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# COLLECTIVE

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ISSUE 27

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*into*  
**the wild**

ONLY THOSE WHO RISK *GOING TOO FAR*  
WILL KNOW *HOW FAR* THEY CAN GO





# There's something about Mamie

Spawn of silver SCREEN ROYALTY she may be, but for this famous OFFSPRING, Hollywood sets the stage for tackling BIGGER ISSUES.

WORDS MELANIE DIMMITT

I'd rather play Ophelia than Juliette, really. It's fun to lose your sh\*t." With her whisper-soft voice, effortless poise and ethereal air, even obscenities are rendered seductive by Mamie Gummer. Much like her mother, Meryl Streep, the 32-year-old actress delivers razor-sharp wit with disarming sweetness, pursing her lips while battling jetlag, and kindly allowing the inevitable comparisons one can't help but draw with the famous face who gifted her those striking blue eyes.

"It's never been an aspiration of mine to be a megawatt movie star like she is," says Mamie, born Mary Willa to Meryl and sculptor Don Gummer. "I couldn't if I tried. There's a lot of people out



MAMIE FOR 'CLARE VIVIER X & OTHER STORIES'

there trying and it's damn near impossible. So I don't get caught up in trying to keep up with her. I just want to do this thing that I love as long as I love it."

Perhaps best known for her roles in television series *The Good Wife* and *Emily Owens M.D.*, Mamie's recent performances in *Side Effects* and *Cake* have secured the rising star's foothold in film. This year's *Ricki and the Flash*, for which she is currently touring in Australia, saw her star alongside her mother – with Meryl having all but thrust Diablo Cody's script into Mamie's hands.

"I mean it wasn't *that* aggressive. But yeah, she did, and it was a great vote of confidence," she says, before taking on a Yoda-like persona. "It sort of did feel like [she was saying], 'You are ready. The time has come.'"

But it wasn't the first time the pair had played mother-daughter outside the realm of reality. Almost 30 years ago, Mamie made her on-screen debut in the 1986 comedy *Heartburn* (under the pseudonym Natalie Stern); dubbed an "inordinately cute baby" in a review from the *New York Times*, and "already accomplished enough to steal scenes, even from Miss Streep." And 20 years later, she portrayed a younger version of Meryl's character in the 2007 drama *Evening* alongside Toni Collette and Claire Danes.

*Ricki and the Flash*, released on DVD this month, sees Mamie play Julie, the recently dumped, dangerously depressed daughter of Ricki Rendazzo, an ageing rockstar who abandoned her family to follow her dreams – a stark contrast to the very-much-present Meryl who raised Mamie, her older brother and two younger sisters (one of whom is also an actor).

"I'm lucky," says Mamie, reflecting on her childhood. "[My parents] are really lucky. They've been rewarded for a lot of hard work. They've been able to make a living doing what they're really passionate about. Just seeing that and seeing how happy and how full their

lives seemed because they were able to live that way... that was a pretty extraordinary model."

Acting was always the medium for this creative, who says she could never draw, and had neither the patience nor discipline to learn an instrument.

"Although, maybe it's not too late," she ponders, her mother having just learned guitar for the role of Ricki. "You can teach an old dog new tricks, I guess."

Meryl described the experience of working alongside her offspring as "therapeutic" – news to Mamie, it would seem.

"Oh, that's nice," she smiles. "I would say it was profound, you know? In the process of anyone growing up and individuating – becoming an adult – there's sort of a levelling of the playing field and you start to look at your parent with a more level gaze. I think to meet in that way and to work together was a way of doing that."

While not daunted by the Hollywood heavyweight beside her on set, Mamie jokes of being intimidated "by everybody else". But in truth, her real fears lie on the other side of the camera.

"This kind of stuff," she says coyly. "The selling of it. Or if I have to get up and speak as myself. It's always easier to do it with a script and as a character. If

I'm just me, I feel exposed. The funny thing about our business is you have to have this rhino skin to withstand the scrutiny and the public opinion, and then turn around and be ultra-vulnerable in the work, and disappear into another person. That can be confusing."

The "pageantry" of the red carpet also perplexes the New York City native, with 'glam cams' and 'mani cams' ("Don't you know? You just stick your hands in this little box and show off your manicure.

*The funny thing about our BUSINESS is you have to have this RHINO SKIN to withstand the SCRUTINY... and then turn around and be ULTRA-VULNERABLE in the work, and disappear into ANOTHER PERSON.*

It's intense") broadcasting every twitch in high-definition.

"As women parade down the line, you can see their legs shaking underneath the dresses, which makes me uncomfortable just to watch it at home in my pyjamas. And to actually go through it is another thing..."

It's unsurprising then that, aside from her mother's less-than-subtle enthusiasm, the necessary dowdiness of Julie's character (who spends the majority of the film as a "raging, feral creature" in dire need of a shower) sparked Mamie's eagerness to take on *Ricki and the Flash*.

"I really was excited about not having to look pretty, and be just simply 'the girl', you know? Or the object of the male lead, or playing in reaction to that. I liked how very chaotic she is. As an actor, that's where you want to go – into the muck and mire of human life." >





LEFT AND BELOW RIGHT: MAMIE WITH SISTERS GRACE AND LOUISA FOR 'CLARE VIVIER X & OTHER STORIES'

– for your mother, your daughter, your sister, your wife or yourself – by actively supporting the equal rights amendment”) and the importance of empowering more female writers.

“You know the Bechdel test?” she asks, referring to the assessment of whether a work of fiction features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. “I’d like a few more films to pass that. Let’s just get those numbers up. We need more women writing too... I know a lot of men who do something literally twice in their life and then they brag... I would like to be able to buck up and have that same kind of confidence, and just think, ‘Yeah, I

wrote a short story, I’m a writer’, and own that. Even if it’s not warranted, just fake it ‘til you make it like the rest of them do. And it

could make a whole lot more possible.”

Budding actors, specifically, she advises to, “treat everything like an opportunity. Even if it’s an audition, try not to let it be a test or reflect poorly on you. Just try and use it to experiment and get better,” before perfectly reciting a quote, taken from the preface of

*Ugly Lies the Bone*:

“Beauty is but skin deep, ugly lies the bone. Beauty dies and fades away but ugly holds its own,” she says, and then, eyes glinting, “I hope I don’t screw it up.”

*I really was EXCITED about NOT having to LOOK PRETTY, and be just simply ‘THE GIRL’, you know? Or the OBJECT of the male lead, or playing in REACTION to that. I liked how very CHAOTIC she is.*

As this story hits the stands Mamie will be hitting the boards, mid-way through her season of Broadway show *Ugly Lies the Bone*, where she plays the lead, Jess, a soldier who returns from war with serious injuries and spends the play dealing with her body’s decay.

These recent role choices beg the question: has needing to look beautiful bothered her in the past?

“It’s just distracted me, you know?” she says. “It’s nice to not have to think about me. I mean if it makes sense – if someone I’m playing is really obsessed with their hair, then that’s fine. But if it flies in the face of that then yeah, I think it can detract from a person’s story.”

Bringing the topic of women off-screen, Mamie stands strongly behind her mother on the issue of equal rights (in June this year, Meryl sent a letter to each member of the US Congress asking them to, “Stand up for equality



MAMIE AND MERYL ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER IN *RICKI AND THE FLASH*



*Treat everything like an opportunity. Even if it's an audition...*

