

ELODIE YUNG

Photography KEIICHIRO NAKAJIMA

Styling YUNCHIAN PENG



Dress BURBERRY.
Boots LAURENCE D'ACADE.



Interview by KAREN FRAGALA-SMITH

The summer of 2017 will be remembered as the season that strong women took over the movies, rescuing our collective unconscious from cruel and unjust global powers by gifting us two hours of respite from the news cycle— one film at a time— as we marveled at our heroines’ courage, dexterity and tight abs. Gal Gadot in Wonder Woman; Zoe Saldana in Guardians of the Galaxy 2, Cara Delevingne in Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets; Charlize Theron in Atomic Blonde; and Sofia Boutella in The Mummy— all wildly disparate roles that had four things in common: Brains, Beauty, Brawn and Badassery.

Music has always been a tremendous part of Sophie’s life; she released her But no discussion of the fierce women of this summer’s box office would be complete without mentioning actress Elodie Yung, who stars opposite Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson and Salma Hayek in the new action comedy The Hitman’s Bodyguard. A relative newcomer to Hollywood, Yung is best known for playing Elektra Natchios in the second season of the Marvel Universe and Netflix series, Daredevil, and she reprises this role in the new Marvel series, The Defenders, which released on August 18. Like the aforementioned strong female characters, Yung has brains (she has a law degree from The Sorbonne in Paris and studied acting at London’s Academy of Music and Dramatic Art); Beauty (Naturellement!); Brawn (she’s a black belt in karate) and Badassery (keep reading, you’ll see). But unlike her sociopathic character Elektra, Yung couldn’t be more pleasant— or fascinating— to talk to. On set of her TWELV editorial photoshoot in New York City, she took a few moments to chat with us about her journey from television in Paris to acting school in London to the silver screen in Hollywood, and how it all started with a fake CV.

In The Hitman’s Bodyguard, you share the screen with some legendary actors— Samuel L. Jackson, Gary Oldman, and Salma Hayek— and you more than hold your own with them. Were there any moments throughout the shooting process that you felt a bit intimidated?

I was just thrilled to be a part of a project with such amazing actors. Growing up, I had the biggest crush on Gary Oldman, so when I met him I was a bit like “Ooooooh! Gary Oldman!” But I learned a lot by being on set every day with them and watching their work and how serious and passionate they are. When it comes down to my work, I feel like I am in my element. Now, if you asked me if I am comfortable at a dinner with all of them, then this is where my social anxiety would kick in. But I feel at home on set, so I’m confident there.

In Netflix’s new series, The Defenders, you reprise your role as the sociopathic villain, Elektra from Daredevil— what was it like to join forces with Sigourney Weaver against The Avengers?

It was fun to play a villain and work with Sigourney. She’s such an amazing actress and a kind woman, and very helpful. She really plays with you. But neither her or I would define our characters purely as villains. I don’t think you can portray your character well if you define them as evil. She definitely has darkness in her, but I am looking for her humanity. This year, Elektra is almost a new character because she doesn’t remember her past. She is a blank canvas. I approached her as if she were an amnesiac. Her memories come back slowly. I wanted to make her true nature reemerge but without anyone knowing it, because she’s not in a safe place to express it.

**“I TRY TO
FORCE DOORS.
I WOULD
NEVER FIT A
CHARACTER ON
PAPER.”**

Many of your characters have a certain toughness and physicality, which you make totally believable, even as a petite, beautiful woman. Does this come from your own toughness growing up on the outskirts of Paris? What was your upbringing like?

I enjoyed my childhood, but aspects of it were tough. My parents went through it, but they were never tough with us. Their attitude is more like “Life is tough, but let’s enjoy it.” My mom is French and Italian and my dad is from Cambodia. He escaped during the war and was the only survivor from his family. The first job he landed in Paris was at a supermarket, pushing the carts, and that’s where he met my mom. She was working there as a cashier. When you meet them, you would not think they are tough people. They raised us to say, “Despite everything, let’s embrace life!”

The character Elektra is remarkably athletic, and her fighting includes elements of Muay Thai, Krav Maga and Capoeira. What was your training regimen for the role like before you started shooting?

When I learned that I was coming back, I started training in Los Angeles weeks in advance. And when I came on set, I trained with the stunt team. They try to build your muscles so you don’t get hurt on set. I do my own stunts and all the choreography, and then I have a stunt double, Lauren Kim— who is the best— who does all the crazy stuff. My character is kind of a weapon, so I wanted to be as fit and strong as I could.

How did your parents respond when you told them that you wanted to pursue acting after law school? Were they apprehensive or supportive at first?



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My parents are quite supportive of anything we’ve done, my siblings and I. My mom was a bit more careful but she understood that it was something I was testing out. A friend of mine was making money doing commercials and she said, “Just say that you are an actress. You can get into my agency probably.” So I made a fake CV and I got representation, and from there I was cast in [the French series] *La Vie Devant Nous*. That was my first job. After that, I continued my training in London.

You were already a respected TV actress in France when you came to the United States—what made you want to pursue a career in Hollywood?

I never thought of it this way. What I wanted was to train in London after I did the series in Paris so I could challenge myself as an artist. I wasn’t fluent in English at the time, and I thought it would be a great thing for me to explore Shakespeare in English. After that, I had the chance to audition for *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, directed by David Fincher. [She was cast as Lisbeth’s friend, Miriam Wu.] That was my first real audition in English. So that brought me here. But it was never “Bye, bye France, I’m going to Hollywood.” Never!

What actors or actresses do you admire or wish to emulate in your career? Is there anyone in particular you would want to collaborate with on a project?

I have a lot of admiration for Isabelle Huppert and Juliette Binoche. I love Jessica Chastain as well. They are very different, but you can see that they explore their own humanity in their characters. They are able to do a complete change from one part to another. You can see that they are very curious. They are seeking the human side of those characters and themselves. I admire that a lot. There is something very raw about these women that is very appealing to me.

Do you feel like your cultural background and unique look has been an asset or a challenge for you in casting decisions?

I am a bit of a weird case. Here, people perceive me as French and in France, I am half-Asian or sometimes I have heard that I am not Asian enough. There’s always something and I don’t pay attention to anything. I love acting so much. I’m not going to stop at one, ten, twenty people telling me “You’re too much like this” or “You’re not enough like that.” My team is well trained. I tell them “Just get me in the room, get me the audition, even if they’re looking for a blonde American woman,” because once I’m there, maybe I can bring something different and change someone’s mind. I try to force doors. I would never fit a character on paper.

*Would you ever be willing to “ugly up” for a role, as Charlize Theron did in *Monster*, if it were needed to play a character?*

Yes, please! I just want to try as many characters as I can and tell as many different stories as I can.

Where do you hope to be five years from now? Do you have any interest in directing or producing?

I just want to work with great directors. I want to meet great artists and work with people that I admire. There is something that I am kind of writing that I would love to accomplish in the next five years, but it’s on the side, it’s a personal thing. My real passion is acting. It’s what drives me. If I can work with Barry Jenkins [*Moonlight*] and share the screen with Jessica Chastain, then I can die happy.



This Page: Jacket ROBERTO CAVALLI
Left Page: Dress, Belt, Shoes PAULE KA



*This page: Dress ROBERTO CAVALLI.
Right page: Top DSQUARED2.
Jacket JUST CAVALLI.
Skirt BRANDON MAXWELL.*



*Hair MIOK. Make Up JOELLE TROISI Using CHANEL & GLOSSIER. Producer MARBLES & MARBLES: MAKIKO ASADA.
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Special Thanks to ROBERTO BUCHELLI and the RIVINGTON HOSPITALITY GROUP.*