

STORM WATCH

Alexandra Shipp crafts her own take on an iconic superhero

Text by KEITH GORDON

Since Alexandra Shipp first took on the role of Storm in 2016's *X-Men: Apocalypse*, a lot has changed for the 27-year-old actress. No longer merely an emerging star, Shipp now occupies a major role in the billion-dollar mega-franchise, which has paved the way in for other big-time castings like the female lead in another summer release with big expectations, *Shaft* with Samuel L. Jackson.

With her return in this summer's surefire X-Men blockbuster, *Dark Phoenix*, Shipp has earned a significant place for herself, and her character, in the current iteration of the X-Men universe. "What I loved so much about going back into this process was that in the beginning, on *Apocalypse*, everyone really made us newcomers... feel really good and welcomed into a family," Shipp tells *Maxim*. "So when we came back it felt like it was a family reunion."

As the newcomers have grown into their roles as some of the most famous, and beloved, superheroes in comic lore, they've had to develop their own concepts of these well-known figures, a challenge that Shipp still takes pride in. "I love Halle Berry as an actress and I loved her work as Storm, but I wanted to do something a little bit different," the Phoenix-born, L.A.-based actress confesses.

She also leaves the character open for growth and development for what should be a long run in the X-Men franchise, an appealing thought for the legions of X-Men fans. "I'm always looking for material," she notes. "Every time I see a comic book store that I haven't been into, I have to see if there's any Storm comics that I haven't gotten before. It's a constant evolution of a character."

Keeping that "family reunion" environment on set can be a challenge, especially on a project of the scale of a nine-figure superhero extravaganza with its CGI, green screens and larger-than-life stunts, but Shipp sees the positives of being part

of such a huge enterprise. "As an actor, it's really incredible walking on to a movie set and seeing all of the cranes, wires, green screens and cameras and all of the people that it takes to operate and move through a scene," she says. "So for me, it was always really exciting. It felt like there was a buzz on set."

Shipp has also managed to find ways to balance herself personally in the short breaks she gets between scenes. "I work a lot and I'm very fortunate to be able to work a lot, but it's hard to find those moments and those beats and that time for yourself," Shipp reveals. "So for me, I'm always trying

to get away and get in a quick five minutes of just me and my own thoughts and my life and my own mind. That mediation, throughout the day, as many times as I possibly can, really does help me kind of stay afloat when this world is so hectic."

That doesn't mean this makes it easy on the production assistants responsible for corralling her on set. "I just kind of take a beat for myself. I sneak. The next challenge for Shipp will be harder than ducking PAs on set. For someone with a huge year ahead of her professionally, and a seemingly endless array of opportunities and future projects, the actress still doesn't seem to have been dropped in the deepest-end of stardom and fame. But odds are this is soon to be a distant memory.

"I don't think my life has changed so crazily," she says. "I'm one of those fortunate actors in which I feel like I rarely get approached for an autograph or someone recognizing me. So, I'm always excited when it does happen. [Friends] are like, 'Why were

you so excited about that person wanting to take a picture of you?' And I'm like, 'Because they recognize me, no one ever recognizes me. It's fun!'"

With all due respect to Alexandra, those days of semi-anonymity are likely at an end. If this ends up being the Summer of Shipp, don't be surprised, even if Alexandra herself might be a little shocked herself.



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Appearing in two potential blockbusters this summer, Alexandra Shipp looks poised to be the next big thing in Hollywood.

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