





ENorthern Exposure

Northern-Irish actress Séainín Brennan looks sizzling hot in the flesh at the moment, but it's a stark contrast to her latest TV role as Liz Tyler in the acclaimed new Belfast-set primetime drama *The Fall*, which also features former *X-Files* star Gillian Anderson

By **ALEXANDRA MCKEEVER**
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Although incredibly beautiful, there is certainly more to Séainín Brennan than meets the eye; strong, humble and opinionated, the actress is determined to make her mark and use her position for good. One of Northern Ireland's most prolific actresses, Brennan has just hit our Sunday-night screens in the new primetime drama *The Fall* – written by Emmy Award winner Allan Cubitt. She plays Liz Tyler in the psychological crime thriller alongside former *X-Files* star Gillian Anderson as Detective Superintendent Gibson and Jamie Dornan as serial killer Paul Spector.

“When something is so brilliantly written you're on to it, you're drawn to the truth of it, you're drawn to the realism of it and you just get so excited you want to be in it,” says Brennan.

With an ever-growing thirst to better herself, Brennan believes in only taking on the roles which she really wants and which she feels she can play with real conviction, even if that means turning

down work.

"I think it's really important to work with great actors, to work with great directors and with great writers and great producers because that's how you learn, that's how you evolve as an actor." A five-part series, *The Fall* has already received a five-star rating from *The Times*, as well as rave reviews from *The Guardian*. Screened on RTÉ on Sunday nights and BBC each Monday evening, the series debuted in the US at the end of May on Netflix.

When it comes to her co-stars, Gillian Anderson and Jamie Dornan, Brennan admits to being captivated by their talents.

"Gillian is really smart. She's beautiful and extremely talented and just really interesting and good fun. And Jamie is really friendly, just a great guy. He is the most down-to-earth person I've ever met. And he's got a lovely singing voice; we'd hear him singing on set!"

Brennan grew up in Belfast as part of a typically large Irish Catholic family. More comfortable with family events than red carpet affairs, she gushes about the numerous activities which her family frequently organise, from Sunday lunches to their adventure days, which can consist of anything from picnics to treasure hunts. This family closeness has been a crucial part of the young actress's levelheadedness in her rise to success.

Having started as a child actor in advertisements and theatre, she took a leave of absence from the world of acting at the age of 16 to focus on her education. Following an honours degree in European Studies at the University of Ulster, she went on to earn a scholarship for a Master's Degree in European Political Administration at the College of Europe in Bruges. Then following a brief stint working as a political lobbyist in Brussels, Brennan knew this was not the career for her, and packed off home in favour of a career in acting.

"I just knew that I wanted to be on stage, I wanted to work in the theatre," she says.

When asked about her family's reaction to her turning her back on a well-paid job in Brussels in favour of a career in the unpredictable world of acting, Brennan says her family were apprehensive, but supportive.

"I always, always, always loved the theatre, I see the words 'stage door' and I literally jump up and down like a child at Christmas." She goes on to credit her agent and her mother as the best people to pick her up and help dust herself off when dealing

with the disappointment that goes with her chosen career.

"My mum is very good at reminding me that I picked a profession that's so subjective," she says.

Brennan forged her career in the theatre with roles in Frank McGuinness's adaptation of Ibsen's *Ghosts* at Bristol Old Vic and *Death of a Salesman* at the Gate Theatre in Dublin.

"I had always wanted to work at the Gate, they produce world class theatre."

Following this, she went on to tackle the role of Helen Woods in *Scenes from the Big Picture* by Owen McCafferty. Swapping theatre for the screen, the actress then went on to star in her first primetime drama, *Hidden*, on BBC1, in which she played the role of Francis, the English girlfriend of Philip Glenister.

She also likes to dedicate time to charity work and, in 2010, she was the force behind the charity White Sapphire Ball, inspired

by the great work of the hospice which cared for her grandmother who died in 2003. She marked her grandmother's second anniversary in 2005 with a garden party that raised £25,500.

While working on *Macbecks* in Dublin's Olympia Theatre in 2008, Brennan was struck by the number of young children that required constant hospice care and the lack of funding available, and so the idea of the White Sapphire Ball was born.

"I set about trying to do something to help them and I said I can't guarantee anything but I'll certainly try, and I'll give it everything I have, and I do that with everything that I take on in my life. I try to give it one hundred per cent and certainly give it the best that I can." She sat down and wrote to as many people as possible in an attempt to acquire the most

valuable auction items and, with items from Madonna, Elton John, Brian May, Rory McIlroy and Matt Groening [creator of *The Simpsons*], she made sure her cause was recognised internationally.

"I basically pulled in every favour that I could and I was really lucky as we raised £72,500, which was an incredible amount of money and I knew that that went a long way to help families in need and I am really proud of it."

Similar to her own approach to life, Brennan favours the roles of strong women and real characters.

"I love playing real characters, real-life people and I love playing women of conviction," she says.

At the core of all of her beliefs and ethics, both in life and in work, is the importance of honesty. "What I love about being an actor is that you get to portray real life. You can take on a character and you get to go on a journey and you never have to pay the ultimate sacrifice that that character has to pay." Her honesty is something which endears her to her fans. Although a natural beauty, Brennan is humble in every sense and

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often takes to Twitter detailing the processes which she goes through before red-carpet events and photo shoots.

"I wake up looking worse than most people, I look like a scarecrow! I'm just a regular girl and then a creative team comes in and waves their magic wand and even I look in the mirror and go 'Oh, I don't look half-bad!'"

Keen to share her experiences with her followers, Brennan will photograph each step from barefaced beauty right through to polished perfection and post these on her Twitter account. Conscious of keeping the focus on acting, she is reluctant to allow her looks to overshadow her talent and stresses her desire to play the truth, something which she thrived on while taking on the unglamorous role of Liz in *The Fall*.

As for what the future might hold, this Irish beauty intends to focus on screen work for the time being.

"I love Ireland, it's my home and we're home to some of the greatest television shows on earth, such as *Game of Thrones*. We've got incredible theatre and there's a wealth of things to be doing in Ireland as an actor and I'd love to be able to stay here."

Uninterested in moving to the bright lights of LA, Brennan makes it clear that she is more than content with her life in Ireland at present.

"I have no grand plans to go to Hollywood, but having said that you're never going to turn down a part by Tarantino!"

You can expect to see a whole lot more of this up-and-coming Irish starlet in the coming months and years. 📺

***The Fall* continues on RTÉ One on Sunday nights.**

