

Former Teen Star Hilary Duff Redefines Herself in the Near-Future Satire WAR INC.

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Wednesday, 30 April 2008

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Premiering at this year's Tribeca Film Festival, the dark futuristic satire WAR INC. offers one helluva platform for former clean-queen pop star Hilary Duff to make a unique career move. Starring veteran actor John Cusack as covert assassin Brand Hauser —who works for the mega corporation Tamerlane which has been hired to wage a future war on insurgents in fictional Turaqistan —; Duff plays Yonica Babyyeah, a Middle Eastern pop star about to be married to the son of Turaqistan's Emirate.

Through many twists and turns, master hard-guy Hauser finds out he has a deep bond with Babyyeah, one which makes them both abandon their careers and escape the craziness of the absurd war.

Sound familiar? The film's quite a dramedy, something Cusack has long been familiar with over his career ("16 Candles," "High Fidelity") and something totally new to recording artist Duff (mostly famous for her teen TV show "Lizzie McGuire") who spoke to us before the film's debut.

FEARS: Playing a Middle Eastern hot celeb is an unconventional role for you?

HILARY DUFF: Yeah! I have to get all my words and thoughts together; I can point out all the obvious reasons—I've never really done such a... My character is obviously so very different from who I am in my everyday life. But it's nice to get to challenge myself, and do something that's so unexpected. And that a lot of people didn't think I even wanted to do, or could do. And the whole movie is so crazy and out there.

So I don't think anyone would be like, oh Hilary Duff's going to be in this film. You know, most people wouldn't think that I'd choose this. But it's all I really wanted at the time. So...

FEARS: Was it difficult to consider a role that could change your whole image?

HILARY DUFF: I don't know if I necessarily thought, oh this is the role that's gonna change my image. When I read the script, it just impacted me largely.

But when I got there, I was like, "Uh oh. This could be bad, or it could be good." You know?

FEARS: This movie pokes fun at pop stars and their overt sexuality like your character and others in the real world. How do you deal with all that and the gossip about your own life?

HILARY DUFF: After awhile there's really no way. You can try and do it. But eventually everything's gonna come out, you know what I mean? It's not like you can keep something secret for a long time.

It's not like I've kept this whole, like this deep, dark side of me that nobody's found out about yet. And that I've just maneuvered my way into like having nobody find out who I really am, you know?

But honestly, I'm not like that really, I don't know what you think a pop star would be. But even though I sing pop music, that's not who I am. And I don't think there's a certain step by step guide to do it the way i did it.

You know, everybody's different. But, I don't think that's a really good way to answer that question! But it was fun to play

a character who's the complete opposite of who I really am, and how people view me.

FEARS What was the worst part of doing this movie?

HILARY DUFF: I had so much makeup on, it was totally horrible. Like the white lips, with the purple lip liner, it was horrendous. But for some reason, the pop stars there are all exotic looking, and they can pull it off better than I could. You know, just 'cause I'm not used to it.

But they did this really bizarre thing in the clubs there, like where when a song came on that everybody really loved; they would throw napkins up in the air. And the whole place would be with like napkins in the air, it was crazy. So everything that's bizarre in the movie really happens over there, you know?

FEARS: You go Scarface on everybody, and in a wedding gown; so is this your first time firing a gun in a movie?

HILARY DUFF: [Laughs] It felt totally weird and I felt so weird doing it. First of all, I was dressed crazy. I'm in the worst wedding dress I've ever seen. And I looked like a hooker underneath it.

That was the shortest, tackiest, craziest purple hair. It was out of control. And I was told, just go for it. That came from one of the producer's wives, who would have a few drinks and just go crazy on the dance floor. And then she would want everyone to dance with her. She'd go like, come on! And so they were like, do her, do her! And was like, uh, okay. So I just had to go for it. But shooting that gun was like insane.

FEARS: Was it your first time—I mean shooting a gun?

HILARY DUFF: I've shot a gun before. I'm from Texas! But not a machine gun, and not like that!

FEARS: Was it fun?

HILARY DUFF: It was fun. It was awesome. But I was not really in shooting gun attire. You know, not in kicking ass attire. But Marisa and I were like strong, powerful girls, you know?

FEARS: What was it like to sing in a Middle Eastern accent?

HILARY DUFF: That was so fun! I can't even begin to tell you. Like she's not exactly a huge talent and it was so much fun to sing off key.

FEARS: Was it hard to sing off key?

HILARY DUFF: It can be quite easy, actually!

FEARS: Speaking of bizarre stuff, what was it like dropping that scorpion down your pants—was it real?

HILARY DUFF: It was scary. I guess! It was real, it was a real scorpion. I think it was one of those things where at the time I was like okay, I've already done this in a movie, and that in that movie. So I can't back out now, I've gotta just go for it, you know?

FEARS: How was it working with Marisa Tomei playing a heroic journalist?

HILARY DUFF: It was great. She's supposed to be this feminist, but in real life I think she's this empowered female too. Yeah, it was just cool to watch her on set, and kind of learn from her.

FEARS: WAR, INC. takes a funny look at the tragic subject of Iraq. Do you think people will get that?

HILARY DUFF: Do you think they'll see the funny side? I hope so. There are so many families that have been devastated by what's going on over there, and the choices that our country has made.

So I hope so. I don't think we're trying to put out a bad message because we're trying to raise awareness. It is bizarre, and funny, and a little disturbing, you know? It's all of those things.

But really at the end of the day, it's like, look what we're doing. And it's not right. So I feel that's the message of the movie. And that people will get that, if they're open to it. So if they won't be like too easily offended, I feel they'll get that.

FEARS: Do you want to do more movies now?

HILARY DUFF: I guess so. I didn't do movies for a long time, because I guess nobody wanted to take a chance on me.

FEARS: How come?

HILARY DUFF: Because of everything in the past, I think I got kind of typecast. But it's nice to do something different, and play around with different things.

FEARS: How do you feel about being in the spotlight?

HILARY DUFF: it's a really big compliment, you know? It's daunting when I think about it because everything is so heightened right now. It's like all of the attention is on you, it's like bigger than it ever was.

And like the magazines, and the way that people look at celebrities and view them, and stuff, it's really flattering. And I wouldn't have any of this if it wasn't for, I guess, all of that attention, and getting so many people to be my fans. And my hard work on top of that.

FEARS: How about the attention on your love life right now?

HILARY DUFF: It's hard. And it's hard to ignore a lot of the things that are said. So you just live your life the way you want to live. And take what you want to take out of it because it is an exciting time.

And I get to do all the things I love. And hopefully do positive things, and set a good example. But there's so much that tries to get in the way of that. So it's hard to keep a sane head sometimes, you know?

FEARS: How do you stay focused and together, unlike other young female performers we see falling apart in their personal lives?

HILARY DUFF: First, I think that I've had a lot of help from people. You know my family, and the team that I've kept around me for a long time. I've done this since I was younger. So obviously, I haven't done it alone.

It's definitely been a joint effort. And those people helped me balance my life. Like now time is going to be set aside for

designing stuff. And now that I've gotten older, I kind of have a different view of life. It's not like okay, sit down and design some jeans, you know what I mean?

It's more like, I'll get an idea in my head, and say, I want this fabric. So it's more like hands-on, now that I'm older and know how to do it. But when I was younger, it was more like, we're gonna film this movie here, and then we're gonna take a break. And then we're gonna set this month aside for rehearsals.

And that's kind of how I got used to it. I was able to juggle it, and have the life. But it was more like a set schedule. And now that I'm older, it's a bit more scattered about. And I look at it more like a job, even though I love it.

You know, it's more like, okay I'm gonna go to work now. And when I was younger, it was more like play. But I think what's helped keep me sane, is keeping those people around me. And not trying to do it all myself. And not thinking that I have all the answers.

FEARS: Having blazed a trail for other teen girl stars like Miley Cyrus, what would you say to her when she's going through this tough time?

HILARY DUFF: I don't know! Who am I to say? Everybody goes through stuff, and takes their own path. But those are decisions that she made. And now she says that she's sorry for them.

That's not an easy position to be in. People are pressuring you to do something. But if you wanted to do it, that's a different story, you know? I don't feel I'm to comment on that. Whether she wants to do that, to each their own.

I don't know, it's a weird thing to be in. It's not something that I would choose to do. But if she did, then that's fine. It's just probably not that, I don't know how her fans would feel about it. But maybe she doesn't mind.