Film Close-Up: Christina Ricci

by Joey_Berlin

Christina Ricci is just 27, and she has already been a celebrity for more than half her life. She first found fame as a little girl in two hits, "Mermaids" and "The Addams Family," before blossoming into a remarkably versatile young actress with mature performances in such films as "The Ice Storm," "The Opposite of Sex" and "Buffalo 66." Ricci was also fabulous in "Monster," the film for which Charlize Theron glammed-down and won the Academy Award. Now, it is Ricci's turn to get a little nasty.

CHRISTINA RICCI - Christina Ricci plays a wild young woman who looks everywhere for love, not quite finding it, in the movie 'Black Snake Moan.' CNS Photo courtesy of Bruce Talamon.

In "Black Snake Moan," a deep-fried Southern gothic melodrama, Ricci stars as a used-and-abused town tramp in backwoods Tennessee. A spiritual blues-man played by Sam Jackson rescues her after a violent night, and decides to cure her wicked ways - by wrapping one end of a thick chain around her naked waist, just above her panties. The other end he secures to an old, rusty radiator. The image is certainly provocative. But Ricci, who is a longtime supporter of anti-sexual assault organizations such as The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, is pleased with how the film addresses issues of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Q: You insisted on using the real, heavy chain instead of a more comfortable fake one. What made you decide to go that far to play the role of Rae?

A: I think there are millions of women like Rae out there. And the link between childhood sexual abuse and promiscuity in women and low self-worth and post-traumatic stress, that link has been well-established. So when I started doing my research about survivors of childhood sexual abuse and reading testimonials and statistics and really understanding what she would be suffering from, and the pain and fears and anxieties that were really her motivating emotions, I just felt so much compassion for her. I felt just really compelled to kind of protect her, by playing her. It was uncomfortable to get into character because it's somebody who expresses themselves and views the world in a polar opposite way than I do.

Q: You were almost naked on set much of the time. Do you think the rest of the cast and crew ever get used to that?

A: Well, they had to. It was really necessary for the crew to be used to it because I was playing someone who has no sense of her body, and places no value on her body. Her body has never done anything but cause harm. And she has no regard for herself so she wouldn't care if she were clothed or not. I needed to lose any sort of self-consciousness, because I feel like sometimes you can see self-consciousness in a performance when somebody is almost naked in a scene, and I really needed for that not to be there.

Q: Was it easy to find the level of trust which you and Sam Jackson had to have for each other, or did it take some time?

A: No. I mean, it was pretty immediate. Once we were doing rehearsals, he and I realized that we were going to work really well together and we could really trust each other. I was so flattered by that because I've loved him for so long and I was kind of intimidated, and felt like, "God, I hope he likes me. And I hope he thinks I'm a good actress." So when I realized that he trusted me and that he respected me, and of course I already trusted and respected him, it was amazing. To be able to rely on each other like that and be really vulnerable with the other person, it was such a great feeling.

Q: How did you like working with Justin Timberlake, who plays your boyfriend? What did you think of his acting?

A: I thought he was great. And Justin is so much fun to be around. He's really silly and goofy and, you know, we had a great time on set. And I was really impressed with his acting. He was great, he really connected with the other actors in the scenes and he could do a lot of things that took me years to learn how to do.

Q: After the filming was finished, was it hard to get back out of character?

A: It was harder to get into character. Coming out of a character, I think that's something that just slowly happens the more you start to look like yourself again, the more you're in your own home again. And it was kind of funny because, you know, I'm a prude and I do not like walking around naked. I was in my bathroom about two months after the movie finished and I was brushing my teeth and I was in my underwear. I looked down and it was just like, "Oh, I've got to put something on." And then I just stopped and thought, "Oh my God. I was half-naked for two months and my butt was on camera!" And so I called my sister and I was like, "Oh my God, I can't believe what I did. Is it OK? I'm freaking out!" And she's like, "No, no. It's OK. You were playing a part."

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