

Former child star Christina Ricci has grown into a screen siren, somehow avoiding the pitfalls of early fame, writes Joanne Hawkins

Hollywood isn't always kind to its child stars. While some have managed to turn early stardom into a successful adult career (Drew Barrymore, Kristen Stewart), the walk of fame is littered with those who have crashed and burned under the pressure – Edward Furlong (*Terminator 2*), the two Coreys, Haim and Feldman (*The Lost Boys*), and Jonathan Lipnicki (*Jerry Maguire*), to name a few.

Christina Ricci could have easily gone either way. She made her film debut at age nine in 1990's *Mermaids* and then won over more fans with her delightfully deadpan portrayal of Wednesday in *The Addams Family*. By 13, she was a household name and staring down the barrel at the pitfalls young fame seemingly entails.

So how did she succeed where so many others failed?

"It wasn't terribly difficult for me because I'd do one movie a year, then go back to my hometown in New Jersey and have the rest of the year to be a child again," she says down the line from New York. "My parents were careful to keep my world very small."

And it helped that she loved acting. "It was always something I'd keep doing until it wasn't fun any more," says Ricci, who entered showbiz after an agent spotted her in a school play. "But when I was 14, I was like, no, I think I want to do this for the rest of my life."

Not that it was all smooth sailing. Ricci gained a reputation for being precocious in her teens, largely because she was fond of trotting out provocative lines such as "I'm not afraid to die" and "I think reincarnation is possible. Hopefully, we all get recycled" in interviews.

"I don't think I was a mixed-up kid," she muses now. "I was 17 or 18 and hadn't been to college, so I didn't understand why anyone would want to know my point of view. I said sarcastic and shocking things in the hope people would be blinded by the sarcasm and stop asking me things I had no answers for."

She also suffered from anorexia, brought on by a realisation that her body didn't fit the Hollywood mould.

"It's awkward to go through puberty when everybody is looking at you," she recently told US TV show *The Talk*.

Despite continuing to work in the business that exacerbated her illness, Ricci, 32, recovered. "I was lucky I got over it and haven't had any issues since," she says. "I try to stay healthy; I work out and try to keep a lot of muscle. But I'm more concerned about >

GIRL interrupted



(left) Ricci stars in *Bel Ami* as Clotilde, one of the many lovers of womaniser Georges Duroy, played by Robert Pattinson.

Crying FAME



Not all child stars grew up to be as happy and successful as Ricci.

1. TATUM O'NEAL

At 10, O'Neal was the youngest person ever to win an Oscar (for 1973's *Paper Moon*), but her adult career has never matched those heady heights and has been overshadowed by drug addiction. Last year, she starred in the reality show *Ryan and Tatum: The O'Neals*, in which she attempted to fix her fractured relationship with her father.

2. LINDSAY LOHAN

It's hard to remember LiLo was once better known for her promising acting career (she starred in *The Parent Trap* aged 11 and *Freaky Friday* aged 17) than her frequent court appearances and stints in rehab. She recently posed for *Playboy* magazine.

3. MACAULAY CULKIN

After appearing in the *Home Alone* films, Culkin was the most famous – not to mention richest – child actor in the world, but he struggled to find further success. In 2004, he pleaded guilty to misdemeanour drug offences and enrolled in a compulsory treatment program.

maintaining a healthy body and healthy bones [than anything else]."

This month, Ricci stars in *Bel Ami*, based on the novel by Guy de Maupassant. She plays Clotilde de Marelle, who's seduced by social-climber Georges Duroy, played by Robert Pattinson. At the time of filming, Pattinson was at the peak of *Twilight* hysteria. Did the more experienced Ricci give him advice on handling the attention?

"God, no," she says. "I've not experienced that kind of fame and I don't think I ever will, so I wouldn't have any advice to give."

"But it doesn't seem to get to him at all," she adds. "When we were shooting in Budapest, there were quite a few girls screaming on the street, but he wasn't annoyed by it in the slightest."

Ricci found herself in the position those girls dream of – filming love scenes with Pattinson. "We joked and had a laugh about it," she says. "We made a point of trying to put each other at ease. It's just part of the job. Sometimes those scenes can be funny, but they aren't terribly thrilling."

Bel Ami is Ricci's biggest film in years. While she received rave reviews for her role in *Monster* in 2003, subsequent movies have failed to set the box office alight. And the *Mad Men*-style TV series *Pan Am*, in which Ricci starred, was recently axed after just one season.

She's sanguine about the insecurities of an actor's life. "I try to make sure I have as many opportunities as possible and work in as many mediums as I can. I've been in this industry since I was [a child], so I don't feel as insecure as I possibly did when I was 14."

"I don't look back on my career and regret it in any way. I'm happy with the roles I do."

On the love front, Ricci is currently dating *Pan Am* crew member James Heerdegen, after being briefly engaged to her *All's Faire in Love* co-star Owen Benjamin in 2009, and hooking up with Aussie actor Kick Gurry on the set of *Speed Racer* in 2007.

The diminutive star (she's just 155cm) says she's in a good place in her 30s. "I don't necessarily feel my age, but I definitely feel more secure. It took me a while to be comfortable with who I am." ■

***Bel Ami* is in cinemas now. See page 33 for our *Bel Ami* competition.**

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