



HOT YOUNG STAR

From Australia to America, Assassination Nation star Odessa Young has learned to harness her self-described “pure, white hot energy”

BY RYAN CHRISTOPHER COLEMAN

THE BRUTAL, BOMBASTIC CULTURAL SATIRE *ASSASSINATION NATION* exploded into theaters in September, introducing vast new swaths of audience to its dynamic star, Odessa Young. When I asked her just prior to the film’s premiere if anything felt different about this experience she said, “Well, in the movies I did before I wasn’t, you know, killing Republicans.”

In 2015, when Young was just 17, she got a definitive career break with prominent roles in two films (*Looking For Grace* and *The Daughter*—her first features), participation in international festivals, and a major award from her native Australia’s most prestigious ceremony (the AACTA for Best Actress in a Leading Role for *The Daughter*).

Born in Sydney in 1998, Young’s first acting role was on a children’s television serial called *My Place*. “Like a soap opera, for kids?” I ask. “Shit, I wish. That would have been so

▲ A RISING STAR FROM DOWN UNDER, ODESSA YOUNG MAKES HER STATESIDE SPLASH WITH *ASSASSINATION NATION*

fun,” she says. *My Place* was a historical episodic that premiered in 2009, based on a beloved Australian picture book. The series chronicled the story of modern Australia in reverse order by focusing on the revolving inhabitants of a particular locale, decade by decade, episode by episode, ultimately extending back to the establishment of the first British penal colony in 1788. “Maybe there’ll be a 2018 episode,” she says, in the unmistakable tone that I come to recognize as her signature... genuine, yet ironic, almost arch—it’s all a joke, but we’re in on it together. She adds: “I should tell them I’m still available.”

Acting came by way of serendipity to the 10-year-old Young through a teacher. “My drama teacher gave me this pamphlet. They were looking for kids to do a work-

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shop audition. I kept following the leads and somehow got hired. Really, it didn't occur to me that it was work."

Young tells a similar story when it comes to being cast in *The Daughter*, a loose Ibsen adaptation directed by Simon Stone, featuring an ensemble of high-voltage Australian talent (Geoffrey Rush, Sam Neill, and Miranda Otto among them). "When it came time for *The Daughter* they needed to have a workshop table read, and I was in the right place at the right time to be the kid they could call to read for Hedvig."

"I had no real hope I'd get the role," she confesses. "I thought I was too old. It didn't seem possible. I had never been in a movie before."

I ask Young about the emphasis she puts on luck and timing—two ingredients that seem to repeat often in her propulsive career.

"I was buffeted through that period of my life by really fortunate tides," she says of the period linking *My Place* and her 2015 breakout. "I don't mean to discredit my talent," she says. She falls silent, searching. "But



▲ **MADE IN SHADES:** YOUNG DOVE INTO THE DEEP END EARLY IN HER CAREER, SHE SAYS, WITH A LOT OF ENERGY AND A LITTLE LUCK

I had no fucking idea what I was doing back then. I was running on pure, white hot energy with absolutely no idea of how to harness it. I remember people saying to me I was good, but it didn't register. I didn't feel like I was doing anything. I felt like I showed up and just tried to make the words sound as truthful as possible. That was the foundation of what I did then and it remains the foundation of what I do."

And now? "I know a bit more what I'm doing. It feels more like an achievement. The second you say you know what you're doing is exactly when you realize how little you know." This mantra seems to be the animating principle behind Young's tireless exploration of new terrain—geographic, thematic, and formal.

Which brings us to the feature at hand. When it comes to *Assassination Nation*, Young is unambiguous. "It's a provocative movie. It was our aim to make people angry. It was our aim to make people think and talk to each other—to hate us, to love us, whatever they fucking feel," Young says. "This is what I have to deal with—that I may be hated by a majority of this country. Or, I don't know, by whoever does see it. Many of them might not like me." If the movie finds an audience that appreciates a fearless young actress, she need not worry. **MM**

Assassination Nation opened in theaters on September 21, 2018, courtesy of NEON.

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