

From *Scandal* to star

Kerry Washington talks about her hit show, crisis management and what it's like working with Quentin Tarantino.

By Heidi Kurpiela

More people should watch *Scandal*, not for the rapid dialogue, hairpin plot twists and government sleaze, but for Kerry Washington.

The actress is so convincing as aggressive Washington D.C. political fixer Olivia Pope that I half expected her to sniff out my weaknesses over the phone and use them to control the interview.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

Instead, Washington seemed genuinely touched by the fact that I dig her show.

Created by Shonda Rhimes (*Grey's Anatomy*), *Scandal* is based loosely on the career of former D.C. press aide-turned-crisis manager Judy Smith, who serves as a producer on the series.

The first season of the hour-long drama, which debuted this April on ABC, has just arrived as a two-disc DVD set. You'll need it if you're planning to tune in next season. In just seven episodes, *Scandal* covered enough salacious material to make the Drudge Report read like a nursery rhyme.

CL: First of all, I'm not a big TV-watcher, but I'm hooked on *Scandal*. I love it. It's smart and juicy!

Thank you. Thank you. Those are the good vibes I like to hear.

I couldn't stand to be left hanging after the finale.

It's sort of a show that's become appointment television for people. That's why I think the [first season] DVD is really rewarding for fans. It has a lot of behind-the-scenes stuff. It even has footage from when we were auditioning, which is

tremendously embarrassing for us, but for fans it's terrific.

Your character on the show, Olivia Pope, is based on an actual woman with a crisis management firm in D.C. — Judy Smith. Did you spend a lot of time together before filming began?

Judy is a producer on the show so she's around a lot. She and I have actually become very good friends. I adore her. She's been really helpful to everyone in understanding the way crisis management works. At some point, though, I had to remind myself that there's a very significant difference between Judy Smith and Olivia Pope. Judy Smith's personal life is really wonderful. Olivia Pope's personal life is a little more complicated.

Because your character is sleeping with the President of the United States?

Oh, that's sooo complicated. I think all the relationships in general are complicated. On top of that you've got infidelity and being involved with the leader of the free world...

Yeah, about that. Your affair with Tony Goldwyn [Goldwyn plays U.S. President Fitzgerald Grant] is so juicy, even when it's not steamy. Those little scenes, like the one in Olivia's apartment when the two of you curl up on the couch for a minute and say nothing to each other? It was so good it made my heart hurt.

It's funny because so often when you're doing a scene with another actor, you're looking at them and witnessing their work. When you watch the scene, there's nothing that surprises you because you've already experienced it. In

that scene where we snuggled, it was just as moving for me the first time I saw it because I wasn't aware of the intensity and emotion on Tony's face. It was a very moving surprise.

I just saw the trailer for Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*. You play Jamie Foxx's wife in the pre-Civil War south. What has the experience been like so far?

We're still shooting, so it's tricky to talk about something I'm still doing. I don't have an objective take on it yet. It's been a pretty profound experience working with this director and these actors [Leonardo DiCaprio, Christoph Waltz, Samuel L. Jackson]. My character couldn't be more different than Olivia Pope. She's not even considered a human being according to the U.S. Constitution. ... wait a minute ... hold on one sec ...

(A person yells something loudly in the background. Washington yells something back. There's a loud rustling noise and a bang.)

Everything OK?

Yeah. This person driving by was telling me my door wasn't closed.

Are you driving around Los Angeles?

Yeah.

While talking on the phone with your car door open?

Yeah. And that person just freaked out when they realized they were talking to Kerry Washington.

Read more of Heidi's Q&A with Kerry Washington at cltampa.com/movies. ❗



NO POPE: Actress Kerry Washington insists she's nothing like the character she plays on TV.