

Her Sonic Scream

Ilma Seperovic

"Children at a very young age, most children play pretend, they make up stories, and they use their imagination to act. For children, it's some of the earliest behaviors that they do – the art of storytelling. It was just, for me, an extension of that, it was fun to do, and I wasn't aware that it was on a bigger platform," says Jurnee Smollett, 33, who began her career at an early age as she was featured on shows like *Full House*, *Cosby*, and *Hangin' with Mr. Cooper*; however, to Smollett, it was her just "having fun and playing." Eventually, as she worked with other influential actors and directors, including Kasi Lemmons, Samuel L. Jackson, Angela Bassett, and Denzel Washington, this has become a huge part of her life. "Once I understood the craft more, it became something I couldn't live without," she adds.

Also, due to her upbringing in the Smollett family, it wasn't a surprise that Smollett continued to work in acting. "My mother was very artistic, she loved the arts," she recalls. "I just grew up in a very artistic family – whether or not we were going to be in the industry. Everyone was going to be artistic, that's just who we are."



SHIRT: JING (FROM L'ÉLÉ PUBLIC RELATIONS); SHORTS: EQUIPMENT (FROM PUBLIC); JEWELRY: KASSANDRA NICHOLSON JEWELRY (FROM VAN A PUBLICITY)

In the recently-released *Suicide Squad* spin-off, *Birds of Prey* (and the *Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn*), Smollett acted as Dinah Lance – better known as Black Canary – a world-class martial artist with a superpower called Canary Cry, a powerful scream which could break objects and disorientate her opponents. “To me, it’s so fascinating to play a woman who is so powerful, and yet she is in her own way,” she says. “It’s a powerful story to tell everyone. It’s a relatable story because I feel like we all, at some point, struggle with that in our lives, the question of why we are not achieving our true potential, and oftentimes, the answer is us – we’re the ones in our own way.”

Since Smollett started her career at such a young age, she has seen the industry change, such as the #MeToo movement, an increase in representation in lead, major, and speaking roles, and substantial progress on salary equity. “I’m very excited for where the industry is headed – the shift of the balance of power,” she shares. “I’ve definitely seen

more women of all kinds behind the camera that are telling our stories, which is very exciting to me.”

Smollett is a very busy actress but she has also worked with many non-profits, including the Children’s Defense Fund, Artists for a New South Africa, and TIME’S UP. “It’s the responsibility of those of us who have a platform to speak for those who don’t,” she affirms. “You have plenty of powerful women in the industry. But really, one of the missions is to make sure we are using our voice for women in other industries who don’t have the sort of platform or voice that we have. It’s an obligation for us to speak for women of all kinds, women across all industries.”

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 Videographer: Diane Choi
 Editor: Eiko Watanabe

Special thanks to Four Seasons Hotel New York Downtown (@fsnydowntown - www.fourseasons.com/newyorkdowntown/) & EPK Media (@myepk & @epkmedia - epkmedia.com)

Top-right: Dress: RICHARDS HANDEL/TFE (FROM SHOWROOM SEVEN); Earrings: LAURA CASPI JEWELRY (FROM YANA PUBLICITY); Rings: ETTIKA (FROM YANA PUBLICITY); Shoes: MAVETTE (FROM SHOWROOM SEVEN); Purrlle; Jewelry: LUVNYJEWELRY & JENNIFER ZELNER JEWELRY (FROM YANA PUBLICITY); Bottom-right: Shirt: EQUIPMENT (FROM PURRLE); Shoes: EQUIPMENT (FROM PURRLE)

