

**T**here are actors, and then there are ACTORS. The kind of performer that can do anything. And in Canada, we have quite a few of them. First, you start to become familiar with their faces. Then you get to know their names. You see them in movies. You see them in TV series. You see them in plays, and in musicals. Al Waxman, Gordon Pinsent, John Candy, Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, Michael Riley, Sean Cullen... the list goes on and on. Canada just seems to breed very talented, very versatile actors. Ellen Dubin is just such an artist. Her talents are vast, and her resume is huge. You have seen her in a myriad of roles, showing her versatility. Right now, she is playing the role of Jeri Slate in the series *The Collector*. Best of all, she is Canadian through and through. Recently, she was kind enough to take time out of her VERY busy shooting schedule to chat with UMM...

**UMM: You live in Toronto... and you also live in Vancouver, and Los Angeles. Which came first, career-wise?**

**Ellen:** I started in Toronto. Actually, I started as a shy ballet dancer. I was very anti-social; I was one of those wallflowers. So my parents put me in dance class. And... I fell in love with dance recitals. I was always the one who would have to die an extra second, or get that extra laugh, so my teacher said to me, "You're a wonderful dancer but I think you're a better actress, and this is a direction you should probably go in." And that was probably the only nice thing she ever said to me, because she used to hit me with a stick (laughing). She was from that old

Russian school. So from there, I started doing a lot of stage work in every little city outside of Toronto, you know, summer theatre in the Kawarthas, and Thunder Bay, and Timmins. Actually, I did a show in Timmins, and we stayed in a hotel that below was a strip club and above was the hotel, and across from the room that we were sleeping in was a neon 'GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS' sign. It had an 'I' missing, so actually it was 'GRLS GRLS GRLS'. Anyway, the point of this story is that I've paid my dues. I started in plays, and did musicals, singing and dancing... I was what was known as a 'triple threat'.

**UMM: Yeah, with the background you have as a dancer, and a stage performer, and TV and movies... does this background give you the basis for your characters, or is it just the natural ham in you that comes out?**

**Ellen:** No, I think it's a combo platter. I think any amount of training that you have definitely helps. And other things, like if you speak French, or, for example, I did some sword fighting in school, and I

used that in *The Highlander: The Raven* series. So, anything that you have helps when you approach a script. Or if I don't know something, I'm an intense researcher. I'll look something up, just so I can be as authentic as possible. If I need an accent, I'll phone an operator just to hear the accent.

**UMM: You have had some great success with the Sci-Fi genre, and the sci-fi fans are notorious for being extremely well-read on their topics, sometimes to the point of being ridiculous. And they will pick people apart...**

**Ellen:** The fans in sci-fi are like-loving family members: they will tell you everything they love and then they will pick apart things as well. I've been very fortunate: I've done a lot of 'genre' stuff, and yet everything has been different. I will do something over the top like Giggerota (Ellen's wildly popular character from the TV series *Lexx*) who's a cannibal... and, well, you know, they really know their stuff. And they'll be like, 'oh, she's wearing blue, does that mean she's in a healing mood?' Or, in this show, *The Collector*, (Ellen's new series, in which she plays Jeri Slate), we just aired six episodes in Canada, people are starting to find interesting things in the furniture, or different numbers and things; or they find things that relate to the Bible. Oh, yeah, they're amazing.

**UMM: Does it freak you out a bit or is it flattering?**

**Ellen:** You know what? I think it's flattering. I just laugh at all those actors that are like, 'Oh, this is ridiculous, all this attention'. You know what? We're in it to please; I'm in it to please an audience. Yes, I get great satisfaction out of doing an amazing part, but that's not going to give me



the feedback of laughter or tears, or letters saying 'you changed my life'. That, to me, is everything.

**UMM: Putting aside your current role on *The Collector*, which character that you've played do you have a personal affinity for?**

**Ellen:** Wow, that's a very good question, and I've never been asked that. I'll tell you what some of my favourites are: it's fun when somebody casts you opposite to who you are. For example, I had a great time on *The New Addams Family* where I played a hillbilly. They blacked out my teeth, they took my boobs and gave me a bra to make them all droopy looking, gave me a big ass, with bird's nest hair, and makeup to look like soot all over my face. And I walked around talking with a bad twang like a comedic version of *Deliverance*... and that was the complete opposite of me, and I had a good time doing that. And the role in *Napoleon Dynamite* where I played a kind of Stepford Wife who was constantly perky in purple polyester. (Ed. Note: *Napoleon Dynamite* was screened at the Sundance Film Festival, and bought within an hour. It was a critics' choice for one of the best comedy films at Sundance. It was a low-budget film that is packing a big buzz).

**UMM: Sometimes we lose our great Canadian actors to the U.S...**

**Ellen:** Oh, we have major talent in Canada, with producers and directors and actors, and I'm very grateful to have this work (in Canada), and I find sometimes when

we go down to the States people there really appreciate our background. Generally, we're not just pretty faces; we are well trained actors, and anything they throw at us we can handle. And we have a really good attitude about it because we're used to paying our dues. We do theatre, we do television for a small amount of money - you know, we don't get paid \$1.7 million an episode (in Canada), so we're very grateful when we get water in our trailer (laughing). So, I'm very appreciative, and I will always... ALWAYS come back to Canada to work and stay here. It's my home.

**UMM: What are your thoughts on Canadian actors - great Canadian actors - who go south to play tiny roles in big films?**

**Ellen:** Well, it gives them visibility, and more money. I know where you're going with this though: you're saying that you would rather watch one of us in a great part in a Canadian production as opposed to a 'Here's your water, sir' role in an American production.

**UMM: Exactly. But how does that feel for you? I mean, playing opposite a Tom Hanks or someone similar has to have a certain appeal to it, but at the same time, as an actor, you have to forgo these great Canadian roles for lesser parts.**

**Ellen:** You know, I believe you can have it all. I mean, sure, sometimes, yes, I would love to act opposite a Jeff Bridges, but if it happens, it happens. That's why it's great to have Canada to give us those roles. But I think you can have it all.

**UMM: Who are some of your favourite Canadian actors?**

**Ellen:** Let's see... there are SO many great Canadian actors. I love watching Colm Fiore on stage; he has a lot of charisma. I like Nicholas Campbell in *DaVinci's Inquest*.

**UMM: Is there anyone that, when you hear you're going to work with them, you are delighted because they are fun to hang out with?**

**Ellen:** Well, I can't name names... But I like to work with anyone who is generous and giving, and is fun to work with, and doesn't cause hassles with the crew. Of course, it would be fun to work with a Jim Carrey or a Mike Myers. I love some of the Second City gang, those are talented people.

**UMM: Where do you want to go next with your career?**

**Ellen:** Well, I'd like to produce a movie. Something that's a little off the wall, with six actors, and no car chases or blowups. I also would like to continue on this series (*The Collector*), I'm really enjoying it. I'd also like to fit in some travel; I'm missing some parts of the world that I'd really love to see. You know, there's so much to do, and if I didn't have to sleep, I wouldn't...  
**UMM**

