



EMMY REWARDED

*From New York's Metropolitan Opera to Dragonball Evolution, actress **Emmy Rossum** isn't ever what you expect. Who would have guessed the girl loves a lounge act?*

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Bra (\$90), panty (\$80), and thigh-highs (\$125) by VPL. Visit vplnyc.com.

“YOU KNOW HOW MANY TIMES I SAW THAT MOVIE? AT LEAST 15.”

It's late into my evening with Emmy Rossum at the Beverly Hills Hotel's Polo Lounge when our waiter casually confesses his adoration. He's speaking about Rossum's breakout performance in the 2004 film *The Phantom of the Opera*, and his timing couldn't have been better. Hours earlier, the first topic of our tête-à-tête is the Lounge's singer and his unrewarding position. “I really admire those guys,” Rossum says wistfully as our bottle of Sauvignon Blanc is uncorked. “They have to sing beautifully every night, and no one listens.”

Rossum can relate—not only as a former child opera singer and currently an emerging singer-songwriter, but also as an actress whose biggest role to date was a controversial one that split audiences and critics alike. Yet one fan's nod can speak for many, whether you're a singer or an actor. “Sometimes you'll be at the grocery store and someone will say, ‘I loved *Songcatcher*,’” she says, referring to her first film role. “Completely random.”

At 22, Rossum offers a mixture of charming candor and philosophical contemplation. She's no less proud of April's *Dragonball Evolution* than her turn in Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River*. “I'd never held a gun before—I'm such a pacifist. I'd never done any martial arts. When am I ever going to get to wear a latex catsuit and shout, ‘Did you steal my dragonball?’” she says, less than half-joking.

Though filmed in a remote part of Durango, Mexico, the new movie has also enabled her to see much of Asia. Since the holidays, Rossum's traveled over the Pacific five times, visiting Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, and South Korea to promote the popular manga-turned-live-action fantasy. And as we tittle, her BlackBerry buzzes with the news that her next junket will involve a stunt where the cast members all pop out of human-size dragonballs when they're announced. This is a long way from Andrew Lloyd Webber-land.

It's even farther from her professional start, at age seven in the Metropolitan Opera's children's chorus. “The second I walked into the opera, I felt like here's a bunch of people who are crazy in the same way I am,” says Rossum, “I felt like I finally belonged!” Though born and bred in Manhattan, growing up with mother Cheryl (a commercial photographer), she shows none of the narcissism or nihilism that city's offspring so often exude—despite having attended the esteemed Spence School.

Rossum no doubt called on some of her Spence experience to play Alexa in *Dare*, a Sundance-screened indie about privileged suburban teens who get involved in something beyond your typical after-school special. “I have a three-way in



Davis over-the-knee boot in black ridged patent by **Brian Atwood** (price on request). Visit brianatwood.com. One-piece and arm pieces, stylist's own.

it,” she announces, quickly adding, “There's no nudity, per se.” Whatever that means, it's certainly another stretch for Emmanuelle, whose ladylike manners, modest sense of style, and impressive intellect (she reads Rilke and quotes Descartes) balance quirks and guilty pleasures like ice cream for breakfast and onion soup for dinner, old movies, mystery novels, and long bubble baths.

With saucer-size eyes, picture-perfect lips, and expressive limbs, Rossum is the kind of girl who could get whatever she wants out of whomever she

wants, so it's all the more notable that she eschews birthday presents, doesn't understand why clothing companies send free things to people who can afford to buy them, and keeps her dating life (yes, she has one) out of the gossip columns.

More than once, Rossum breaks into song. When asked what it would take to get her up with the unappreciated lounge singer, she snaps back, “Not much.” And when she offers to duet with the waiter, he probably doesn't realize she's not kidding. But unfortunately, this is not that kind of place.

“When am I ever going to get to wear a latex catsuit and shout, ‘Did you steal my dragonball?’”

Rossum admits she’s “at a crossroads” musically. Having taken a bit of a declared sabbatical from acting to release a revelatory album in 2007 and a holiday EP last year, she’s experienced the challenges of getting heard in today’s marketplace. “I think you risk going niche-y by really trying to express what you want to do,” she says. But doing a more mainstream pop record holds no appeal. “I feel like that would just be non-challenging and wouldn’t really represent me.” While her own tastes range from Colbie Caillat to Lil Wayne (“Damien Rice has got to put out a new record soon,” she adds), Rossum’s still finding where she fits on the spectrum. Piano lessons hint that she might be looking toward more serious performance spaces than karaoke bars sometime soon, but she cautions, “I don’t like to mix making music and making films—I feel too distracted and want to put my heart, soul, and head into every project.”

And we may also be seeing more of her in Las Vegas. Rossum is looking at a getaway condo (conveniently, her uncle and aunt own the Westside’s Rossum Realty). Like many entertainers, Rossum is drawn to Sin City’s lights, even if she isn’t the out-all-night clubbing type.

Rossum is no doubt eager to have another movie make as big a mark as *Phantom*, but she’s clearly not rushing anything. “I’m still young. There are some things I just don’t know how to play yet,” she says. “I kind of think I’m ready to do a musical again. Last time there was a depression in America, people turned to Shirley Temple and musicals. Maybe they will again.”

Choices, for her, don’t appear to be so agonizing. “If something strikes my fancy, then I’m going to do it, and if it doesn’t, then I’m not,” she says simply and without arrogance.

“I feel like that’s the way I’ve played my life up to now, to play it by ear, which for the most part has worked out OK—not to decide what I’m going to do [beforehand] and be open. If I make those decisions and end up waiting tables, I’ll be happy.”

And as we depart, Rossum stops in the middle of the room, looks the lounge singer in the eyes, and tells him how much she enjoyed his performance. ▼

