

CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

Bérénice Marlohe took control of her own career management to win her first big-screen role: as a Bond girl with a dark side in the latest instalment of the 007 franchise

BY MATT MUELLER

When director Sam Mendes unveiled his cast for the 23rd James Bond film, *Skyfall*, to the world's press, amid the familiar faces – Daniel Craig and Judi Dench, along with newcomers Javier Bardem,

Ralph Fiennes and British actress Naomie Harris – there was an unexpected arrival in the 007 fold: Bérénice Marlohe. Sharing the mission as new Bond girl alongside Harris, this Parisian beauty is *Skyfall*'s mystery selection and has descended in a swirl of glamour to the Cannes Film Festival to introduce the film's new trailer on the beach.

In Swarovski's suite at the Hotel Martinez, surrounded by the company's glittering wares (including a shimmering, crystal-flecked dress in a glass case), Marlohe sweeps into the room like the eye of a storm as a harried photographer, his assistants, make-up people and PRs swarm around her. We're five months from *Skyfall*'s release, but the fever-pitch frenzy that comes with being the most recent member of an exclusive club is fully in evidence – and Marlohe looks ready to face it.

In *Skyfall*, Marlohe is playing Severine who, as per the tradition of pre-release cloak-and-dagger strategies (and in the words of Winston Churchill), must remain a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma for the time being. The cat definitely has Marlohe's tongue: she can't say much about the character apart from the fact that Severine has "a dark side" and is connected to both James Bond and Bardem's bleach-blond villain, Raoul Silva. "I wanted to create her so that she's not easy to define – is she a good or a bad girl? – like maybe some of the previous Bond girls have been," Marlohe says. "I wanted to give her a lot of shades – like James Bond, who's vulnerable but very strong, a killing machine but with a great sense of humour. I wanted to play with all of those shades too so that you'll see someone charismatic on the screen, not just someone in a bikini."

Actresses cast as Bond girls are known for talking the talk but not necessarily walking the walk when we finally see how their frequently brief and inconsequential eye-candy appearances fit into the 007 scheme. Be honest: apart from perhaps Eva Green's Vesper Lynd in *Casino Royale*, can you even remember a Bond girl from the past 20 years? But besides being strikingly beautiful, there is also something formidable and charismatic about Marlohe in person. We're prepared to believe her when she says that Severine isn't going to be forgettable.

Having had only minor roles in French television on her acting CV, the 33-year-old actress has now taken a massive stride forward with *Skyfall*, her first movie and first English-language role. With her agent barely able to get her TV ▶



explaining that she often comes out with “bad jokes” in moments of tension. “But it was a great moment.” Marlohe celebrated by going out to a restaurant with her cousin and her cousin’s boyfriend. “I love to eat, so when it comes to celebrating, you have to have nice food in front of you!”

Born to a Chinese-Cambodian father and a French mother, Marlohe grew up in Paris and – not surprisingly – says, “I’ve always felt international” (although her own personal globalisation doesn’t extend to her father’s native tongue: she can only say “thank you” and “eat rice” in

Khmer). Painting and piano were her youthful passions; she studied the latter for several years at the Conservatoire de Paris. But her appearance couldn’t help but land her a modelling agent, and it was a natural progression to acting lessons and auditions.

Shooting *Skyfall* required filming in Istanbul, Shanghai and Scotland; Marlohe readied herself for her scenes by blasting Mozart’s *Requiem* (“when you need something in the guts”) and rap music (“when you want to feel a bit more gangster”). She’s the seventh French actress to match wits with 007 (or be bedded by him – or a combination of both), although the Bond girl she feels has inspired her most is Dutch actress Famke Janssen’s leg-crushing vixen Xenia Onatopp from 1995’s *GoldenEye*. “I really admire actresses who are bold, and she played a psychopath who had orgasms while she was killing people – I love that!” she giggles. “This is what I’m aiming at: to be something original.”

Marlohe downplays any suggestion that she’s looking to outstrip Janssen for badness, and insists she’s not out to emulate any of her predecessors. “That would be boring,” she says. “But I love evil characters. They’re the ones you remember.” She also says that Severine will be more of a talker than a fighter, revealing that her fight sequences in *Skyfall* required a grand total of one day to shoot. Although she won’t be showing off any impressive martial arts skills, Marlohe did request firearms training – but more as a way to enhance her performance. “It’s a discipline,” she says. “You have to use meditation, concentration and focus to fire guns, and I felt that would

help me feed my character’s personality.”

As for Craig, she says, “He is so talented; it’s great for me to be in front of him, and also Javier. In a human way, too, Daniel is very grounded and nice, and has a great sense of humour. I’m very natural and social, and I love to laugh, and he’s the same. It was a relaxed atmosphere. It all came easily. I could just go and have fun. I’ll remember this experience all my life, because I was with so many wonderful human beings.”

Skyfall is already paying dividends where Marlohe’s career is concerned. Prior to her arrival in Cannes, she met twice with a “very big” director about appearing in his next movie. It appears the days of Marlohe having to be her own agent and manager are already a distant memory. ■

***Skyfall* opens on 26th October in the UK**

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auditions, Marlohe took matters into her own hands, tracking anyone she could find with a connection to the project and dispatching her show reel to them. Facebook turned out to be a handy asset in her mission to be seen.

“I did the business of a manager and an agent myself,” says Marlohe, who went through three auditions for the role, the last one with Craig. “Then I won the part. It doesn’t sound too hard, but it’s a lot of years of working, looking for that chance. I’m a perfectionist. So until the last minute I spent every second getting ready for that [final audition].”

It was a golden opportunity to become part of one of the world’s most illustrious film franchises, which Marlohe has adored since she was a child. “I always felt connected to that universe,” she says. “I loved the specificity and the sense of humour. The characters are so colourful. You know the bad guy is going to have a fake eye, or a cat.”

Mendes broke the good news to Marlohe over breakfast in London. “I said, ‘I don’t know if I want to do it,’” she laughs,

FILM STILL As Severine in *Skyfall*; Daniel Craig as James Bond