Come on, *Kathleen...*

She's been all-singing, all-dancing for a while now. But it's as an actress that Kathleen McDermott is making her mark

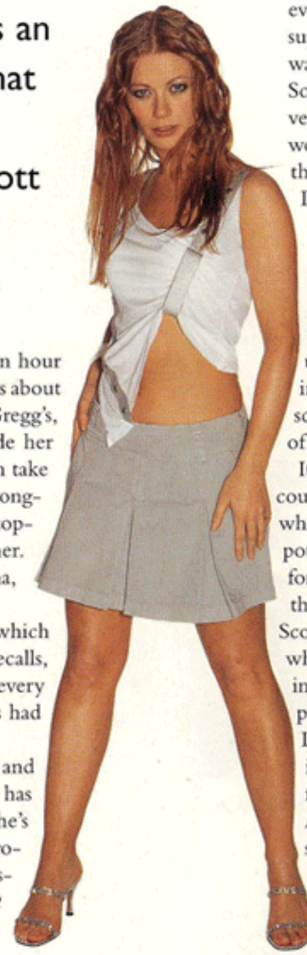
FINE words butter no parsnips, as some sage once said, and in the film business no amount of critical acclaim will bring you the riches you deserve – unless Joe Public shares the professional pundits' enthusiasm. So Kathleen McDermott must wait a while for the private jet, and her sideline, singing in a Chinese restaurant, will have to continue. But maybe not for long…

Certainly she's full of optimism as she settles into her seat in an Edinburgh hotel lounge prior to our photo shoot: "My ambition is to have a number one hit record and a number one film at the same time. Jennifer Lopez managed it…"

This striking, down-to-earth redhead talks at 90 miles an hour and laughs constantly, often at her own expense. She enthuses about pleasures as simple as a lunchtime tuna Oval Bite from Gregg's, and could not be less 'art house' if she tried. Yet she made her mark as an actress in *Morvern Callar*, Lynne Ramsay's stylish take on Alan Warner's macabre Highland buddy tale. She starred alongside Samantha Morton, an established performer with such top-flight projects as Woody Allen's *Sweet and Lowdown* behind her. Yet for many it was McDermott who stole the show as Lanna, the uninhibited best pal to Morton's gloomy Morvern.

The movie won reviews every bit as enthusiastic as those which greeted Ramsay's debut, *Ratcatcher*. And as McDermott recalls, its appeal went well beyond these shores: "It was sold out every night at a cinema in New York, and the New York Times had it as one of their top ten films of the year."

Yet *Morvern Callar* never quite made it in multiplex land, and that, for McDermott, is something of a sore point. Scarcely has her first glass of mineral water moistened her lips before she's voicing her frustration at what she sees as a failure to promote the film. "It didn't get much advance publicity. It wasn't billboarded, which was quite annoying actually. *Sweet Sixteen* was on the billboards and that did really well."



On the face of it, Ken Loach's surprise hit has a certain amount in common with Ramsay's film – both very gritty, both very Scottish, both placing much faith in untried performers – but the contrast in their commercial fates hasn't stopped McDermott from striking up a friendship with *Sweet Sixteen* star Martin Compston. The two were brought in to launch this spring's huge Burns and a' That festival, striding across the famous Brig o' Doon in Alloway as a modern-day Robert Burns and Jean Armour for the assembled photographers.

It was one of many engagements that fill the McDermott diary these days. In the autumn she won a Bafta at a star-studded evening in the Armadillo in Glasgow for best supporting actress as Lanna, and in April she was presented with the Bowmore Scottish Screen Award for best actress of the year. The veteran Brian Cox, now wowing audiences worldwide in *X-Men 2*, won best actor and the presentation ceremony at One Devonshire Gardens in Glasgow was a chance for yet more mingling with luminaries of the profession. Unlike quite a few thespians, Kathleen McDermott is an extreme extrovert, a touchy-feely young woman who people warm to, who strikes up an instant rapport, and you get the impression that every chat she has with a screen star will yield something in the way of advice or inspiration.

It will all stand her in good stead for what could be her second movie role – and one which sounds like it has more box office potential than her debut. *The Flying Scotsman*, for which filming is not yet under way, tells the amazing story of Graeme Obree, one of Scotland's sporting greats. The Ayrshire cyclist who became a world champion after building his own bike from old washing machine parts is set to be played by pin-up boy Jonny Lee Miller, still best known as the blond one in *Trainspotting*, though his other parts in films such as *Complicity*, *Plunkett and Macleane* and *Regeneration* are not to be scoffed at. Shirley Henderson, whose profile seems to be rising almost by the hour – reaching a peak with the part of Moaning Myrtle in the second *Harry Potter* – is pencilled in to play his wife, with McDermott as her best friend. Bob Hoskins has been mooted for a part too, as has Sean Biggerstaffe, another young Scottish talent seen in both *Potter* films as the quidditch captain Oliver Wood. The emotional 'triumph of the underdog' theme is pure Hollywood in a way that Lynne Ramsay's nihilistic mood piece patently wasn't, and it could strike a chord with a much wider public.

If it does, it will set the seal on an extraordinary success story for this likeable 26-year-old. The circumstances of her discovery

CLOTHES BY CRUISE, URBAN OUTFITTERS AND LK BENNETT

'My ambition is to have a number one hit record and a number one film at the same time'

'Everybody I have spoken to says you've just got this natural ability so hold on to it'

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