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Elegant and classy, Rebecca Hall insists that being the daughter of stage legend Sir Peter doesn't make a career... **"I just think you're either talented or you're not."** Either way, with *Dorian Gray* she is looking for something different, having found her feet playing prim for Christopher Nolan and Woody Allen. What? **"Please accept me as a sex object!"**

Rebbecca Hall is worried she's getting a bit of a reputation. "Only plays extreme intellectuals," she mock-frowns. Well, in *Dorian Gray*, she *does* play the clever-clever suffragette-photographer girlfriend of Oscar Wilde's damned über-narcissist. "Nothing to do with me!" she hoots of the feisty character traits imbued in her Gray-doter Emily Wotton. "I don't only do roles that are strong, independent women who are suffragettes! I'm going to scream from the rooftops: *please* accept me as a sex object."

A brief fit of hysterical mirth reverberates in *Total Film*'s eardrums, before Hall suddenly steadies herself and adds, "I like playing the intellectuals. They're the most interesting roles." As the Cambridge-educated daughter of British stage titan Sir Peter Hall and American opera star Maria Ewing, she must qualify as a real-life brainiac herself, right? "God no, are you kidding? I watch *Britain's Got Talent* with the rest of 'em," she demurs. "I did go to Cambridge and do English Literature so I suppose I'm quite well read. But I don't think I'm an intellectual snob. I'm a big one for being aware of pop culture."

Hall is ringing *Total Film* from a park near her current place of employ, The Old Vic, while munching down a lunchtime sarnie. Although London-born and Sussex-raised, the 27-year-old actress doesn't presently have a home of her own, living a vagabond's existence. "I've been living out of two suitcases for the last 18 months and probably will continue to do so!" she says giddily. "Eventually it'll make me go crazy but for the minute it's alright."

In those 18 months, Hall squeezed in two telly dramas (including the brilliant *Red Riding* trilogy), three films (*Frost/Nixon*, *Dorian Gray*, Nicole Holofcener's New York-set fem-com *Please Give*), awards-season tubthumping for *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* and Sam Mendes' *The Bridge Project*, a two-role/two-play, 10-month

whirligig (New York, Singapore, Madrid, London) that she plunged into straight after Woody Allen's comic comeback had winched her several rungs up the It-Actress ladder. She's also just signed on for Ben Affleck's *Gone Baby Gone* follow-up, *The Town*...

Out this month though is *Dorian Gray*, which Hall calls "not your average, seriously respectful-of-the-literature adaptation", while unable to suppress a snicker that her Edwardian glamourpuss doesn't even feature in Oscar Wilde's gothic novel. "I'm going to get in trouble with the academics," she whispers, with conspiratorial glee. "It's one of those things that if you're an English actress, everyone assumes you've done a bunch of period adaptations of great English novels. And when I got offered it, I suddenly realised that I hadn't actually done any and I'd quite like to do one."

Most of Hall's scenes come opposite Ben Barnes, as Dorian, the hedonistic aesthete who barter his soul for eternal youth. Barnes' very first day on set involved a sex scene with 19-year-old Rachel Hurd-Wood. Likewise, Hall's first *Gray* day also involved climbing into bed with Barnes. "Maybe he has that in his contract that he has to get all the women into bed on their first shot!" she chuckles.

Tall, willowy, Jane Birkin-sexy and bristling with intelligence and mischief, it's obvious why she's been professionally tractor-beamed by Mendes, Allen, Ron Howard and Christopher Nolan (for *The Prestige*). And for that, she has her father to thank. Peter Hall — distinguished founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company, celebrated director of the National Theatre for 15 years and honorary knight of the realm — not only took a paternal interest in his daughter's thespian dreams, he actively gave her an enormous leg up, casting her at 10 in his '92 TV mini-series *The Camomile Lawn* and drip-feeding her a steady supply >>



Shades of Gray: (clockwise from right) getting personal with Ben Barnes in *Dorian Gray*; opposite Javier Bardem in Woody Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*; with father Sir Peter Hall.



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of pithy stage roles after she dropped out of Cambridge. Hall fields the nepotism question like she does everything – with a cheeky candour that could reek of impudence if it weren’t backed up by proper acting chops.

“I’d be an idiot if I said that it wasn’t helpful in many, many ways,” she declares. “But I wouldn’t say it helped me more than most people when you get to a point. I just think that you’re either talented and able to do it or you’re not. And if I wasn’t, then being Peter Hall’s daughter sure as hell wouldn’t have helped me – it would have made sure that I never worked again.”

She scoffs at the notion that growing up the daughter of legends in their own fields offered any advantage when Woody Allen came to cast her in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (in his infamously terse fashion he asked Hall in a doorway if she could do an American accent; she said yes and two weeks later got the gig). “If your parents are legendary figures, they are to other people, but to you they’re just your parents,” she muses. “My dad’s my dad but coming face to face with Woody is a whole other kettle of fish.”

And did that kettle’s Jewish-neurotic contents meet her approval? “I found Woody to be much more how I’d hoped he’d be, having been such a big fan of his work,” she says. “There’s a lot of mythology that surrounds him that’s blown out of proportion – don’t shake him by the hand, don’t look him in the eye, don’t talk to him unless he speaks to you first. And it’s true, there are eccentricities, but no more than any other legendary director. People have idiosyncratic ways of working and he has his.”

Including knocking off every day by 5pm... “Occasionally, we went to 5.30 but generally it gets to 5 and he’s like, ‘I have a life.’” Woody’s civilised working day gave Hall the chance to indulge in

her own Barcelona adventure, hanging out in coffee bars and strolling around the city unnoticed, unlike her co-stars Scarlett Johansson and Penélope Cruz, who couldn’t venture outdoors without the accompaniment of hefty bodyguards. Hall is adamant that she’ll never achieve that level of fame, but also admits, “I think I’m in denial. I keep believing, meh, it’s not going to happen, or if it does, it won’t matter – I’ll just carry on exactly the same.”

One deliberate step in Hall’s fame-avoidance strategy was taking herself off the film market precisely at her most covetable. “Doing the *Bridge* project just after *Vicky Cristina* came out was perfect timing for me. So often you see these actors who have great opportunities where they’re given a lot of exposure, like I am in that film, and then you find yourself on an uncontrollable merry-go-round where you get wildly overexposed and your moment becomes a moment as opposed to a career. I just decided that I was going to make myself unavailable to go out to parties – I’d do theatre for a year rather than get any more famous!”

She is, however, thrilled at the prospect of working with Affleck, even if she only has one day’s rest between her final stage performance and catching a flight to Boston for the shoot. An adaptation of Chuck Hogan’s heist novel *Prince Of Thieves*, Affleck’s second directing effort promises a high-stakes love triangle between Ben’s robber-man, *Mad Men*’s Jon Hamm and Hall, who will play... a bank manager. “It’s a different sort of role for me,” she admits. At least she won’t need to worry it’s going to bolster her reputation for only playing fiercely intelligent women. “What are you saying?” Hall laughs. “Bank managers can be suffragettes too!” **TF**

***Dorian Gray* opens on 9 September and is reviewed on page 58. For the latest features and video, check out tinyurl.com/tfdorian**

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