



Facets of SARAH PAULSON

*“I HAD ALREADY
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BECAUSE I HAD
PLAYED THEM ALL.”*

by SUSAN SCHELL

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Styling HISSA IGARASHI

Dress MARCHESA VOYAGE.



Dress ERDEM.
Cardigan A.F. ANDREWS.
Earrings, Ring: PATRICIA VON MUSLIN.

Sarah Paulson is an American actress who has starred in numerous films, television shows, and theater productions. Consistently, she has played a vast variety of characters and roles. Moreover, her ability to play such a varied range of characters has led to her participating in an assortment of projects including the Oscar-winning film 12 Years a Slave.

Paulson's history of transforming herself from role to role seems to have made her a perfect fit for the FX anthology, American Horror Story, in which she and all the cast members take on new characters each season. Her performance in the second season of American Horror Story: Asylum as the character Lana Winters won the Critics' Choice Television Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Movie/Miniseries. From season to season Paulson, along with an incredible cast, has stunned audiences with her dramatic performances and her malleability as she transformed herself from character to character.

After having the opportunity and pleasure of chatting with Sarah Paulson about her career and American Horror Story, I am now even more eagerly awaiting the next season of American Horror Story: Freak Show.

Susan Schell: How did you first know you wanted to be an actress?

Sarah Paulson: I think I knew that before I even came out of the womb, if such a thing is possible. I just have many memories from the time I was really small and before anybody could possibly know what a vocation was or what a calling was, all I wanted to do was act. It manifested itself as me playing all kinds of imaginary games as a child; I would direct my sister around and create entire fantasy worlds. I would pretend to be from other countries when I would go into shopping malls when I got older. I pretended to be blind from time to time just to see if I could convince other people that I was - there were all kinds of acting things that I would do. From a very young age I think it was something that I always knew I wanted to do.

Was there ever an alternate career path you could have seen yourself in besides acting?

SP: There was a moment in time when I was younger, before I knew that you could even be an actor, I mean I didn't even really know what it meant [acting] but I knew I was drawn to that kind of stuff but I didn't know you could make a life doing that, but I'm a huge animal lover. So there was a moment where I thought I could be a marine biologist or a veterinarian. But very quickly I realized that to do those things, you have to be a scientist or a doctor. That idea went out the window because my math skills would not allow for either of those things to come to fruition. Also with my love for animals I don't think I could ever do anything like perform surgery on them, or have to euthanize them, or anything horrible. I don't know, I would have to be the kind of vet that just sits and plays with the animals in their laps and that would be that.

What did you think when you first read a script for American Horror Story?

SP: In terms of the second season, because in the first I only had a few episodes so I read my scenes for that, I didn't really know what was going to happen in the second season. I remember the scripts were hand delivered to my hotel in New Orleans where I was shooting Twelve Years a Slave and I got the first four episodes. It had my name on it printed in red, watermarked with my name across it so that nobody could steal a copy without knowing where they got it and my character's name was in bold on the binder "Lana Winters." I just read the first four scripts in about two hours and couldn't believe that I was going to get to

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play that part. I continue to feel that way today. I mean that was only four episodes in and I had no idea where it was going to end up so needless to say I was very, very excited.

What has been your favorite character you played in the series thus far?
Lana Winters.

You definitely have to express a great range of emotions while playing Lana Winters, was she one of the more challenging characters to play?

Well it was very challenging and then there were also aspects of it that were easy. The part of it that was easy, and I use the term easy very loosely- I don't mean it was easy, I just mean that there were just certain things that lent themselves to helping it along in terms of its level of the weight of difficulty of it that I had to carry. Which was that we shot it all sequentially essentially. It was 13 episodes, the beginning, middle, and end to this woman's story. She starts out as this plucky thirty-three-year-old reporter who wants to be taken seriously and ends the series as an eighty-year-old woman. So the fact that we were telling the story in that way and that it wasn't a movie where I had to start at the end as an old woman before I had experienced or played any of the things that happened prior to that. By the time of the season finally I had already lived through all those things that Lana had lived through because I had played them all. That was incredibly helpful in terms of making it something that was possible to execute. I think it would have been very difficult had it been a movie for me to do all of that because it would have all been out of order, we would have done it a different way. I think part of why I was able to do it was because I really felt like I was experiencing it all and it was all happening to me at the same time. It was one of the unique experiences where I really felt that connected to a character. You couldn't really find that blurred line between where she stopped and I began, as well as the reverse.

In your career you've played a varied assortment of characters, do you feel that has helped you transition from character to character, season to season of American Horror Story?

I just think that it's one of those great gifts that I felt like in the beginning of my career I used to think it was a real problem for me that I would play all these different parts and that no one would really remember me specifically for one thing.



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I was doing different things all the time and I think lots of times you can get famous or well known for doing one specific kind of thing or a movie, or TV show, or character that is a massive hit. Because of the nature of American Horror Story where we change every season, the audience doesn’t ever get used to you playing one person. As an actor you are constantly stretching yourself trying to do something different every year. So there is a built in comfort zone there where the audience is excited to see you play something different and you are as well excited to see if you can pull it off, so everyone is kind of all in it together. I know later in my career and where I sit now, I think it’s a very big blessing that that my face is rubbery enough or whatever that it allows me to sort of play different people and not have someone go “oh I don’t buy that one!” In the beginning I remember thinking if I could just figure out what it is that I do that can get jobs so that I was working, I would love to figure out what that is and it ended up being the opposite of that. The very fact that I could play a myriad of different parts meant that I was going to have more opportunity to continue to play different things and that I wouldn’t be pigeonholed in playing one kid of girl/woman/lady.

Is it refreshing to take on a new character each season? Or is there a comfort in sticking with the same character?

I don’t know, I think I’ve been too much of a gypsy character actress that I think if I had to go to work and put on the same outfit everyday that it might make me insane. I had a little bit of that in Asylum [season 2] because every time I was in the asylum I wore the same dress every day. There came a point where I was like “ah, I need to get this thing off” but I knew it would end because there were only thirteen episodes. If I signed a seven-year deal to play the same character for seven years and I knew I’d be wearing suits everyday because I was playing a lawyer I wonder if I would be able to handle that, I’ve been so spoiled with this other way of working.

Do you have any special tricks or things you do to mentally prepare yourself before you have a tough scene?

No, I feel like the writing is good on the show and we have great directors, the other actors are so extraordinary that you just kind of buckle up and play that game in your mind of “what if?”- what if this was real, what if this was happening? These stakes are real, everything is real. What would you do? What would she do? And if you are looking at Jessica Lange’s face when you are acting you don’t have to do much to try to create realities that aren’t there, you are getting an awful lot right back at you.

I heard that you are playing a two-headed woman in this upcoming season, what is that like as an actress? Is that like taking on two characters at once?

Yes, I can’t really talk about it but it reminds me of the Lana Winter’s time in terms of the challenge that lies ahead of me with this one. It doesn’t have the kind of Coven [season 3] ease, once again I’m being asked to really go there. That is just the kind of challenge I like and it is why I’m on American Horror Story. I hope they never let me leave; I’d leave there kicking and screaming.

What is next for you? Any upcoming projects?

Yeah, I have a movie called Carol coming out with Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara that Todd Haynes directed that I finished a couple months ago. I don’t know when it will be out but it was a very exciting thing to be a part of.



*This page: Coat A.F. VANDEVORST.
Earrings PATRICIA VON MUSULIN.
Left page: Coat, Shoes A.F. VANDEVORST.
Shirt VICTOR & ROLE. Skirt DOMINIC LOUIS.
Belt PATRICIA VON MUSULIN.*



*This page: Dress LOUIS VUITTON.
Right page: Dress ERDEM.
Cardigan, Shoes ALEXANDER VORST.
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