

Robin of Sherwood

Judi Trott

Interview

by Patrick Mulkern

JUDI Trott is a 23-year-old actress and lives in Chiswick. Born in Plymouth, she moved with her family to Stoke Poges in Buckinghamshire when she was five. She has two older sisters who are both married with children. Judi trained at the Royal Ballet Company in London until she was 17. Then she turned to acting and joined the London Studio Centre to attend a drama course. She is currently starring in HTV's *Robin of Sherwood* as Maid Marion and kindly gave up her time to talk to *Starburst Magazine*.

What made you turn from ballet to straightforward acting?

I realised going full-time into a ballet company wasn't what I wanted to do. Then almost by chance really, I appeared in a film called *Heaven's Gate* with John Hurt and Kris Kristofferson. It was a very glamorous film, like nothing I'll probably ever do again. I was dithering a lot at the time about whether I was going to carry on dancing, and John Hurt talked to me and persuaded me to consider acting instead. So I started to do more drama classes at the London Studio Centre, taken by Stephanie Beacham, and she also gave me a lot of encouragement.

Did you find any restrictions not having gone through the usual channels like RADA or Lamda?

Not at all. In a way it made things much simpler. The centre was in touch with several agencies, so I got an agent and my Equity card quite soon and started to meet people – all three of which are vitally important.

How did you get the part in *Heaven's Gate*?

It was a very minor rôle – it wasn't even in the original script – but the director Michael Cimino decided he needed a girl to





ROBIN OF SHERWOOD: Oliver Tobias and Judi Trott

be seen dancing with John Hurt at the start of the film. I wasn't given any lines to deliver, but we were given chest-mikes and improvised as were dancing across the room. It was wonderful for me – enormous close-ups on a cinema screen.

What did you follow that up with?

I was still at college, but I did *Ragtime* and *Bright Eyes* for the BBC. Then I played an art student, Ellen, in *Take Three Women* on BBC2 and in 1982 I played Lady Sarah Armstrong-Jones in *Charles and Diana* for ABC. That was rather controversial!

The play you're touring in at the moment is *Present Laughter*, isn't it?

Yes, it is. We opened last week in Bath and we're in Guildford at the moment. It's my first stage play and I really love it now. But I must admit I was awful last week. I was so nervous. I kept getting everything wrong, I just couldn't relax into it. And it's even worse when you know you're being awful. I had to ban all my family and friends from coming to see me in it. But this week it's been much better and I've really been getting my teeth into it.

How did you get the rôle of Maid Marion? Who actually cast you?

I suppose Esta Charkham, who's now the producer. She was the casting director at the time. She'd previously cast me in the *Charles and Diana* film, and she put my photograph up before the director for Marion. It was a very period-type photograph and I think it was just what the director Ian Sharp was looking for. On the strength of that one picture, I'd almost won the part.

Was there much competition?

I assume so. I never saw the official list, but I know there were many different types being considered – blondes, brunettes... originally they were going to go for a very dark Marion. But when Michael had been cast, they wanted a contrast and were going

to have a blonde, and somehow they then ended up with a red-head! I'd always visualised her as a proper Saxon blonde.

How long does it take to make a series of Robin Of Sherwood?

Well, the first two series were about 14 weeks, but the series which is on now we did from February to September.

That isn't really very much time for 13 episodes of a film series. You must have gone at quite a pace.

Yes, we had to get an hour's worth of television in the can in just under two weeks. With a normal modern-day film that's not too bad, but because ours is period, especially as we're acting with horses and have to be out in the open so much of the time, everything takes so much longer.

Have there been any problems during filming?

We had to spend a lot of time in a banqueting hall of a castle. It was a gorgeous set, lit by hundreds of little candles, and the team were using smoke-guns to mist up the atmosphere all the time. It wasn't dry ice, something else. They said it was essence of vanilla most of the time, but we found after a while our nostrils were black. It was disgusting – we spent hours coughing up black gunge. Extremely unhealthy – like smoking about 90 cigarettes in one go. Sometimes it's better to be out in the fresh air.

Where do you stay when you're filming down in Bristol?

I get a flat. We can stay in a hotel if we want to, but I prefer to be independent. I think it's very important to break away from the group. We spend so much time together during the daytime, I like to have my evenings by myself. When you're away from home on location, there's a tendency to stick together, and for the first two years it was like one long party. Last year was just too long to do that again.

What was the feeling among the cast when Michael Praed decided to leave?

Opposite, I think, to what people would have imagined. We were all so pleased that he'd got a starring rôle on Broadway, that I can't ever remember anyone saying 'Oh God. He's walking out on the series'. Michael was obviously worried that he was going to affect all of us, but when he confided in me I said, 'This is a really exciting opportunity. You've got to do it'.

Did you think the series would grind to a halt?

No, because the producers announced very shortly that they were looking for somebody else. I did think they'd have a problem finding someone. But then they found Jason, and after the first week it was very plainly obvious that Jason could easily carry on from where Michael left off.

How did you find working with a new leading man, and how would you say Marion has adapted to a new Robin?

Well, Jason's lovely, and very good to work with. He takes the part very seriously, knowing he has to live up to Michael's legend. He plays it very differently: stronger perhaps, with a wry charm and an unconscious glint in his eye. He has a certain magnetism – and will be fatally attractive to women viewers. As for Marion, she has had to recover from her shattered world and believe again in a new Robin. Slowly but surely, she falls in love with him, but won't admit it. She's afraid to lose a second time – an outcome she feels is inevitable, with the kind of life they lead.

How do you get on with the villains like Nickolas Grace (the Sheriff) and Robert Addie as Gisburne?

It's great fun working with Nick Grace. He sends things up so wonderfully well. When I was watching *The Power Of Albion* episode the other Saturday, there was a scene with the Sheriff threatening me. And I kept remembering on set Nick saying to me, 'You'll never leave Nottingham. Never. Never! Never!' Gradually going more over the top. Then he said, 'You'll never, never, NEVER leave *Robin Of Sherwood*!' It was very funny.

What are your favourite moments from the series?

I like the dialogue scenes and intimate scenes the best, which are an acting challenge rather than all the running around which is a physical challenge. I like a scene which is my scene, which I'm in control of, particularly if it's all in one take with me moving into several different positions. Being subdued in my performance, and therefore being more natural.

If there's another series will you be in it?

If I'm available yes, but I'm involved in *Present Laughter* until the beginning of August. I wouldn't want to go on playing Marion indefinitely. No actress could commit herself like that. You have to be realistic and think about your career. This series could go on and on if we wanted it to until we were hobbling around the forest with wooden sticks. *The Geriatrics of Sherwood*.

Judith Trett.

