

special advertising section

LAWEEKLY

EDUCATION
DREAM JOBS '06



PHOTO BY BADER HOWER

THE VOICE ACTOR



PHOTO BY JARED BUTLER

Who: Kat Cressida, 35, Bel Air Estates

KAT AND MOUSE

What: Voice-over talent, celebrity voice-matcher

How: You may have never heard of Kat Cressida, but you've probably heard her. As a top voice actor she's heard every day as the announcer on ESPN's *Pardon the Interruption*, *Cold Pizza* and *Quite Frankly*; in McDonald's TV commercials; on video games from *Titan Quest* to *Quake IV*; and is even the voice of the Black Widow Bride at Disneyland's Haunted Mansion.

One of Cressida's specialties is celebrity voice-matching: she's filled in for big names like Nicole Kidman, Keira Knightly and Julia Roberts on various films, animation projects and movie trailers.

"I never would have thought something like this existed," she laughs. "If I had known about it I probably would have spent all my life aiming for it."

Instead Cressida, who had a bi-coastal upbringing and attended Beverly Hills High School, completed a comprehensive education (a double-major in Critical Writing and Analysis and Theatre Production and Management at UC Berkeley, as well as summer programs at UCLA and UC Santa Barbara studying everything from illustrated manuscripts to the history of religion), worked as a literary agent, and then for five years was an on-camera talent in sitcoms and commercials.

"An animator at Disney said 'You love Disney, you love the animated features, why don't you try doing voice-over?' And my response was, literally, 'What's that?'"

Once aware of the field Cressida threw herself into it, learning her craft at The Voicecaster in Burbank amongst others.

"You can't just walk up to a microphone and be a voice-over talent; you have to take classes and

workshops. The microphone is a very sensitive and nuanced kind of an instrument. We all know the experience of hearing our voicemail back — we think we sound nasal and strange. The microphone multiplies that 10 times, so you have to learn how to work with a microphone to get the kind of sound, a), that you like, b), that the client's going to like, and then on top of that you have to learn to take direction instantly.

"One of the best places to learn is the Voicecaster. They have classes from the very, very beginning all the way through advanced workshops for working pros. They cast during the day and they teach great classes at night.

I'm now the coach for their animation workshops."

Cressida was soon on the books of the prestigious William Morris Agency in Beverly Hills (whom she credits with putting her at the next level and giving her room to grow) and, crucially, set herself up with a home studio to record sessions and auditions.

"That makes my marketability and availability open to everybody. I had to learn all the equipment and had to learn from a very good engineer how to run a Pro Tools [digital audio workstation] session ... A lot of my day will consist of my getting auditions and call-backs from various agents around the country and then

I'll knock out the auditions in between actual sessions here in L.A."

While Cressida's college education might seem unrelated to her current career, she views the discipline of learning in general as vital to succeeding in her world.

"UC Berkley, it's a very prestigious school and very challenging to get into, but they made you fight like hell to get your classes for your majors ... that certainly taught me how to deal with Hollywood, where no one's going to say 'Sure, come on in and take this career'!

You've got to say, 'I want this,' and be persistent.

★ "you can't just walk up to a microphone and be a voice-over talent; you have to take classes and workshops."

"Having to go through even a two-year college program teaches you that it's about strategy and planning and making some intelligent choices, and you build the muscle group of going through something that's not necessarily enjoyable but will provide the building blocks for finally getting where you want to get to."

At UCLA, where her summer program involved participating in every aspect of a theatre production, from sound design to playing the lead, Cressida learned to be a functional part of a much larger whole.

"That taught me that it wasn't just about raw talent or thinking that I deserved something. It

was about really earning it and pitching in."

Like many "dream jobs," voice-over is deceptively hard work. "It definitely is fun, just like everything that we love," says Cressida. "But it sometimes requires ridiculous hours and a lot of intention to hold fast to that. Voice-over is the kind of field that I think a lot of people assume that they could be in if they were just given the shot ... to me that's tantamount to saying if you put a pencil in my hand I can now be a great artist!"

As an essentially behind-the-scenes career, voice-over doesn't have the overt glamour of many on-camera jobs. "For me the most glamorous part of the job is when I'm having a dream come true. That to me defines why I got into this," Cressida says. "Like when I got to work with the director and producer of a Disney animated feature. There's the feature on the screen and they're relying on me to bring something to it — that's glamorous to me."

For all of her success, Cressida's well aware that in the world of voice-over every day's an audition — literally. "As talented as I may believe I am on any given day, and however in demand — today I have five different things set up for the next week, which is great — that's because every day I'm waking up at 8 o'clock in the morning, learning my voice stuff and recording a ton of auditions.

"In voice-over you're reminded every day that you're replaceable because you're auditioning left and right ... there's always someone who's brand spanking new [entering the field], with a fresh sound and the energy of a kid."

Cressida's advice to others pursuing a voice-over career is to be realistic about your strengths and focus on these. "Just figure out what you love to do in voice-over. Don't try to be super-perky McDonald's sales girl if you really are dark and edgy. Once you've defined that and you get better and better at that, then no one else can beat you at that and eventually you'll be ready

WHERE :

The Voicecaster

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