

**'Firefly': Summer Glau reflects on Joss Whedon, sci-fi women and River's edge**

May 3, 2011 – Noelene Clark

*Fox cancelled Joss Whedon's 2002 television series "Firefly" after a meager 14 episodes were produced, but you can't take the sky away from this space Western — the series maintains a cult following among "Browncoats," the fans who have taken the series to U.S. Navy ships and even outer space. Fans were disappointed when the show's big-screen sequel, "Serenity," didn't spark the prayed-for second season. Now, Capt. Malcolm Reynolds and his ragged, vagabond crew are back on television on Discovery's Science Channel — and while there aren't new adventures, Science is the first channel to roll out all 14 episodes in the proper order, "the way Joss had intended it," as a Discovery spokeswoman puts it. The season finale airs May 29. Our Noelene Clark caught up with "Firefly" and "Serenity" cast member Summer Glau, who played River Tam, the ship's brilliant, spooky and damaged fugitive. The role launched Glau's genre acting career, which has carried on with "Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles" and "The Cape."*

**Noelene Clark: Eight years after "Firefly" was abruptly canceled, what's it like to know that the show is finally airing in order, in its entirety?**

Summer: I've been getting a lot of people coming up to me, saying that they love that it's back on.... We had our fair share of obstacles, but in the end, I think that people really understood the heart of our story and still love it even today.

**Noelene Clark: Why do people still love it so ardently?**

Summer: I think they love it because of Joss and because of the way that Joss writes. I think that he has many, many special gifts, but one in particular is that he writes characters that people instantly feel that they know. I think that a big part of the magic of "Firefly" is that it was a group of people that couldn't be more different, living in close quarters and becoming a family, and I think that viewers instantly found someone to identify with specifically. And I think that's why people still love it today. I think that our audience immediately connected in an emotional way.

**Noelene Clark: About that connection with your audience — did you ever worry that people wouldn't connect with River Tam, or for that matter, with Cameron in "Sarah Connor"? Both characters are sort of programmed and have to prove their humanity.**

Summer: I think that River and Cam are actually opposites in a way, because they both do have a difficult time connecting to people, but are extremely different in how they express that obstacle. With River, it felt very natural for me because it was basically my first job, and I didn't know any of the rules or the process that goes into shooting a series. I had just done one job for Joss before, a guest star spot on "**Angel**," and he cast me after "Angel" as River. So in the beginning, when I was first joining the cast, I didn't know how to read the call sheet, I didn't know that they would come get me when they were ready for my scene. I had come from the dance world, and it was so different. So in a way, I used that in my portrayal of River — just sort of a fish out of water and someone who didn't quite know how to jump in.

**Noelene Clark: At the beginning, nobody understands her, but by the end, everybody loves her.**

Summer: Thank you! I'm so moved that people really started to feel protective of her and started to really see her as their little sister, you know? It meant a lot to me.

**Noelene Clark: Did you know River's secrets when the show first started? Did you know where the character was going?**

Summer: No, I didn't know anything! He's so good at keeping secrets, and I remember going from "Firefly" to "Serenity" ... [Whedon] had just had his first son, and I was coming to visit **Arden** for the first time, and he said, "I think River is going to be a martial arts expert." And my jaw just hit the ground. I had no idea he was going to make this killer weapon. So all my dreams came true when I came to that role. Everything was bigger and better than I could have imagined it, and that's just the way Joss is.

**Noelene Clark: Even in the fight scenes, River moved with determination and grace. Was your dance background helpful for this part?**

Summer: Absolutely, for River specifically, because she wasn't great at communicating the way that everyone else communicated, and part of the way I decided to express that was through her physicality. And Joss really encouraged that part of it for me. My favorite episode of the series was "**Objects in Space**," and she really did get to express herself physically in that episode. It was a really fun part of the challenge of playing River.

**Noelene Clark: I've heard some of the cast members say that the "Firefly" cast grew unusually close in a short period of time. Was this your experience?**

Summer: It's interesting. I didn't know any different because it was my first job, and I remember everyone telling me at different points while we were shooting, "This is a really special experience." Even now, looking back – it's been eight years – it really was a special experience that I could never replace. Everyone was so in love with the story, and everyone really, really wanted to be there. I think that our chemistry as a cast was extraordinary. And I learned so much. I can't believe how forgiving everyone was of me not really knowing what I was doing. They treated me like an equal, and I made a lot of embarrassing mistakes in the beginning, and they never made me feel like I didn't deserve to be there with them. It meant a lot to me.

**Noelene Clark: What lessons did you take from your "Firefly" experience to future parts, like "Sarah Connor" or "The Cape"?**

Summer: I think the teamwork is something that I've always sought to re-create. After doing "Firefly" and moving on, I always wanted to be part of a series again. I love doing films, too, but there's just something special about being part of the team and feeling like you're actually a part of the family, and I always look to re-create that. And I really did with "Sarah Connor." I worked on "Sarah Connor" even longer than "Firefly." And I always remembered how generous everyone was to me when I didn't know what to do, and I didn't know the rules, and I didn't know camera angles, and I didn't know lighting. I remember **Allen Easton**, who was our camera operator during "Firefly," he used to have to guide me onto my mark from behind the camera, because I just absolutely did not understand lighting. I ended up working with him again on "The Cape," and he saw how much I had grown and how much I have learned, and so I always try to remember how much everyone else gave to me. I also remember how **Nathan [Fillion]** was so welcoming whenever we had guest actors on our show. I've been on other shows where nobody really talks to you when you're a guest, and you don't ever really feel like you get to know anyone, and I remember watching Nathan really reach out and try to make the experience fun for any guest actor who came on our set. That made a big impression on me.

**Noelene Clark: Were you a Whedon fan before you were cast on "Angel" and then "Firefly"?**

Summer: I was, but I didn't realize how much I was going to love him until I met him. My actual first audition for him, I thought was a complete disaster, and I had no idea that he was going to end up being my mentor and being the person who I feel is responsible for giving me my career. Words cannot express how much I love Joss.

**Noelene Clark: It seems like you've primarily done sci-fi. Do you worry about being type-cast? Do you like those types of roles?**

Summer: It's a blessing! I love it. Joss tried to describe the fan base to me when I first got started, and I had no idea what this kind of *devotion* was going to mean to my career, because I feel like ever since I started out with "Firefly," everyone has kind of looked at me as a little sister, and they have supported me as I have gone on to other projects, and it's just a very different experience than doing mainstream drama or mainstream comedy. Sci-fi, genre, comic book – it's just a little bit different, and I've *always* loved it. I've done other things, but it always seems like my sci-fi projects have been what people respond to the most, because those fans are extraordinary, so passionate.

**Noelene Clark: A lot of times in sci-fi, the female characters are overt sex symbols, like Barbarella. But the characters we've seen you play, though feminine, seem much more subtle. Is that a decision on your part?**

Summer: You know, I've always just made the choices on my characters based on my connection to them, and I've made decisions that maybe other people haven't understood, why I passed on something, for instance. Why would you pass on that role? Why didn't you want that role? But it's all about your connection to it. And one thing that I can say about working for Joss is that he writes women better than almost anybody. He has such a connection to our voice, and never writes women just as sex symbols. They're always very complicated and strong. And what I love about River is that she was very strong, and she was very vulnerable at the same time. And I think all women are like that. I've never taken roles that I felt were very overtly sexualized, because I just don't connect to it. I don't respond to it. I hope that women can relate to that.

**Noelene Clark: What do you have coming up? I understand "Knights of Badassdom" is coming out this year.**

Summer: Oh yeah, I shot that movie last summer, and it was such an incredible experience. It was my first comedic movie. I actually called Joss, and I told him about it, and I said, "**Steve Zahn's** in it," and he said, "Do it." We both love Steve Zahn. It was like summer camp. We shot it up in Spokane, Wash. I learned so much from those guys, you know, **Jimmi Simpson**, **Ryan Kwanten** was in it, **Danny Pudi**, **Peter Dinklage**, it was just an amazing experience. And I think that the fans that have been supporting me are really going to enjoy this movie. It's really a love letter to LARPerS, and we had a blast shooting it.

Taken from latimes's website:

<http://herocomplex.latimes.com/2011/05/03/firefly-summer-glau-reflects-on-joss-whedon-sci-fi-women-and-rivers-edge/>