

Entertainment Outlook

Jacqueline Bisset specializes in heavy drama

STAR SPEAK



FRANK SANELLO

Film star Jacqueline Bisset specializes in heavy drama. Of French, Scottish and English extraction, she has played Tolstoy's tragic heroine in the TV miniseries "Anna Karenina"; a German countess who hides her Jewish lover during World War II in "The Forbidden" on cable; an adulterous wife in the film "Under the Volcano"; and a troubled actress recovering from a nervous breakdown in the movie "Day for Night."

Bisset's current film, "Scenes From the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills," represents a departure for the actress. In the low-budget comedy, she plays Clare Lipkin, a retired TV star who battles bulimia and her attraction to her houseboy, played by "Wiseguy's" Ray Sharkey.

Bisset began her career as a model in London and then landed bit parts in farces such as "The Knack" and "Arrivederci, Baby!" in the mid 1960s. A brief appearance in the 1967 James Bond spoof "Casino Royale" led to a

long-term contract at 20th Century Fox.

"The Deep," one of the biggest hits of 1977, made her an international star.

Bisset spoke to us by phone from Rio de Janeiro, where she's shooting the psychological drama "Wild Orchid," in which she plays an international banker who is obsessed with Mickey Rourke.

Q. What attracted a star, as they say, of your magnitude, to such an off-beat film as "Scenes From the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills"?

A. I like ironic, self-deprecating humor. But it did take me awhile to decide to do it. The director said he wanted to play it straight, and I didn't see how you could. We ended up playing it just a little above reality, with the eyebrow slightly arched.

Q. Did your agent or advisers tell you not to do such a low-budget, controversial film because it could hurt your career?

A. I wasn't exactly encouraged to do it by my agent. He's wonderful, but just a little more conservative than I am. I was looking for something comedic, but the comedies I am offered tend to be cute, and I've done that before. This had an edge. I like comedies with an edge, rather than sweet, cutie stuff. I enjoy watching other people

being cute, but not me.

Q. "Scenes" has so many outrageous scenes. Was there anything in the original script you refused to do?

A. There was a nude scene that I didn't think was necessary. I ended up doing it in an aerobics outfit. There are enough people being naked in that film. Everybody didn't have to be naked.

Q. Your character is bulimic. You're so thin. Did you ever have a food disorder in real life?

A. No, thank goodness! I like food a lot. It's a struggle, but I've never been bulimic or anorexic. But there have been times in my life when I was more obsessive about food than I am now.

Q. My guess is that Anna Karenina was your most demanding role. She's one of the great literary creations, but so complex that you never know if Tolstoy sympathizes with her or condemns her.

A. Actually, because it was so well-

written, in a strange way it was one of my easiest roles because I could refer to the book. So many things in the book helped me interpret the script.

It's absolutely clear what Anna's motivation was. And there was a lot of emotion behind it, which always makes it easier to play.

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