

'I really hope I'm not playing Miranda in 20 years' time'

She hates shopping, uses the subway and is in love with another woman. Cynthia Nixon talks frankly about life beyond the latest Sex and the City

INTERVIEW Helena de Bertodano PORTRAIT Ondrea Barbe



CYNTHIA NIXON

As Cynthia Nixon was walking down a street in New York recently, a truck pulled up in front of her. “Some men leaned out of the window and started yelling at me: ‘Your movie SUCKED.’ It was very startling.” They were referring to *Sex and the City*, the 2008 film following the hugely successful television series about four New York professional women who call the shots (mostly) in their relationships with men. “I thought: I bet you \$1,000 you haven’t seen the movie, but something about it makes you angry. We’re just a comedy but one that has become very polarising, because we showed what was actually happening in New York: women out on the town, meeting men and drinking and shopping and indulging themselves and not just sitting by the phone waiting for it to ring.”

Now, with *Sex and the City 2* about to open, Nixon is bracing herself for yet more attention. I ask if she is impervious to the comments. “I’m not like Miranda,” she laughs, referring to the steely, cynical attorney she plays. “Those men did hurt my feelings. I was having a hard day anyway. It is peculiar the things that people will say to you just because you’re famous – things that they would never say to just a random person on the street; they would never be so rude or mean.”

We meet for an early breakfast in Nice Matin, a bustling French brasserie on New York’s Upper West Side, which is just a stone’s throw from the apartment Nixon shares with her girlfriend, Christine Marinoni, and her two children from a former relationship, Samantha, 13, and Charlie, 7. Nixon, 44, arrives 15 minutes late but shows few other traits of celebrity behaviour – apart, perhaps, from a slightly eccentric diet. She orders a glass of hot water to which she adds iced water and lemon slices. To eat she has oatmeal and a menu item called “perfect grapefruit segments”. “Only perfect ones,” she jokes. “But I don’t want the apples, honey or granola that come with it,” she tells the waitress firmly. Later she places a small pile of pills next to her plate and works her way through them: “I’ve always been a vitamin taker. I have a multivitamin, a B complex, a vitamin E and this one is tamoxifen, which is an anti-cancer thing I have taken since my breast cancer.”

A few years ago Nixon had a lumpectomy after early cancer was detected during a routine screening. “I didn’t make it public knowledge while I was going through it, but afterwards I felt I should. My privacy is my privacy, but I also feel there are things in my life – like being with a woman, having cancer, sending my kids to public [state] school – that are not really private. *Sex and the City* gives me a forum. Like Eleanor Roosevelt [whom Nixon played in the 2005 film *Warm Springs*,

earning an Emmy nomination] said: ‘I came to realise that wherever I went photographers were going to follow me, and so I thought: I’ll just take them places I want them to go.’”

So after we meet she will be hurrying off to deliver a keynote address at a breast cancer luncheon, then taking part in a political action committee. “I’m very much involved in this battle to oust the New York State senators who voted against gay marriage because they’re all up for re-election in November.” She and Marinoni got engaged last year but cannot legally marry in New York, which enrages Nixon. “What are you going to tell me?” she says of the senators. “You’re going to tell me my family is not legitimate? You’re going to look at us and say we should not get married for some reason? Why?”

Nixon refers to Marinoni often and with ease. When I remark on her bright pink iPhone, Nixon laughs: “My girlfriend hates it but at least I know it’s mine, not hers.” The screensaver is a picture of Marinoni, whom she met when both were campaigning to reduce New York school class sizes. “It wasn’t about discovering I was gay, it was about falling in love with someone and that person was a woman. I’m not saying that’s how it is for everybody, but that is how it was for me.”

Warm and friendly, she talks candidly about any subject except – absurdly – the movie she is publicising. This is not Nixon’s fault; the cast is under strict orders not to give away any plot details, although she does reveal that this film is very different from the first. “This movie is about being in your prime,”

‘This time the four of us are back together in a pack having adventures. In real life, we’ve had our fights on *Sex and the City*, but the four of us are very close’

she says. “It gets back to the beginnings of the series when it was more of a comedy, more of a caper. In *Sex and the City 1* we were all in our separate worlds and would come together in times of crisis. In this one, the four of us are back together in a pack having adventures. It is years since the characters have had that sort of girl-time to hang out together. That’s what happens when you get older: you have a significant other or children or a career.”

What about in real life, I ask, do they all get on well together? “We’ve had our fights in the past,” Nixon admits. “But I think the four of us are very close. The thing is, we don’t hang out in a foursome, we hang out in groups of two or three. We meet up for dinner or see plays together. I recently went to a Cate

Blanchett play with Kim [Cattrall] and my girlfriend. Sarah Jessica [Parker]’s son and my son are almost exactly the same age, so sometimes when we’re out in the Hamptons in the summer we get together and the boys play. And Kristin Davis lives in LA, but when she comes to town she comes over for dinner.”

A trailer for the new movie shows the foursome on holiday together in Dubai (although the footage was actually shot in Morocco). “You are fun in Abu Dhabi,” says Kim Cattrall’s character, Samantha, to Miranda who is ordering another round of champagne. In another scene Miranda is whooping at some men in a swimming pool. “Miranda’s always excited for an excursion,” says Nixon. “I feel like it’s taken her a long



Top left: Kim Cattrall, Kristin Davis, Cynthia Nixon and Sarah Jessica Parker in the first series of *Sex and the City* and, right, a scene from the new film. Below left: Nixon as Eleanor Roosevelt, with Kenneth Branagh as President Roosevelt, in *Warm Springs*

time to get to this place where she can just really let go and have some fun.”

Nixon – who auditioned for the part of Carrie Bradshaw, Sarah Jessica Parker’s role, when the series launched in 1998 – says that when she first started playing Miranda, she felt she could not be less like her: “I thought, I love this character but I really have nothing in common with her other than feeling, ‘Oh, we’re smart girls.’ I had long blonde hair and a kind of hippy vibe back then. Miranda was bitter and cynical and I’m overly optimistic. She was very single, I’ve never really been single. She had a mother phobia, I was already a mother.” Now she feels they have become more alike. “By the time the series ended it seemed like we had met halfway. We saw Miranda creep out of her shell and soften and become a mother and believe in love.”

Shooting finished in January and Nixon still sports Miranda’s trademark short red hair, which is slowly growing out. “I’m sort of making my way back to blonde. I had an event last night so my hair has some shape. Normally it’s just...” She drags her hair down her face to show how flat it usually is. She

wears no make-up and is dressed casually in a fitted brown sweater, maroon trousers and ankle cowboy boots. “I am not a clothes person,” she says, which is ironic considering the emphasis that *Sex and the City* places on high-end fashion and \$500 pairs of shoes. She yanks round the neck of her sweater. “What does that say?” she asks me. “W,” I tell her. “I don’t even know what that stands for,” she says. “W for cheap! I have one or two crappy catalogues that I order clothes from. My girlfriend sees me reading them and can’t believe it as she actually is a clothes person.”

What about her handbag, I ask. Surely a *Sex and the City* actress carries a designer handbag? “This?” she says incredulously, holding up a slightly collapsed-looking bag in an off-putting shade of greeny-brown. “Oh, my God, no. This bag is a perfect example. In the new movie there’s a wonderful moment where we flashback to how each of us looked when Carrie first met us in our terrible Eighties fashions. So Pat [Patricia Field, the show’s costume designer] put me in a bad suit with shoulder pads and bad jewellery and running shoes, and she’s searching around for

a horrible bag and suddenly sees this. My very own bag that I carried on to set that day was, for her, the epitome of what a fashion dunce would have.” So the bag becomes famous? “Actually, we just used it for the Polaroid.” She pats it fondly and jokes: “It doesn’t appear in the movie. I try to maintain its privacy.”

Nixon says that in this movie the story arcs for most of the characters are “happy”, although the trailer shows Carrie facing a testing time, with her husband, Mr Big, flirting in a bar with Penélope Cruz, and Carrie’s old boyfriend, Aidan, popping up in Abu Dhabi. Another clip is of Miranda saying ecstatically to her on-screen husband, Steve: “I made it!” Nixon explains: “Miranda is made a partner [at her law firm]. But she has a new boss and her boss hates her. So she’s finally got the thing she always wanted, and yet it’s horrible.”

The cast spent seven weeks shooting in Morocco. Nixon’s two children came to visit for Thanksgiving, as did Parker’s son, but Parker’s new twin surrogate daughters were too little to travel. “It was very hard on all of us,” says Nixon. But both Parker and Nixon describe it as a bonding experience, too, ➤

CYNTHIA NIXON

especially the week they spent in more basic accommodation in the desert. “We stayed in this crazy medieval-feeling hotel that looked like it had gotten electricity very recently, but it was beautiful with long, old stone hallways. They would cater us dinner every night in the hotel so all the cast and crew would sit and eat family-style, which was very nice.”

For the other six weeks the cast was scattered in hotels around Marrakesh. “I had my own bungalow with a kitchen,” says Nixon, who stayed at the luxurious Es Saadi. “A kitchen is the No 1 thing for me when I am in a hotel; I don’t want to pay the exorbitant room-service prices.” Despite her wealth – each actress was reportedly paid \$500,000 per episode of *Sex and the City* – Nixon makes a point of living frugally. “I take the subway and bus and I’m not a consumer at all. The only thing I like shopping for is food.”

Nixon says that the huge success of *Sex and the City* still surprises her, as well as the controversy the series sometimes provokes. “I don’t think we are changing society, I think we are reflecting it, yet we have become part of the culture wars. When John Kerry was running for the Democrats there were women wearing T-shirts saying: ‘Carrie does not speak for me, and neither does Kerry.’ It was like, wow, somehow they see us as a representation of the evils of progressive America.

“I remember a sweet young man came up to Kristin and me and said: ‘My girlfriend just loves your show – and she’s a feminist!’ And Kristin was like, ‘Whaddaya mean, “She’s a feminist”? We’re all feminists.’ But I know there are some hardline feminists who think



they want to take a picture. But Sarah Jessica has it far worse; I think people are permanently stationed outside her house.” I ask her why she thinks Parker attracts more attention than the other three. “I think it’s because her husband [Matthew Broderick] is famous, too,” says Nixon matter-of-factly.

Still, when Nixon left Danny Mozes, her partner of 15 years and the father of her children, in 2003 and started living with Marinoni the following year, she had her own media circus. “When my girlfriend and I confirmed that we were seeing each other, a lot of what I read, particularly about her, was very mean – and I only read a fraction of



From left: Nixon with her former partner, Danny Mozes, in 2002; with her girlfriend, Christine Marinoni, and her son and daughter by Mozes

Nixon says she tried to imitate her parents’ amicable divorce during her split from Mozes. Her father, a radio journalist, and her mother, an actress, divorced when Nixon was 6. “My parents were not very good at marriage – I still remember the fighting – but they were good at divorce. My mother always said if she hadn’t had me she thinks she would have stayed with my father because she could have taken the fighting on for herself but not for a child. I feel that if you have any sense and any control you need to do that for your children.”

She remains on good terms with Mozes and says her children adore Marinoni. “They call her Mom. Their father recently married an amazing woman and they are devoted to her as well. The other day my daughter said to me, ‘My life has turned out really well,’ and I was like, ‘What do you mean? You’re only 13.’ And she said, ‘When you and Dad split up it could have been horrible, but it was OK, and now we have these stepmothers and they could be horrible but they’re great.’ And she’s right. It’s all turned out very well.”

Nixon says she will stay with Marinoni for the rest of her life. “I really do feel that we’ll be together for ever. I have never felt that with anyone else before.” But she does not predict the same long-term future for herself and Miranda – although there is already talk of a third movie. “I certainly hope I won’t still be playing Miranda in 20 years’ time.” She puts her head in her hands and groans. “Can you imagine the four of us in our sixties and seventies? Oh, my God, don’t even try!” ■

Sex and the City 2 is released on May 28

‘It wasn’t about discovering I was gay, it was about falling in love with someone and that was a woman’

it’s too much about men and shopping. But we’re not propaganda: women are very interested in men and clothes. That’s true.”

Nixon – a child TV star who acted on Broadway as a teenager and landed a role in the film *Amadeus* aged 18 – has learnt to deal with the constant attention. “It’s not so bad. I find the more upper-echelons people are economically, the more pesky they can be. They come up and say things like: ‘My cousin knows your orthodontist’s uncle-in-law.’ And I’m like [she puts on a fixed rictus grin]: ‘OK!’ The average person in the street leaves me alone – although I did have a bunch of girls follow me, squealing, the other day. Finally, I just turned around and looked at them. I was like: ‘I can hear you, speak to me, don’t speak about me loudly.’ What’s hard is that everyone has a camera on them all the time now and

what was written. I’d never had a publicist and I hired one just to deal with this situation.”

The other three *Sex and the City* stars were all very supportive. “They were amazing – especially Kristin, who went on *Letterman* at the time. Her entire interview was taken up with this question about me. Letterman was like, ‘What about the guy she used to be with, is he gay now, too?’ Then at the end he said to her: ‘What about you, might you fall in love with a female?’ And Kristin said, ‘Never say never.’ She was tremendous. Then when we all appeared on *Oprah*, who was sceptical about [my relationship], the three of them just went, ‘Grrrr’ [she mimes clawing]. It felt a bit like that *Sex and the City* episode when a guy calls Miranda a fat-arse and they all gather round me and are like, ‘You. Leave. Her. ALONE.’ In real life, they did the same for me.”