

# Acting on instinct

Jennifer Lawrence has emerged as one of Hollywood's most highly regarded young actresses, writes *Harold von Kursk*, earning upwards of US\$20m per film

It's rare that a star is born with their first major role, but Jennifer Lawrence accomplished that feat with her explosive performance in *The Burning Plain*. Only 17 at the time, she more than held her ground opposite formidable co-stars Charlize Theron and Kim Basinger, and three years later would go on to earn her first Oscar nomination for *Winter's Bone*. Since then, not only have Lawrence's extraordinarily compelling performances catapulted her to box office smash hits, but her effervescent and unfiltered personality has charmed audiences all over the world.

But recently she decided to take a two-year break from acting after feeling burnt out and generally disappointed with the direction her career had taken. Having enjoyed so much success so soon – she won the Best Actress Oscar for *Silver Linings Playbook* in 2013 – Lawrence needed to take some distance from the film industry and her highly mediated life.

"I was not pumping out the quality that I should have," Lawrence said. "I just think everybody had gotten sick of me. I'd gotten sick of me. It had just gotten to a point where I couldn't do anything right..."

"I didn't have a life. I thought I should go get one... The attention on me was so high and extreme that, in a bizarre way, the set had become a great escape. Everybody treats you normally. It's not like

you walk into hair and makeup and people are like, 'Oh, my God!' But you get burnt out. Eventually I had to ask myself, 'Am I saying yes because I want to go to work the next day? Or am I doing this because I want to make this movie?... I think that I was people-pleasing for the majority of my life.'

Lawrence recently returned from her hiatus to co-star with Leonardo DiCaprio in *Don't Look Up*, director Adam McKay's (of *The Big Short* fame) end-of-days sci-fi political satire that now ranks as the most-viewed Netflix film of all time. Jennifer plays astronomer Kate DiBiase together with fellow Doctor Randall Mindy (DiCaprio) to try and alert the world to an approaching comet that will strike and destroy the earth in six months, only to be met with political resistance and bureaucratic squabbling.

Meanwhile, the 31-year-old is entering a new chapter in her life as a first-time mother. Having managed to keep her two-year marriage to New York City art gallerist Cooke Maroney largely hidden from public view, Lawrence is equally determined to shield their child from the spotlight: "Every instinct in my body wants to protect their privacy for the rest of their lives, as much as I can. I don't want anyone to feel welcome into their existence."

This is very much in keeping with the level of commitment and exuberance that Lawrence has been

able to channel in virtually every one of her screen personae. Who can forget the calm resolve she brought to her homemaker turned multi-millionaire entrepreneur in *Joy*, or the shattering she displayed as an expectant mother in the head-horror film, *Mother!* The latter project, which she shot with her then boyfriend, director Darren Aronofsky, left her emotionally and physically spent. "I never lose myself in a movie, said Lawrence.

"This is the only time I've lost myself. I couldn't tell my body that none of it was real. I kept on hyperventilating."

Ironically, Lawrence turned to acting as a way of helping her cope with the problems she was having growing up in Kentucky and adapting to school life. Suffering from what she once described as "this weird anxiety", she took comfort in watching movies and then playing characters while alone in her room.

"Acting was something I knew I could do and it gave me all the confidence I was lacking in everything else," Lawrence recalled.

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**JENNIFER LAWRENCE**

"I was having trouble at school and I had a lot of social anxieties and stuff and acting was the one thing that made that anxiety go away. I didn't feel good about myself until I discovered acting and how happy it made me feel. My parents sacrificed so much for me to be able to realise my dreams and I owe them everything."

A prime example of the American dream, Lawrence is the product of a modest southern family from Louisville, Kentucky. She believed in herself and her acting ability so much that she convinced her parents at age 14 that was ready to go to New York City and make the rounds of as many talent agencies as she could find.

"I kept bugging my parents to take me to New York and let me go up for auditions and then finally my mom took me there. Then this talent scout spotted me when we were walking in Union Square and asked to take my photo. He wasn't creepy, he was very professional.

Then all these agencies started calling and I auditioned for a commercial and that's how it got started. After that acting was all I talked about and my poor mother had to deal with my obsession.

"I convinced her that we should move to New York and I had the best time of my life riding the subway and going to auditions and living there as a teenager. It was just a surreal and amazing experience for a Kentucky girl. Eventually producers started flying me out to L.A. for auditions and it's kind of been a blur since then."

Lawrence had an almost mystical faith in herself and kept telling her friends that she was going to be famous. "I knew that acting ►





was what I was meant to do with my life and I didn't want to let it go. It's all I wanted to do with my life and I knew it was something I could excel at. That's why I finished High School early. Nobody wants to hire someone who's still in school, so I'd lock myself into my room and work for eight hours to finish all my courses and graduate early because my Mom insisted I finish school. "A lot of my friends graduated from

**Opening (previous): Jennifer Lawrence on the red carpet for the premiere of *Mother!* during the 74th Venice Film Festival in 2017 Above: Lawrence sits between Josh Hutcherson and Liam Hemsworth at the *Hunger Games* Handprint and Footprint Ceremony in L.A. in 2015**

university and they didn't know what they wanted to do or whether they could even find a job. Acting has always been my destiny and that's kind of made it easy for me in life."

Following her Oscar nomination for *Winter's Bone*, Lawrence was heralded as Hollywood's latest 'It Girl' and the fame exploded with her subsequent appearance as the blue *Mystique* in *X-Men First Class*.

Then came her role as Katniss in *The Hunger Games* which would evolve into a billion dollar film franchise and establish Lawrence as a major box-office draw. Fame and fortune came so fast to Lawrence that it never gave a moment's respite to pursue any formal training as an actress, not that she needed it.

Unlike other famous movie stars – including her *Mother!* co-star Michelle Pfeiffer who would later feel intimidated when working alongside more classically trained actors – Lawrence has always felt totally secure and utterly confident in her raw ability.

"I never did theatre or took acting classes which I think has helped me. I just have good instincts when it comes to playing characters and acting is something I have

a natural feel for. I loved watching movies on TV but it was only when I started doing some modelling that people began telling me I should also try acting."

"My imagination is the most crucial part of what I do. I can't look for roles that are identical to me in any way. I want the creative flexibility to imagine a life outside of my own. And I can't go around looking for roles that are exactly like my life. So I just rely on my imagination."

Lawrence's mass appeal owes as much to her irrepressible spirit as it does to the level of authenticity she brings to both her public and screen selves. There's never a false moment when it comes to her way of engaging with the world or her ability to be present and in the moment in front of the camera. ▶

**"I NEED TO FEEL THAT I'M BEING AS TRUTHFUL AND NATURAL AS I CAN BE BECAUSE I KNOW THAT WORKS FOR ME"**

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"I don't want to present a manufactured version of myself. . . I need to feel that I'm being as truthful and natural as I can be because I know that works for me. That's why I do basically no research for a part because I like the idea of getting to the set and operating from instinct.

Ironically, her next role will be that of Theranos founder Elizabeth

Holmes, the notorious Silicon Valley con artist/entrepreneur convicted in January of four counts of wire fraud for bilking investors in her start-up healthcare company that claimed to have developed a radical new method of testing blood. Lawrence will again be directed by her *Don't Look Up* helmer, Adam McKay, who stated that she was "born to play the role" in *Bad Blood*.

"I do my best work when I'm functioning instinctively and letting the emotions flow naturally into my character," said Lawrence.

"I like not knowing how I do what I'm doing — it lets me be much freer and more uninhibited and fearless when I'm working."

Just as she is in real life. ■

**Above: Lawrence wearing Rosie Assoulin as she attends the 12th Annual Veuve Clicquot Polo Classic at Liberty State Park Right: Lawrence with an Academy Awards Best Actress gong in 2013 for her role in *Silver Linings Playbook***