

A LIFE MORE ORDINARY

She has made the journey from the streets of Craigend in Glasgow to the boulevards of Cannes, but accidental film star Kathleen McDermott is still dazzled by an unlikely fame

I think it's the moment when Kathleen McDermott is helping Elvis out of his boxer shorts that the true strangeness of the situation hits home. It's a Thursday night in Bath Street in Glasgow and the Shanghai Shuffle is jumping. Literally. People are on their chairs or even up on the tables hollering along as not one but two Elvises – what's the plural, Elvi? – remove their Vegas-era jumpsuits (what else?) only to hide their modesty with pink spangly ten-gallon hats while singing Tom Jones's You Can Keep Your Hat On.

The room is full of Glaswegians who have long shucked off any notion of worrying about how cool they look – if they ever cared – and are getting on with the serious business of enjoying themselves. They seem to be making a good job of it. The only time they quieten down is when their food arrives, delivered by small Chinese women who ghost through the madness unnoticed, or by Jimmy, a Chinese waiter who just can't help but be noticed. But then since he's 16 stone and wearing a kilt that's hardly a surprise. And in the middle of the revels is the naggingly familiar face of McDermott, her red hair a Belisha beacon on the minuscule dancefloor as she belts out the hits of everyone from Shania Twain to Liberty X, or takes turns with Jim, a self-confessed Shrek lookalike, to cajole the singers to strut their stuff. Not that they really need it.

Tonight she's wearing a see-through top and a black bra. "I forgot you were coming," she says to me and the photographer when we arrive, indicating her choice of apparel. She's maybe slightly mortified. But only slightly. "It's pure mad here, int it?" she adds, before dashing back to join in with the blokes from

table six who are giving a spirited, if not totally tuneful rendition of 500 Miles by The Proclaimers. It's hard to disagree with her. And that's before the four-foot blow-up phalluses make an appearance.

McDermott has been working at Shanghai Shuffle for three years now. When she started people told her she would probably go somewhere with her singing, but she never took the idea too seriously. "I'm like: 'I don't know how to go somewhere.' How do you do it? So I never bothered." Now people come up and ask her for autographs or her photo. "And I'm like 'but I'm no' famous, what do you want a photie for?' And they're like: 'but you will be.'"

The reason for these intimations of immortality is, of course, her starring role in Lynne Ramsay's new film. Even Weegie office workers, it seems, have heard the buzz about Morvern Callar and of how McDermott, a trainee barber out shopping with her sister in Argyle Street was spotted by a casting agent and given the second lead. It's the myth of the local girl made good made real. If her face is familiar it's because you'll have seen it on the front pages over the last few months. McDermott at Cannes, and in Edinburgh, attending premieres, winning awards (including a Herald Angel), dressing up in the latest outfits by Amanda Wakeley. Kathleen McDermott becoming somebody.

But even somebodies have to buy the messages and though she has put aside the clippers for the time being, most weekends McDermott can be found stripping middle-aged office workers and generally giving it ▶

Even now, Kathleen McDermott can't believe her film career started on a Glasgow street

