

Interview with Elisabeth Moss: Star Of El Camino and Mad Men

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IFC recently had the opportunity to chat with [[Elisabeth Moss]], actress and mild-mannered Peggy the Ad Exec on AMC's [[Mad Men]]. She tells us about her experience on that plus we talk at length about her starring role in the new drama, El Camino, which is being released on DVD next week.

Read the interview after the break.

IFC: I found your character Lilly to be one of the most beguiling and believable people I've met at the movies in a very long time. What was it about her that struck a chord with you?

EM: I think that she's a dreamer, and ultimately just looking for a home, as all 3 of these characters are. But without finding peace within herself, she realizes she's not gonna find it anywhere else. So she eventually decides to go find that first. Or at least we hope she does!

IFC: At least on the surface, Lilly seems to be very different from the other roles we've seen you in. What was your biggest challenge in playing her?

EM: I think there are differences but also similarities. She's a loner, she's independent, she's different from other people, which is something that some of the characters I've played have in common. But she's also more outgoing and free and is willing to take risks, which is a different sort of thing for me.

IFC: Roger Ebert and a couple other critics have noted something akin to a generational sensibility that El Camino brings to the traditional road movie genre. There's an absence of melodrama that leaves some older audiences a bit adrift. On the other hand, younger audiences don't seem to have a problem with the way the characters arc and interact. Did you and your fellow actors work with Erik Weigel, the director, to consciously achieve this tone, or did it evolve more organically?

EM: It evolved organically, but was also very present in the script. It felt very sort of minimal, and had great potential for us as actors to paint it in with the color of the characters we developed.. Erik gave us a lot of freedom to do that, and the actors I think felt a certain sense of freedom to try things.. But at the same time keeping that sense of simplicity. I think that's the cool thing about the movie; it doesn't get mired down in cliché and melodrama, it's almost stark in its simplicity and just let's the characters live and tell the story. (

IFC: There's a refreshing precision to your performance in El Camino that is usually found in actors with a theatrical background. How important has theatre been to your craft?

EM: I would love to do more theater than I have!! I did an Off Broadway play that brought me to living in NY, when I was 19, at the Atlantic Theater Company, and then made my Broadway debut in Mamet's Speed The Plow recently, but beyond that, I've done more tv and film than theater, although I hope to change that. I think theater is very important for actors to stretch different muscles and develop a certain discipline of doing something over and over and making it new each time. Also there's nothing like communicating to a live audience and getting that immediate communication back from them. It's very alive.((

IFC: The unfortunate truth about the state of American independent film is that you and your fellow actors could of all done the same quality work in El Camino, but without your growing name recognition to help get critics' and wholesalers' attention, this film would have most likely disappeared without a trace. It's gotten to the point where even major film festivals limit their selection of "no name" features. Do you think actors understand how important they are these days to getting a worthwhile film like El Camino made and seen?

EM: I can't really speak for other actors, but I know that the decisions I make on projects are based always on the quality of the project itself, and not the size of the film, which is why I've done so much indie film! But you have to keep your eyes open, and your imagination too, cuz you never know where something good might be, it could be indie, it could be a big film, it could be on a cable network that no one has ever heard of before! I think that supporting the work you've done, when it's small, and has the chance of not being seen, is very important too... But I find that good work and good projects can be found in many places, and as long as you're doing it for the right reasons, you can't go wrong.

IFC: What are some of your favorite road movies?

EM: Gosh I have no idea.. It's funny as much as this is absolutely a road movie, that's not how I thought of this film when I took it, and I think that any good road movie, has to have more than just a car.. And that's what defines them. Whether it's the acting, or the writing, or the cinematography, it's always something else that distinguishes it, otherwise driving around in a car can be boring! With El Camino, I feel, and I hope other people do too, that it has all of those elements that I said above, that really bring it together and make it rise above just a road movie. Although there is definitely a lot of driving in it. (

IFC: The new season for MAD MEN begins next month on AMC. Are there any interesting developments for your character, Peggy Olson that you'd like to share?

EM: I'd love to share but can't really! All I can say is that Peggy is really trying to figure out who she is in this man's world, and that's what this season is about for her. She's trying to figure out if she's Don Draper, or does she have to be something else, and then from there, what is that something else. It's a season of exploration for her and rising in a world that has not seen someone like her before and doesn't know quite what to do with her. But it's the story of how women got to where they are now, and I am proud to tell it.

TO WATCH THE TRAILER OF ELCAMINO OR BUY THE DVD, CLICK HERE