

Summer Glau: Interview

Summer Glau was born in 1981, in San Antonio Texas. During her teenage years, she trained and performed as a dancer until a serious injury forced her to take some time out. While she was recovering she landed her first acting job, and soon afterwards began working steadily as an actor and dancer. Glau's first television series role was a guest spot on Joss Whedon's Angel in the episode Waiting in the Wings. That role led her to be cast in Whedon's next series, Firefly, playing the role of River. When Firefly was cancelled, Glau went on to appear on the CBS series Cold Case, and the MGM feature Sleepover. Then, in 2005, she reprised her Firefly role in the movie Serenity. We caught up with her as Serenity was due for release on DVD...

Sci-Fi-Online: Were you surprised that your character went from being in a cancelled TV show to the big screen?

Summer Glau: It was a shock. It just surprised me, the scale of it. Joss told us from the moment the show was cancelled that he was going to find a way to keep telling the story but we didn't exactly know what that meant.

It took us a while. When we got cancelled it was right before our holiday, so we didn't even get a chance to let it settle. We went to Nathan's house and we were together for the one last time and then we all went home for Christmas, so it was just a shock.

SFO: How different is your character from that which you played in the TV series?

SG: Not as much as we were preparing for. Everyone was saying that this was going to be so different, but our dynamic was already set up from when we worked together and when we worked for Joss. So when we went to set to do the film, the things that were different were not us. It's was more like the sets were bigger, we had more money, and more time.

SFO: Was it more physical?

SG: Absolutely for me. And I think for everyone, for Sean [Maher - who played Simon], he ended up getting in there and fighting the battles too. But I trained for three months before we even started shooting anything.

SFO: Was there anything they told you to do and you thought 'no way'?

SG: [Laughs] The split on the ceiling, but we got up there and we did it. When I was up there it didn't hurt. There was a guy who was helping me, and they had to rebuild the hallway three times because they had to measure my legs. If it's off an inch I can't hold my leg up. So I would get in a split and get situated and I stood up there between takes. It was easier than I thought.

I met my stunt co-ordinator, Chad Stahelski, months before we started and he watched me move, he taught me some different steps and stuff, and he saw that I was a ballet dancer. He created a kind of hybrid technique for me that was a more "balletic" way of doing martial arts. He said that it was a combination of wuchu, kung-fu and kick boxing. And it was very different from dancing [laughs]. I worked hard, we all worked hard.

I have a big scar on knee from one stunt going wrong, and I pulled every muscle in my body - dancers are very strong but it's a completely different kind of muscle memory. Martial arts is kind of like a snake: it snaps and then it comes back in. Dancing is always up, always lifting and it's very fluid. I can hold my leg out for a long time as a dancer, but in martial arts you have to get your leg up that high but you have to get it down in

one second. So I kept pulling hamstrings, I was limping home, I'd do ice baths where I just had to carry ice bags home and lie in a bathtub because I pulled everything. My body really changed a lot. And I was a vegetarian and I ate meat by the end of the movie. I was eating steaks [laughs].

SFO: Did you keep the workout going after the movie?

SG: You know, they offered to let me keep coming to the class and I said no [laughs].

SFO: What was the most difficult sequence to shoot?

SG: The storage locker was hard for me to do. And also the mule chase because we were actually in the mule and then it was green screen. They made this incredible rig and we all sat up there in the desert for days and days and shot that mule chase. The boys loved it and the girls wanted to get out of the sun.

SFO: How did you make the move from dancer to actor?

SG: I was going to be a ballet dancer all my life. I started dancing full time when I was 14, and I had some really bad injuries, one in particular when I was 19. It would not heal. I was really stubborn, I would not give my roles to anybody so I kept dancing. Finally I just couldn't take class anymore, and I had to admit that I had to stop dancing classical ballet.

So I came to L.A. for a summer, basically following a crush that I had out here and he ended up moving to New York the minute I got here [Laughs]. So I started auditioning for anything, and found that, I guess, I could act and maybe I could get work doing that. And I had this secret feeling when I was a little girl that I was going to end up acting. So it felt right.

SFO: Did your ballet training benefit you in acting at all?

SG: The thing about River that I like, is that she doesn't have a lot of lines. Especially in the series she had to show what she was thinking just by the way she moved or by how her face was moving. I think that has helped me a lot as an actor.

I still have a hard time sometimes, expressing my anger with words, I'm better at moving and being in a room and showing how I feel that way. It's a thing that I had to work on because I was very shy as a kid. I think that's why I love dancing, because I felt that people were watching me but I didn't have to connect with them. They were out there and I could feel that they were watching me but I didn't have to look at them.

Now with acting it's very therapeutic for me, having to actually say and communicate.

SFO: What kind of message do you want the audience to take away after viewing Serenity?

SG: One thing that we keep talking about is believing - whatever you believe, you have to believe it with your whole heart. That's one theme that keeps running through. And love. Taking care of the people around you, taking care of the people you love, it's simple. There are many layers and everybody that comes to see it feels something different when they walk away.

SFO: What is it about Joss Whedon that makes him special?

SG: If you stand by him on set for 10 minutes you realise every detail that runs by him, you realise how special, creative and patient he is. He is kind, and he speaks well to

everybody. He gave me what I have now in my career, he cast me in my very first TV show, he believed in me when nobody believed in me. He saw something that other people were not seeing. He's my hero in a way. I'll never forget what he's done for me.

SFO: What's happening next with you, are you hoping for a sequel?

SG: We'll have to wait and see how successful the first one is.

SFO: Thank you for your time.

Taken from **SciFi Online**'s website:

http://sci-fi-online.50megs.com/2006_Interviews/06-01-30_SummerGlau.htm