

FROM AN ADRIFT 20-SOMETHING ON *GIRLS* TO AN AGELESS BOY WHO CAN FLY IN *PETER PAN* TO THE LEAD IN THE HORROR FILM *GET OUT*, ACTRESS ALLISON WILLIAMS HAS CERTAINLY SHOWN RANGE IN THE SHORT SPAN OF HER CAREER. IT IS THIS RANGE THAT HAS MADE 28-YEAR-OLD ALLISON THE SUN VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL'S FIRST RECIPIENT OF THE RISING STAR AWARD; AN AWARD GIVEN TO AN ARTIST WHOSE EVER-EVOLVING BODY OF WORK POSITIONS THEM AS A BREAKTHROUGH FORCE IN THE INDUSTRY. ALLISON WILL BE HONORED AT THE SVFF RISING STAR PRIVATE RECEPTION, SPONSORED BY BEAUTYCOUNTER.

## *rising star*

# ALLISON WILLIAMS

By Hayden Seder

"It's very flattering and somewhat surreal," says Allison about receiving the award. "I choose my roles to be varied because, for one, it's more interesting for people to see and two, perhaps selfishly, it's more interesting to play completely different people every time." Best known for her role as Marnie in the hit HBO show *Girls*, Allison got her start in comedy in the Yale improv group "Just Add Water" and has recently segued into a film debut in February's *Get Out*. The psychological thriller depicts an interracial couple, Rose (Allison Williams) and Chris, meeting Rose's parents in a neighborhood where there is a sordid history of young black men mysteriously disappearing. While a horror film as her first movie may seem surprising, Allison made her choice with purpose. "I waited for a movie that had something to say, that was daring, and going to be conversation-provoking rather than a movie for a movie's sake," explains Allison. "Putting questions about race within the genre of horror will get the conversation going. When deciding on a role, I ask myself: *Why this, why now, why me?* A lot of movies are made for the sake of movies but I love what I do so much that I don't want to taint my love for it with an experience that leaves something to be desired. I look for roles that I feel the need to do and that, if the film isn't made, it would be a loss."

Allison's role of Marnie on *Girls*, for which she was nominated as Best Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series at 2016's Critics' Choice Television Awards, was something of a coup for the then-freshly-out-of-college 20-something. Allison had just graduated from Yale and moved to L.A. to fulfill her life-long dream of being an actress. But even though she is the daughter of famed NBC anchorman Brian Williams, Allison didn't want to call in favors and was prepared for the tough life of an unemployed actress. Yet using the connections that she

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PHOTO BY CRAIG BLANKENHORN



Opposite page: Allison Williams as "Marnie" in HBO's *Girls*. Above: Allison Williams in her new film *Get Out*.

already had, Allison decided to send out a video that she saw as a “calling card.” It was this video—a mashup of “Nature Boy” set to RJD2’s “A Beautiful Mine”—that attracted *Girls* producer Judd Apatow, enough for him to reach out to Allison about auditioning. “It was my first audition and I had zero expectations that it was going to work out,” says Allison. “I guess it was just one of those things where I had exactly what they were looking for...and the rest is history.”

*Girls* premiered in 2012 to universal acclaim from critics who praised the show for its raw and real portrayal of the 20-something experience. Audiences loved the show for the same reasons, seeing something of themselves in the four women who dominate the show. “These four women [*Girls* characters Hannah, Marnie, Jessa, and Shoshanna] are so specific but I see similarities in my friends and my own life,” explains Allison. “I think that’s what makes it so magnetic to girls of a certain age. Even if it’s not your experience, it feels and looks familiar in a way that television didn’t look for a while—it was more aspirational. Lena Dunham, the creator and star of *Girls*, was interested in taking a snapshot of people who were likely to already exist and delve into their lives with them.”

With the sixth and final season premiering in February of this year, a large chapter of these ladies’ lives is now coming to a close. That chapter includes much of Allison’s 20s, as the show started when she was 23 and ends as she approaches her 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. “I’ve learned so much, not just from *Girls* specifically, but about my values and what I want my life to look like. I’m insanely lucky. *Girls* has allowed me to be really picky and hang on to this vision of what I do for a living and not compromise it. I still love what I do in a very pure kind of way.” One of Allison’s biggest takeaways from the experience is learning what it’s like to leave something to the audience. Over the last six seasons of *Girls*, the cast and crew kept coming back each year and tinkering with the process. But with the show’s end, “the series belongs to the viewers now,” says Allison.

When asked about this new time in her life, Allison compares it to her own time fresh out of college. “I really liked the time after college when I didn’t know what was coming next; I found it exciting and invigorating. I’m looking forward to this next period in much the same way.” One can only guess what the girl who keeps audiences guessing will do next—from musicals to comedy to drama and beyond, Allison will continue to follow the path of a rising star.

**ALLISON WILL ALSO HOST ONE OF THE FESTIVAL'S COFFEE TALKS AND WILL BE HONORED AT THE SVFF RISING STAR PRIVATE RECEPTION, SPONSORED BY BEAUTYCOUNTER.**

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