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Film



## Star of The Exploding Girl, Zoe Kazan (Yes, that Kazan) Breaks Through

By **Melissa Anderson**

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Zoe Kazan appears in every scene of Bradley Rust Gray's *The Exploding Girl*—a title that could just as easily apply to the 25-year-old actress. Last year, the granddaughter of legendary director Elia Kazan and the daughter of screenwriter-directors Nicholas Kazan and Robin Swicord acted on Broadway twice (in *Come Back, Little Sheba* and *The Seagull*) and made her breakthrough screen performance as Maureen Grube, the guileless secretary who has an affair with Leonardo DiCaprio in *Revolutionary Road*. In Gray's exquisitely observed character study, Kazan plays Ivy, a college student with epilepsy who is back home in Brooklyn for the summer, trying to negotiate the end of one relationship and the beginning of another. I reached the Carroll Gardens resident—who has upcoming roles in Richard Linklater's *Me* and Orson Welles, Rebecca Miller's *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee*, Nia Vardalos's *I Hate Valentine's Day*, and the new, untitled Nancy Meyers film—in Los Angeles to talk about coming of age.

**While preparing to play Maureen in *Revolutionary Road*, you watched *Some Like It Hot* and *The Apartment*. What kind of research did you do to play Ivy in *The Exploding Girl*?**

Ivy was a different situation because the role was written for me. I met Brad Gray when I auditioned for him for another film, and we both remembered each other very strongly. He contacted my agent in the winter of 2008 and asked if I would meet with him. We went for this eight-hour walk in the cold in January. About two minutes into the walk, he said, "I want to write a movie for you. Do you want to make a movie with me?" And I was like, "Yeah, what's it about?" And he said, "I don't know—you're gonna have to trust me on this." But I was in on the creation of the character; I named her before I even knew who she was.

**Why did you choose the name "Ivy"?**

I just thought it up. The script was much simpler than I thought it would be. Ivy is, in many ways, the exact opposite of me [laughs]—she's a very contained person. I love to make other people responsible for my emotions. It was a great thing for me, both as an actor and a person, to play somebody like this.

**There's a fascinating rhythm to Ivy's excruciating cell phone conversations with her boyfriend. How was the timing of the silences worked out?**

Part of that comes from the theater, from working with a live audience and listening to their internal tempo. I also think that knowing [when a relationship's] not good, but not being able to admit it to yourself, is part of the growing-up story for Ivy, too. The kind way to think about how Ivy's psychology works is that she doesn't want to burden other people; the unkind way is to say she's a doormat. If Ivy really had the ability to stand up for herself, she would say, "Why are you being such an asshole to me?" But that's something that she learns how to do.

**Do you have any favorite coming-of-age films with young women protagonists?**

I know this is going to sound funny, but *A League of Their Own*. I watched that movie every summer. I think *Cleo From 5 to 7* is a coming-of-age film in a way. And I guess *Belle de jour*, too. But the problem is that a lot of those films sexualize the girls. That's something that Brad really didn't want to do. *Splendor in the Grass*—Natalie Wood sort of has a coming-of-age story in that.

I imagine you saw *Splendor in the Grass* [which Elia Kazan directed] many times while growing up.

[Laughs.] No, I've seen it once or twice. I actually watched it to do *Come Back, Little Sheba* because that script was [also] by William Inge.

**As the daughter and granddaughter of screenwriters and directors, was movie-watching a big part of your childhood?**

Yeah, I would say that it was. Some of my favorite movies as a kid were normal kid movies like *The Little Mermaid* or *The Red Balloon*. And some of them were *It Happened One Night*, *His Girl Friday*, and *Mean Streets*.

**For the past two years, you've been extremely busy with both stage and screen work. Do you hope to focus on one more than the other?**

Speaking of coming-of-age . . . when I started my career, I took everything that came to me. It's only recently that I've been able to be a tiny bit more discriminating. When I first started acting, I just wanted to make movies. I come from a family where movies are so highly valued—I didn't even see that much theater as a kid. It just wasn't that available in California. So when I started getting theater jobs, I thought it was a good way for me to learn how to act better in general so that I could do more movies. Now, I've gotten to this point where I've turned down really good movies in order to do plays. From the perspective of the film industry, the [theater] work isn't as valid. But I'm starting to realize that I have to stand up for my right to have a stage career.

The *Exploding Girl* plays at the Tribeca Film Festival April 23, 25, 28, and May 2

<http://www.villagevoice.com/2009-04-22/film/star-of-the-exploding-girl-zoe-kazan-yes-that-kazan-breaks-through/>



## Film

### Tribeca Film Festival 2009 Guide

**By Melissa Anderson**

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For its eighth installment, the film festival frequently criticized for its sprawl and unwieldiness returns in trimmer shape: 85 features will unspool at this year's Tribeca, down from last year's 120 and fewer than half of 2005's record high of 176 titles. The fest, which runs April 22 to May 3, promises the usual mix of the good, the bad, and the worse. Below, our guide to 10 standouts, plus three titles, unavailable for preview, that we're eager to see.

#### *The Exploding Girl*

Zoe Kazan—the only actor who didn't chew and spit out the scenery in *Revolutionary Road*—finds a much worthier vehicle for her talents in Bradley Rust Gray's lovely film about a young woman at home in NYC during a semester break. When not palling around with Al (Mark Rendall) or enduring a series of maddening cell phone calls with her boyfriend, Kazan's Ivy is frequently seen in moments of silent contemplation while the city blooms and bustles around her.