

Lake Bell

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interview by Roberto Croci

She loves dogs, pizza with mushrooms, and cars, and she would like to live in Italy. Lake Siegel Bell, actress, writer, producer and voice-over artist extraordinaire, grew up between Manhattan's Upper East Side and Vero Beach, Florida. Tall, sinuous and possessing a statuesque beauty, her ironic and intelligent sense of humour allows her to be equally at home in "a pair of Louboutins or sneakers and flip-flops," in her own words. "I am a chameleon." Her next three films, whose diverse genres range from drama to thriller to comedy, will certainly give her the opportunity to prove this assertion. We will see her respectively in "Million Dollar Arm" with Jon Hamm, shot in India and the USA (where it will be released in May), "The Coup" with Owen Wilson and Pierce Brosnan, set in Thailand, and "Man Up" with Simon Pegg, which is currently being shot in England. Among her first roles were frequent appearances in television series "The Practice", "Surface" and "Boston Legal". She then moved on to romantic comedies such as "Over Her Dead Body", "What Happens in Las Vegas" with Cameron Diaz, "It's Complicated" with Steve Martin and Meryl Streep and "No Strings Attached" with Ashton Kutcher and Natalie Portman. Until one day she decided to write, shoot, produce and act in a film all her own. The kind of film that you don't see in theatres any more, with beautiful dialogues, intelligence, humour, surprise and credible relationships. "In a World", not coincidentally a tale of the world of voice-over artists in Hollywood, won the 2013 Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award at Sundance. Directing is also among her many passions. "I love the urban, ironic and comical directors such as Woody Allen and Paul Mazursky; but also the epic ones, like Miloš Forman, Emir Kusturica, Alexander Payne and Thomas McCarthy. And I identify with the sense of humour and the taste for dysfunctionality that characterises the work of Miranda July and the brothers Jay and Mark Duplass," she tells us from her home in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, where she lives with her husband, the tattoo artist Scott Campbell, and the two stray dogs they adopted, Margaret and Texas. "My parents were divorced. I lived with my mother in Florida, and every two weeks I got on an airplane and flew to New York to visit my father. I traveled as an unaccompanied minor, and the layover in Atlanta was the time I got to spend with all of my flight-attendant friends, who had adopted me as their mascot. One day I asked them if I could make the regular security announcement, since I knew it by heart. That was my first performance. I remember imitating the voice of my favorite flight attendant, and I was very professional, despite being only 11 years old. But above all, I understood that doing impressions, in addition to being a form of entertainment for my parents, could give me a personal psychological boost and could even become a possible career. I could have worked in film or advertising or doing voices for cartoons. "At the age of 14, Lake convinced her parents (mother: model, interior decorator, academic; father: real estate developer) to enroll her in a boarding school in Connecticut. "I wanted to be independent like my big brother." Later, she asked to study theatre in England, "where being an actress is considered a serious profession, not like in the United States, where they laugh in your face and ask you which restaurant you work in." Her parents, however, wanted her to study humanities at Skidmore College in upstate New York. "I went there for a year, and then I transferred to the Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance in Kent. I have always been very independent, and I've never been afraid of living alone. I love adventure. But I understand that parents can be concerned about the future of their children. Acting is not a simple career, and it can intimidate even the most determined people." During her course of studies, she never went anywhere without a recording device. "When I heard a strange accent, I recorded it. And since I had this idea of overturning the male-dominated world of voice-over artists in Hollywood, I tried to learn as many different accents and voices as I could. Needless to say, upon my return it certainly was not easy to make ends meet. Fortunately, I began landing some smaller roles in television

productions. I have to confess that for a long time I continued to record voices. “Another one of Bell’s passions is writing, as shown in her film, “In a World”. “Writing has always been a passion of mine. It started with writing letters to my mom during vacations and while I was away at boarding school. She is a truly gifted story-teller. In a certain sense, I have always tried to be as good as she is, and that is why I continued to practice, writing and rewriting. Our letters were very important to the development of my prose, and subsequently to the dialogues of my screenwriting. My father, on the other hand, gave me his passion for motors. He collects cars and is an amateur race car driver. He was the owner of the Virginia International Raceway and New Jersey Motorsports Park, two European-style race tracks, where you can test drive Formula 2000 and F1. But I am not a fan of power. I prefer versatility and elegance in a car. I am also a motorcycle lover, and my husband is a real fanatic. He owns quite a few of them. So of course, many of our first conversations were about the beauty of motors and how dangerous it is to ride. When he discovered that my father was the owner of Motorsports Park, where he himself often went to race, he told me, ‘I think that you and I will be friends forever.’ Instead, we got married.” Recently nominated to the Board of Women’s Film, she does not like being called a “woman director” and is rather skeptical of the women’s clubs of Hollywood. “Women in Film creates a supportive artistic community among us women, but I believe that it is important to define ourselves simply as directors, actors and writers. Period. The genitalia don’t count. Rather, as long as we allow other people to hang labels on us, we are simply playing ‘their’ game.” She loves fashion but admits that when focusing on her writing, she will wear jeans, a T-shirt and the inevitable sneakers. “As an actress and director I may find myself in diverse circles to which my personality can adapt itself very well. The dress codes vary from formal to casual. When I am at home, I don’t worry about what I wear. It is my creative space, and I need to be comfortable. When I go out, I like to be elegant and to experiment. I consciously select the designers and the dresses I wear. It doesn’t matter if they are famous names like Armani or less well-known, like Lyn Devon, a dear friend of mine who taught me to respect fashion as a form of art.”