



INTERVIEW **MARIAN QUINN** By DIEGO HERNANDEZ

32A is one of the smallest bra sizes a girl can buy. It's also the name of a (now defunct) bus line in 1970s Dublin, the time and place Marian Quinn chose to set her charming debut about four 13-year-old girls on the verge of adulthood. EXBERLINER talked to the Irish writer/director about sex, maturity - and the little things in life.

There have already been so many coming-of-age films. What made you risk another one?

My background is in acting. I lived in New York, where I formed myself as a theatre and independent film actress. At some point in my career I felt that there wasn't enough work for me to do there, so I started writing this screenplay about a subject that is very familiar to me. I wrote about girls because, as an actress, I was frustrated to see that there weren't any plays about women. But I did not want to do a story about losing virginity and getting pregnant because they have been done before. Instead, I focused on the age of 13 since that is an interesting time prior to reaching the teenage years and becoming more confident in oneself. I also avoided a big story with an intricate plot because I just wanted to evoke that simple feeling that kids have at that age. There is nothing new or different about that feeling, but it just seems so special.

And there is also a particular approach towards sexuality - it's from a girl's perspective.

Yes, I think the difference is that girls look at other girls in order to compare themselves. Naturally they don't see them in the sexual way that boys do; it is more like: "Oh my God, am I going to be like that?" So girls are always measuring themselves against women.

How difficult was it to work with young actresses?

It was challenging because to me it was important to work with girls that were actually 13 years old. Physically, girls develop when they are 14 and 15. Many Hollywood films show older women posing as kids and it's hard to feel their vulnerability. A particular scene when two girls kiss each other was a huge ordeal to shoot, but they were so professional - and when the youngest girl puts on a bra in another scene, we had her mum and sister on the set.

Was it difficult to find the right actresses for the roles?

We had a huge audition, and held workshops and improv sessions with the girls. In the end, we narrowed it down to 15 and I came up with the four actresses. By the time we chose them, they were very confident with the style of working that we were going to use.

The characters in your film switch between assumed and physical ages. We see kids taking care of the house-

hold and adults secretly picking their noses. Is growing up a process that never ends?

Whenever we begin something new in our lives, we somehow experience that coming-of-age thing again. Right now I am working on a script about two people well in their fifties who fall in love. It makes me laugh because I keep thinking of them as teenagers in the way they follow each other around from a distance, and become obsessed and nervous. We always have this thing of constantly rediscovering aspects of life.

One of the girls manages to get the sexy older boy they're all after, but then he spurns her. Why did he fall for her in the first place?

When he meets that girl, she brings out the playful side in him. He doesn't need to be cool in front of older kids anymore and he does enjoy her company. But then he compares her with older girls and has second thoughts. It's interesting because a man and a woman in their forties, whom I know separately attended the premiere of the film. The following night he apologized because he had done the same thing to her but had not thought about it until he saw the film. It is something that most young kids unintentionally do.

The film features long scenes with your brother, the actor Aidan Quinn. What was it like to work with him?

Well, I wrote the characters as fictional but, of course, they are vaguely based on my own childhood. There were some scenes where he made me laugh because he reminded me so much of our dad. He did this unconsciously but it was really funny.

Your film is set in the 1970s. Why? Do you think the film wouldn't have worked in the present?

On the one hand, the girls that were 13 at the time we were doing the film said that they could relate to the story and felt the same way, but all these external things have changed so much. The world of a 13-year-old today is all about mobile phones and the internet and videogames. Also, there is this kind of worldliness in kids today that was not present in the 1970s: it made that decade so much more innocent. Since the story is sort of naïve in many respects, I am sure it would not be believable nowadays.