

SUMMER GLAU ABOUT "SERENITY":

Filmfocus-reviewer Luuk van Huet interviews actor Summer Glau, who plays the paranormally gifted, deadly but mentally unbalanced teenager River in the science-fiction movie "Serenity".

Look out! This interview contains Spoilers to "Serenity".

Q: How did the shootings of "Serenity" differ to those of "Firefly"?

A: It was for the whole cast different in many ways. Shooting a TV series is very stressful, because each week you have to worry about ratings. The TV stations are very susceptible to these numbers; they must be high and growing. For a science-fiction show which was broadcasted irregularly and not in the correct order, it was difficult to get high ratings. Besides we were at a TV station which broadcasted many reality-TV shows, and these are immediately need-gratifying: you don't need to get to know persons; you don't need to invest into the plot, and so on. Our show was folded and there was a different idea behind it.

There were many persons you had to get to know and you need to give this kind of show the time to find an audience. We were constantly afraid that we'd be cancelled or replaced by a reality-TV show. That we were able to make this movie is thanks to Universal, who were very enthusiastic about our story. They gave us the money, the studio and the means and then they left us alone.

Thus in three months time we could make exactly the movie which we wanted to make, without us being under pressure.

That was the biggest difference between making the show and the movie.

Q: Did it go without saying for the cast to participate in this movie?

A: We all gladly wanted to participate in this movie. We found it to be terrible when our show was cancelled, since we had worked on it with much love. I was worried that they would maybe cast other persons for certain roles, since I'd never been in a leading role in a movie. Already at the beginning, Joss Whedon said that he would not tell this story if he could not get all people from the show.

So we had to figure out a way to get everyone together at the same time and of course we all said "Yes!" and in the end it worked out fine.

Q: What do you like about your character?

A: Her contradictions. How she is very fragile and withdrawn, but at the same time impressive and strong.

I like how she can be something in one minute and the complete opposite in the following minute.

Q: You come across as a mentally healthy person. How did you prepare yourself to play a mentally unbalanced character?

A: (laughs) I did not perform a study about derangements or so.

The one thing that reminded me about River were my memories about my puberty.

I was very isolated, since I did not go to school, I knew nobody in my age and did not know how I had to behave, since at that time I was dancing full time. I created my own reality, because I was often alone and when I wasn't, then I was dancing.

In principle, dancing is playing a role and telling a story. And I also had a time when I was sorrowful and confused, and in part I based River upon that.

Q: Talking about dancing: you go on quite a riot in the movie, which is probably all choreographed. Did your experience as a dancer help you with those scenes?

A: Very much. Above all the discipline and the ability to train something a whole day, use every muscle in your body, that kind of stuff...

When I met my trainer for the first time, the one who had choreographed the fighting scenes, he was so impressed that he said: "Ok, I can't teach you how to act as if you can fight, I can teach you how to really fight." He then thought up a style which fit my appearance and my kind of movement.

It was very very different from ballet, but it was still something that suited me. Many fast kicks and arm movements, very gracious and many turns. Especially the turning was essential, for example blocking

a blow from somebody and then with a kind of hover-turn-movement kicking somebody else. In the fight scenes I constantly turned around since I don't get nausea. That was something that very specifically happened in my fights. That my muscles learned to move so quickly and aggressively was a huge challenge. Besides, my fighting stance was low. In ballet, you jump and you stand on your toes, but for the movie I had to stoop a lot. Sometimes I had to stoop for hours at a time, until I nearly couldn't stand on my legs any longer.

And at the end of the workout, my trainer just let me execute my favourite move, which I of course do the best. (taken by enthusiasm, Summer jumps from her chair and treats us with a live demonstration of her expertise) Look, like this. And he knew that I'm dying to perform the move well, that's why he saved it for the end.

Q: Was that an existing style for fighting or did you develop that during training?

A: It contains elements of Wu Shu, Kung Fu and kickboxing. So it's much kicking, just Wu Shu contains really a lot of arm movements and turns.

(those are again demonstrated)

There came a few different people to me to teach a number of different techniques.

It was very intensive and interesting to learn. What I miss from dancing is the regularity of being busy with something again and again every day, and it was nice to be able to be engaged again like that.

Q: Do you still dance much?

A: There are times when I would again come to practice, but dancing takes so much strength that I can't engage into it every day so that it is difficult to stay motivated. I'm used to dance on a certain level and if I don't first train hard for a month, then I won't get there. And when I am on location, for example I just came from Romania, then it's nearly impossible to dance.

Q: Do you think that there is a chance that the series makes a restart thanks to the movie?

A: I would find that lovely. The nice thing about the series is that you have a secure job, you go the the set every week and get a stronger bond with the crew. It was unpleasant to stop, because I had to say goodbye to the cast and crew, and I considered them family. A movie is more like a project for three months, during a series you have the time to develop your character.

Joss never wanted to tell us about our characters. We still don't know what the story of Sheperd Book is, and the background of Inara stays a mystery as well. Joss then says: "Just wait!", hence we hope to be able to make a sequel so we at least can do all that we want to learn about the characters.

Q: I heard that a deal was made for three movies...

A: That's right. But it's up to the reception of this movie. If "Serenity" is not received well, well... But if enough people go to see the movie, then we can do more.

Q: With what other projects are you busy now?

A: I just shot a movie in Romania and so was away a bit. Now that I'm back I have to go to auditions again and things like that. I am at an uncomfortable point in my career since at auditions I always hear: "We consider your acting style and your state in our top three of our choices!" and so the rest is approved, my picture is once more looked at, follows a talk with the casting director and the director and in the end it's between me and two celebrities. And then the role goes to a celebrity, because that's the safe choice since it's about a lot of money and they prefer a girl known to everybody.

Q: Facing the large number of casualties in the crew of the Serenity, don't you worry about your own condition in a sequel?

A: I know! I know! Only it's always a spectacular death, so if the sequel should be, I have my peace with it. Besides, Joss is good with bringing back characters. In Edinburgh he said during a press conference that he cannot imagine making a sequel without Book and Wash. I don't know how he's doing it, but he's always got a plan.

Q: Is there a role which you always wanted to play?

A: I would like to have a leading role in an epic movie. When I grew up, I used to look for movies like "Gone With the Wind", "Ben Hur", "Gladiator", "Sense & Sensibility" with costumes and old-fashioned phrasing and things like that.

Q: You come from Texas, do you also have a Mexican background?

A: No, even though I feel myself as partly Mexican because I grew up in that area. But I'm German, Irish and a bit Scottish. Nobody sees that, by the way. Nobody knows how I really am!

Q: How was the work together with Sean Maher on the set?

A: I admire him very much. The first time that I met him, I found he was the most handsome, most talented and most intelligent person I had ever met. I nearly didn't dare to look at him, stand with him and act. And he protected me. I was very embarrassed, I had nearly no acting experience and I wanted to stay between all these mighty actors. And he made it easy on me, I feel never wrong around him. He is at the same time my favourite actor to work with. I'm attuned to everyone, but if I may choose, I prefer a scene with Sean, since he knows how to get out the best in me.

Q: Before you started acting, you were a ballet dancer. Has one of the two your preference, and how about the fact that you had to stop dancing due to an injury?

A: It was very difficult to let go of dancing because that was my identity as kid and teenager. Since I was no dancer anymore, I was a nobody. I realized that I was injured and that it should never again become better, and I slowly had to give up dancing. Acting was my deliverance. Joss taught me that my possibilities are endless. If you want something and you apply yourself enough, then you can make your dream come true. I would like to get a role in a dance movie, so that I can combine the two.

Q: You started with a role as dancer in "Angel", right?

A: Yes! And I danced a bit in "Firefly"!

Original interview:

<http://www.filmfocus.com/nieuws/item.php?id=7633&PHPSESSID=61035f492c78782c7415f607ea379b7e>

Translated from Dutch by Malte for **Summer-Glau.net**