



G. I. JANE

Linda Cardellini on her *Return* to screen

WORDS BY RACHAEL SCOTT

Last year, Michelle Obama set up an initiative asking the entertainment industry to “create a dialogue on ways to share the stories of military families through film,” and Hollywood appears eager to help.

But, Linda Cardellini didn't need prompting from the White House to make *Return* – Liza Johnson's moving and realistic portrait of a young woman in crisis after a tour of duty. Cardellini's Kelli finds it impossible to readjust to civilian life and is haunted by her experiences overseas, but unable to vocalise her depression. When she learns her husband (a low-key Michael Shannon) is cheating, she turns to the bottle and the arms of *Mad Men*'s John Slattery.

Cardellini, who is best known for playing *ER*'s stropny nurse Samantha Taggart and high school student Lindsay Weir on *Freaks And Geeks* – the cult TV show that

alerted us to the talents of James Franco, Seth Rogen and its producer Judd Apatow – sat down with us to talk about her film.

STUDIO: You're in virtually every scene of *Return*. That must have been quite daunting...

Linda Cardellini: I don't think I truly realised what that meant, I just knew that it was a fantastic role. Even though I'm on screen a lot by myself, there was never a time I felt alone or unsupported. It felt like a community of people working toward a common goal – to try and pay respect to something that's not well communicated within society.

STUDIO: Kelli is incapable of expressing herself, even though her family is supportive. Why does she keep it locked in?

LC: I really wanted her to be able to understand what is happening, to make other people understand. Instead she just becomes more alienated. So, it's really heartbreaking. I think you're lucky if you can put your finger on one traumatic thing happening to you. For her, it's not that cut and dry.

STUDIO: We aren't told what happened to Kelli on duty. Was your performance more demanding without that gap filled?

LC: It was a great gift. Those are the things that you really look for, especially if the camera can get so close to you that a shift of your eyes can tell part of a story. What attracted me to the script were the silences and the small details.

STUDIO: What was it like working with Michael Shannon?

LC: He's fantastic. Smart, funny and I find him to be really warm. But the second I met him, we had our first scene and we have to start kissing. Of course, it's always something like that for the first scene when you first meet somebody.

STUDIO: You've mixed up comedy and serious drama a lot in your career. Will you do a comedy next?

LC: I love to do something that's different from the other. I started doing theatre. I do a comedy stage show once a month in Los Angeles, too.

STUDIO: That must keep you on your toes.

LC: Yes. Especially now that I'm going to have a baby (*rubbing her bulging belly*). Everyone keeps asking me what I'm doing and I say, “I'm producing a human next.” I've devoted so much of my life to establishing a career and I'm really proud of that success, but I'm especially proud of being able to become a mother.

STUDIO: You did six seasons on *ER*. It must have been difficult when it ended.

LC: I didn't realise I was there for so long, because everybody else had been there longer. The show was on for fifteen years, so I felt like a fledgling. It was such an amazing community of people and losing that was hard.

STUDIO: Didn't you audition for *ER* about ten times?

LC: Not for that role, but I auditioned a bunch of times. I auditioned for ‘the girl with a broken leg two’. I hadn't done very much acting and I never got a part. And then after some movies, I got a phone call from John Wells

(*ER*'s executive producer) and he wanted to know if I wanted to do one of his shows – *West Wing* or *ER*. It was so funny, after all that rejection to be offered a choice of what I would like to do.

STUDIO: Out of all the auditions you've had, is there one that sticks in your mind?

LC: My audition for *Scooby-Doo* was probably the most mortifying experience I'd had. I was wearing Velma's orange jumper, her little red skirt and over knee socks. I was wearing glasses, I put my hair back so it looked like a bob, and I fashioned this voice that I had really worked on. I remember thinking, “I'm not going to care what anyone thinks.” After I left, I cried so hard. I felt so stupid. I thought, “Everybody in town thinks I'm an idiot. I practically showed up in a Halloween costume!” And then I got the job.

STUDIO: Have you ever made any big sartorial boo boos?

LC: Oh, God, yeah. I had some serious eyebrows at some point. Fashion-wise, I've gone through so many things – poses when I didn't realise that you had to pose a certain way, or I'd stick my tongue out and then realise that with the Internet those things never go away. So, you become terrified of everything and that's not good. But yes, there are plenty of mistakes that I've made and I will probably continue to make. But that's life. **S**

Return opens in cinemas April 6th

