



## JELENA JENSEN, LEAD ROLE AS FRANCIS MARION BEYNON

Whew! What a week! All worth it though—to open to rave reviews! As Producer of The Fighting Days I cannot explain the pride I feel. Two performances down, and now that we have a chance to catch our collective breath, I caught up with Jelena Jensen to ask her some questions about herself and playing in the starring role as Francis Marion Beynon.

In the time that we've been working on this production together I have come to know Jelena to be as professional and talented as they come. When she realizes she is free of her Father's tyranny, you can see it on her face. Goosebumps! The kind of actress that can convey emotion without dialogue. And on top of all that, she's funny too! Her interpretive dance practice is not to be missed. I'm glad I've finally gotten a chance to sit down with her. Our paths don't cross often enough.

"Thank you for agreeing to this interview Jelena. When did you first get into acting?"

"I was in my first show when I was three years old!" She lights up. Clearly acting is a big part of who she is. "It was the Cinderella Pantomime in Kimberly. Through CCT I have had the chance to work with some of those same people, even all these years later!"

"That young? What attracted you to acting?"

She's smiling while she remembers, "I love to tell stories and make people feel things. To me, nothing beats the feeling of making a quiet audience gasp, cry, or laugh unexpectedly. Being able to transport a whole room of people into another world for a couple hours, is like magic. I like getting to know the characters I play and letting them become a part of me. I get to step on stage and be someone else, and it feels so special to get to introduce that character to the world!"

"Sounds intense. What do you do when you're not doing theatre?"

"I spend a lot of my time reading, mostly fantasy or sci-fi. I love to be whisked away into different worlds and experience new things..."

"I'm sensing a theme here."

"You could say that. But the best part about books is that it's all from the comfort of my own home! I also enjoy painting, baking, dancing, and hanging out with my crazy animals."

"Is this your first starring role?"

"Yes and no?" She takes a moment to differentiate. "I have been a lead in a production, but only in musicals. I have never had a starring role in a play before. I had a large role as a supporting character in "A View From the Bridge" in 2017. I was a lead in "Rock of Ages" in high school and one of the four cast members that were all leads in "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change".

"I sense a BUT coming."

"Buuuuut I have never been the singular, starring role, where the show is about my character's story. It is an honour to be in this position and be able to tell her story."

She didn't have to tell me this. I was there to see her discover the role. The painstaking research hours and heart she voluntarily gave. And I've seen the results. Crowds showering her with their love of her portrayal of the play's lead.

"Who are you playing in the production?"

With obvious pride, "I play Francis Marion Beynon. She starts out as an anxious young prairie girl from a strictly religious family. She grows throughout the show into an outspoken, passionate city woman." She ponders the transformation. "The Francis you see in the first scene is very different from the Francis you see in the final scenes. Yes, I play one character, but with how much she grows over the seven years of the show, it feels more like playing multiple characters."

"Like Sybil."

Blink. Blink. "I don't know what that is."

"You know? The movie? Sally Field?"

"Forrest Gump's mom?"

"Never mind. How did you prepare for such a large undertaking?"

"... uhhmmmmmm..." She plays coy, keeping her secrets just that.

"Ok, I won't push. What was the biggest challenge for you to take on this role?"

"There have been many challenges and learning experiences throughout this role, but I think the biggest one is the physical challenge it is for me. I have some health struggles and chronic pain that can make being on my feet for long periods of time, quite difficult. In this show, I have no chances to sit and take a break backstage, as I am in every scene! Being able to make it through a two-hour play, with no breaks, has definitely been an intense challenge for me, but has also been incredibly rewarding."

"Are you like your character at all?"

"I think I am like Francis in a lot of ways. We share a lot of views and opinions, and personality. We both started out timid and anxious and have grown into our place in the world." The other side being. "We are not alike in that Francis has a quick temper and voices her opinion loud and clear, whereas I am slow to anger and I tend to keep things to myself."

"What sort of person is going to love this character?"

She feigns surprise. "What sort of person won't love this character? I may be biased, but she is such a complex, heartfelt, wonderful character, and I am so glad I have gotten to know her this well."

She reflects on how she brought Francis to life. "Francis grows so much through this show, and bringing her to life was a large undertaking! One thing I did while learning the lines and the character, was watch how she grows and becomes more confident through the course of the show and I tried to figure out how to portray her getting older and more mature. I tried to find her physical habits, such as wringing her hands when anxious, and as she matures, slowly faded those out. They still come back at times but aren't as much of a constant. Her posture also slowly gets better as the show progresses."

"And finally, if you had your choicer, what show would you do next?"



“This is such a hard question!! Two of my favourite all time musicals are “[title of show]” and “Something Rotten!” and I would love to be in either of those. “Ordinary Days” is another favourite. All three of those shows have some of my dream roles. Following this show I would probably want to be in something completely different, so I guess I would choose “[title of show]”, a musical about two guys writing a musical about two guys writing a musical!”

Hear that future casting directors? That’s Jelena Jensen, Cranbrook’s newest hot star! Watch for her in lots more quality shows in the area.

The Fighting Days is directed by Melodie Hull.

The Fighting Days runs February 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16\*, 19, 20, 21 and 22nd at the Studio Stage Door. All shows at 730PM, except the 16th which is a 2PM matinee.

The show is proudly sponsored by East Kootenay Credit Union and BriKat Construction.

I sincerely hope to see you there,

***Gordon Sheridan***

Producer

The Fighting Days



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