



Catherine THE GREAT

The legendary Canadian actor continues to delight in unexpected ways.

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BLOUSE AND PANTS (ISSEY MIYAKE),
SLEEVES AND TIGHTS (WE LOVE COLORS)
AND HEELS (STELLA MCCARTNEY)



DRESS (J.W.ANDERSON),
TIGHTS (WE LOVE COLORS),
SHOES (LOUIS VUITTON) AND
RINGS (O'HARA'S OWN)

THE ABSOLUTE LAST THING Catherine O'Hara wants to talk about is Catherine O'Hara. We're five minutes into our conversation, and so far, we've chatted about getting stuck in places and making do with what one has on hand. After O'Hara tells me that she recently used a fork as a comb ("It was so stupid," she says, laughing), I gently try to steer her back toward the topic at hand. "Do I have to?" she asks.

It's early summer, and O'Hara, dressed stylishly in a crisp white shirt and thick-square-rimmed black glasses, is speaking to me via a video call from her cottage in Muskoka, Ont., a couple of hours north of Toronto. The award-winning actor—who delighted audiences in her critically acclaimed role as Moira Rose in *Schitt's Creek*—has been juggling a packed schedule. She's taking a break from filming Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg's upcoming Apple TV+ series, *The Studio*, in Los Angeles (where she lives) and gearing up to promote the highly anticipated *Beetlejuice* sequel, *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* (out September 6), in which she reprises her role of Delia Deetz, struggling artist and stepmother to Winona Ryder's Lydia.

When O'Hara, now 70 years old, was cast in the beloved 1988 Tim Burton film about a raunchy, mischievous spirit (played by Michael Keaton), she had no idea how the weird and wacky story would land. "You never know how something's going to be received," she says. "I mean, that's the magic. That's the scariest thing. But if you're lucky enough to work with people who make each day exciting, creative and stimulating, that's the best, because you really don't know where it's gonna go from there. So much of it is luck and timing."

Beetlejuice centres around a married couple (played by Geena Davis and Alec Baldwin) who die in a car accident and become ghosts trapped in their former home. When the Deetz family moves in, the couple try to scare them away, but their presence only piques the eccentric family's interest. With no more options, the ghosts turn to Beetlejuice for help, and chaos ensues. The movie, which was a critical and commercial success, helped catapult the careers of O'Hara—who was already well known for her role in Canadian comedy series *Second City Television*—and her co-stars, and it was also how she met her husband and the father of her two sons, production designer Bo Welch. (O'Hara tells me she coaxed Burton to convince Welch to ask her on a date. "I actually wrote in a diary, 'We're supposed to get married someday, so I wish he would ask me out,'" she says with a smile.)

Thirty-six years later, the sequel, which Burton sees as a continuation of Lydia's story, has three generations of Deetz women reuniting at the haunted home after a family tragedy. Delia and Lydia have put aside their differences from the first film, but now Lydia is dealing with similar relationship issues with her own rebellious daughter, Astrid (played by Jenna Ortega), who doesn't realize how dangerous Beetlejuice is until it's too late.

"Just to see Michael [Keaton] as Beetlejuice [again]—he hasn't aged at all," says O'Hara. "He has mould all over his face, but he's so alive playing a dead guy. He just attacks this character with joy. It's really funny because he doesn't realize that when you're speaking with him [on-set], it's like Beetlejuice in your face, talking about [regular] life." There is also something repulsively attractive about Keaton's Beetlejuice, and when I mention this, O'Hara immediately agrees. "Thank you!" she exclaims. "On paper he's just a despicable demonic character, but not with Michael doing him. He's kind of hot." ►

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BLAZER, SHIRT, TROUSERS AND
TIE (SCHIAPARELLI), EARRINGS AND
LARGE RING (ALEXIS BITTAR) AND
SMALL RINGS (O'HARA'S OWN)

O'Hara's sense of joy and infectious humour came naturally to her while she was growing up in Toronto in a big Irish Catholic family with six other siblings. Her father, who worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway, was a real joker, while her mother loved to do impressions. Being funny and laughing were part of normal family life, with everyone playing off each other. When her older brother, Marcus, brought home a new girlfriend, Gilda Radner (an original *Saturday Night Live* cast member), a teenaged O'Hara was immediately smitten. "She was like a beautiful rag doll with her long limbs and big, wild hair," she says. "She would come home [with my brother] and improvise with our family, teaching games to my mom and dad. She was so in touch with the child within—more than anyone I've ever known—but such a beautiful, sexy woman at the same time."

Radner introduced O'Hara to the world of improv through the Toronto branch of the improv troupe The Second City. There, she met fellow actors Eugene Levy, Martin Short, John Candy, Dan Aykroyd and Andrea Martin, most of whom went on to star in *Second City Television* (or *SCTV*), an iconic Canadian sketch-comedy show that was eventually picked up by NBC in the U.S. "Improv is just so freeing," she says. "And if you let go, everything feeds you—every person, every character and everything you've ever experienced in your life. I just love to be surrounded by really talented people and feed off of them."

After *Beetlejuice*, O'Hara's career continued to flourish internationally into the '90s as she went on to star in beloved holiday films *Home Alone* and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York*. Soon, she (along with former *SCTV* co-star Levy) began working with acclaimed director and writer Christopher Guest on the hilarious mockumentary-style comedies *Waiting for Guffman*, *Best in Show*, *A Mighty Wind* and *For Your Consideration*. "Chris [Guest] and Eugene [Levy] would have these great outlines with great characters written in there but also no dialogue," says O'Hara. "How Eugene would react or how I would react or what those actors would say or do—none of that was written. So the idea was there, and it was up to everybody to improvise. It was really thrilling—a thrill-seeker's way to act."

Throughout her career, O'Hara has always worked extremely well with Levy, something she jokingly credits to the fact that they only "briefly dated" back in their Toronto theatre days and realized quickly that they were better off as friends. "He always says that we [both] take our comedy very seriously," she explains. "And with him, I always know that if we have a creative disagreement—which is rare—it's coming from a sincere, respectful place and it's always for the good of the project. I totally trust him and respect him." So when Levy and his son, Daniel, approached O'Hara with a TV script, her interest was immediately piqued. "You know how we were just saying that there's no predicting how something's going to be

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► accepted?” she asks. “*Schitt’s Creek* is a freaky example of that, because we did this little show for ourselves.”

The CBC riches-to-rags series, which ran from 2015 to 2020 and followed the newly broke and displaced Rose family, made its way from Canada into the world’s living rooms. O’Hara played matriarch Moira Rose, a fashionable former soap star whose elaborate lexicon, endless collection of wigs and outrageous avant-garde style immediately won over viewers and also nabbed her numerous awards, including an Emmy, a Golden Globe and five Canadian Screen Awards. “Catherine was a bona fide star long before we started *Schitt’s Creek*, but what she did with the character of Moira Rose was an absolute artistic *coup de grâce* and seemed to remind the world just what an accomplished actress she really is,” said Levy in an email.

It also introduced her to a younger audience, propelling her into different spheres—she’s now a fashion darling, for example, and a Loewe runway-show regular. “It’s all *Schitt’s Creek*,” she says in disbelief. “Nobody looked at me like I had any relation to fashion at all. It’s because of that character. It’s crazy—it’s so cool.” She’s also been taking on unexpected onscreen roles, filming alongside Pedro Pascal (“He’s so lovely and beautiful and funny—everything you’d want him to be”) for the second season of *The Last of Us* and playing a former Hollywood studio head who gets fired and replaced by her protege (Seth Rogen) in *The Studio*, with Kathryn Hahn, Bryan Cranston and too many other guest stars to name. “Evan [Goldberg] and Seth [Rogen] are so smart,” she says. “But they’re open to ideas. It’s just very familiar in that way—working with really good, smart, talented people who are open to collaboration. I’m completely spoiled by my *Second City* training because it’s all about working together.”

O’Hara is generous in her praise of others but modest about her own work. What makes her so compelling to watch is how she completely embodies her characters and gives them very real dimensions. She’s extremely cerebral when creating them—drawing inspiration from all over the place—and, of course, she is so naturally funny that she knows exactly what will hit and when to land a punchline. Fellow Canadian actor Martin Short, one of O’Hara’s oldest friends, agrees. “When she’s playing a character, she just finds the [most] hilarious, oddest eccentricity,” he tells me over the phone. “She’s very physical, but she also knows what’s hilarious about [the character], and she doesn’t overplay it. She’s like a great chef mixing all the perfect ingredients at the right levels.” Short has known O’Hara since their early comedy days in Toronto, and they still speak every week. “Oh, I adore Catherine,” he says. “She is one of the most loyal, wise human beings I’ve ever known.” Levy feels the same. “Catherine is a brilliant actor who never takes her craft more seriously than the people she is working with,” he said in the email. “She’s a truly

good person with an acute sense of humour, and that combo is a perfect recipe for a fun working relationship. There are very few people I’ve had a 50-year friendship with, let alone a 50-year working relationship, and those are the people you cherish in your life. Catherine is one of those people.”

With a career spanning almost five decades, O’Hara has solidified her status as a Canadian legend: She became an Officer of the Order of Canada and was inducted into Canada’s Walk of Fame. But she still just considers herself a “big goof” who’s baffled by the fact that she’s made a lasting impact. “I’m lucky [I get] to keep doing things like this at my age—I can’t believe it,” she says. “Over the past few years, when I’ve gotten scared or nervous or if I start grouching about something, I’ve tried to really practise turning it around and being grateful. Like, ‘How lucky are you right now to be alive? And then to have this opportunity right here in this moment?’ [Because] I was nervous during this cover photo shoot [but] how crazy is it that at my age, I’m wearing these clothes and I’m lying over this pool?”

O’Hara considers herself “a freak” because she’s decided to age naturally in an industry where the pressure to look young is immense. “I do think of age, but otherwise, I rarely look in the mirror,” she says. “I feel that now, stories about people my age usually have to do with death and divorce and disease. So I’m really fortunate [to] have people around me who respect aging people and who give me new experiences. I’d like to think that the kind of roles I’m getting to play now are roles that people are

getting to play in life. I’m playing a studio head who becomes an independent producer—how beautiful is it that someone my age is doing this? It’s the way it should be.”

At the end of the day, O’Hara sees age as more about how you look at life than how you physically look, and her life is filled with humility and humour. “My husband and I laugh about everything all day long,” she says. “That’s the best. Or if we get into a fight, we’ll actually make fun of each other to break the tension. It really helps. My parents were blessed—they laughed until the end. That’s the best way to live, because there’s so much sadness. You’re really lucky if your sense of humour is encouraged, because I think we’re all born with it, and if it’s encouraged in your life, that’s a gift.”

O’Hara is also pensive about her next chapter. “When [you turn] 70—this is advice [I read] for anybody turning any older age—imagine that you’re going to live a minimum of another 20 years,” she says. “What are you going to do with those years? If you look at it that way, you look at it as a challenge. Like, instead of ‘Oh no, I’m going to downsize’ or ‘I’m going to slow down,’ imagine that you are going to live to 90. What are you going to do?”

It’s clear O’Hara has sat with that idea for a while, because her answer is immediate: “You look forward.” ■

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DRESS AND HEELS
(ACNE STUDIOS) AND
TIGHTS (WOLFORD)



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