

Talking with PAULINE COLLINS

STAR SPEAK



FRANK SANELLO

By Frank Sanello

British actress Pauline Collins won the 1989 Tony Award for her performance in the one-woman play "Shirley Valentine" on Broadway. The bittersweet story of a lonely housewife in Liverpool was also a huge hit in London and earned Collins a slew of British acting awards.

Now Collins has reprised her stage role in the new feature film "Shirley Valentine." It transformed the one-woman play into a multi-cast movie.

Collins, who is 49, is best known to American audiences for her role as Sarah, the spunky maid who was always getting into trouble on the classic British TV series "Upstairs, Downstairs." It aired in the United States on public television in the early 1970s, and it continues in reruns on local stations around the country.

"Upstairs, Downstairs" brought Collins a certain measure of fame. But she had been a working stage actress for years before the series, appearing in everything from musicals to the classics.

A native of Shirley Valentine's Liverpool, Collins is a descendant of Irish poets.

Q. When you did "Shirley Valentine" as a play, it was a one-woman show. The film version has other roles. Did you mind sharing the screen?

A. I was delighted to make a multi-cast movie. All those extra characters make a more realistic piece of entertainment. Besides, it couldn't have been a one-woman film, because movie audiences don't accept that sort of thing. Theatergoers are a little more willing to do the extra work of suspending disbelief, which a one-woman show requires.

Q. You had a fairly explicit nude scene on a cramped boat with Tom Conti in "Shirley Valentine." Was that hard to shoot, for logistic reasons, if for no other?

A. No, I had done a bit of nudity before. And Tom Conti is my neighbor. Our daughters go to the same school. So it was really easy to do it with him — like doing it with your brother, but not quite.

Q. You're still best known for playing the maid on "Upstairs, Downstairs," even though you played the role almost 20 years ago. Do you feel typecast?

A. Amazing, isn't it? I was only on for 12 episodes, and people are still talking about it. I don't mind being typecast. It was a wonderful part. I had been around for a while, but it was the first thing that brought me to the attention of the public. So, I've al-

ways been grateful for Sarah.

Q. How did you feel when you won the Tony for "Shirley Valentine"?

A. I'd like to quote my colleague Jean Marsh, when she won an Emmy for "Upstairs, Downstairs": "Giving your highest acting honor to a foreigner is generous, broad-minded, unchauvinistic... and typically American."

Q. When you performed a scene from "Shirley Valentine" on the Tony Awards ceremony, your Liverpool accent seemed much thicker than in the film.

A. Sometimes when I'm nervous, the accent gets thicker. I decided to use less of an accent in the film, because Americans might find a Liverpool accent hard to understand. Heck, some Londoners find a Liverpool accent hard to understand!

Q. Why is British TV so superior to American TV? We don't have anything as good as "I, Claudius" or "Brideshead Revisited," to name just two British imports.

A. American TV is not inferior to the British. We just send you our best stuff. You don't see our game shows. And nobody does miniseries better than you. Your chat shows are much bigger and more exciting. In England,

— like you have in America. But it's still not quite nice to make a lot of money. The English have a big hang-up about money. Yuppies are looked down on over here.

Q. Just about every British actor I've interviewed is left wing and loathes your conservative prime minister.

A. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool socialist, so you couldn't print what I think of Margaret Thatcher. She is a megalomaniac. Because she's a woman, she's felt it necessary to wield an inordinate amount of power. She's made the mistake of not delegating authority more or taking advice.

Q. If you hadn't become an actress, what do you think you would have done?

A. I trained to be a teacher. My father was a headmaster of a Catholic primary school for 25 years. He loved the school so much that when they offered him a promotion to a bigger school, he turned them down. He loved teaching. I didn't feel the same joy he did, so I didn't think it would be a good idea for me to carry on the family tradition.

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Pauline Collins

'American TV is not inferior to the British. We just send you our best stuff.'

— Pauline Collins

we're besotted by your soap operas and "Hill Street Blues." "Rich Man, Poor Man" is considered a classic in England.

Q. Many of my British friends who now live in America say that one of the reasons they left Britain was the class consciousness of the people there.

A. People are very class conscious here (in Britain). It's probably hard for Americans to understand, because it's bred into you here. But I think we're gradually moving away from that to a more monetary value system

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