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Lesley Ann Warren
BROADWAY AND FILM LEGEND



Lesley Ann Warren

Actor, Lesley Ann Warren started her career as a child ballerina. She had no idea that her love for dancing would lead her to Broadway and later in film and television.

With more than 120 television, film, stage and web appearances, Warren is best known for her roles in Walt Disney's original "Cinderella" (Director Charles S. Dubin and writers Joseph Schrank and Charles Perrault), "Mission: Impossible" (Creator Bruce Geller), "Harold Robbin's 79 Park Avenue" (Writer/director Paul Wendkos and writers Richard De Roy, Jack Guss and Lionel E. Siegel), "Victor Victoria" (Writer/director Blake Edwards and writers Hans Hoemburg and Reinhold Schünzel), "Choose Me" (Writer/director Alan Rudolph), "The Limey" (Director Steven Soderbergh and writer Lem Dobbs), "10th and Wolf" (Writer/director Robert Moresco and writer Allan Steele), "Desperate Housewives" (Creator Marc Cherry), and "In Plain Sight" (Creator David Maples).



Sir Patrick Stewart and Lesley Ann Warren in 'Blunt Talk'

"It wasn't that I wanted to simply be an actor; I wanted to do musicals and have roles in those productions."

Her more recent roles include "Jobs" (Director Joshua Michae Stern and writer Matt Whiteley) and "It Snows All the Time" (Writer/director Jay Giannone and writers Eric Watson and Eric Hover), as well as two hysterical shorts on Will Ferrell's Funny or Die, "Forehead Tittaes" (Director Jake Szymanski and writer Seth Morris) and "Every Conversation With Your Mother" (Writer/director Jason Headley).



Funny or Die "Every Conversation You Have Had With Your Mother"

Didn't you begin your career in ballet?

"Yes, I started as a ballet dancer in New York, where I grew up. I did ballet from about 6 to 15. But at 14, I was friends with many of the young girls who were in "Bye, Bye Birdie" on Broadway. I used to go with them and hang out backstage. I became really enthralled with musical theater.

"So, I went to an open audition for the national company of "Bye, Bye Birdie." I actually got the role, but my parents wouldn't let me take it because they wanted me to finish high school. Of course I thought my career was over [Laughs], but it wasn't. I started taking acting classes for young people and started singing. I also started studying jazz dancing along with ballet and I began that exploration into acting.

"I went to Music and Art high school for two years and then moved on to the Professional Children's School (pcs-nyc.org) my last year in high school. It was a very academic high school in New York that also allows you to take out-side classes and audition, so I started auditioning. I auditioned over a 6-month period for my first Broadway show, "110 in the Shade." I got it. That changed the course of my life and ignited my career."



Lesley Ann Warren with Erich Hover on the set of "It Snows All the Time"



Lesley Ann Warren and Stuart Damon in "Cinderella"

“My audition was really awful. I was just terrible. They told my manager, “She’s just not ready.”

So, clearly you knew early you wanted to act.

“I didn’t really know until I started exploring musical theater. It wasn’t that I wanted to simply be an actor; I wanted to do musicals and have roles in those productions. That is when I started acting and left ballet behind.

“Ballet is a very singular, focused art form. As a ballet dancer, you really can’t be doing many other things. I became much more in love with not only being able to express myself through my dancing, but also through my words and emotions.”

Isn’t it also true that ballet dancers have a shelf life as well?

“Oh, for sure, they have a shelf life, absolutely. A ballet dancer is really lucky if she can be dancing at 40. Honestly though, that is not why I switched. I switched because I fell in love with expressing myself through my emotional life as well as my physical life as a dancer.”

How do you think your ballet training has impacted your current career?

“My ballet training, which was intense, has everything to do with my discipline... my perseverance... my attention to detail, and my ability as an actress to utilize my body in roles that some actors who may not ever had physical training may less comfortable with.”

Would you mind telling us about your role in Richard Rodgers’ “Cinderella?”

“I loved “Cinderella,” and I love that it was such a huge part of my life.

“I was doing “110 in the Shade” on Broadway, and my manager at the time, arranged for me to audition for “Cinderella.” There were probably more than 100 young girls auditioning. I was so scared and so intimidated by auditioning for Richard Rodgers (“Carousel,” “The King and I”), Eugene Loring, who is a very famous choreographer in the ballet world, and Johnny Green, who is a wonderful musical conductor.



Lesley Ann Warren and John Davidson in "The Happiest Millionaire"

“My audition was really awful. I was just terrible. They told my manager, “She’s just not ready.” However, the director Charles Dubin (“M*A*S*H,” “Matlock”) had seen me on Broadway. I had won the award for Most Promising Newcomer on Broadway at 17. He said, “You’ve got to see her again.” So, they called me back and this time the audition was at Richard Rodgers apartment on Park Avenue. They were all there, but Richard Rodgers shooed them out of the room and he invited me to sit on the piano bench next to him and played “My Funny Valentine.” He had me sing it word for word the way that he wanted to hear it, so I did and got the role as “Cinderella.” It was an amazing experi-

ence to have won that coveted role, but to also have that experience with Richard Rodgers. It was life altering."



Lesley Ann Warren and Scooter Teague in "110 In The Shade"

At the time that "Cinderella" was released, it became a yearly tradition for most American families to huddle around the TV.

"I can't tell you how many people have told me that, like Rob Marshall ("Chicago," "Into the Woods"), who is a brilliant filmmaker. He told me that he and his sister, Kathleen Marshall ("Grease," "Living on Love"), who is also a Broadway choreographer, used to do the very same thing. They would sit in front of the television every year. He said that was one of the most influential reasons that he chose to go into musical theater.

"Lee Daniel's, the director of "Precious," told me the same thing. In his home, which was a difficult home, he and his siblings would watch. That was their one moment of solace in a home that was very challenging. He told me that he would sing "impossible" and it would give him hope again. So, to have been a part of something that has become part of people's history is one of the most rewarding parts of my life."

People often take experiences like "Cinderella" for granted these days, but back in the day, it was new and innovative and something audiences hadn't seen before. It was huge.

"Yes, like the "Wizard of Oz," it became a classic, once a year, family gathering that was transforming for them. To be a part of that is just mind-blowing."

Your next big role was "Dr. Kildare," correct?

"Yes, I did "Dr. Kildare," and I also did a television show called, "Run for Your Life," with Ben Gazzara ("The Big Lebowski," "The Thomas Crown Affair"). It was during that time that I screen tested for "The Happiest Millionaire." They brought me out to Hollywood and put me up at the Bever-

ly Hills Hotel. I was 18 years old and didn't drive. I had two weeks of costume fittings, makeup, hair and rehearsing. "In those days, they did screen tests in the really old-fashioned studio system screen test way. I tested, got the role, and they put me under contract at Disney. At that time, Walt Disney was alive and this was his last film. After the "Happiest Millionaire," I made a second film for him, but he had already passed. Big musicals... big starring roles; it was incredible."

"I love "Cinderella," and I love that it was such a huge part of my life."

Did you ever meet Walt Disney?

"Oh yes. I got to spend time with him. He was on set all the time. I had dinner at his home and we shot at his ranch. He was always around. He was very much a part of everything that went on at the studio. On any given day, he knew what was being served in the commissary, what the ani-



John Davidson, Lesley Ann Warren and Walt Disney



Lesley Ann Warren in a publicity still for "Harold Robbin's 79 Park Avenue"

mators were doing, to what color bow was in my hair. He was completely hands on in every department and aspect of his studio. He was a genius."

One of the great shows you were in on television was "Mission: Impossible." Why did you leave the show after only one season?

"I had an amazing time, but I wanted to explore roles in television, film or stage, which allowed me to do more as an actress. Although, they gave me a lot of emotional and intense stuff to do on "Mission: Impossible," I had a strong yearning for more. The show was really about the intricacies of the plot and the machinations of the characters resolving each story. I really wanted to do more character driven projects, so I asked to be let out of my contract.



Bruce Willis and Lesley Ann Warren in "Color of Night"

"The next film I did was "Harry and Walter Go to New York," which was a great period movie with Jimmy Caan ("The Godfather," "Misery"), Elliott Gould ("Ray Donovan," "Ocean's Thirteen"), Diane Keaton ("Annie Hall," "The Young Pope"), and Michael Caine ("The Last Witch Hunter," "The Dark Knight"). It was a great experience."



Lesley Ann Warren and Elliot Gould in "Drat the Cat"

"It did blow my mind and then to win the Golden Globe for Best Actress that year was a shock."

You have always been very clear about what you wanted, even early in your career.

"When I was very young, I had an intuition about what types of projects I was attracted to; what spoke to me. I was very clear about what I didn't want to do. There was a period of time in my 20's that I lost that voice inside.

"I was married and had a little baby and my husband was very... controlling. He had a vision for me that didn't really match my own vision for myself. I was very young and un-der the influence of this man. It wasn't until I left that marriage, that I was able to start reclaiming my own voice. It's not that I haven't made mistakes, and choices that I look back and think, "Oh dear, why did I do that?," I have. But once I reclaimed my voice, I also reclaimed my own knowing what felt right for me.

"Even though it is always hard to turn down work, my philosophy is that I have to be true to my own self and my own sensibilities, my own taste and my own creative chal-



Lesley Ann Warren and Kermit the Frog

was ridiculous, but the film actually dealt with some important stuff. I was proud of it."

One of the great films you did was "Victor Victoria." Did you know when you accepted the role that the film would be, at the very least, controversial? Nothing like this had ever been available to audiences before.

"The truth is, I didn't know. I was told by my agent that I had a meeting with Blake Edwards ("The Pink Panther," "Switch"). I was out and about living my normal life; my hair was in braids and I was wearing a jumpsuit. They said he was leaving for London and I had to go, so I showed up and we talked for about 20 minutes. We just talked and laughed. At the end of these 20 minutes, he said, "Would you like to do this movie?" I had not read the script, but because it was Blake Edwards, and I had seen "Breakfast at Tiffany's" 11 times [Laughs], and "Days of Wine and Roses, and "Pink Panther," I said, "Yes, I will do anything you would like me to do."



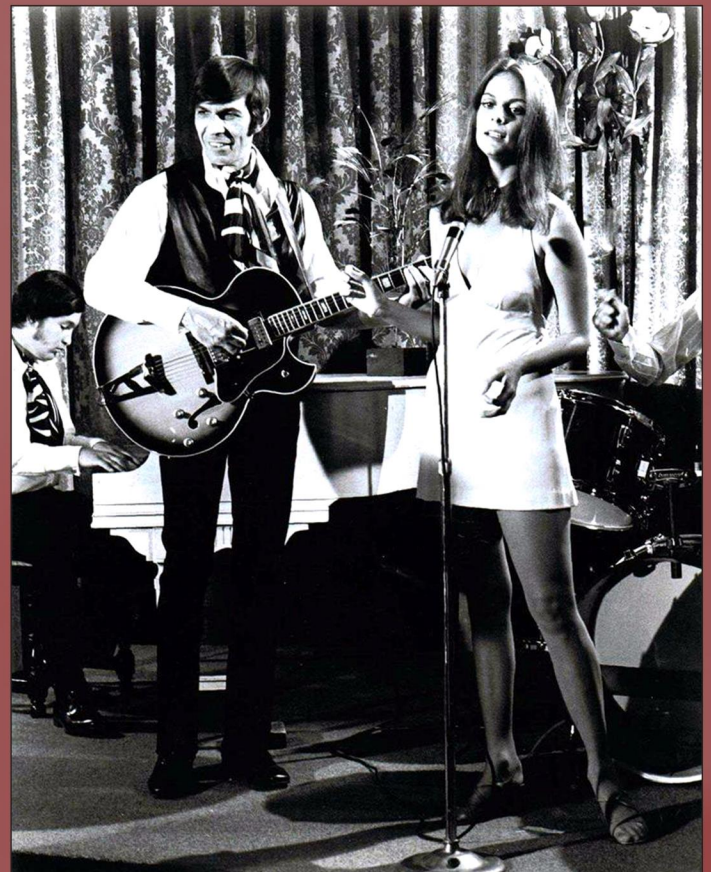
Lesley Ann Warren in a scene from "Color in the Night"

"I went home and the character wasn't blonde, she didn't have an accent, there was no musical number, but I was so excited to be working with him that I came up with the ideas for her in my home. I called his producer and I asked

if I could make a few changes, so he ran it by Blake and he said yes. After that they sent their hair and make-up people from England and they came to my house where we created this character.

"When I saw what Blake was doing in terms of gender identification, and people's perceptions of others, and everything he was tackling, I realized it was revolutionary."

"Being born and bred in New York, the dance and theater world that I came from, none of this seemed irreverent to me personally, because I had been around it my whole life. When I saw what Blake was doing in terms of gender identification, and people's perceptions of others, and everything he was tackling, I realized it was revolutionary. It



Leonard Nimoy and Lesley Ann Warren in Mission: Impossible



Lesley Ann Warren and Peter Graves in *Mission: Impossible*

was an important film as well as being incredibly entertaining. It was a timeless film.

"I thought the dance number that Blake did, where the men have the masks on depicting them as women, and they keep turning around and they are men, it was absolute genius."

What about the film "Songwriter" with Willie Nelson? What is he like?

"He is an absolute doll. I did two films with him. I did "Songwriter" (Director Alan Rudolph and writer Bud Shrake) and "Baja Oklahoma" (Writer/director Bobby Roth and writer Dan Jenkins) which was an HBO movie. I just absolutely love him. He is charming. He is funny. He is wise. He is generous. His character mentored me in the film "Songwriter." All the feelings that are on my face, when I am around him in the movie, are the truth about how I felt about him. I just had a big'ol crush on him. I just adore him."

We noticed that in many of your films, "Victor Victoria," "Clue," "Baja Oklahoma," you also did the soundtracks. Tell us about your love for singing on film.

"I love musicals. I love music and dance. That is how I grew up. I grew up on Broadway. I grew up with the movie musicals of Disney and all the musicals that came before them.



Lesley Ann Warren in a scene from "10th and Wolf"

I just love them. Anytime I get a chance to sing or dance in a movie, I jump at it. It is a first true love of mine."

"My mother, Margot (Warren), was a very famous singer in New York. Her stage name was Carol Dexter. I have a picture of my mother from the Copacabana in New York, where she performed and the awning says, "Manhattan's Newest Dream Girl."



Lesley Ann Warren and Peter Graves in *Mission: Impossible*

"... I have played country western girls, and it's easy for me. I'm not sure why, because I am a New York girl ..."

A member of our team has begged us to ask you about "Pure Country."

"It's so funny, but I am getting on a plane in a few days to do a film festival in Waxahachie, Texas. They are honoring "Pure Country" at their film festival. They invited me to come down and participate."



Lesley Ann Warren and Meghan Mullally in "Will and Grace"

Did you ride horses during the shoot in Texas?

"No, but I rode horses when I was young. I rode in Central Park, so I was familiar. It was English, though, and not western.

"It's funny, but I have done 3 or 4 projects that have been shot in Texas. I have played country western girls, and it's easy for me. I'm not sure why, because I am a New York girl, so it is very strange that I find myself so comfortable with it, but I do [Laughs].

"George Strait was just a doll; an absolute utter doll. Filming was fun because Kyle Chandler ("Friday Night Lights," "Bloodline") played my boyfriend in the film and the guy who is trying to usurp George Strait's career. Kyle was so great and he has gone on to do such fantastic projects. So it was a great cast and a really fun experience to be in George Strait's world."

Tell us what it was like to work with director Robert Moresco on the film "10th and Wolf."

"Bobby is one of my favorite directors to work with, and I have worked with some really brilliant directors. He is brilliant. He understands, from an incredibly empathetic place, what the actor needs, how to help you, and how to create an environment that allows you to fly. He is such a wonderful writer, but he is also an incredibly empathetic human being. Working with him was an absolute joyful, creative experience. I also loved working with Giovanni Ribisi ("Ted," "Saving Private Ryan"), whom most of my work was with. It was just one of the best acting experiences I have had.

"I was sad that "10th and Wolf" didn't get the kind of promotion it could have. We had a producer that was new to the game and she truly didn't know how to position it. Unfortunately, we got lost in the shuffle."

"I loved being on that set, just to watch Meghan Mullally and Sean Hayes. They are so hysterically funny."

We are going to jump forward to "Will and Grace" and "Desperate Housewives."

"Yes. "Will and Grace" was just an incredible joy. I loved being on that set, just to watch Meghan Mullally ("Children's Hospital," "Sofia the First") and Sean Hayes ("Bucket List," "Crowded"). They are so hysterically funny. They are comic geniuses, both of them. So to be around that was total joy. I loved my character.



Lesley Ann Warren in "Girlfriends Guide to Divorce"

"Before we started, they never told me what the character was going to be like. They just called me on the phone and said, "We want you to have a funny laugh." That is all they told me. So I created the character out of my complete imagination [Laughs]. Working with director James Burrows (Taxi, Frasier, Mike and Molly), was a joy as well. He is a comedy legend. He is phenomenal. To work with him was like getting anointed in television sitcoms, comedy land. It was a fantastic experience to work with him, as well as, obviously, the actors. I loved Meghan and Sean specifically.

"Desperate Housewives," on the other hand, was having such internal conflicts on that show when I came on, that it

made for a stressful set. You walk into that, you can feel it and it's hard."

"We went to the premiere with my agent, manager, and friends, and I am sitting there and the scene is just gone."



Lesley Ann Warren in a scene from "Jobs"

It's always interesting how people who are struggling with each other can do such amazing work.

"Absolutely. That is one of the things you learn is, just because people are having trouble on the set, doesn't mean it's not going to be a great production."



Mel Brooks and Lesley Ann Warren

Tell us about "In Plain Sight." You actually did that series for several years.

"Yes, I was on the show for 4 seasons. I loved it and I didn't want it to end, but Mary McCormick ("K-Pax," "Jekyll Island") had three little girls, and it was just too much for her to be travelling back and forth to Albuquerque, where we shot it. We had to wrap it. I loved the show, and I loved working with Mary. The whole experience was a great one. I also loved my character. I thought it was a really full, interesting character for television."

It is amazing how much work you have done in your career. We didn't put it all together until we were getting ready for this interview.

"It's crazy. I go through pictures and I think, "Oh my God," I did so much work [Laughs]. Sometimes I can't even believe it myself."

One of the roles you were really interested in was as "Clara Jobs" in the film, "Jobs."

"That role was a disappointment for me, because there was actually a really good emotional scene between "Clara" and Ashton Kutcher's ("The Ranch," "Two and a Half Men") character, "Steve Jobs." At the beginning of



Lesley Ann Warren singing in "Songwriter"



Lesley Ann Warren in "The Limey"

the movie, there is a scene where his parents find out he is on drugs and have this heart to heart with him. We are upset and very concerned as parents; worries about his future. Anyway, we shot it and later they were tested the movie. The feedback that they got from the test audience was that they did not believe Ashton as a 17 year old, so they cut that scene and started the film when he was in college. That scene was a major reason that I accepted the role to begin with [Laughs]. What was lost in the film

was not very much, and not very influential, but it was a disappointment for me."

It's always sad to see great scenes end up on the cutting room floor.

"It happens and is part of the world. I understand the reasons, but it didn't help me as an actress. I wished I had a stronger presence in the movie."



Lesley Ann Warren in "Choose Me"



Lesley Ann Warren in "Clue"

***"I think that
"110 in the Shade,"
my first Broadway
show, catapulted me
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have before."***

We hear stories where actors have big scenes and they find out the scenes are cut when they attend the premiere or watch it on television.

"That is exactly what happened. We went to the premiere with my agent, manager, and friends, and I am sitting there and the scene is just gone. I was mortified, but here is nothing you can do."

Do you feel that directors or producers should have an obligation to warn actors when their scenes end up on the cutting room floor?

"Most directors do. I did another movie called, "Going all the Way" (Director Mark Pellington and writer Dan Wakefield). It was Ben Affleck's ("Argo," "Gone Girl") first movie. It had Ben, Rachel Weisz ("The Mummy," "Oz the Great and Powerful"), Jeremy Davies ("Lost," "Texas Rising"), and Jill Clayburgh. It had a great cast. The director called



Lesley Ann Warren and Whoopi Goldberg in "Burglar"

me on the phone before the screening and said, "Look, I need to tell you that we had to cut such and such." It wasn't a big cut for me in the film, and I was disappointed, but not to the extent that "Jobs" was, because there was still plenty left that was really good and in that case, I was forewarned and that difference affected how I felt going into the screening."



Lesley Ann Warren in "Dream"

Tell us about your recent role in, "It Snows All the Time."

"That's a movie I did about a woman whose husband has early onset dementia and the effect of early onset Alzheimers has on the family. It was a true story and I got to spend quite a bit of time with the actual woman and man depicted in the film. It won an audience award for Best Film at the L.A. Art Film Festival and the Boston International

Film Festival for Best Director. It's a good film."

Can you tell us about working with writer/director Jay Giannone?

"I loved him. This is his second film. I found him to be passionate, intelligent and hardworking. I like working with him. He is also an actor and recently finished film with Mark Wahlberg ("Boardwalk Empire," "Daddy's Home") called, "Patriots Day." It was a great experience for me given the material and how much he is affecting so many people."

We would love to hear more about your stage work.

"I did a play called "Next Fall" at the Geffen Playhouse in L.A. about 2 ½ years ago. The play had been on Broad-

way, and it was a very powerful experience for me. The play got some stunning reviews. It was a hugely emotional role about a woman whose son is in a terrible car accident. She and her ex-husband and his friends are all convening at the hospital. In the second act, I had this very emotional and powerful monologue.

"Most of my theater as in the early years of my career, so prior to "Next Fall," I did another Broadway show called "Dream." It was a great experience, but we had some faulty producers who didn't pay the New York Times to continue our ad. We had standing ovations every night for four months and we could have gone considerably longer, but they dropped the ball and the show closed. Wayne Cilento (Wicked, Aida, Sweet Charity) directed and choreographed the play and I got to sing and dance my heart out."

Do you miss being on stage?

"I don't really miss it. I love it, and it's an honor whenever you get to do something in New York. However, it is a gigantic commitment. My home and my family are in L.A., so for me to uproot myself is a big, emotional commitment for me. I was asked to do "Chicago" on Broadway, and I thought long and hard about it, and I realized that I didn't want to recreate role that has been recreated so many



Margo and Lesley Ann Warren

times and my Mom was still alive at that time and I simply didn't want to leave her. I would love to do more theater, but it is not something that I feel deprived of doing when I am not doing it."

"I have been lucky enough to, all along the way, have magical moments in my career that have propelled it forward for me and allowed me to do pretty wondrous projects."



Mel Brooks and Lesley Ann Warren in "Life Stinks"

Of all your projects, which would you say really impacted your career?

"I think that "110 in the Shade," my first Broadway show, catapulted me into quite a bit of exposure that I didn't have before. Also, Cinderella" was an enormous turning point in my career, and the Disney movies brought me to the world of film in Hollywood. That was another enormous shift. Certainly, Harold Robbins' "79 Park Avenue," after winning the Golden Globe and not working for a few years after my divorce. And obviously Victor Victoria. And a movie called "Choose Me," which was a first of its kind independent film, where I won the People's Choice Award. The film was very regaled and on audience's top 10 lists for years. Also, Steven Sutterburg's "The Limey" is a film we didn't talk about, and "Clue" which has turned out to be a cult favorite. There are so many opportunities that I have had. Even "Will and Grace" and Desperate Housewives" reacquainted me with a younger audience comedically.

I have been lucky enough to, all along the way, have magical moments in my career that have propelled it forward for me and allowed me to do pretty wondrous projects."



Ken Barnett & Lesley Ann Warren in 'Next Fall' at the Geffen Playhouse

You have to talk about your role in "Blunt Talk" with Sir Patrick Stewart. The show is hysterical.

"Patrick Stewart ("X-men," "American Dad") is an absolute dream. He is a dream to work with. He is a dream as a person. He is funny, smart, sensitive and kind. I just love working with him. I play his long lost love. It was such a wonderful opportunity to have a romantic opportunity with Sir Patrick Stewart [Laughs]. It was just great.

"He is a great actor and I loved the crew, director, writer. It was a really wonderful experience all the way around.

"In our first scene, we were in a boat in the middle of Lake Hollywood surrounded by cameras. There was something I had never done before. There were navy seal type men who were positioned all around the boat in case anything happened. They had to go underwater while we were shooting [Laughs]. That was definitely a first for me. I had never experienced anything like that before.



Sir Patrick Stewart and Lesley Ann Warren in 'Blunt Talk' 2



Barry Bostwick, Lisa Edelstein and Lesley Ann Warren on the set of *Girlfriends Guide to Divorce*

"So here we were doing this very lovely, romantic scene and here are all these navy seals. We also had this big kiss at the end of one of the scenes. We did the scene many times, and on the last shot, a pullback crane shot, we had to keep kissing for this like ridiculously long time [Laughs]. It's so funny because you don't really know the person and you are kissing nonstop for like 20 minutes [Laughs]. He was a total gentleman."



Christopher Lloyd, Lesley Ann Warren, James Roday and Dule Hill in *Psych*

We found something on the internet we just have to ask you about. You just did "Every Conversation With Your Mother" on Funny or Die

"[Laughs] Yes. That was my second Funny or Die. My first one was called "Forehead Tiffaes" created by Marion Cottillard ("Inception," "The Dark Knight"). Both are ridiculously funny."

So what projects do you have coming up next?

"I will be making a film called "Cry/ing" in July that I think is just beautiful. The woman who is producing it was nominated for an Academy Award for directing a short film and her husband will be directing this one. It is a beautiful script, so I am very excited. I don't want to give the film away because it has a reveal in the middle of the film, but I will tell you it is a two-character piece."

"... women with strong voices are still referred to as aggressive, bitchy, the 'c' word, or a diva."

We also understand you will be doing a panel on "Women and Ageism in Hollywood" August 5th at The London in L.A., and we would like to know how you feel women's position in Hollywood has changed? Do you think it is improving?

"I think it is improving because there are more women willing to speak out. There are more women above the age of 50 that are powerful creative beings that have a voice and can make those voices heard. I think that the issue of women everywhere, but specifically in this case, Hollywood, getting the opportunity for influential positions is on everybody's mind and tongue. Is there still gender behavior issues? You bet. I recently read a great article that pointed out that women with strong voices are still referred to as aggressive, bitchy, the 'c' word, or a diva. If you have a strong opinion or a strong voice, you are still relegated to being perceived in those ways. If you are a woman and say something the same way any man would say it, you become pigeonholed in a particular way. It's not fair. It's not right. It's shaming and meant to keep women in a box. So, it's a continual fight. Sometimes it's worth it and sometimes it's not, but yes, I think it is improving, but it's not enough."

