

“Carrie is as far from Samantha Jones as the equator is from the North Pole.”

A CONVERSATION WITH KIM CATTRALL

Carrie Kipling on *My Boy Jack* on MASTERPIECE CLASSIC

Sunday, April 20, 2008 at 9pm ET on PBS

What happens to a family when they send—and lose—a loved one to war? That question lies at the heart of Masterpiece's *My Boy Jack*, which airs Sunday, April 20, 2008 at 9pm ET on PBS.

My Boy Jack tells the story of British literary giant Rudyard Kipling's son Jack, played by *Harry Potter*'s Daniel Radcliffe, who triggers a bitter family conflict when he joins the Irish Guard at the outset of World War I. The production is based on the acclaimed play of the same name, written by David Haig—who also wrote the screenplay and stars as Rudyard Kipling. Kim Cattrall (*Sex and the City*) plays Kipling's American wife, Carrie, who foresees the fate that awaits her son, and Carey Mulligan (*The Amazing Mrs. Pritchard*) is Jack's protective older sister, Elsie.

Cattrall, who is best known to American television audiences as *Sex and the City*'s successful and sexually uninhibited PR exec Samantha Jones, was attracted to *My Boy Jack* not only for its telling of the Kiplings' story but also to the relevance it will have to millions of families, including her own. Here, she talks about what she learned, what the story meant to her and what she hopes viewers will take away from *My Boy Jack*.

Q: Describe the experience of working on *My Boy Jack*.

A: I'm so thrilled to have been a part of *My Boy Jack*. It's such an important film. In many ways, the story—that of a young man going off to war—is timeless, but there is also a poignancy to it today, of course.

Q: How much did you know of the Kiplings' story before you read the script?

A: I grew up reading Rudyard Kipling. My parents were British, and I spent much of my childhood in England, where he was a magical figure. As a child, I read the *Jungle Books* and had a special affinity for the novel *Kim*. I also enjoyed his poetry; “The Way Through the Woods” is still one of my favorite poems.

Later on, I understood that Kipling had been considered a jingoist by many for his political views and that his popularity and reputation had suffered for it. But I didn't know that he had been married to an American, and I didn't know anything about Jack.

Q: What appealed to you about the script?

A: When I read it, I couldn't put it down. I was so touched by the story. Most films about war focus on the battle and the glory, but *My Boy Jack*—along with recent films like *The Valley of Elah* and the television movie *Friendly Fire* from the 1970s—looks at how families experience war and what it means for their lives. It's a story that's seldom told, but it's one that I think is very important.

Q: The story also has personal significance to you. Can you talk about that?

A: Like Jack, my nephew, who recently turned 18, is bent on joining the military and being part of what he perceives as the greatest battle being fought in his lifetime. Like Jack, he also has bad vision as a result of an accident when he was a young boy. His desire to serve in Iraq—and my desire for him to not go—was a deeply personal parallel to the making of *My Boy Jack*. It caused me to look further into history—not just world history, but my own family history as well. My paternal grandfather served in World War I and was wounded at Passchendaele. He spent two years recovering and was never quite the same. He served again in World War II and died of pneumonia after six months at the Front. My father grew up without his father, and I thought about that a lot during the filming.

Q: What was it like playing a character based on a real person?

A: This was my first time playing a real person, and it was quite daunting. In addition, there was the challenge of playing a woman from another time in history—one that is about as far from Samantha Jones as the equator is from the North Pole. As an actor, I felt a responsibility to truly understand Carrie Kipling—who she was, what she was like and how her experiences shaped her.

Q: What was it like working with your co-stars David Haig, Daniel Radcliffe and Carey Mulligan?

A: We had a lovely time. We became like a family. *My Boy Jack* is the realization of a 25-year dream for David Haig, and we all felt a deep sense of dedication and enthusiasm in bringing it to life. We felt such a responsibility to the project and to the characters. There was a feeling among us that we were not just making a film for entertainment but that we were telling a story of human experience.

When we began filming, Daniel—like Jack—was turning 18, and that also had a special significance. I remember that on the first day of filming he brought a photo of his great-grandfather, who had served in World War I, in his uniform. I was really touched by that.

Q: Carrie Kipling was not well liked by her husband's family and contemporaries. Henry James called her "this hard capable little person," and others described her as controlling, difficult and unimaginative. There was even a book written about her called *The Hated Wife*. How did you get in touch with her character?

A: She was a complex woman, and I did a great deal of research to learn as much as I could about her. I even spent a night at the Kiplings' home in Vermont, where they lived for a time early in their marriage. They left behind so many personal effects—it was almost like they had just been there.

At the time that they married, Rudyard Kipling was an enormous star. He was beloved by his fans and in great demand from an admiring public. In fact, he was hounded, as we see in the opening scene of the film, when Carrie chases two paparazzi from the grounds of their home. She was fiercely protective of her family's privacy and wanted to control peoples' access to them, which did not necessarily endear her to many. In addition to being Kipling's wife, she was his agent, his manager, his security guard, his lawyer—she made it possible for him to do the work for which he was so admired.

Q: As a viewer, it's easy to dislike Rudyard Kipling at times throughout *My Boy Jack*. How did you reconcile your feelings as an actor, playing the woman who loved him, and your feelings as a person?

A: You know, all people are flawed, and he certainly was no exception. One of the things I learned as I prepared for the role was just how deeply Carrie loved Rudyard, and how much he relied on her. At a time when women didn't have a voice of their own, she was this strong, guiding force behind a literary giant who was a fantastical genius but also an emotionally volatile, bombastic rollercoaster of a man.

They lost their eldest child, Josephine, to the flu when she was just seven years old. At the time she died, Rudyard was so ill himself that Carrie had to wait a month to tell him the news. Josie had been the love of their lives, and they were absolutely devastated. When you consider the experiences that bound them to one another, you begin to understand the depth of their relationship. And one can't forget that she was a woman of her time. As a dutiful wife, she stood by her husband—right or wrong.

That's not to say that it wasn't hard for her. Rudyard betrays her when he gets Jack a commission after promising her that he will get him a desk job, and you see in that moment that things have changed. Something has shifted between them, and the relationship will never be quite the same.

Q: You filmed the exteriors on location at Batemans, the Kipling's home in Sussex. What did that bring to the experience of making *My Boy Jack*?

A: It was incredibly powerful to be at the house where this story literally took place. On the last day, we filmed the scene where Rudyard walks Jack to the car as he is preparing to leave for the war. We all thought, "This is the path they walked; this is the gate they walked through; this is the place where everything happened." It was like going back in time.

Q: You've had a long and successful career in film, television and on stage. What do you like about television in particular?

A: I absolutely loved working on *Sex and the City*—it was an amazing experience. But when you're on a series, it can put in peoples' heads a limited idea of who you are and what you can do. In the four years since the series ended, I've enjoyed mixing my work up with theater and film. It's exciting and challenging at the same time—sometimes I ask myself, "Can I do this?"

Making *My Boy Jack* felt more like shooting a film than a television program. We had rehearsals, and we had the luxury of time to get to know the characters and one another. Unlike some television, which is shot quickly and out of sequence, production on *My Boy Jack* had a clear beginning, middle and end, which allowed us to build emotionally to the climax of the story.

Q: Masterpiece is reaching out to younger women viewers—call them the *Sex and the City* crowd. What do you think a program like *My Boy Jack* offers those viewers?

A: I think that many younger women will be attracted to *My Boy Jack* for Daniel, of course. He's so dear and so sweet. I think he gives a very brave, smart performance, and I'm so proud of him. *My Boy Jack* is certainly not a "chick flick," but it portrays two strong women of different ages—Carrie and her daughter, Elsie—in a way that I think will be compelling to viewers. It's easy to forget how far women's rights have come in the last 100 years, and this film offers a window on a time different from our own in so many ways. Younger women may not realize that it wasn't so long ago that women didn't have the freedom to speak their minds—let alone cast a vote.

Q: *The New York Times* started a brouhaha recently when it asked, "Is PBS necessary?" Why do you think public broadcasting is important, and what does it offer viewers?

A: When I was growing up, public broadcasting gave me access to programming I never could have found elsewhere. I remember watching *The Naked Civil Servant*. It was so beautifully rendered—I'd never seen anything like it.

PBS has been responsible for so many seminal moments in television history. It has consistently pushed the envelope in the name of tolerance, acceptance and understanding. The programming is done with such care, intelligence and taste, and it's inclusive—everyone can watch. I remember babysitting my sister, who is 10 years younger than I am; we would watch *Sesame Street*, and I would enjoy it almost as much as she did. PBS understands how to make television that is entertaining and informative without seeming didactic or boring—it connects viewers intellectually and emotionally with what they are watching.

Q: You're a self-confessed *Masterpiece* fan. What makes it so special to you?

A: I've been watching *Masterpiece* since I was a girl. I couldn't wait for it to come on, to see Alistair Cooke and feel the sense of pageantry—just the music alone. I remember watching *Elizabeth R* and *I, Claudius*—they were brilliant. And *Masterpiece* is still wonderful today. *Jane Eyre* was one of my recent favorites.

Masterpiece has a gift for storytelling. The stories are so diverse—they truly transport you as a viewer. Everything is so beautifully shot. It's a joy to watch. For all of those reasons, I believe that *My Boy Jack* belongs on *Masterpiece*, and I'm so proud to have been a part of it.

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My Boy Jack is a WGBH coproduction with Ecosse Films. The producers are Douglas Rae, who also produced *Mrs. Brown*, and Michael Casey. The director is Brian Kirk (*The Tudors*). The writer is David Haig. The executive producers are Robert Bernstein for Ecosse Films and Rebecca Eaton for **MASTERPIECE**.

MASTERPIECE has been presented on PBS by WGBH since 1971. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting and public television viewers provide funding for **MASTERPIECE**.

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