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Elizabeth Olsen plays the title character in *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, about a girl who escapes from a cult, playing at Sundance.



The Olsen sister act

No, not Mary-Kate or Ashley. It's Elizabeth who is making a name for herself at Sundance

PARK CITY, Utah — Elizabeth Olsen shares the name, not the brand.

"I always wanted to act, but I never wanted to be part of that. I'm an actor. I'm not a brand or personality," says the 21-year-old sister of billionaire twin moguls Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen.

"I think that's why I held off (from acting) for a long time. I waited until I felt a little more comfortable and confident as a person to not feel that pressure that I think is fictitious. It's made up by people I don't come into contact with in my everyday life.

"I have a great relationship with my family and I love talking about them ... I don't do the same thing (my sisters) do. We do very different things. But we support each other. And so I don't feel



KEVIN WILLIAMSON
 At Sundance

that shadow that the media assumes (is there)."

And even if she did, it's unlikely she would for much longer. Olsen is generating raves for the first of two performances unspooling at this year's Sundance film festival. In *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, she portrays a young woman who escapes a cult. Her second film is the single-take thriller *Silent House*, in which she plays another character with a slippery grasp of sanity.

Even before the festival began, she was being declared

its breakout sensation — just as Jennifer Lawrence was last year for *Winter's Bone*. Just hype? John Hawkes, who starred in *Winter's Bone* and plays the cult's charismatic leader in *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, says the comparisons are not unfounded.

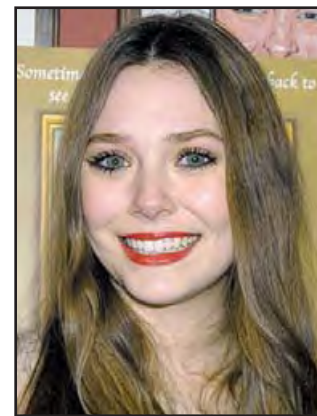
"I told Lizzie while we were shooting, 'You should be doing this.' Because I could feel something in Lizzie's work that was comparable (to Lawrence's.) There's an ease, a wisdom beyond years, a clarity in what they do. They're very different, but there's a lot of common thread there ... To have it come out of these young beautiful women is astonishing."

Olsen, understandably, is simply taking the hype in stride and focusing on the business at hand.

"What's great about that is that hopefully it gets more attention to the movies and hopefully helps them get distribution because that's the whole point of being here ... I'm happy to be at Sundance because I think that's where you want to be when you're part of something special."

Special — and grueling. When it's observed she's tormented in both projects, she laughs. "I know!"

But she denies there was any calculation at work, i.e.: a desire to prove her acting chops. "What compelled me to (*Martha Marcy May Marlene*) was more character driven. What compelled me to *Silent House* was the challenge of how they made that film in one shot. That was really exciting to me — and to have the stamina to do the



Elizabeth, the smiling Olsen sister, at a New York play.

film for those long shots was really exciting. Like doing a play. I chose them for different reasons. I didn't necessarily think 'Meaty!' It was just a really brilliant script. I just

wanted to do it so badly and I'm so glad I got to make it."

How did her family react when she told them she was playing a victimized cult survivor? "My dad asked if he could come visit the set one day and I said no. He asked why. And I said, 'I don't know what we'll be shooting that day.' And he goes, 'Liz, is there nudity?' And I was like 'Yeah.' And he said, 'Is this a good idea?' And I said, 'Yeah it is.' They've always backed me up."

Already she's reaping the benefits of Sundance buzz. Late this weekend, it was announced Olsen had landed her next film: a paranormal thriller in which she'll star with Robert De Niro, Cililian Murphy and Sigourney Weaver.

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