

LOOK

Homeward,

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

>> Actress **Claire Danes** began her career on the small screen. Which makes her return to it in Showtime's stellar "Homeland," set right here in Washington, all the sweeter.

JIM WRIGHT/ICON

It's been more than 16 years since Claire Danes, now 32, starred in a television series. Which is a lifetime, quite literally, for the teenage character that first made her famous, 15-year-old Angela Chase in "My So-Called Life," the role that earned the actress an Emmy nomination and a Golden Globe Award in 1995. Only 19 episodes aired before the show's abrupt (and hotly contested) cancellation, yet Danes' take on a yearning, self-aware sophomore suffering the indignities of high school is the stuff of TV legend. So much so that in 2007, *Time* magazine included the series on its list of "100 Best TV Shows of All Time."

So the small screen is pleased to have Danes back, this time on Showtime. Never mind her long foray into film, which has been an eclectic mix of the critically acclaimed ("The Hours," "Romeo + Juliet"), the interestingly independent ("Igby Goes Down," "Shopgirl"), and the unapologetically mainstream ("Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines," "The Mod Squad").

She's done theater, too, much of it ambitious. But her most profound work has been on television, as in last year's *pièce de résistance*, the biopic "Temple Grandin." In it, she

has a redhead with full-access clearance to headquarters in Langley, Va., so thoroughly kept an audience in such exquisite suspense.

Danes-as-Anderson is convinced that a former POW (the brilliant Damian Lewis of "Band of Brothers" fame), who's just returned home as a war hero, has been flipped by Al Qaeda during his eight-year captivity in Iraq. She's also certain the soldier is using his insider status to imminently set off the ultimate terrorist strike on American soil. Her boss (Mandy Patinkin) can't be sure if his protégé is brilliant, off-balanced or maybe both. As the saying goes, the plot thickens.

Danes raves about the experience: "I'm really impressed by the quality of the writing," she tells *Washington Flyer*. "Everyone involved in the show"—which also co-stars Diego Klattenhoff, Maury Sterling and Morena Baccarin—"is just sort of desperate to get to the next episode. And we're talking about people who are spending 12 months together, yet they still have the energy to be excited about it!"

Danes did her homework to prepare for playing a female Jack Bauer with a twist. "I had to do a crash course in the CIA and bipolar disorder. I was a little overwhelmed, because they're both so complex—but fascinating. I read articles and books on the

who specializes in the condition, "and collectively we diagnosed my character together. Does Carrie have Bipolar 1? Is she more up than down? It was sort of a perverse way of playing with Barbies."

With Danes' portrayal of Temple Grandin already under her belt, is the actress drawn to characters with mental complexities? Or does she simply like her roles to live in shades of gray, never easily defined?

"Well, I joke that I'm making my way through the DSM-V [*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*]. But I'm really interested in how people can be wired in fundamentally different ways to each other. And how people with these conditions—which sometimes can be talked about in pejorative terms—often have something advantageous [to share with] society, with unique perspectives. They can perceive the world in different ways. I don't mean to dismiss the pain and struggle that may come with these conditions; they're not without their complexities or complications. But there is something to be said for having a special, unique mind."

Up in the Air

As an actress with such a formidable resume, one that spans 33 films and a dozen or so Broadway credits, it should come as no surprise that "sometimes I feel like I'm constantly on an airplane," she says. But no matter: "I love traveling," she adds. "I do it for work, which is great because you become immersed in the culture, and you're working with people from that place, and you get very plugged in. But at the same time, you don't have many opportunities to see the things tourists get to see, the sights. So the last few summers with my new husband [British actor Hugh Dancy, whom Danes met when they both landed parts in 2007's "Evening," and later wed in 2009], we'll travel just for traveling's sake, which is fantastic. Sometimes I get overwhelmed: There's too much I want to see ..."

She elaborates: "I love France," she says, the country where she married Dancy in a private ceremony. "And Italy and Greece. And Scandinavia, too. I love England. I have an English husband, and I've also worked there a lot. I love Mexico, and I would love to go to Africa. I'd love to see Russia. And I went to China for a film festival last summer in Shanghai, and that was really fascinating; I'd like to see more of that country. I could go on and on ... I want to go back to Thailand again ... I love Tokyo. I've been there for work ..."

So she's a seasoned pro when it comes to fastening her seatbelt and taking off. "Right now I'm shuttling back and forth between Charlotte, N.C., New York and L.A., where we're filming ..."

Agent

"I had to do a crash course in the CIA and bipolar disorder. I was a little overwhelmed, because they're both so complex."

wowed as a 1960s autistic woman who revolutionized both the cattle industry's and the medical establishment's view of autism, a role that won her a second Golden Globe and her first Emmy, as Outstanding Lead Actress in a Miniseries or Movie.

Now, there's "Homeland," Showtime's answer for former "24" fans desperate for a fix. Danes plays CIA agent Carrie Mathison, a terrorist tracker who suffers from bipolar disorder, and who swallows back a daily dose of mood-stabilizing meds. It is, quite simply, thrilling TV, the kind you schedule the rest of your evening around. Not since Jodie Foster riveted audiences as Agent Clarice Starling

CIA. And I met a woman who was a very high-ranking CIA officer who [took] me to Langley and introduced me to her [CIA] colleagues. I listened to them for hours, gleaning information."

Mastering the nuances and behavioral traits associated with bipolar disorder—a condition that causes extreme emotional highs and lows, with periods of unusual, sleepless energy followed by, at times, episodes of crushing depression—was every bit as challenging as learning to convincingly wiretap and videotape a soldier's home, something her character does in the season's opener.

"I met with a psychologist," she says, one

Many of "Homeland's" scenes are shot in Charlotte, with the exception of a few exteriors with an unmistakable monument or perhaps the U.S. Capitol in the background. Still, Danes is no stranger to Washington, although her experience in the city is admittedly "rarefied," as she's quick to describe it.

Which makes sense, when you think about it. The rest of her life is rather glamorous, too. Danes grew up in Manhattan (and all over the world on film sets); she's played the love interest opposite such dashing leading men as Leonardo DiCaprio, Jared Leto and Billy Crudup (the latter in real life, too); now, she lives and travels with the debonair Dancy, making the rounds between New York City, their country house upstate, and his parents' home in Oxfordshire.

So it's par for the course that her history in D.C. is not exactly, well, your average tour of the nation's capital, either.

"I'm not wildly political," she says. "I'm not one to have a conversation about politics ... I always go to Washington for work." She's referring to time logged on location; you won't find her campaigning before Congress for a cause, as many Hollywood stars do who wear their political persuasions on their sleeves.

"I've been very, very spoiled," she continues, laughing at herself a little. "You know:



Danes stars as Carrie Mathison in "Homeland," set in Washington.

JIM BRIDGES/SHOWTIME

It's, like, dinner with the president! I've been to the White House Correspondents' Dinner a couple of times. And I went to the Kennedy Center Honors [last] year because my good friend [dancer, choreographer and Broadway vet] Bill T. Jones was being honored ... Edward Albee and I were appointed to talk about him. I also went to the Mark Twain Awards [in 2005] when Steve Martin was being honored, and I spoke there, as well. I seem to be engaged [to travel to D.C.] to give brilliant people awards! And then,

most recently, I went to visit Langley ... not a bad way to see the town, but it's a little embarrassing!" Still, she pronounces: "I'd like to come to Washington and just hang out."

We like the idea, Claire, and will welcome you back, anytime, much like the small screen that displays your talents to such tremendous effect.

And here's an added bonus: no need to attend awards shows, memorize soaring speeches or secure all those special clearance badges. ☺

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