



Jessie Collins talks to
Amanda Byram about getting
married, growing wiser and
being in the right place at the
right time.

Taupe crepe de chine dress (€1,325) and orange
overskirt (€625) by Miu Miu @ miumi.com; onyx ring
(€110) @ Rebecca Davis

Girl Grown Up

Amanda Byram has some exciting news from LA. She also has unfinished business there, and when we first meet she is about to return after leaving over three years ago, thinking she would never want to go back. But there has been some water under the bridge since then. She has been hosting the very successful *Total Wipeout* game show on the BBC and has got engaged to ex-rugby international-turned rugby agent, Craig McMullen. Things have moved on, professionally and personally, and the time seems right to revisit her past. "I hosted a special on the royal wedding for TLC (the US cable channel) and my agent said, if ever there was a good time to come back, come now. I spent two months thinking 'do I really want to do this, do I really want to go back?' It's a bit of a milestone for me because I left LA behind and never wanted anymore to do with it." "But as time has gone on," she continues "I have matured into life back in London and I have found myself in a contented place. Everything has been starting to fall into place and finally I feel like maybe I'm ready to go back and tackle something that I think I left unfinished. I look back on stuff and think I should have done this and I should have done that. So in a sense it's a little bit of closure for me."

There is also a bit of housekeeping to take care of. She still has an apartment there that she has been toying with selling. "I feel like I left so many things untied because when I left I couldn't wait to get out. I had just met Craig, we were living in France and it was the furthest leap you could take away from LA. Now I am in a place where if a job comes up over there I'd be delighted to do it. Before if a job came up my heart sank, I didn't want to spend another year away from family and friends and being single in LA. With *Total Wipeout*, it's a constant and stuff in London is going really well. So it feels like a good time to go back and see what happens."

And happen it did. As we are going to press she calls from her London home having just returned from LA with great news. Fox has signed her up to present their Emmy pre-show (which garners massive ratings every year in the US) and for the first time in her career she has been given her own show in the UK, a new talent contest called *Don't Stop Me Now* launching on Sky One HD this autumn. The talent come-game show picks its contestants from the audience, all of which are aspiring entertainers. The audience vote on each act with sudden death being dolled out to those that fail to impress. "Being able to do the UK/LA thing is something I have wanted to do for ages. And I have been really lucky in the past. I have just managed to be in the right place at the right time. When I go to meetings people ask me 'What is it you really want to do?', I'm a jobbing presenter. I want to work. I want to work on things I enjoy, I want to do something that I can be myself in."

All this does come on the back of the incredible success of BBC's *Total Wipeout* which she admits has certainly been a boon. Co-presented by *Top Gear*'s Richard Hammond, it features twenty contestants a week who ritually humiliate themselves in a series of challenges in an attempt to win £10,000. For those who haven't seen

“Sometimes I think I’ve kind of
become that really
strong independent
woman that’s kind of annoying for men
to be around”

it, it involves making it across almost impossible assault courses, with participants usually ending up upside down in pools of water, or mud, or both, accompanied by dubbed boing noises and comedy splash sounds. It is ridiculously silly (and really funny) and has grown massive audiences since it first aired in early 2009. So much so, that four days prior to our interview news comes in that it has been recommissioned for a fifth series.

Filmed in Argentina, what goes on behind the scenes, Byram explains, is almost as colourful as the escapades on film. “Regardless of the contestants doing mad stuff, it’s Argentina, it’s not the most professional environment I’ve ever been in. If a cameraman walked into the BBC with a cigarette and a patch on his eye whilst filming me and the smoke was going across the lens, he would be fired. Whereas Mariano, my favourite cameraman in the whole world, flicks it on to dry grass, the grass starts to smoke. You are like, really?! One morning we get to the set to find that armed men had come during the night and held up the security guard and stolen every piece of equipment we had. The following morning we come in and the cameras had steamed up and they don’t really know how to get it off the lenses. Next time we had the most torrential rains, we couldn’t film, everything was immersed. One of the sets blew up. [There was an] actual fire on the Crash Mountain [one of the key obstacles on the show]. No one knows how it happened. You could make a show out of behind the scenes. But it’s also one of the reasons why we love it. It’s a haven for potential disasters.”

And in case your wondering, she hasn’t tackled the course herself (the BBC won’t insure her), nor does she intend to. “I don’t see the doing of it as fun, I love the watching of it. It’s a crazy show but I love the fact that it’s so popular because it’s just silly and fun. It’s bubble gum for the brain.”

The separation from her fiancé that the filming schedule demands is not something she relishes, and though they had planned to get married this year, work commitments have meant they have had to postpone. “Craig proposed on a Sunday and I left for Argentina for 14 weeks on a Monday so though I was engaged I was feeling less attached than I did before. Now we are just enjoying being in [it]. I am only back a few months from Argentina and am due to fly back again in October. So this year for the wedding is out.”

Getting engaged has thrown up its own set of surprises too. “It’s something I’d always wanted but now that marriage is on the horizon it doesn’t mean as much to me as it did before I got engaged.” She cites Elizabeth Gilbert’s book *Committed* (the sequel to *Eat, Pray, Love*) as bringing her out of the ‘bubble’ of obsession with having the perfect wedding, the perfect day, and to realise that it isn’t about the wedding, it’s about the marriage. “I had completely lost sight of that,” she admits, “for me now it’s more about that everything is structurally right for a marriage. I am also getting my head around the idea of being married because I have been so independent for so long.”

For the moment London is home to them both, but that doesn’t look set in stone. “For [Craig] work can be in France, or can be in Australia, but I don’t think he’s the biggest London fan. He’s a Sydney boy. He has given up a lot for me because my career is based there. But it’s difficult because I have to turn around and go on a job for two months. I’ve got to be very mindful of that.”

But finally making a home in London has given her new perspective on her time in LA too. “When I left to move to LA, I was miserable, I didn’t want to have anything to do with London again. I had broken up with Paddy [Kielty, who she dated before moving], I had just bought my apartment there, I didn’t have that many friends, for me it was soulless. It started to become what LA became at the end.



"I want to do [work] I
enjoy. I want to do things
that I can be myself in."

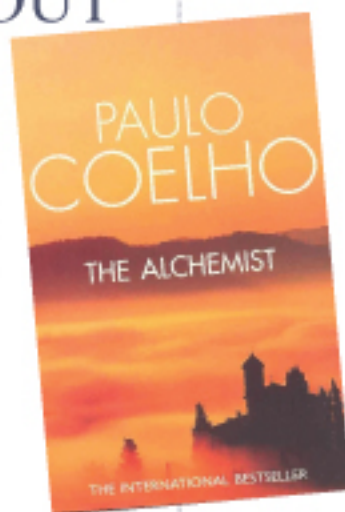
Yellow crepe top (#340) and mini skirt (#300)
by Acne © Brown Thomas; snakeskin boots
(#220) by Prada

Photography: Barry McCall
Stylists: Sash Rickard
sashrickard.com
Hair: Dylan Bradshaw
Makeup: Paula Callan
Photographer's assistant: Stephen Gallagher
Post production: Paul Canning

AMANDA CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Book:

The Alchemist changed my life quite profoundly. I read it on a holiday in Tuscany and I came home and fired my agent and I moved to L.A."



Beauty:

Paw Paw ointment. "It's the Aussie version of Vaseline, they have just started to bring it into the U.K. Its made out of Paw Paw, you can use it on cuts, dry skin, it cures everything."



STELLA MCCARTNEY

Fashion label:

"I am a big Matthew Williamson fan, always have been and I love Stella McCartney. I love my highstreet too, I love mixing and matching, a Zara top with Louboutin wedges."

"I feel like maybe, I'm ready to go back and tackle something that I think I left unfinished."

So now I have to wonder whether it's the place or it's the person."

The experience, she says in hindsight, has not been in vain. "I've learnt a lot about myself since I moved to LA and came back, this whole kind of resurgence, especially in what I do, it's such a self-critical job, you are always walking on eggshells. I think I have toughened myself up over a period of time, sometimes a little bit too much. Sometimes I think I've kind of become that really strong, independent woman that's kind of annoying for men to be around. But with Craig he lets me breathe, he lets me do everything that I need to do, yet he's still there as a partner and as a support so there is definitely a happy medium."

It's still a delicate balance she admits, preventing the self-sufficiency so keenly developed from letting any vulnerability through. "I definitely feel that in my old age I have become someone I am proud of but sometimes I wish I wasn't so headstrong. This industry has done a lot for me in some ways but sometimes I wish I was this meek little person who was like 'you do everything for me!'. I don't want it to make me too strong that I can't let anyone do anything for me."

When it comes to family, she is refreshingly not overly pressurised about becoming a parent. "I am 38, I am not getting any younger. And I don't think you are ever ready. In my business you always think you have to do the next thing and the next thing before you can do that. It's like dangling a carrot in front of you your whole life, one day you wake up and go, I caught the carrot ages ago. I filled up on carrots and I can't see that. So there has to come a point where family becomes a priority. For me being a career woman I have always focused on that and I really love what I do. I do have to be mindful of that a little more, and try and not keep going for the carrot!"

The future then, seems to be about trying to go a little easier, and not expecting too much, though this seems set to be tested more than ever given the incredibly hectic schedule she is about to embark upon. "I am a perfectionist in everything, there is the shiny perfect Amanda that sugar-coats everything and it's all wrapped up, then there is the realist Amanda. You need to get out of the shiny perfect world. Everything doesn't have to be a certain way, so I am learning just to do things my way, not just the way that everyone expects them to be done. So I'm learning, I'm growing up, finally!" ■

Don't Stop Me Now begins on Sky 1 HD on 23 September