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**RUBY
ROSE**

MEET THE ACTRESS
WHO'S CHANGING THE
FACE OF HOLLYWOOD

Rebel ROSE

She's overcome childhood bullying and depression to become Hollywood's hottest rising star. And now RUBY ROSE's quirky cool is taking centre stage in the latest *Pitch Perfect* instalment – a film whose inclusive message she 100 per cent endorses ➤

INTERVIEW ELAINE LIPWORTH
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“SINGING IN FRONT OF A THOUSAND PEOPLE IS MUCH HARDER THAN FALLING OUT OF A WINDOW OR FIRING GUNS”

With her raw talent, edgy image and the kind of striking looks that stop traffic, Australian actress Ruby Rose is the most original rising star in Hollywood. Familiar to fans of the Netflix show *Orange is the New Black* for her scene-stealing turn as lesbian prison inmate Stella Carlin, she has also attracted attention in a series of high-octane action films, ‘kicking ass and doing crazy, petrifying stunts’ opposite Keanu Reeves in *John Wick: Chapter 2* and Vin Diesel in *xXx: The Return Of Xander Cage*. The 31-year-old has built a massive fanbase on social media – nearly 12 million followers on Instagram alone – added to which she is the face of make-up brand Urban Decay and Nike’s ‘Force Is Female’ campaign.

In short, Ruby’s career is in flight – and she is about to become a household name, starring alongside Anna Kendrick and Rebel Wilson in *Pitch Perfect 3*, the latest instalment of the hit musical franchise set in the world of a cappella, which has taken more than £300 million at the global box office so far. The new film sees the return of the nerdy but endearing Barden Bellas, led by Anna’s sassy Beca and Rebel’s hilarious Fat Amy. ‘I love that *Pitch Perfect* is about friendship’ says Ruby. ‘The girls have relationships and crushes but the central story is about how much they mean to one another and about female empowerment.’

A powerful role model herself, Ruby was raised in Melbourne by her single mother Katia Langenheim and started her career as a model and DJ in her teens. She came out as a lesbian at the age of 12 and is a passionate campaigner for LGBTQ rights and diversity. Last year, her friend Taylor Swift called Ruby ‘a force of nature’ when she presented the actress with a prestigious award from GLAAD (previously the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) for her work promoting ‘equality and acceptance’.

Ruby was ‘ecstatic’ about joining the diverse cast of *Pitch Perfect 3*. Representing girl power at its best, and directed by a woman, Trish Sie, it celebrates inclusiveness. ‘The Bellas are all very different in terms of size, sexuality, race and personality, and together they’re so strong, which is great because kids can look up to these women,’ she says. The film follows the



From top: Ruby opposite Taylor Schilling in *Orange is the New Black*; in *Pitch Perfect 3*; with her mother Katia Langenheim

Bellas, who (with the exception of Hailee Steinfeld’s Emily) have now graduated from college, but decide to reunite one last time for a tour of Europe to entertain US troops. There’s a talent contest (judged by music producer DJ Khaled, in a cameo) and Ruby’s character Calamity (‘the name says it all’) is the lead singer of a cool all-girl group called Evermoist.

To begin with, Beca and her pals ‘make fun of us because we look like models and they think we won’t be very good’, says Ruby.

It rapidly emerges, though, that Evermoist poses a serious threat to the Bellas, who only perform vocal harmonies and covers of hit songs, ‘whereas we play instruments and write original music. We look down on the a cappella situation!’

Working with Anna ‘was incredible’, says Ruby. ‘I’d look at her and go, “Are you serious?” because her pitch is amazing...perfect. She never hits a dead note.’ As for her fellow Aussie co-star, whose character has rebranded herself as ‘Fat Amy Winehouse’, ‘Ah. I just want to eat Rebel on toast, I love her madly. Rebel, myself and my bandmates from

the film went to an open-mic night and we performed “I Love Rock ‘N’ Roll”’. Ruby beams at the mention of her friend, saying there were moments on the set when Rebel would have cast and crew in stitches, for example, ‘when Fat Amy first hears our names: Calamity, Chastity, Veracity and Serenity, she goes, “If I joined your group that would make me...Obesity.”’

Portraying Calamity presented a fresh challenge for Ruby. ‘I have always played sports, so action is safe for me. *Pitch Perfect* meant singing in front of a thousand people, which was much harder than falling out of a window or firing guns. But it’s good to do things outside your comfort zone.’ It was also her first experience as a ‘mean girl with catty one-liners. I was the opposite of that in school,’ says Ruby, revealing that she was severely bullied. ‘I would be the one person in the class not invited to the party. I was an easy target because I had a single mum and not many people did.’

‘My mum is a strong woman who did everything she could to make sure I had food on the table,’ says Ruby, who is chatting over a veggie burger (she’s a vegan) at a hip vegetarian restaurant in Los Angeles. It is immediately clear why the actress is Hollywood’s Woman of the Moment. She is charismatic, with sparkling eyes which ‘change colour from green to grey to blue’. Her hair is cropped but longer at the front: ‘I’m growing it out a bit. I want that 90s Leonardo DiCaprio *Romeo and Juliet* vibe,’ Ruby says. And she does have that young Leo look. (Observers have often jokingly commented on Ruby’s resemblance to Justin Bieber, too.)

She is wearing a silk pyjama jacket over minuscule shorts and high-heeled, black velvet Valentino boots. Almost every inch of the actress’s visible skin is covered in a tapestry of tattoos. One reads ‘mum’, another declares, ‘be the person your dog thinks you are’. Ruby is about to have most of them removed because they’re difficult to cover up for film roles. I don’t see her partner’s name – she’s in a relationship with Australian musician Jessica Origliasso, of the Veronicas. Ruby warns against tattoos of a romantic nature: ‘I don’t recommend it,’ she says wryly. ‘They call it the kiss of death. There are probably better ways to celebrate your love.’

Ruby looks tough but she is actually warm and friendly. ‘When studio heads meet me they say: “Wow, you’re actually a lot more sensitive than we imagined.”’ Our conversation often comes back to her mother; clearly a huge inspiration. Katia was 20 when she gave birth to her daughter and walked out on Ruby’s ►

“WHEN I TOLD MY MUM I WAS GAY, SHE WAS, LIKE, ‘YEAH, I KNOW – WHAT ELSE?’”



◀ father: ‘Mum was scared to leave but she wanted to protect me.’ Katia, an artist and a teacher, worked for several years with ‘disadvantaged youth at a prison’. Ruby doesn’t see her father (‘he was troubled, not a cool dude’), but she is in regular contact with her half-brother Harry. Katia remarried when Ruby was in her teens and the actress is close to Roderick, her stepfather: ‘I didn’t really miss having a dad; I had other father figures. My grandpa and uncles are amazing. And my mum was an all-star. If I wanted to go camping or climb trees, that’s what we did.’

Money was in short supply. ‘I didn’t have cool clothes and we didn’t own a TV, but I thought it was normal and it meant that I got to be more outdoorsy and creative.’ Trips to the cinema with her mother were treats: ‘I remember seeing *The Flintstones* and *Titanic*. We would sneak into other movies after watching the film we’d paid for, and see as many as possible on that one ticket,’ she laughs. ‘We were going to make that ten dollars count!’

Given her rebellious image, it’s interesting that as a child, Ruby was a member of her local Anglican church choir: ‘The parish let my mum rent a house for \$200 a month, which helped us out of a really tough time. In return I was in the church choir and my mum would do flower arranging and make scones. It was a very free-spirited church and I loved singing.’ She left the choir in her teens. ‘I didn’t think singing at church was cool any more,’ she says wistfully. ‘I get a bit sad that I stopped – it was a big part of my life.’ By then, Ruby’s musical tastes had moved on. A fan of the Spice Girls for a while, ‘I really loved Nirvana, Sinéad O’Connor, David Bowie and Guns N’ Roses. I was obsessed with Prince, because that’s what my mum listened to.’

Ruby describes high school as ‘a total nightmare’. She doesn’t dwell on the past, but tells me that ‘there was a lot of name-calling and writing on toilet



“I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED KIDS BUT COULDN’T RAISE THEM FAR AWAY FROM MY MUM”

doors. Things like “bitch” and “Ruby is a slut”, despite the fact that I’d never slept with anybody’. The bullying ‘escalated to physical attacks and I went home very upset many times. Then I got acclimatised to it and became numb.’ She’s grateful she grew up before the advent of social media. ‘The public shaming kids face now is so much harder.’

From an early age Ruby knew she was a lesbian. She says Katia ‘is a mum, so she just sort of knew.

When I did tell her she was, like, “Yeah, I know – what else?” She was fine that I liked Ninja Turtles and didn’t want Barbie dolls. I dated a couple of guys in school who were really sweet; I just never slept with them. Poor guys!

They actually knew I was gay and I was, like, “We can be best friends and call each other boyfriend and girlfriend.”

She says there were few role models to look up to growing up. ‘If I’d seen more gay people [in the

media] it might have been easier. Angelina Jolie was the only person I related to because she was a little different and had tattoos and was cool and badass, but also because she came out and said she was bisexual.’

Throughout high school, Ruby was also dealing with psychological issues and was told she had bipolar disorder; a condition her father suffered from. ‘I was diagnosed and undiagnosed and diagnosed. My moods were erratic and I was up and down, a very depressed kid.’ She took various medications (‘some helped, some didn’t’) and had therapy (‘not enough’). Sessions with the school counsellor ‘didn’t feel safe’ because they took place at the scene of the bullying, while therapy at the local community centre wasn’t consistent. As her family couldn’t afford to pay for treatment, Ruby saw therapists ‘who would volunteer their time, but it wasn’t always the same person. The fact that I survived it all is a mystery to me. I threw myself into drawing, music, writing

poetry and psychology. I was obsessed with being a child psychologist.’

Ruby says that she now knows she doesn’t have bipolar disorder: ‘I still have highs and lows, but I feel great now.’ She does still see a therapist on a regular basis. ‘I think therapy is wonderful for everybody. It helps to calm everything down and align things.’

Her dream of studying psychology (the subject is still an interest of Ruby’s) changed when, as a teenager, she was discovered by an agent at a Pink concert and started modelling, as well as working in bars. ‘I was a workaholic; I had four or five jobs.’ After school, she began VJ-ing at MTV; acting and presenting jobs followed. Ruby moved to the US in 2013. She made a short film *Break Free*, a tribute to gender fluidity, which chronicles the actress chopping off her long blonde hair (a wig), binding her breasts and transforming from a quintessential blonde bombshell into a tough, masculine archetype. The film went viral on YouTube and she was suddenly in demand.

Next year she’ll appear in *The Meg*, a thriller with Jason Statham (‘he’s really sweet, really funny’) about a prehistoric shark. ‘I play a scientist and engineer. There are moments where people will probably drop their popcorn.’ Determined to avoid typecasting, she’s keen to do more comedy. Ruby is also outspoken about the shortcomings of the film industry. She wants to see more films with gay characters. ‘It’s important that everyone can go to the movies and

see somebody that they can relate to. It is strange that actors can be painted green or can fly in films, but [some directors and producers] still can’t imagine somebody who is gay playing a heterosexual. I think that’s closed-minded.’ But she’s optimistic that things are changing, ‘with people recognising now that gay people can play straight people and vice-versa’.

On the subject of Hollywood politics it’s impossible to avoid the subject of Harvey Weinstein, the disgraced film mogul accused of sexually abusing dozens of women. Ruby hasn’t worked with the producer but says she’s ‘inspired’ by actress Ashley Judd and the others who have come forward to discuss their disturbing experiences: ‘They are so courageous.’ Ruby herself was sexually harassed as a teenager by her boss in a fast-food outlet ‘where I was working’. Two years ago when she was offered ‘a really cool cover shoot for a magazine’ she turned it down because the photographer assigned to the job was Terry Richardson, who has been accused multiple times of sexually exploiting models. ‘Because of the experience friends of mine have had with him, I said, “I won’t shoot with Terry.” They said, “It has to be him,” so I lost the cover.’

We discuss the way the Weinstein scandal has drawn attention to abuse in all walks of life. ‘Any woman you meet has probably been through some type of sexual harassment or sexual assault, it is not just happening in Hollywood. My mum has experienced it, so have friends who are nurses and teachers.’ She thinks the repercussions of the scandal will lead ‘to a huge shift in the way men

RUBY RATES

MORNING ROUTINE

I take my dogs outside and then I have a cup of mild coffee, so I don’t get too jittery. I always have the same thing for breakfast: two pieces of toast with banana.

WHAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE ABOUT YOU?

I go to bed at 10pm.

YOUR BIGGEST FEAR

Not utilising every single day and living life to the best.

DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN

THREE WORDS

Strong, hard-working, passionate.

WHAT’S BY YOUR BED?

Soothing stuff: crystals and candles, a Himalayan salt lamp, a picture of my mum and my diary.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE PRIME MINISTER?

Have a supportive chain of people working for me and promote love and acceptance, instead of dividing people. I think we’re stronger as one.

FAVOURITE LGBTQ FILMS

I loved *Carol* because it is a beautiful story and I adore Cate Blanchett. *Blue is the Warmest Colour* was fantastic. I love *Brokeback Mountain*.

WHERE ARE YOU HAPPIEST?

At home in the garden on a hot day with music and good food, with my three chihuahuas. They’re all a bit handicapped: Chance can’t walk – she has a wheelchair; Charlie broke his neck and jaw, and the third, Ru, is just weird!

MOTTO

I love the quote, ‘Be yourself, everybody else is taken.’

treat women’ and adds that in her view, ‘we need to educate boys on how to respect women and to know what boundaries are and what is not acceptable’.

Inevitably, we discuss Donald Trump, too. Living in Trump’s America, says Ruby, ‘is exhausting’. As an Australian citizen she doesn’t want to say too much about American politics, but is concerned about the president’s policies. ‘Although I want to keep my finger on the pulse and know what’s happening, I was so tired of waking up every morning to more bad news [about Trump] that I deleted social media from my phone.’

As we chat, Ruby orders a coconut water and ginger mocktail. I haven’t had a drink for seven years,’ she says. ‘For me there was a correlation between drinking and getting depressed and I realised I didn’t enjoy waking up with a hangover.’ She doesn’t miss alcohol: ‘It’s not as though I’m shy and drinking helps me come out of my shell.’

Ruby started dating Jessica a year ago. They were previously involved almost a decade ago. ‘We tried but we couldn’t have been in a relationship back then because we were both drinking, we were both wild and rebelling.’ This time ‘it’s different’, says Ruby because both women

are happier in themselves. ‘The cliché that you can’t live with somebody until you love yourself is true. There is something about leaving your 20s behind that means you stop sweating the small stuff and realise that it doesn’t matter if you think, “I was prettier or thinner when I was 21”. Yeah,

maybe...but I was miserable,’ she says.

The couple live in Ruby’s LA house and the relationship works because they get on so well, she says. ‘If your partner is your best friend, that’s going to be the foundation of the relationship. We are teammates. It’s about honesty, respect and having a partner who makes you laugh. Some people think, “Oh, it must be much to be easier to be in a relationship as a lesbian because you’re happy to share the bathroom.” Well, no, it’s, like, “I need to use the shower now, I have to get ready.” It’s all the same problems. It’s not as though all lesbians exchange clothes – and Jess is tiny.’

Ruby has been engaged twice: to Roald Dahl’s granddaughter Phoebe Dahl, and to model Catherine McNeil. ‘I’m a romantic and when I was younger my head would go straight to marriage and family,’ she smiles. ‘Those relationships didn’t work out but they were amazing, so there are no hard feelings.’ Are she and Jess contemplating marriage? ‘I don’t know. I know that we love each other very much and we’re inseparable. We both cook. I’m better at side dishes and she does the whole meal – I don’t have the patience for that.’

Last month Ruby took to Twitter to thank everyone who voted in favour of legalising gay marriage in Australia. ‘It’s more about equal rights than the actual act of getting married. It’s important not so that I can get married, but because of the message it sends to gay kids growing up, so that society is not telling them, “You’re not accepted.” They need to know they’re no different from their friends.’

Whether Ruby and Jess walk down the aisle or not, the actress has plans to eventually start a family and move back to Australia. ‘I have always wanted kids but I couldn’t raise my children far away from my mum and my grandparents. I’m not ready to do that now. I’ve just started in film and I’m getting amazing opportunities, but eventually I would like to move to somewhere in Australia by the beach, have a couple of kids and ten animals. That would be the dream.’ 🐾

■ Pitch Perfect 3 will be in cinemas from 20 December



Ruby with her partner Jessica Origliasso