I am, and learning to love themselves. It's a great message. It's something I strive to do. I think it's a very sweet and innocent film. It's not very shocking. It's a romantic comedy that's told in a traditional way and that makes it seem less sensational. And I think that's a good thing. She's gay, she accepts it and she moves on. It's healthy that it's not a big deal and that it's not a big tragedy or a controversy.

Q: You have been candid in the past about how your parents apparently disapproved of your career, which caused a rift. Did your own experience help you understand this character better?

A: I could relate to her struggling with feelings of people judging her. And that's not necessarily from my own family, but about my being an actress and other things in my own life. You have to center yourself and say, "It's OK." To be honest, this is something that everybody could relate to, regardless. It's hard to learn about who you are.

Q: The script calls for the actors to imitate the snappy dialogue rhythms of classic Hollywood films. How tough was that to master?

A: I talk really fast anyway. Everyone's always telling me to just slow it down. But Sue (Kramer, the director) just let me talk like I talk. And Tom Cavanagh is the fastest talker ever. You couldn't even understand us.

Q: Are you a classic film buff?

A: Love them. Certain ones, anyway, like "Woman of the Year," "Adam's Rib," "Roman Holiday." "It Happened One Night" was really great!

Q: How about new movies? Do you see a lot of them?

A: I wait until friends recommend something because so many movies are so formulaic. I don't want to sit through a movie that's just a formula. So I don't go that much.

Q: Did you like filming in New York?

A: I was raised in L.A., but I've been living in New York for five years. It's exciting to go home to your apartment at night instead of to some hotel. And New York is exciting. It's exciting just to be filming in the streets.

Q: You filmed several scenes when the cast and crew were just out and about in Manhattan, right?

A: Yeah, that was really crazy. We were filming at the Farmer's Market in Union Square, and they were having some problems because people kept looking in the camera. We weren't a huge budget film, so some of the people were really just people who were walking down the street. And they'd stare at the camera.

Q: Celebrities often say they like New York because people there leave you alone. Is that your experience?

A: Well, I think New York is kind of chaotic. There's a lot of energy, for sure. And New Yorkers aren't really impressed with anybody.

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