

## TEN QUESTIONS WITH

## SAOIRSE-MONICA JACKSON

Leaving *Derry Girls* behind was tough, but now she's finally getting to act her age

In 2018, Saoirse-Monica Jackson got her big break playing 16-year-old Erin Quinn in Channel 4's awards-guzzling sitcom *Derry Girls*. The Derry-born actor said goodbye to the character in 2022 and since then she's popped up in DC blockbuster *The Flash* and is now in Paramount+'s *The Doll Factory*, a 19th-century-set thriller involving doll-painters and obsessive taxidermists. In the new year, she's in Netflix's *The Decameron*, a raucous black comedy set in 14th-century Italy. At 30 years old, Jackson is finally leaving teenage roles behind...

This has been your first year post-*Derry Girls*. Were you ready for the show to end?

It was bittersweet. I think the weirdest thing for me was leaving behind [writer] Lisa McGee. Lisa based my character, Erin, on her younger self and Erin aspires to be everything Lisa has become – Erin would love to write a hit TV show and get a doctorate and do all the amazing things Lisa's done. So it felt bizarre when the show ended, because I was done with Erin but Lisa is continuing her life.

Would you ever revisit the role? It'd be interesting to revisit Erin down the line and see what she's

up to, because your 20s are so chaotic. But that would really be down to Lisa. I'd love to work with her again.

There's now a *Derry Girls* mural in Derry, which has become a tourist attraction. What's it like to see your face on the side of Badger's Bar and Restaurant? Derry's quite a small city and the mural's not far from where I grew up, actually. The pub that the mural's on is quite a special place to my family, so I've got a lot of

'It was bittersweet when *Derry Girls* ended'

**CULTURAL MOMENT**  
With her fellow *Derry Girls* cast members, inset, immortalised in a Derry city mural

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**TOY STORY**  
Jackson stars in new period thriller *The Doll Factory*

memories associated with it. But when I go home I try to avoid walking past it – I've seen people queuing up to see it and take photos. It's lovely to see the tourism coming back. For so long, people were apprehensive about going there, but the city has so much to offer and I think *Derry Girls* opened the doors to that.

**The show had a fanatical fanbase. What's the weirdest experience you've had with a fan?**

People always want to hug me! Especially teenagers, which is so sweet. They come up and they're so excited. I mean, what do you do in a situation like that when a stranger asks you for a hug?

**You've swapped 90s Derry for 19th-century London in *The Doll Factory*. What drew you to the show?**

I like things that are quite dark, magical and creepy and the original book it's based on [by Elizabeth Macneal] really had that atmosphere. It's sort of about the notion of ownership and men being extremely upset when they don't get their own way with women – it's still relevant.

**You're also in *The Decameron*, a TV drama based on the 14th-century Italian literary classic – not the former Prime Minister... That's so funny, because when I actually got the job, I rang my brother to tell him, and he thought I was playing David Cameron's wife! I thought, that's a big leap, but fair enough, I didn't realise how wide my character bracket was.**

***The Decameron*, like *The Doll Factory*, is a period piece. Were the shows a similar experience?** It was really interesting to be in two period shows. They were both fun, but with extremely

different tones. *The Decameron* was unlike anything I'd ever read before – it's really off the wall. It's very funny, but also very dark and sexy. I can't think of anything else to compare it to, though I know that *The Favourite* [the Yorgos Lanthimos movie starring Olivia Colman as Queen Anne] was used as a reference.

**It's a long way from *Derry Girls*. Was that a conscious decision?**

I always wanted to do more drama, and I don't think there will be anything like *Derry Girls* again. It was definitely exciting to play a different emotional range. For example, it's good to play fear. It's such a common and complex emotion, and I don't think *Derry Girls* had a tone of fear ever, even given the backdrop we were against. That's what was so beautiful, that the girls were sheltered from all that.

**You were in *The Flash* earlier this year. How different was filming a huge superhero movie compared with what you'd done on *Derry*?**

I couldn't believe how long we spent on just a tiny thing. It was mind-boggling, getting through one page of dialogue over four or five days. But it was a real privilege. The director, Andy Muschietti, was a remarkable guy; he created a space and a scope to try things out. It was a brilliant experience.

**And, at 30, finally acting your age, too...**

It's absolutely brilliant. When you're playing a teenager, they're often quite confused about the world, emotionally, so you're kind of stuck in that space sometimes. But now I'm getting to play women in their 20s, it's fantastic. You want to play all the complex things that happen through your life, and you've got a lot more to work with.

STEVE O'BRIEN

*The Doll Factory* is on Paramount+ from 1 December

## WHAT IT'S LIKE...

## to be an extra on TV



**EXTRA, EXTRA!**  
David Thomas (bottom inset) and, main picture, in *Stonehouse*; he's also doubled for *Slow Horses* star Marek Vasut (right)

**As an extra – also known as a supporting artist – it's David Thomas's job to make scenes appear more realistic. He's had non-speaking parts in dramas such as *The Crown*, *Stonehouse* and *Slow Horses*.**

a Jeep Renegade, go through water and take a sharp right. I did a test with the stunt coordinator, then he left me to it.

**ACTION!** I trained at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and had a bit of an acting career before teaching drama. I retired about five years ago. My friend started doing extras work and said I should give it a go. I joined three agencies: The Casting Collective, Uni-versal Extras and Extra People.

**SELFIE TIME** The brief can be as simple as "Man walking dog in the background". I'll get an availability request and if I say I'm free, they'll want a current selfie – full length, face, profiles and the back. My measurements are on file and costume fittings are done a week or so before filming, but I wore my own dinner jacket on *The Crown*. I'll often wear thermals underneath because it gets cold while standing around.

**FAST CAR, SLOW HORSES** In series two of *Slow Horses*, I was the double for Marek Vasut, who played ex-KGB spy Andre Chernitsky. I had to drive down a steep hill in

**ALL IN A DAY'S WORK** I do three or four jobs a year and the standard day rate is £120, but I get more if I'm on set early or stay late. If they need to trim your hair for a role, they pay £15 extra.

**THAT'S ME... I THINK** I watch things I'm in, but usually can't see myself. But I was in *Stonehouse* for four minutes [main picture, above], sitting behind Matthew Macfadyen playing one of the MPs berating his character, John Stonehouse. You're discouraged from interrupting the cast, but I muttered to him, "God, that was hard, well done." The director congratulated him – and then me!

**THE WAITING GAME** You've got to be adaptable and patient. It can be quite tedious, but I love the process. It occupies me, it's interesting and it buys a few little luxuries. LAURA RUTKOWSKI

New episodes of *Slow Horses* are released on Wednesdays, Apple TV+