

Q&A

WITH FELICITY HUFFMAN

Why Can't a Man Be More Like a Woman?

BEST KNOWN for her Emmy-winning turn as the harried stay-at-home mom Lynette on *Desperate Housewives*, Felicity Huffman takes a noticeable departure from Wisteria Lane in her latest film, *Transamerica*. Playing Bree, a transsexual who embarks on an impromptu road trip with the teenage son she unknowingly fathered in her previous life as a man, Huffman creates a very human character—a hilarious, vulnerable but resilient woman who happens to have a penis. The actress talked to *O* about conquering the most challenging role of her career. So far.

O: Your character, Bree, is a man who's been living as a woman, days away from a sex change operation. What attracted you to the part?

FH: Being able to play a man becoming a woman is an actor's dream. Just to get to sink your teeth into not only the internal journey but also the external one is so



Felicity Huffman and Graham Greene in *Transamerica*.

challenging and terrifying. It was irresistible.

O: What was the most difficult aspect of playing Bree?

FH: The voice. When transgender male-to-females take hormones, it doesn't change their voice, so they might look like Kate Moss but sound like James Earl Jones. I worked with a voice coach who helped me put Bree's qualities—loneliness, self-consciousness, being studied and hidden—into her voice; and I ultimately dropped it six octaves. I also wanted to represent someone in the transgender community truthfully, and I was frightened that my performance wouldn't look authentic. It's

the most difficult thing I've ever done on film.

O: How do you think audiences will react to the controversial subject matter?

FH: I hope they don't think, *Oh, that's a weird, marginalized section of society and it doesn't interest me*. I hope they realize the film is a good comedy that, from what I've seen, appeals to 14-year-olds as well as grandmothers. I also hope the movie brings a message that the truth of the human soul is universal. It's something we all share whether we're transgender or Christian or Muslim or anything else we think represents divisions that seem unbreachable.

—R.D.



Lihle Mvelase plays Beauty in *Yesterday*.

Yesterday and Tomorrow

A beautiful small film comes to the small screen.



THE TITLE character of the poignant South African film

Yesterday was given her name by her father because, she explains, "things were better yesterday than today." This sentiment sets the tone for director Darrell James Roodt's (*Cry, the Beloved Country, Sarafina!*) road film of a different sort—the first

movie made in the Zulu language for international release. Tony Award-nominated Leleti Khumalo leads a brilliant Zulu cast as Yesterday, a rural woman of little means whose husband is a miner in faraway Johannesburg. When Yesterday is diagnosed with AIDS, she sets off to confront her husband, determined to survive the

year so she can return home and see her daughter, Beauty, off to her first day of school. Nominated for a foreign-language Oscar last year, this beautiful, sad, timely epic, which makes its television debut on HBO on November 28, convinces us that while things may have been better yesterday, there's still reason to feel hopeful about tomorrow. —R. B.