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COWBOYS & INDIANS

Q&A: Sara Canning Of 'Hannah's Law'

We check in with the star of the upcoming western premiering on Hallmark Movie Channel June 9.

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Illustration: Sam Sisco

Cowboys & Indians: You're playing a vengeful bounty hunter in *Hannah's Law*, the new western premiering June 9 on Hallmark Movie Channel. That's quite a change from your role in *The Vampire Diaries*. Do you think that, deep down, every actor wants to do a western?

Sara Canning: Absolutely. I know I did. And I want to do many more now. Especially because I got to play a bounty hunter. That's definitely not the standard role that we see women typically playing in westerns. Now I have the bug, the western bug. But, you know, I've always loved westerns. In fact, I can remember I actually wrote a paper when I was at university on Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*. And ever since then, I think I've always felt it would be a unique and awesome experience to make a western. And it was. I think everybody needs to get a western on their résumé.

C&I: Your character, Hannah Beaumont, is gunning for the bad guys who killed her family years earlier. What was it about the role that drew you to this project?

Sara: Well, vengeance is an interesting thing to play with in any genre. But I was especially excited to read about this woman who is definitely fitting into a man's role but who doesn't fit into society because of that. And that always interests me about any role, but particularly a period role — a female character who's doing something we're not accustomed to seeing women do. Someone was joking on the set that whenever we see a woman in a western, she's usually working in a brothel, or she's a schoolteacher, or somebody's wife or widow. I was glad to play a woman in that time who really wasn't any of those things.

C&I: Was it also an incentive to have a female director, Rachel Talalay, on board for the film?

Sara: Oh, definitely. When I heard that Rachel was directing, it definitely drew me to the project. She's so smart, so cool. And she'd really done her homework. She was talking with me about choosing her shot list and whose work, whose westerns, she wanted to allude to. And, again, a woman directing a western — that's not something we're accustomed to seeing, either.

C&I: How much time did you have to prepare for scenes that required horse riding skills?

Sara: I went through a very quick little boot camp shortly before we started shooting the film. About two days. But the horse wranglers were great. And they would ride with me when I wasn't shooting.

C&I: What's the best advice they gave you?

Sara: Really, to just relax. I remember the moment when I got my body to grasp what it meant to post with the horse. Before then, it was just this concept that they were explaining to me, and I was thinking, I'm not getting this at all. But when I finally felt it, it was like, Oh, wow! It was like a revelation.

C&I: Some actors in westerns say they never really get a firm grip on their characters until they find just the right hat. Was that true in your case?

Sara: [Laughs.] Well, I did try on a lot of hats, a whole lot of hats. But really, it was like that for my whole wardrobe. All I had to do was step into those clothes and I had Hannah's walk down right away.

C&I: Think you might like to get back in the saddle for a sequel?

Sara: Well, I think that John Fasano, the scriptwriter [and executive producer], has a very large collection of stories in mind he'd like to do with the character. It was great to have him on the set, to ask him questions about Hannah. And he really has her back story hashed out so well. So if we do get to do another film about her, I would be excited about it.

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