

# Culture vulture

West End theatre star Summer Strallen is trading high notes for belly laughs in new comedy play *What's In A Name?* Simone Hellyer catches up with the Laine Theatre School graduate

## How did you become involved with this latest play?

I did *Intra Muros* at Park Theatre for Adam Blanshay Productions and he asked me to read the adaption of *What's In A Name?* and I thought it was absolutely hilarious. It's the first time that I have done just comedy, so it's really nice to be getting my teeth into a character that's purely comical.

## The dinner party in the play descends into complete chaos, have you ever been to any events like that?

There have been some parties that have started very civilised and ended up with somebody punching someone else. I'm sure it happens all the time at family gatherings too. I have a very theatrical family, so we generally tend to stay away from religion and politics when we get together.

## What do you love about the character you're playing?

I love her so much! I love characters like this because they are so dry. I've just moved to New York and my character Anna is just like some of the women I have come across there who don't have time for anything other than what they are doing at the time. Everything in her life is quite transactional too, like 'OK,



Summer Strallen

*What's In A Name?* calls at Richmond Theatre from Tuesday November 12 to Saturday November 16. Visit: [atgtickets.com/shows/whats-in-a-name/richmond-theatre/](http://atgtickets.com/shows/whats-in-a-name/richmond-theatre/)

we're having a baby. I'll book in the caesarean on the 28th at 11 o'clock, then'. And she very much thinks that her time is more important than anyone else's and won't apologise for it. I'm very much the polar opposite of that, which is why it is so fun to play her. My mother definitely won't like me having to use expletives in the play, but I happen to love it.

## Do you hope to play more comedy roles in the future?

Yes, the last play I did was very serious and this is also an opportunity for people to see me doing something different that's not a high kick and a Top C. And it's been great to be working with this cast as they are just such connoisseurs of comedy and with comedy it's really hard to play for real and not just play for laughs. That's a real bugbear of mine, as a budding director as well. I really learned comedy from doing years and years of panto with absolute legends like

Roy Hudd, Allan Stewart, Joe Pasquale and Cilla Black. They could just off-the-cuff come up with something hilarious.

## What have been some of your favourite roles to play?

Snogging Ewan McGregor in *Guys and Dolls* at the Picadilly Theatre was probably one of the biggest highlights.

## Which performers inspired you growing up?

Probably my sister Scarlet, who was in the original cast of *Mamma Mia*. Everything my aunt Bonnie Langford does is such an inspiration too and taught me about work ethic and staying humble and willing to learn. Just because you're on the West End doesn't mean you've made it; you can always learn more and always improve more.

## 'It's really nice to be getting my teeth into a character that's purely comical'

## Have you done many regional theatre tours?

I did earlier on in my career, but I really love going round the country and I think it will be interesting to tour a comedy play to see who laughs at what geographically. I love seeing different theatres too because there is just so much gorgeous history.

## Have you spent much time in Surrey?

I spent a lot of time in Surrey when I was younger because I was brought up in Twickenham. I quite often say that I'm from Surrey really because I actually spent most of my time in Richmond and I went to Laine Theatre School in Epsom. ♦

Photo: Piers Foley for Target Live



*What's In A Name?* stops at Richmond Theatre this month