



Riding high ... Cate Blanchett says *Robin Hood* co-star Russell Crowe was "incredibly generous" to work with.

Iron maiden

Cate Blanchett tells JENNY COONEY about sparring with Russell Crowe and riding as a rougher, tougher Maid Marian.

Cate Blanchett's Maid Marian in the coming Ridley Scott blockbuster *Robin Hood* is no shrinking violet. In this revisionist tale of the backstory leading up to the legend of Robin Hood as we know it, Marian is struggling to survive in Nottingham, taking care of her ailing father-in-law and poverty-stricken village while her husband and most of the men of the hamlet have been away at war for 10 years.

A marksman in the king's army, Robin (Russell Crowe) shows up to honour a promise he made to Marian's late husband. He is then persuaded to stay on and pose as her spouse so she will not lose the family estate, which cannot be inherited by a woman. The film gives Blanchett a chance to wield swords, shoot arrows and fight in a battle on horseback.

When the recent danger from Iceland's volcanic ash cloud prompted Crowe to reschedule his interviews to Los Angeles instead of London, Blanchett was left to go solo at a media conference in London's swish Dorchester Hotel, a quick flight away from the Berlin set of her spy drama *Hanna* (also starring Eric Bana).

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Dressed in a black and cream-patterned silk overlap dress by Alexander McQueen and black velvet Lanvin heels, Blanchett was proud to talk about her latest role, in which she holds her own with fellow Oscar winner Crowe.

How is your Maid Marian different?

Ridley didn't want Marian to be fainting or wilting behind a handkerchief like in previous versions. This was supposed to get closer to what the gritty reality would have been. The men had gone away to fight this interminably long war and so the women were left to fend for themselves and Marian had assumed what used to be traditionally male roles in the village.

How was it working with Russell Crowe for the first time?

It was really great and we've had a very wickedly funny email correspondence, which I really relished. I think as Australians, because we live in a land mass that is the size of North America but with only 20 million of us, the performing-arts industry is really quite small and you get invested in one another's successes and career paths. So I'd followed his career with great



Family affair ... Blanchett with partner Andrew Upton and their three sons. Photo: Snapper Media

interest and admiration. Russell is a force of nature and his reputation precedes him, so you're wondering, 'How is it going to be together?' but I found him incredibly generous and absolutely dedicated and he was not only invested in the film's success but, being a producer on the film, he was also invested in people's enjoyment of the experience. Thanks to him, the merry men were pretty merry!

Is it true that when you both attended the ceremony to unveil your Australian postage stamps, he asked the crowd if they thought you should work together and you said yes to this role the next day?

Yes. It was a pretty amazing thing for Nicole [Kidman] and Geoffrey [Rush] and Russell and I to all be made into stamps and I was really chuffed. But before he got up at the podium, Russell said he was going to ask me to be in a film with him in front of everyone and take a vote and I said, 'I dare you,' and he did it. That's kind of how the relationship followed. We're quite playfully combative with one another and that probably came across in the dynamic of the film. I'm very fond of him.

Were your own three sons [Dashliel, Roman and Ignatius] excited about the movie?

Absolutely. They were enthralled by the whole story and it was the best summer of their lives being on this set. They went to school in a little

village not far from the set and I would pick them up from school and then come on to the set and they'd play bows and arrows with Russell and it was sort of like a Boy's Own Annual.

Does going back in time with a character like this make you appreciate your life a little bit more today, seeing the hardships that women endured back then?

I'm always doing that; I'm one of those annoying mothers who goes to the supermarket and says, 'See this piece of meat in plastic? That was a cow once,' so my boys get it every day and just roll their eyes. So I'm always full of appreciation. That's the extraordinary thing about the place that I've found myself - I never expected to be in this place where I would even be considered to work with Ridley Scott. *Thelma & Louise* was such an influential movie for me growing up before I even knew I wanted to be an actor. Even today, I'm thinking, 'Here I am staying at the Dorchester!'

Was it fun getting dirty and doing all the action stuff for a change?

I do like a challenge and that's what I really loved working with Ridley. He'd phrase things in a way you could never say no. He'd set up a shot and say, 'OK, I want you to walk through behind that horse, another one is going to run at you but you're going to step backwards, go around, hit that guy with the broadsword, turn around, hit the other guy with the broadsword, run to open the building and let all these people run out coughing because it's going to be filled with smoke.' And you just say, 'OK, let's go!' As far as dirt goes, any mother of three boys will tell you that on set at 6.30 in the morning, I'm already covered in Weet-Bix and cornflakes, so it's a matter of just one kind of dirt replacing another.

Russell said you liked to kick up your heels at the end of the day and relax with a drink. Is that the way you usually work?

I did have a few but I'd never touched a drop before working with Russell [laughs]. I used to do that perhaps more before having children but this time was great because they were with me and at the end of the day they were in the trailer, so it became like a summer barbecue and that means you can hang around more and relax. You go through a lot in one day on a film like this - you've just shot a battle sequence together or you've just fallen in love that day - so it's nice, rather than having to rush away, to be able to relax and unwind together.

How is it working in Europe on *Hanna*?

It's a small independent directed by Joe Wright [*Atonement*] and I also get to work with another Aussie, Eric Bana, which is great. I read the script and it was the most frightening, unpredictable 30 pages of any script I'd ever read and Andrew, my partner, said, 'You've never had that reaction before,' and I said, 'Yes but I can't do it because they want to shoot for eight weeks and I won't fit into the children's school holidays.' But then they reduced it to 22 days so I was able to do it. Sometimes you have to say no to things but in the end, the right people make the film whether you're part of it or not.

What kind of mother are you?

I don't sit around thinking what sort of mother I am but I definitely think of what sort of mother I'm not. My husband and I worry about my generation trying to be friends with their children rather than parents of their children. If you're going to try to make your children like you, you're in dangerous waters, I think. I don't enjoy being the bad cop but sometimes you have to be. I think I'm pretty loving but what I do know is that you have to let them talk and you have to listen. I hope that when they're 15, they're still talking as freely to us as they are now.

Relaxed ... Blanchett after hours. Photo: Getty Images