

Comfort and risk

From her breakout role as a Disney Princess, Anne Hathaway has evolved into one of Hollywood's most respected actresses. Now she delivers another critically acclaimed performance in *Armageddon Time*, writes *Harold von Kursk*

Anne Hathaway is an extraordinarily vivacious and passionate woman.

A native New Yorker, her dream of becoming a Broadway star took a sharp detour to Hollywood where she has established herself as one of the most gifted actresses of her generation.

Ever since the *Princess Diaries* movies first brought her massive public acclaim, she would go on to deliver one remarkable performance after another in *Brokeback Mountain*, *Rachel Getting Married*, and most notably in *The Devil Wears Prada*. She then starred as Selina Kyle, aka Catwoman, in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* prior to winning the Oscar for her bravura performance in *Les Misérables*.

Today, 40-year-old Hathaway is enjoying a wave of critical praise that has greeted her recent work in *Armageddon Time*, a stark drama set in the Queens borough of New York City during the early 1980s. She and co-star Jeremy Strong (*Succession*) play the working-class parents of a 12-year-old Jewish son (Michael Banks Repeta), whose relationship with a Black schoolmate named Johnny (Jaylin Webb) becomes a source of tension.

Directed by James Gray (*The Yards*), the film is a deeply autobiographical coming-of-age

tale of his own experience dealing with a domineering father and caring mother.

"She's a woman who's exhausted, overworked, underpaid — a dreamer who's watching her life come up short again and again, but a fierce and loyal matriarch of this family," says Hathaway of her character, Esther.

"And she's also a daughter who is both loved and resented, and she has her own feelings about that."

Hathaway — whose friends call her Annie — was particularly moved by her feelings of deep sympathy for a woman struggling with her identity to the point where Esther's predicament began to resonate too strongly with her.

"I needed to walk away from Esther... she's a very undernourished woman in terms of, she does not have tactile love in her life. She's not supported. And that feeling of grief and loss... I've lost a number of people in the last few years and I've had to rebuild myself. And so I was actually very excited to walk away from that sad part of her just because I feel like I've done that and I couldn't rebuild her as well.

Added Hathaway: "There's also the female part of [her] experience that is often unsaid. So I felt that a huge part of my job was bringing that aspect of

it — the things that we observe, the things that we as women pick up that might be invisible to men, that might not be something that interests them."

"I have worked too hard on seeing myself with kinder eyes to give away my peace to those who haven't found it for themselves yet," said Hathaway recently about her struggle with the online mob.

"So I do my best to not be afraid of what others might say and just focus on enjoying my life."

She added: "You can't just exist for your work or you lose your sense of who you are. I grew up very fast and was very competitive and determined to succeed in this business. But when you push yourself that way you also keep yourself from evolving in other ways on a personal level."

What is particularly impressive about Hathaway is that no matter how uncool her unabashed ebullience can seem, she is now fearless when it comes to expressing herself without feeling

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the corresponding need to tailor her enthusiasms for public effect.

Much of that new found sensibility is the product of her happy ten-year marriage to producer Adam Shulman. Together they live in New York City with their two young sons, Jonathan, 6, and Jack, 2.

"[Adam] changed my ability to be in the world comfortably," said Hathaway.

"I think the accepted narrative now is that we, as women, don't need anybody. But I need my husband. His unique and specific love has changed me. I feel really lucky — I get to do what I love.

"I'm with the right guy and we make each other happy and we treat each other well."

The support she has found in her life with Shulman has allowed Hathaway to develop into the kind of brilliant, self-empowered, unapologetic and authentic version of herself. Now that she has escaped the trap of being a self-admitted "people pleaser", she can embrace the kind of indomitable spirit that she projects on and off the screen.

"You learn to stop being so driven and become more aware of yourself and your own needs that have nothing to do with your career," said Hathaway.

"That's the kind of evolution I've gone through — I don't work on things as much as simply enjoying them. I have a much richer and happier life now."

With *Armageddon Time*, Hathaway has again proven that she is capable of conveying great pathos and there is plenty of Oscar buzz surrounding her complex portrayal in one of the best films of 2022. ►





Despite the emotional toll it took on her, Hathaway thrived on her time on the set. “I loved being in this family so much,” said Hathaway.

“This was a job I could have gone to every day for the rest of my life and been thrilled. And I know this sounds hyperbolic, but I’m sorry, I act from this place that I’m trusting you with my life. Feeling myself in a found family of actors, in this home that had

Above: Anne Hathaway with *Mothers’ Instinct* co-star Jessica Chastain – the English-language remake of Olivier Masset-Depasse’s Belgian film *Duelles* (2018), is set for release early in 2023 – where the friendship of the two 1960s housewives rapidly deteriorates

been created with such meticulous invisible craft, was just a highlight for me in a very lucky career.”

Hathaway hails from an intellectually and artistically rich upbringing. Her father is a prominent Manhattan lawyer and her mother is a former theater actress. Together, they imbued her with a passion for the arts as well as a strong sense of social responsibility.

“No doubt my mother has inspired me a lot in terms of my creative side because as a young girl I began singing in choirs and trained as a soprano. I also took acting lessons and did theater as a way of preparing for my acting career.

“My father was also a major influence in my life. I took from

him the sense of justice and desire to commit to causes that I consider right. I am lucky to have a wonderful father who took a lot of time to spend with me and my brothers. For many years my dad commuted from work between New Jersey and Manhattan, but he was home every night for dinner and found time, even when he was tired, to do sports and other activities with us. It’s only been lately that I’ve started to appreciate that about him.”

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Earlier this year Hathaway co-starred opposite Jared Leto in the Apple+ streaming series, *WeCrashed*, an account of the spectacular rise and fall of the WeWork company that went from a \$47 billion valuation in 2019 to zero within the space of a year.

She plays one-half of the real-life husband-and-wife team of Adam and Rebekah Neumann whose Silicon Valley unicorn story devolved into another example of corporate mismanagement and greed. Given the collapse of Theranos and the recent 11 year prison sentence handed to its former CEO fraudster Elizabeth Holmes, not to mention the \$36 billion FTX crypto scam engineered by Sam Bankman-Fried, *WeCrashed* offers disturbing insights into the inherent vice of certain startups. ➤



Hathaway believes that Rebekah Neumann was part of the snake oil sales element to raising corporate finance. “We’re all really fascinated by charismatic people and people who have that sort of strange ability to get other people to do what they want. And I think there’s something about the fact that we’re living in a time when we’ve never been so globally connected. I mean, I’m just looking at all of you and

Above: Anne Hathaway with husband Adam Shulman at the 25th Annual Critics’ Choice Awards in 2020 – the couple have been married for more than 10 years and have two children

Right: Hathaway with her Best Supporting Actress Oscar for *Les Misérables* at the 85th Annual Academy Awards

I’m trying to figure out how many time zones there are up here right now. I mean, it’s kind of wild, right, that we’re all able to do this right now.

“So if you are someone who’s charismatic and you do have the reach to connect with a lot of people, that’s a very powerful thing. Given the timing that we’re living through in late-stage capitalism, people are looking to invest in this. So it doesn’t surprise me that we’re seeing this happen again and again and again.”

Next up for Hathaway is *Mothers’ Instinct*, the English language remake of the critically-acclaimed 2018 French film directed by Olivier Masset-Depasse who also helms this version.

Set in the 1960s, the film explores the relationship between

two neighbours and best friends, Celine (Hathaway) and Alice (Jessica Chastain). *Mothers to two sons* of the same age, a tragic accident shatters their sense of suburban complacency and turns their friendship into all-out

psychological warfare. Hathaway and Chastain both served as producers on the project which will premiere early in 2023. “That was the hardest role I have played,” confessed Hathaway.

“It touched my worst fear and I almost backed out of the film because I didn’t know if I could go there as an actress.”

But her goal has always been to push herself beyond any limits that she might have unconsciously harboured during the course of her career. “All my films have served their purpose... in terms of taking me to the next level and setting standards for the next performance,” said Hathaway.

“I make films that offer comfort and joy and hope – sometimes. And then, sometimes, I make films where I don’t care about any of that, and it’s just about: This is something I responded to – a character or a story I couldn’t get out of my head, a director whose work is dark and challenging. I want to honor that part of myself as well.

“You’d think that, at this point, I would have some kind of strategy to be able to tell you about, but I really, really don’t... But it does seem like a blend of comfort and risk.” ■

