

Loo Brealey plays Student Nurse Roxanne Bird



After graduating from Cambridge University Loo wanted to train as an actor so she applied to the Lee Strasberg Theater Institute in New York City. Lee Strasberg was the guru who taught the Method style of acting to the likes of Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro and Al Pacino. “New York is an incredible place for a first-timer,” says Loo. “The steam coming up from the pavement, the yellow cabs, the famous sights; you feel like you’re living in a movie.”

On the year-long course, Loo mixed with students from around the globe, including a Bosnian who took his training so seriously he once lived an entire day in slow-motion. “In the end I got a lot out of the classes,” explains Loo, “but I remember sitting in a room when I first arrived, surrounded by people screaming and sobbing for real, and wondering what the hell I was doing there!”

On her return to the UK, Loo acted in a few fringe theatre productions in London while taking classes with Philippe Gaulier, a French eccentric whose past pupils include Ali G, Emma Thompson and *Friends*’ David Schwimmer. “Philippe’s whole theory is about finding your ‘pleasure’ as an actor. For months he wouldn’t let me on stage because he thought I didn’t want it enough, then finally I did *Lady Macbeth* dressed all in leather with a ridiculous German accent. It was brilliant fun.”

Last summer Loo got an audition through a friend at London’s Royal Court theatre to play a 14-year-old geekish teenager. Aware that the director was unsure if she could pull off the age difference, she went to the call-back audition in a school uniform. The gambit worked as the show got rave reviews and Loo got an agent. Two weeks later, she won the part of student nurse Roxanne Bird on *Casualty*.

Age: 23

Home town: Raunds, Northamptonshire

Similarities with Roxy: “Like Roxy I can be incredibly scatty, but apart from that I think we’re very different. We’ve chosen very different careers for a start, and she is a teenage mother. I haven’t got any kids secreted in my closet.”

Roxy’s best and worst traits: “Roxy is very well-meaning and loving, but she doesn’t have a lot of sophisticated social graces. She tries to do the right thing, but often fails. She isn’t really ready to be a responsible parent. However, I don’t think there’s anything malicious about her.”

Loo’s real-life *Casualty*: “When I was four I went down the hill near my godmother’s house on a tricycle and had to have the inside of my mouth stitched up. I was a monster: it took five nurses to hold me down to apply the local anaesthetic, which they called Pussy Prickle.”

On-screen romance: “I get very close to a Lakeland terrier in episode 10 of the new series. But apart from that, I think the pickings will be fairly thin for a while. Roxy tends to fall in love a little and often but there’s definitely a big romance on the horizon.”

Favourite food and music: “I like everything that’s bad for me, especially school-dinner food like meat pies, mash, gravy and puddings. I despise sweetcorn and I don’t drink caffeine because it sends me completely insane. Music-wise I like anything from Jeff Lynne’s *The War Of The Worlds* to Radiohead, Leonard Cohen and The Smashing Pumpkins. I love new music but I’m actually a bit of a Radio 4 girl.”

How do you keep in shape? “I don’t. I’m one of those people who are always about to start something and never do. Pilates is next on my list. I love massages – does that count?”

How do you relax? “At the moment I’m learning the guitar (Derek is helping me in between scenes). I love watching black and white movies and reading. At the moment I’m crawling through a 300-page anthology of American literature. It keeps me off the streets!”

Did you know?

- As a teenager, Loo used to ring the bells at her local church.
- Loo was sacked from a string of part-time jobs throughout university including a florist for flooding the shop, a sandwich factory for oversleeping on New Year’s Day, a book factory for reading the books instead of packing them and a restaurant for swearing at a customer.
- Loo played football for her College at university and scored the winning goal in the Cambridge Women’s Cup quarter-final.