

She Is “WOMAN,” See Her Gore

Written by Michael Gingold

Tuesday, 24 January 2012 15:09



Scotland-born actress Pollyanna McIntosh has been dividing her time between Britain and the U.S. for nearly a decade now, acting in independent films of every type, including genre features like *9 LIVES OF MARA* and John Landis' *BURKE AND HARE*. It was her turn as the eponymous feral female in Lucky McKee's *THE WOMAN*, however, that has brought her the most attention, and there will no doubt be more as the film hits DVD and Blu-ray today from Vivendi Entertainment.

In *THE WOMAN*, a sequel to the Jack Ketchum-based movie *OFFSPRING* from encoring producer Andrew van den Houten, scripters Ketchum and McKee turn the Woman from a villain to a victim, captured and imprisoned in a cellar by small-town lawyer Chris Cleek (Sean Bridgers). As Cleek enlists his family (including his emotionally abused wife Belle, played by McKee regular Angela Bettis) to assist him in his brutal attempts to “civilize” the Woman, the lines between civilized man and animalistic monster become blurred, then savaged. Throughout, McIntosh rivets the attention without ever saying a word.



FANGORIA: First of all, how does an actress from Scotland wind up in the wilds of Michigan making *OFFSPRING*?

POLLYANNA McINTOSH: I did a movie called *HEADSPACE*, the first movie I did in America after I came here in 2003. It was my first-ever American audition, and I ended up playing the role of Stacy in that. Andrew directed and produced that, and he went on to produce and direct *OFFSPRING*, and he sent me the book one day and just said, “Read this.” And I couldn't put it down.

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FANG: How did you go about bringing the character of the Woman to life in that film?

McINTOSH: I worked out a lot, and spent some time in the woods on my own. I studied animals at the zoo, which is kind of depressing, and viewed documentaries. I grew my hair out every way you can, and just tried to let myself become unencumbered by civilized expectations, propriety and all that kind of nonsense we have, especially the female kind.

FANG: In the book OFFSPRING, the Woman dies. Was it always the intention to let her live in the movie?

McINTOSH: No, it wasn't, actually. The screenplay was written similarly to the novel, adapted by Ketchum himself, but halfway through shooting they just thought I was having too much fun—that's how they put it. So they kept her alive, and thought they could continue her somehow.

FANG: How long after you'd finished OFFSPRING did you first hear that THE WOMAN was going forward?

McINTOSH: I'd say it was about another year before I heard we were going to do it. Then I started speaking with Lucky; we talked on the phone and via Internet for about four months about the project.

FANG: Were you familiar with McKee's work before you met him on this film?

McINTOSH: I wasn't, until Andrew set up a meeting between us. But as soon as I knew we'd be working together, I got ahold of MAY and THE WOODS. I was aware of MAY before, but I never considered myself a horror girl, and thought, “No, that's not for me.” [*Laughs*] Of course, when I watched it, I realized it was a very different kind of film.

FANG: When you watched his previous films, you no doubt saw a lot that would suggest he'd

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do a good job with THE WOMAN, since there's a lot of emphasis on female characters.

McINTOSH: Yeah—Lucky is a sensitive guy, and I think he can see things from a woman's perspective because he gets that we're all equal. I also believe he understands the position women often find themselves in, and that women often put themselves in, and that as a guy there are certain restrictions on how you're supposed to act as well.

FANG: Once you started working with him on bringing back the Woman, was there anything McKee went for that was different from what van den Houten did in OFFSPRING?

McINTOSH: I'd say they're very different directors stylistically, and also in the way they work with actors. Andrew and I knew each other already before we did OFFSPRING, and we had a pretty funny time on that movie. I was going through a separation from a relationship I was in, and Andrew and I were old friends, so he was pretty much the only one who knew what was going on, and he was really sweet with me off set. And then on set, I'd be like, “Andrew, I'm not going to do that!” [*Laughs*] Because we knew each other so well; he'd be like, “Come on!” And I'd say, “Nope! Talk to you about it later!” The other actors didn't quite know what to make of it, because we were like brother and sister.

Lucky and I had already discussed THE WOMAN for months before we began shooting it, and he decided to leave me to do what I was going to do, because we were on the same page. I pretty much felt like we were telepathic by the time we started shooting, and on the same page as far as themes and mood were concerned. I don't remember one moment with Lucky where he was, “No, no, no...” or where I was like, “Do I...?” It was just an indescribable sort of thing.

FANG: The Woman looks like a very grueling character to play. How difficult was it physically?

McINTOSH: Well, I worked out pretty hard, so I was nice and strong. And I made sure I was stretching a lot, doing yoga, because I wound up putting my body through a lot, but I was never in any pain. There was some discomfort, but I was never in any pain whatsoever.

FANG: You have a very antagonistic relationship with Sean Bridgers in the film.

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McINTOSH: I know, but I love him and I loved working with him.

FANG: How did you get that anger and antagonism going with someone you get along with so well off-set?

McINTOSH: It was so easy. I was so clear on my character and so was he; it was just like stepping into a room together, you know? We were always there, and could step out of it just as quickly. It was just really fun, being both his friend and his playing partner.

FANG: How about Angela Bettis?

McINTOSH: She’s such a focused actress, and was so committed to her role, and such a pleasure. I love that face-off we have. It was really fun because she wanted to do her own stunts. Everybody was like, “Don’t hurt each other!” and I would say, “Can I throw you on the ground?” and she was like, “Do it!”



FANG: There are some pretty shocking scenes involving the Woman and the Cleek children, too. Was there any hesitation or any kind of restrictions put on how intense things got when doing the scenes with the younger actors?

McINTOSH: With Lucky, it was really important that we didn’t actually say or do anything

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age-inappropriate around them. You'll notice in the film, if you watch what the kids are witnessing and what they're actually there for in the individual shots, they don't see or do anything, really. The only thing was some of the stuff that Zach Rand goes through [as Cleek's son Brian]. But when it got really intense, he wasn't there.

FANG: There's that scene where Brian assaults the Woman...

McINTOSH: He wasn't there for all of that, either. It was really wonderful the way Lucky handled it all. And I got on so well with those kids. I had such fun playing Scrabble with them, and I felt very motherly toward them. There was a really fun scene where Brian offers me a cookie before everything goes all to hell, where I got to jump out at him, and I scared the shit out of him [*laughs*!] It was wonderful.

FANG: Were you surprised when the movie got the vehement response it did at the Sundance Film Festival?

McINTOSH: Yeah, I think it was a bit of a shock for everyone. Not that it only happened that one time, but it was pretty intense. I felt very badly for Lucky, and it was so unthoughtful, you know? So backward. I mean, the film was written with a dark humor in it. Nobody was applauding or laughing at moments when serious points were being made, but if you don't have kind of an ironic sense of humor, you shouldn't be at Sundance, you know?

FANG: Do you think you'll work with these filmmakers again, maybe bringing the Woman back for another round?

McINTOSH: We've talked about what they're going to do, because it's important to them for the story to be different this time. It has to be worthy of a sequel; we're not going to just bash these things out. We're not the studios; we're not going to insult the intelligence of our audience just to rake in some cash. We're not making a lot of money here, we're trying to make something good, so... It might be a little while, but hopefully we'll be able to get [a sequel] done properly.

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FANG: Are there any other horror roles that you would like to play or that you're up for right now.

McINTOSH: I've just finished a movie called LOVE ETERNAL, based on a Kei Oishi novel called LOVING THE DEAD. It's actually not very horrific, though I believe the novel is. There's a bit of death and darkness in it, but it's more of a dark romance. My role is a woman who has lost her 6-year-old son in a car accident, and she's covers her grief and depression by showing a lot of false hope. It was quite an exhausting film to make; I carried a lot of grief with me for a couple of months.

FANG: As grueling as THE WOMAN, or not so much?

McINTOSH: More so. Because in your heart, you carry that weight a lot. It's difficult.

FANG: It's interesting; you mentioned before that for THE WOMAN you could turn it on and off, but it sounds like you couldn't on this one.

McINTOSH: You know, I was in this shark-fishing competition once, and I pulled in this 6-foot mako, the fastest shark in the ocean. And the first thing it did as we were trying to get the other lines out of the water was go after another mackerel, and eat another fish. That shark was just intent on survival; it was going to get that fish so it could keep living, you know? It wasn't going, "Poor me, how could I be the one chosen by this mean human to be hurt, and don't they understand that my babies need me?" It wasn't thinking that, it was thinking survival, survival, survival, and that's where the Woman is at. It wasn't a lot of weight to carry with me, whereas with this latest character, oh my God, that pain was always there, and she's always hiding it, always covering it, always smiling. It's like, I would get back to my hotel room and be like [*big sigh, then laughs*]. It may sound lame, but it's true.