By Jamie Ruby

Vikings, History's new drama, follows the lives and adventures of real life Vikings, not just as warriors, but also their day to day lives. The story focuses on Ragnar Lothbrok as he rises among the Vikings. The series also tells of his family life, including his wife, Lagertha, played by Katheryn Winnick, and their two children. Lagertha was not only a devoted wife, but also a powerful shield-maiden and warrior in her own right.

The actress recently talked about her role in the upcoming series, which premieres March 3rd on History.

History Conference Call
Vikings
Katheryn Winnick

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QUESTION: Can you tell me a little bit about your character?

KATHERYN WINNICK: I play Lagertha, who is a fierce shield maiden. She's based on a real person, a real Viking. And a shield maiden is really a female warrior in the dark ages, in the Viking era. Her role was to fight alongside with the men during a shield wall. And her specific role was to plug up the holes in battle when the Vikings were falling.

And I play also a young mother and a loving wife who has a true partnership and equal relationship with her husband. And she's a very strong woman. She's definitely modern for her time.

QUESTION: Was there anything about this role that wasn't scripted for you that you added yourself?

KATHERYN WINNICK: Very good question; yes. I come from a martial arts background. And for me with trying to figure out how I can relate to her, it's for me a very different one. She's a Viking, and there's very little information out there on Vikings.

I had to do a lot of research and pick Michael Hirst's brain -- Michael Hirst created the show, he

also did *The Tudors* and *Elizabeth* -- to try to figure out women and who they were in society in the Viking era. So for me, since I had the martial arts background, I wanted to be able to add the spirit of combat in who she is as a person in her day-to-day life.

The fact that she is a warrior, you can see that not only in a battlefield, but you can also see that [in] how she deals with her young children, how she deals with conflict with her husband, how she deals with the community and different struggles to survive.

And that spirit of combat was really important for me to find in Lagertha, because I think that really is the core of who she is. When I started to do my research on her, I fell in love with her. She's such a strong, fierce warrior, and definitely a forward-thinking woman for that era.

SCIFI VISION: So what has been your favorite part about the role so far?

KATHERYN WINNICK: My favorite part? Good question. When I first got on set in Ireland, I was the only girl. I was surrounded by 14 Viking men and I remember thinking, "Wow, this sounds and feels familiar."

I grew up in a martial arts gym surrounded by guys and men and boys. And I pretty much call myself a tomboy. So it was a little bit of getting used to, especially the Viking cast members are all 6-foot-5 and huge.

But I think it really helped with the character and also, who she is she would - since she is a shield maiden. And in those times women were actually allowed to fight on the frontline with their husbands and their brothers and other men.

So it was nice to be able to mirror that and get a chance to hang out with these guys and see them after work and on set and catching up with a Guinness, and also get a chance to work with them.

But I guess my favorite part, in a longwinded answer, is learning about the Vikings and who they were, and the history of it. That's what's so great about this being a historical drama; you really get an intimate look at the Vikings and their family life and how they lived their day-to-day life.

And it was interesting to learn about the mythology and the fact that they were pagans and the believed in many gods, and they believed that gods walked among themselves.

And for me it was such a gift to be able to immerse myself in what Lagertha would have been and how she lived her life and how she spoke and the accent and the language. It was a real treat.

QUESTION: I was curious if you could tell us if you have a favorite episode of the first nine? And in case it's not the same one, is there a favorite episode of yours that focuses on your character specifically?

KATHERYN WINNICK: Great question. We shot in blocks, which means we shot three

episodes at the same time just because it was such an epic series.

In terms of my favorite scene, must have been really working with my husband, Ragnar. There was a scene where he tells me that I can't go on the raid because I need to take care of the family and take care of the farm because the farm was at threat in terms of getting raided and being taken over.

And my character, or Lagertha, is one not to just sit and be pretty. She definitely has a strong voice. And the scene that I'm specifically talking about is when she shows up and really beats him up with her shield and her sword. And they have this lover's quarrel, and they're in a fight.

And they actually start punching each other and snapping at each other and fighting in between kisses. And I just think that that scene specifically shows their chemistry, the flirtiness, but also who they are and the fact that they're equals and partners. And she's one to stick up for what she believes in and will fight, and won't stop at anything to get what she wants.

QUESTION: Do you hope that your character, as a strong female role, will have an influence on the female audience that is watching the show? And what kind of influence do you hope that she would have?

KATHERYN WINNICK: That's a great question. The what - the major thing that attracted me to this role was the fact that Michael Hirst wrote it, and he wrote every episode.

And the fact that he knows how to write women, and also he worked with a historian to try to get the facts. He wrote *Elizabeth* also too, so I trust in him in getting the right side of who Lagertha was as a person and how women were portrayed in that society.

And women were very strong and they held equal partnerships with their husbands. They were allowed to own land. They were allowed to divorce their husbands. They were allowed to fight alongside with the other men on the frontline and to be warriors, not only young mothers, but wives, but warriors.

And I think that for me it's so important, especially in the dark ages, that women - there's not much information out there. And I think it would be so great for people to realize that in the Viking era, women were celebrated and they were very empowering.

And I know I fell in love with her when I was doing my research on her. And I haven't seen a female role written that is authentic and real like this in a very long time, especially for TV. And I think it's so important for people to realize that women were very strong, even in the dark ages.

And they were very powerful.

And if you look at the society, I think in history there was a backward movement in terms of women's rights. But in that period, in the 7th century, women were fierce.

QUESTION: I've watched the first five episodes and I'm absolutely in love. It's just fantastic. And I want to know the physical preparedness you had to go through as an actress, as an actor, to inhabit this very physical role.

QUESTION: Sure, definitely. I started training martial arts when I was 7 years old. I got my first black belt at 13. I started my own martial arts school at 16. And by the time I was 21 I had three different schools. And so I grew up having a very physical background anyways.

I'm a third degree black belt in tae kwon do, second degree in karate, and a licensed bodyguard. So I'd been looking for a role that I can actually get a chance to be that physical. But it's first and foremost well-written and has many layers as a character.

And the physical side of it, I definitely had to learn a new craft. Tae kwon do and karate is based on the art of footwork and handwork. And it's a sport, whereas a shield maiden used her shield and her sword as her weapons. And that for me was very new and a new art form that I had to try to master in such a short period of time.

But it was great to see how they fought and how they used what they had with them in terms of little ((inaudible)) resources as weapons. And Lagertha, being a shield maiden, which was probably passed on from her mother and her grandmother and through different generations, she grew up fighting. So it was interesting to learn how to use different household products for example, or different aspects of the shield not only to defend myself but also to attack.

And physically I definitely got a chance to work with a trainer and work with a fight coordinator to try to get it down. But it was a different style of fighting that I wasn't used to, because it's not like I was able to do spinning roundhouse kicks or spinning back kicks. I had to learn how to use my sword and shield as an extension of my arms and an extension of me as a warrior. So that was different.

QUESTION: I was wondering if you could talk about what it is about this show that will make it such an interest for people to tune in.

KATHERYN WINNICK: I think if people are interested in history, if they want adventure, conflict, and to see the authentic side and the raw side of who Vikings were, the society, and to see an intimate look of how they dealt with their day-to-day lives, I think they would really love the show.

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