

'Houdini's' Kristen Connolly captures the magic of Bess Houdini

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By **Sarah Huggins**

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History's latest mini-series "Houdini" tells the story of the great magician Harry Houdini like no one has ever seen before, and there are juicy nuggets sprinkled throughout the two night event for even the most die hard of fans.

Oscar winner Adrien Brody plays Houdini himself, while "[House of Cards](#)" actress Kristen Connolly plays his wife Bess, who was often his partner in magic as well as life. [Zap2it](#) got a chance to catch up with Connolly to find out just how she went about stepping into the role of Houdini's wife of 32 years.

Zap2it: What was the biggest draw for you to this project?

Kristen Connolly: Mostly, when it was mentioned to me, they told me Adrien [Brody] was playing Harry Houdini and that was really the main thing that got me interested. I'm such a fan of his and I have been for a long time.

How close to Houdini history does this story follow?

It's not totally accurate. I think there are times when you are making this kind of a movie, you try to get the spirit of it more than the individual details. That was what we focused on. A story like this can be truthful, without being entirely factual.

Is there anything in this telling of the story that will surprise even those die hard Houdini fans?

I think more than anything, because it is a little bit longer than a lot of other Houdini movies, I hope they are surprised by how many little things we were able to pack into it.

What kind of preparation did you do for this role?

I was really lucky in that a good friend of mine, a writer, Michael Mitnick knows quite a lot about Houdini and he was able to put me in touch with his magic teacher, Tom Interval, who is a magician based in California. I went out to Los Angeles and I was set up with Tom and John Cox who runs the "[Wild About Harry](#)" blog dedicated to Houdini, that's just this awesome, wealth of information.

Tom put together this amazing packet of all Bess related information. He not only gave me this amazing resource, but saved me countless hours of pouring over all these books for information on Bess' life. It's a little bit harder to find stuff on her. There's just so much written about Houdini and there's a lot written about Bess, but you kind of have to sift through to find it. I referred to that document constantly while shooting.

Did you attempt any of the signature Houdini magic tricks?

Adrien and I made an attempt at trying to figure out how to do that box trick that they do and it was unsuccessful. The amount of times they must have practiced is more time than Adrien and I had to practice. Also we are a lot taller than Harry and Bess were. It was cool to get an understanding of how athletic and nimble these people were to complete the tricks.

What was it like working with Adrien?

He's an incredibly caring person and lovely person to be around. He really brings so much intelligence and thoughtfulness to everything that he does. I was really inspired by his commitment to this project and to getting things right. I think Adrien brought so much passion to this and so much of the excitement.

We really felt like a team to me. We certainly looked out for each other a lot. We went through the scenes and talked about them before we shot them, just Adrien and I to make sure we were getting them right. If there were lines that we felt weren't totally true to Harry and Bess' relationship we would bring that up with the director. I think we both cared a great deal about honoring these people because they are real people and so it matters that they are represented in a way that's truthful and respectful.

When I think back on the whole project, that was really the best part was working with him.

What can you tease about why people should tune in to this version of the story?

Audiences might know a little bit about these historical people, but I guarantee the general population are going to see things that surprise them. I hope it sparks an interest in Houdini, because the more you dig into who they are, they are so fascinating.

This is someone who became outrageously famous in a time where fame and the media was a very different thing. There were no viral videos or things like that. I think the way he manipulated the media and built a giant following in his career is really cool. As much as his ability as an escape artist was extraordinary, he also was really really gifted in keeping the public interested in him and changing with the times. His ability to constantly keep himself on the front page is a really interesting thing.

"Houdini" airs Monday, Sept. 1 and Tuesday, Sept. 2 at 9 p.m. ET/PT on History.

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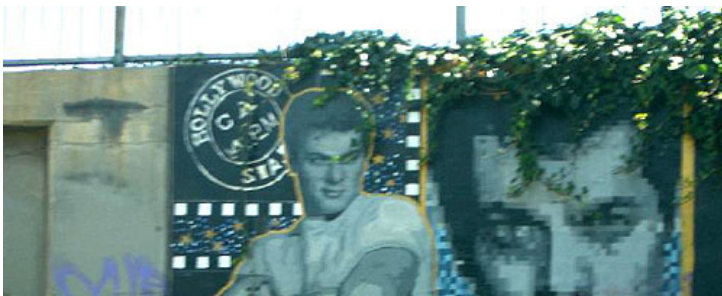
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