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Zest for acting

International award winning actress Lara Lemon talks to **Louise Alexander-O'Loughlin** about her role as leading lady in the thriller 'Strictly Murder', currently on tour and appearing at Rose Theatre Kingston in September. The play is set in the 1930s, penned by the late Brian Clemens OBE, and directed by his son Samuel Clemens.

Q Tell me about Brian Clemens and how you achieved the leading lady role in Strictly Murder?

A Brian was not only a lovely human being, he was a prolific writer and was the brains behind The Professionals, The Avengers, The Persuaders, Thriller and many more television series and films. He was the reason for the strong women in The Avengers – Joanna Lumley and Diana Rigg – and throughout his work there are strong female characters. He had seen my work and before he sadly passed away a couple of years ago, he told his son, actor-director Samuel Clemens, that he thought I would make a great Suzy in Strictly Murder. Therefore, when Samuel was asked to direct the play last year, I was his first choice.

Q How did you feel when you were asked?

A I was absolutely ecstatic. I'd read the play a few years earlier and I'd distinctly remembered Suzy being a great part. The actress playing her gets to run the whole gamut of human emotions.

Q What's the plot of Strictly Murder?

A It is set in Provence in 1939 in the shadow of World War II where an English couple Peter (Gary Turner) and Suzy (me) are living in idyllic isolation. Their peace is suddenly shattered by a stranger from Peter's past who unearths secrets from a buried and hidden life. It is a very clever thriller and there are so many twists and turns with a few laughs thrown in for good measure. Brian was the king of the thrillers, so you're in for a good night!

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Q You are working with some big names in the industry. How did that make you feel?

A I was nervous but determined to show them what I could do and to match the high standard. Luckily the cast is incredible and we make a great ensemble. I am absolutely thrilled to be working with Brian Capron, Corrinne Wicks, Gary Turner and Andrew Fettes. They are absolutely inspirational.

Q Has Samuel changed the script since his father wrote it?

A Yes he has. Samuel was very excited as Strictly Murder is one his favourite plays his father had written and he'd always wanted to direct it. Samuel's directing background is in films and he is extremely visual. There are a few moments in the play that Sam has made more dramatic and shocking. He's an excellent director and it's been a real pleasure working with him.

Q Give me an example of something Samuel might have amended from the original script.

A Oh, that would be telling! I can't really tell you anything without giving too much away.

Q Tell me about Suzy?

A I love Suzy because if she were alive today she would most definitely be a feminist. She is independent, feminine and strong. She's not just the girlfriend!

Q Brian Clemens must have thought you were like Suzy in some ways to want you to be his leading lady. Why do you think that was?

A Brian knew that I am a strong supporter of ERA (Equal Representation for Actresses), an organisation that wants to see women on screen, TV and theatre in equal numbers to men. Currently



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women are systemically under represented. This does not accurately reflect our society: it distorts our view of the real world and some of the statistics are frightening. Brian clearly thought

I was strong minded and obviously feminine (Lara laughs) and independent. Maybe that's why.

Q Have you always wanted to be on the stage?

A I was painfully shy at school, so much so that I was given the part of a 'statue' in a school play. I'd already lost out on Angel Gabriel as I wasn't loud enough. However, I just knew I wanted to be on the stage – even if it was just being a statue.

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Q So how did Lara Lemon find her voice?

A I joined the Yvonne Arnaud Youth Theatre when I was 17 and loved it. From there I joined the National Youth Theatre. I then went on to a year in a repertory company in Reading before venturing out into the industry.

Q Strictly Murder is on at the Rose Theatre in September. Are you excited to be performing there?

A Yes, hugely excited! I have actually worked there for several years now and they have been very supportive when it comes to me going off for work. It's a great theatre and it's a second home for me, but I'm already full of butterflies...excited butterflies!

Q How passionate are you about your career?

A Incredibly. I love the arts and in particular the theatre. I'm going to share with you something that very few people know. I spend all my money on going to the theatre and I have seen over 650 plays to date. Don't laugh when I tell you, but I have a little book (well, books...) in which I have been writing since I was 19. After each play, I put in the book a flyer and ticket and write a review on each play. It's hilarious to read them back – especially the ones I wrote when I was 19 – I was so precocious!

Q Who do you most admire?

A There are so many actors and actresses I admire. The list is endless, but Julie Walters and Olivia Coleman always spring to mind as a couple of very strong women who are exceptionally diverse and talented.

Q Tell me about your awards?

A I was lucky enough to be awarded Actress in a Leading Role for 'Off-Piste' at the Southampton International Festival and Best Supporting Actress at the Chelsea Film Festival in New York. I was up against Fiona Shaw at the Southampton awards and I am still pinching myself about winning.

Q How was the experience on Off-Piste?

A We shot the main bulk of the film in the French Alps so it was a beautiful place to work. It was the director's, Glen Kirby's, first feature so it was very exciting and his passion for the project was shared by the whole team. I played a small part in his next film 'The Pugilist' too. Jack in the Box Films is definitely a company to watch out for.

Q What was your first professional role?

A It was in a tiny pub theatre where I played a waitress in the comedy 'Shakers'.

Q Comedy vs drama. Which do you prefer acting in?

A There are pros to both. Comedies are so much fun and the buzz you get from the audience reaction is unbeatable. Then again dramas are rewarding in a different way and there is always a chance to carry on discovering different layers. But both have their challenges. Comedy isn't as easy as it seems and drama can be emotionally exhausting. In Strictly Murder there is a lot of crying, but it feels cathartic in a way. I love the challenges of both.

Q Do you have an ugly cry?

A Definitely. I have the ugliest cry face. I'm taking inspiration from the amazing Claire Danes who might have the best ugly crying face in the business! ❖



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essence INFO

See Lara Lemon in the gripping thriller Strictly Murder at Rose Theatre Kingston from Tuesday 26 to Saturday 30 September 2017

Website: www.rosetheatrekingston.org

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