

Jane Lynch

Loves, Loves, Loves Her Job

The hardworking actor likes to stay busy. By Edie Stull

NEVER DOUBT how actor Jane Lynch feels about her career. “I love it, I love it, I love it,” she says, her blue eyes wide and serious. “I would do it as a hobby if I had to work somewhere else.”

Lynch was very young when she knew what she wanted to be when she grew up. “I played a candle in third grade,” she explains. “I was a wonderful candle. I was ‘A...A’ was for ‘air,’ so filled with smells of spice...smells of cake, pudding and pie...everything that is nice,” she recites, grinning as she remembers the lines from her first speaking part.

Since then, the tall, striking blonde has used her quick wit and sharp timing in scores of films and TV shows, including both big studio and indie projects. She’s been a member of the filmmaker Christopher Guest’s improvisational ensemble since *Best in Show* and was Steve Carell’s boss in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*. Name a TV show and she’s probably been on it—*Arrested Development*, *Friends*, *CSI*, *Weeds*, *Criminal Minds*, *Boston Legal*, *Two and a Half Men* and—most memorably for her lesbian fans—*The L Word*, where she plays the swagging attorney Joyce Wischnia.

Lynch seems to move with ease between the gay and straight communities. “I see them as one human community, that’s probably why. I’m not out there to change anybody’s mind so much as to tell stories. I think it’s really important for gay people—especially a gay woman in Podunk, Ohio, who thinks she’s all alone—to see her story up on the screen. And if it changes other people along the way, that’s fantastic—and I think it has—but I don’t set out to do that. I just set out to tell stories.”

She’s known for her supporting roles and ensemble parts, and you might wonder whether there’s a part of Lynch that aches to be the star. “Never,” she says without hesitation. “I love acting in an ensemble. I love working with other people.”

The legendary comic Carol Burnett agrees. She worked with Lynch on *The Post Grad Survival Guide* and has been a Lynch fan since the Guest movies and *Virgin*. “When I heard that she was going to be in the film I was absolutely delighted. I was amazed at watching her and how she would improvise and do things a little bit differently with each take. She’s just so good. I loved watching her. We laughed a lot.”

The experience was memorable for

Lynch, too. “She was so genuine and so nice...she’s hilarious,” she adds.

Raised in suburban Chicago, Lynch earned a bachelor’s degree from Illinois State and a master’s from Cornell. She honed her skills on the stage with the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the Steppenwolf Theater Company and the Second City Touring Company and as Carol Brady in the cult favorite *The Real Live Brady Bunch*.

“I think learning how to act is pretty important. I have some techniques and skills I learned when I was 21 that have been hammered into my consciousness, that are now second nature, and without that training I wouldn’t be having as much fun. I had classical acting training, with some method stuff thrown in.”

Lynch, who’s been in Hollywood for 14 years, was 39 years old when she snagged her breakthrough role as the butch dog trainer in *Best in Show*. “Everybody thinks that you should be famous and working right away. I wasn’t, but I worked a lot. I kind of knew it was going to happen to me at some point.”

She also knows what she looks for in a role. “It has nothing to do with money and everything to do with the role and the people I’ll be surrounded with,” she says emphatically. “I like getting my hands on a lot of different things. It really makes me happy.”

That philosophy often leads her to work with friends. “Jane is incredibly supportive of filmmakers and I feel so fortunate that she was willing to work with me as a first-time director on the short film *Love Is Love*,” says producer-director Anne Renton. “She was so generous with her time and talent, and she inclusively engaged with everyone working on the film.”

True to form, Lynch stays busy with a variety of projects and has several movies due out in the coming months. “I’ve done a short and am going to do a pilot,” she adds. She’s also worked with Meryl Streep in Nora Ephron’s *Julie & Julia*, in which Streep plays Julia Child, and Lynch plays her sister.

What does she do on those seemingly rare occasions when she is not working? “I look for more work! I like to stay busy,” Lynch says, laughing.

And it all began with a third-grader playing a candle. “I knew that was just the beginning,” Lynch says. ■

