

venice

LOS ANGELES' ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

FEATURES



FULL CIRCLE & RISING The Upward Trajectory of Mireille Enos

BY JON STEELY, PHOTOGRAPHY RICHARD KNAPP
February 2010

For someone whose plate is so full, Mireille Enos appears firmly grounded and composed as she good-naturedly discusses a career that took off in the New York theater, landed on a hit HBO series, and recently has come full circle back to the stage. “I feel so spoiled,” says the refreshingly natural, auburn-haired beauty, glowing as only the focused artist can glow, “to be working on the projects I am working on and with the people I am working with. How could my life be better?”

Following the artistic trail blazed by her older siblings (actors Jongiorgi and Veronique Enos), the Houston native attended a Texas-based High School for the Performing and Visual Arts before moving to Provo, Utah to study at Brigham Young University. Not quite fitting in, she (“with a oneway ticket and only one bag of clothes”) left for New York City, where a decade of stage acting led to a Tony Award nomination for her performance as Honey in a 2005 Broadway production of “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” Impressive TV credits started to mount, including varied appearances on hit shows “Crossing Jordan”, “Numb3rs”, “CSI Miami” and “Law & Order: Criminal Intent.” And then, following an audition for a completely different character (“the role of an anti-polygamist social worker”), Executive Producers Mark Olsen and Will Scheffer cast her in what ultimately became two roles, playing twin sisters Kathy and Jodeen Marquart on HBO’s Golden Globe and Emmynominated drama “Big Love,” which follows the complicated web of life spun around a practicing polygamist (played by Bill Paxton) and his three wives (Jeanne Tripplehorn, Chloe Sevigny, and Ginnifer Goodwin).

With “Big Love” now in its fourth critically acclaimed season, where other actresses attached to such a series might be spending their free time on Robertson Boulevard, Mireille Enos has decided to delve into her craft even deeper by returning to the stage to portray the frustrated daughter of a renowned feminist author (played by Annette Bening) in Joanna Murray-Smith’s farcical play “The Female of the Species” (loosely based on the true story of feminist icon Germaine Greer being held captive in her home by a gun-toting student seeking revenge).

Venice Magazine caught up with this luminous and unspoiled artist (who also holds a black belt in tae kwon do) in a cozy Los Feliz café to discuss the art of acting, the death of a twin, the avoidance of bad advice and, eventually, Warren Beatty.

Venice: Who made you want to act and what artists inspire you to keep being creative?

Mireille Enos: I’ve always looked up to powerful women like Annette (Bening), Susan Sarandon, Meryl Streep, Cate Blanchett, Kate Winslet. Probably the same names that every actress admires. I like anyone who respects their craft and approaches it with dignity. And those who can successfully find a balance between doing dignified work and having a family. Being able to do that is genius.

On “Big Love” you were playing two characters, twin sisters, and then one of them was killed off. Do you find playing only one character a relief or do you miss the challenge of dual roles?

Oh, I really miss the challenge. And I had no advance warning that the writers were going to kill off Kathy. I was at home just reading the script and came to the line “her neck fatally snaps back.” And I just stomped around the house freaking out! The writers actually created the character of Jodeen (Kathy’s twin sister) so I could remain on the cast. I do miss playing Kathy, but by being kept on to play Jodeen, I got to do an awesome death scene! I got to act out the tragedy of being killed and I still get to keep working on the show. I got killed off, but not really.

Jodeen is nothing like you. What process did you use to play her in a believable way?

I was told that Jodeen would be on the defense stand during a trial. So, I started doing research on the Warren Jeffs trial and found a picture of one of the actual defense witnesses. Instead of her looking angry and full of rage like I imagined, she just looked sad and depleted. The image was so arresting and powerful to me that I began to build the character from it. I took the picture to the writers and the hair and makeup artists and said, “This is Jodeen.” Also, accessing some of my own private sadness and darkness helped me to connect with her. I like to play dark girls. In my actual life, I have no interest in going to those places, but they are fun to explore in a safe, creative environment where there are no real consequences.

If someone asked you for a five-minute acting lesson, what would you try to teach them?

That ultimately you are more interesting than anything you can try to conceive. So, do not be afraid to bring your own complexities and impulses to your work. And always be aware that the other person you are working with is also complex and interesting, so be interested in them, too. And be brave. Be brave enough to publicly be who you are in private. You cannot be an actor and not be brave.

What's the worst piece of advice you've ever been given?

The summer before I moved to New York City, I was in Houston trying to decide what I was going to do with my life. I knew I wanted to act, but wasn't sure which direction to take. A high school friend suggested that I take a meeting with her manager.

A high school friend's manager in Houston?

Yes. A lunch meeting. So, over lunch, this woman said to me, "Listen, forget about art. This is a business. If you want to do art, I'll get you a soapbox to keep under your bed and you can stand on it to do monologues...and nobody will ever be able to pronounce your name, so you should change it to Mauve."

Mauve?

[Laughs] Yes. Mauve!

Let's talk about the very funny "The Female of the Species." Your character walks in on a situation where her mom is being held captive and, instead of coming to her mom's rescue, she sides with the captor! What attracted you to this role?

I love the play. The playwright (Joanna Murray-Smith) is so wonderful and I was amazed by the way she was able to find such a delicate balance between serious issues and farce. As for Tess (Enos' character), I love her range! She is not a character who starts off subtly and then builds. She just launches right in. It's fun to start out being frazzled and indignant and then get to turn into a sex kitten along the way. What could be more of a fun journey than that? I also get to really sink my teeth into an argument with Annette Bening.

Okay, I have to ask: Has Warren Beatty ever been to one of your play rehearsals?

No. But I'm sure he will be coming to one of the performances. I don't think I've ever heard Annette say his name. I've only heard her call him "my husband," which I love. If you're famous and you're married to someone famous, is it considered "name dropping" to say their name? ▼

"Big Love" airs on Sundays at 9PM on HBO. "The Female of the Species" plays February 2-March 14 at The Geffen Playhouse. For tickets call the box office, 310-208-5454.