



# 'Of course I want to find the perfect guy'

A descendant of Jan III Sobieski, once King of Poland, there is something very regal about the enchanting Hollywood actress Leelee Sobieski. Not one to put on airs and graces, however, Leelee lays herself bare.

Interview Dawn Mellowship

**i** get the distinct impression that Leelee Sobieski (birth name Liliane Rudabet Gloria Elsveta Sobieski) has always been wise for her years. Her determination, intelligence, creativity and strong work ethic have led to numerous film roles and praise from casting directors and co-stars alike. At the age of 11, a casting agent appeared in her school cafeteria searching for a girl to feature as Claudia in *Interview with a Vampire*. Leelee auditioned but didn't get the part. She says of her audition: 'I was terrible, but my curiosity was sparked.'

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Appreciating culture is a trait fostered in Leelee by her parents, Jean, a French-born painter, and Elizabeth, an American writer. Reading Shakespeare, painting, horse riding and ballet were some of Leelee's early pursuits, but what did her parents think about acting? 'They thought it was an OK idea. It wasn't their dream – they didn't name me Bette Davis or something. It was like an

accident that started to work out and when that happened they ran with it and helped me along. My parents really took care of me and travelled with me. Because I had my family behind me I was able to stay relatively normal.'

## Fêted at 15

A grounded attitude seems to have served Leelee well and she has starred in a multitude of TV and film roles. The apocalyptic box office hit *Deep Impact* saw her playing Elijah Wood's young bride, Sarah Hotchner.

In the critically acclaimed Merchant Ivory Production of *A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*, Leelee portrayed Kris Kristofferson and Barbara Hershey's daughter, Channe Willis. These films, along with Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, *Here on Earth*, *The Glass House*, *My First Mister* and an array of other spectacular performances, firmly established Leelee as an incredibly impressive actor. Playing the part of Joan in the US mini-series *Joan of Arc* led to Golden Globe and Emmy nominations at the tender age of 15. It may sound like a teenager's dream but it was by no means child's play.

'It was such a concentrated time for me. It was three months, 15 hours a day and I didn't really have a choice but to almost think I was Joan of Arc! When I left I ran as far away from it as possible. The job was difficult but exciting.'

Leelee was offered the starring role in *Never Been Kissed* but chose to play the maths geek instead. 'I thought it was the role of the popular, pretty girl – and I wanted to play a more interesting part.' Drew Barrymore took the lead instead. Leelee has nothing but admiration for her. 'Drew was very sweet and warm it was a really fun set to work on.'

## Hair-raising hobby

I'd heard that Leelee had an odd habit of collecting locks of hair from her co-stars. 'I used to when I was younger, but not so much any more. It just seemed more personal than an autograph. There's something quite sweet when a child asks you for a little piece of your hair, but when it's a young woman it becomes a little bit creepy – everything gets a bit dirty when you're older!'

A mix of youthful inquisitiveness and adult acumen has carried level-headed Leelee through a career that could turn some into Hollywood egomaniacs. Already an industry veteran, she remains decidedly unpretentious.

'I think it definitely made me grow up quickly in some respects, but kept me young at the same time. Growing up, the way that my family was, a child's point of view was really valued. When you are a child and you are working with adults on an equal level it's a really interesting thing because you end up being not so much different. I have been working in







the same field for a long time, but I was working as a child before and now I am a young woman. It's almost like starting over again.

'Good friends are really important to stay grounded. I have the most wonderful friends. They are funny, free people who you can giggle and be stupid with. They make no judgements and do interesting things that I admire, which is especially important in an industry like this. If you can admire your friends, it makes you realise that what you are doing is not as significant as everyone around you makes it out to be.'

Despite her success – and undoubted beauty – Leelee remains very level-headed



### Mr Right-for-Now

Leelee strikes a stunning figure with her willowy frame, long fair hair and piercing blue eyes, but having been single for two years she is philosophical about relationships. 'I am usually attracted to mystery and a little bit of a wicked sense of humour. Tall, dark and handsome – of course – a huge brain and someone that is very kind. They can be in any field whatsoever, but need to be someone who appreciates the arts.'

'I like people who are a little bit mixed in terms of their culture, maybe of mixed nationality, and have travelled, so they appreciate different cultures, value systems and ways of looking at things. I am a hopeless romantic, so any time I meet someone that I think could be my boyfriend I wonder, could I marry this man? But then I am not sure if I believe in marriage any more. I think we cling too much to relationships because we are so scared of being alone. But when it happens it just happens and you don't

title. Nicholas Cage plays a sheriff investigating the mysterious disappearance of a young girl on a secluded island with some rather bizarre pagan inhabitants. In a twist on the original patriarchal community, Oscar winner Ellen Burstyn heads a matriarchal pagan community who sacrifice humans when crops fail. Leelee plays Honey, a barmaid who acts as Nicholas' confidante. Remaining elusive about her character, Leelee says she is 'a mysterious character with the maturity of a woman'.

Other forthcoming films featuring Leelee include *88 Minutes* with Al Pacino, *In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale* and *In a Dark Place*, in which Leelee plays an art therapist who takes on the post of minding two young orphans and finds herself having to redeem their souls from sinister occult influences. Leelee says this is her most challenging role to date.

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think about what anything means because it becomes so simple. Of course I want to find the perfect guy, but at the same time I'm not ready to get married right now. I'm nervous, I don't want to find someone right now but I do want to find someone that is right for now.'

Despite a sanguine attitude and flourishing career, I can sense the sadness in Leelee's voice when she talks about her parents' break-up.

'My parents got divorced in 2001, which I have never said in an interview before. It hit me like a death, especially because it involved so much in my life. My family and I lived together, worked together and had dinner together every night.

Everyone was centred on this family block. Even though the love was still there, when that unit split it just changed my life in a way that I thought it would never change.'

On a much cheerier note, Leelee is starring in a whole host of upcoming films. *The Wicker Man* is a remake of the 1973 British cult classic with the same

constantly in limbo. She really had no friends, no allies. I made myself quite lonely for those two months, shutting myself up in a hotel room and that was very difficult for me.'

### A star is rising

There is a captivating sense of ingenuousness and sensibility about Leelee that makes it easy to understand the admiration she receives from directors and co-stars. The future seems to be full of opportunities for this very bright young star, but her immediate goals are modest.

'I am trying to develop some kind of ritual in my life for the immediate future. When I'm working I am very conscious, but when I'm not working I feel like I can be a little bit lazy. I have a lot of passions but sometimes I am not disciplined enough to focus on them and they float around a little bit too much.'

A bit of a dreamer she may be, but it is evident that Leelee's far from floaty acting career is set to sky-rocket. **tonic**