

Fresh from the Archives: Get to "KNOWING" Rose Byrne

Written by Sam Zimmerman
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Rose Byrne has already been in two hit films this year—James Wan and Leigh Whannell's *INSIDIOUS* and the recently released *BRIDESMAIDS*—so we thought it would be a good time to look back at Samuel Zimmerman's *KNOWING* interview with the actress, who will next be seen in *X-MEN: FIRST CLASS* (which opens next Friday).

In the last few years, Rose Byrne has proven herself an actress fond of unconventional choices. Unafraid of horror, sci-fi and related genre material, her recent outings to the dark side have ranged from Danny Boyle's *SUNSHINE* to Juan Carlos Fresnadillo's better-than-anyone-expected sequel *28 WEEKS LATER* to the jet-black comedy *JUST BURIED*. Her latest film—and venture into the paranormal—is *KNOWING*, directed by fellow Australian Alex Proyas of *THE CROW* and *DARK CITY* fame.

KNOWING finds Byrne playing Diana Wayland, the daughter of a disturbed little girl from 1959 who penned cryptic numbers that foretell horrifying present-day disasters. Now a single mother, she's called on by astrophysics professor John Koestler (Nicolas Cage) for assistance in figuring out what it all means.



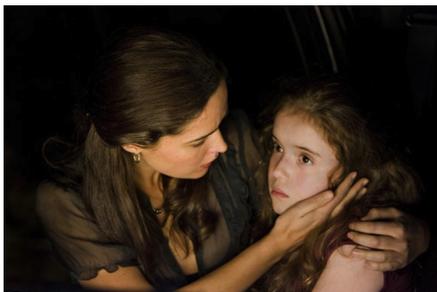
"I don't know, I guess you get cast in one thing, and then it's pretty straightforward," says Byrne, discussing her recent streak of gloom-and-doom projects. "They see you and go, 'Wow, she can do that, let's get her to do this,' and then it's just up to you as a performer, your agents and your ambitions to be seen in other lights. I've really enjoyed the darker stuff like working with Danny Boyle on *SUNSHINE* and *28 WEEKS LATER*, or with Wolfgang Petersen on *TROY*. I've been lucky. But, yeah, I do tend to get these 'end of the world' kind of things—I'm the girl to come to."

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She may joke about such recurring roles, but all things considered, Byrne is a great player to have on the genre team. An actress with serious chops, she has chosen some of the stronger female parts in recent horror and sci-fi, instead of simply grabbing whatever comes along. "There were other projects I could have been involved with that were less prestigious, not in the great hands of someone like Danny or Alex," she says. "In a way, your career is really defined by what you don't do as much as by what you do do. I have a certain sort of standard, and maybe it works and maybe it doesn't, but there's a certain point where it's like, life's too short; you've got to just do what you believe in as much as you can. I definitely try to adhere to that as much as possible."

While on hiatus from her hit cable series *DAMAGES*, the prospect of collaborating with *Proyas* came up, and luckily, *KNOWING* and its heroine met her standards. "The script was great," Byrne recalls. "It was intriguing and dark and wild. I had huge empathy for the character, and felt she was kind of fantastic. You often find the female roles in bigger films can be fairly one-dimensional, but Diana was actually very challenging."



One hurdle the part confronted her with was the intense amount of history and emotional trauma Diana carries, without a large number of actual scenes to express it in. "She's on screen for a shorter amount of time," Byrne notes, "so to explain the damage of her past in a short amount of time was a real challenge. I met with a single parent in Melbourne, which was very helpful, as I don't have any children."

On the other hand, Diana's backstory, as scripted, is so jam-packed that Byrne didn't find the need to imagine events that the character had been through. "She had so much already, with her mother and her litany of bad relationships with men," the actress says. "She had a lot of history; I didn't need to invent anything. It was all sort of there, which was good. Often a character can be underdeveloped and you have to come up with things, but Diana was sort of all about her past more than anything else."

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The screenplay's wealth of information was complemented by Proyas' direction, which Byrne is quick to praise. "My part of the story was so dramatic, so tense and less about the action and the visual stuff, in a way," she says, "so it was really about the emotional state in a given scene, and Alex is very trusting with actors. He's so incredible with his casting process; he's not gonna give you the part unless he 150 percent believes in you. He would completely trust me to try things how I wanted to try them, and in a variety of ways too, so we had a terrific collaboration. I felt in very safe hands, sort of like when I did *SUNSHINE* with Danny Boyle or *MARIE ANTOINETTE* with Sofia Coppola. You feel like you're in the hands of someone who's pretty evolved as a filmmaker, and it's exciting. To me, seeing the finished product and the whole visual world he created—it was a thrill to be a part of that."



The working environment *KNOWING* provided for Byrne was also a huge draw, as it gave her the opportunity to head back to her home country; the movie was shot largely in Melbourne. "It was wonderful, a bonus really," she says. "I'm from Sydney, but Melbourne's like my second home, and I have family and friends there. So often [as an actress] you're in these far-flung locations, but I loved it. If anything, it may have been distracting being surrounded by people I was familiar with. I knew Ben Mendelsohn, who plays the other professor, and Nadia [Townsend], who plays Nicolas' sister, is my best friend in Australia. I was worried about my accent, though," she jokes about essaying an American character. "I thought I'd sound Australian, since you tend to go back to your native tongue when you're in your homeland."

After the round of press for *KNOWING*, Byrne has a few months off before she returns to *DAMAGES*, and is currently weighing her options. She is possibly looking to get into some lighter fare, like *ADAM*, a romantic comedy that was picked up by Fox Searchlight at the most recent Sundance Film Festival. "It's a really small, charming love story between Hugh Dancy and me, where he suffers from Asperger syndrome," she explains. "It's a totally different type of movie, and hopefully, it'll find an audience. It's a much smaller film, but I believe there is a market for everything out there. I'm hoping it'll get some attention."

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She also hasn't ruled out more horror, which her homeland continues to embrace with titles such as WOLF CREEK and DYING BREED. "I really liked WOLF CREEK," Byrne says. "It's a pretty amazing horror movie. It's the right thing and the right project in terms of what I would've done of late. Maybe not right now, because I've just done something more serious with KNOWING, but the pool of talent in Australia is pretty wild in proportion to our population. There are prolific filmmakers and actors and cinematographers coming from there who are working and celebrated in Hollywood. So, yeah, if it was the right thing and at the right time, I would definitely want to be involved."

However, Byrne is quick to add, "I'm not a huge fan of the torture stuff, though. I don't know about you guys..."