

GOT HEART?

Triple threat Laura Bell Bundy is showin' up, two-steppin' out and makin' it count

Escorted on the arm of Bond 45's maître d' to the table I'm waiting for her at, Laura Bell Bundy arrives in true southern belle fashion. The Kentucky-born and raised actress-singer is wearing a flowy, white dress and cowboy boots. As she takes her arm back from her admirer's grip, she flashes me a can-you-believe-this-guy? smirk and takes a seat across the table.

We are in her former stomping grounds, New York City's Theater District (she left for Nashville six years ago, then moved to Los Angeles where she lives now), so it's possible that the man, who could not resist the opportunity to make an entrance with this blonde beauty, recognized her from one of the Broadway productions she has starred in [*Legally Blonde: The Musical* as Elle Woods, which she was Tony nominated for; *Hairspray*'s Amber Von Tussle; *Wicked* as Glinda] or maybe from her FX TV show, *Anger Management* alongside Charlie Sheen.

On *Anger Management* Laura plays Dr. Jordan Denby, in which Charlie and her run a clinic together that helps prisoners with their transition into society upon being released. Jordan is a little quirky. She makes out with an inmate and doesn't think twice about taking a few swigs from the bottle while on the job. But you have to give her some latitude; Jordan is a recovering alcoholic, whose husband was stolen from her by her twin sister. "She has issues with self-control and loving herself. And she has a tendency to be emotional. It's kind of a fun character to play," Laura says with a smile. Are there parts of

Words by Vanessa Pascale

Photo Credit: Jeremy Cowart
courtesy of Big Machine Records

Jordan that you relate to? I ask. "Um, I'm an alcoholic." She laughs. "I'd say I'm pretty quirky. I don't know if I'd kiss a hot prisoner, but I've done some other things that might be up there with that. I'm a rule bender. I'm not a person that lives in black and white."

Brian Austin Green plays Charlie's neighbor and Jordan's love interest. What's it like working with Brian? Did you grow up watching *90210*? I inquire. "I love Brian. Oh honey, yes. It was a little bit weird."

'Oh my god, it's David Silver!' But yeah, he's great. He's so sweet. He and Charlie get along so well. The three of us really do have a great time. Charlie is so amazing at this particular type of comedy: multi-camera television comedy. He's like on another level." On their way to 100 episodes, Laura tells me that the show is going into syndication, and will be airing on FOX, too, exposing *Anger Management* to an even larger audience.

Our waiter comes by to offer us bread, a second time. We decline. Laura leans in close to the recorder. "I don't want bread. I am glu-tarded," she says animatedly. [Laura discovered, on her own, that she had celiac disease several years ago.] "OK? If I eat it, I might shit my pants." This sort of TMI humor is splashed all over her *Cooter County* spoofs, YouTube videos in which she depicts outlandish characters like "The Vacation Destroyer" and Euneeda Biscuit. You can watch them on her website, which I suggest as they are very funny.

Laura has been in show business since she was a child, on Broadway, doing television and appearing in movies. As Marah on *Guiding Light*, she had every experience a person could possibly have, within a two-year period. "Soap actors do not get the praise and the recognition that they should. They have thirty pages of lines a day. They are making this stuff seem real and if that cheesy music wasn't there, it would feel like a real drama," she points out. She

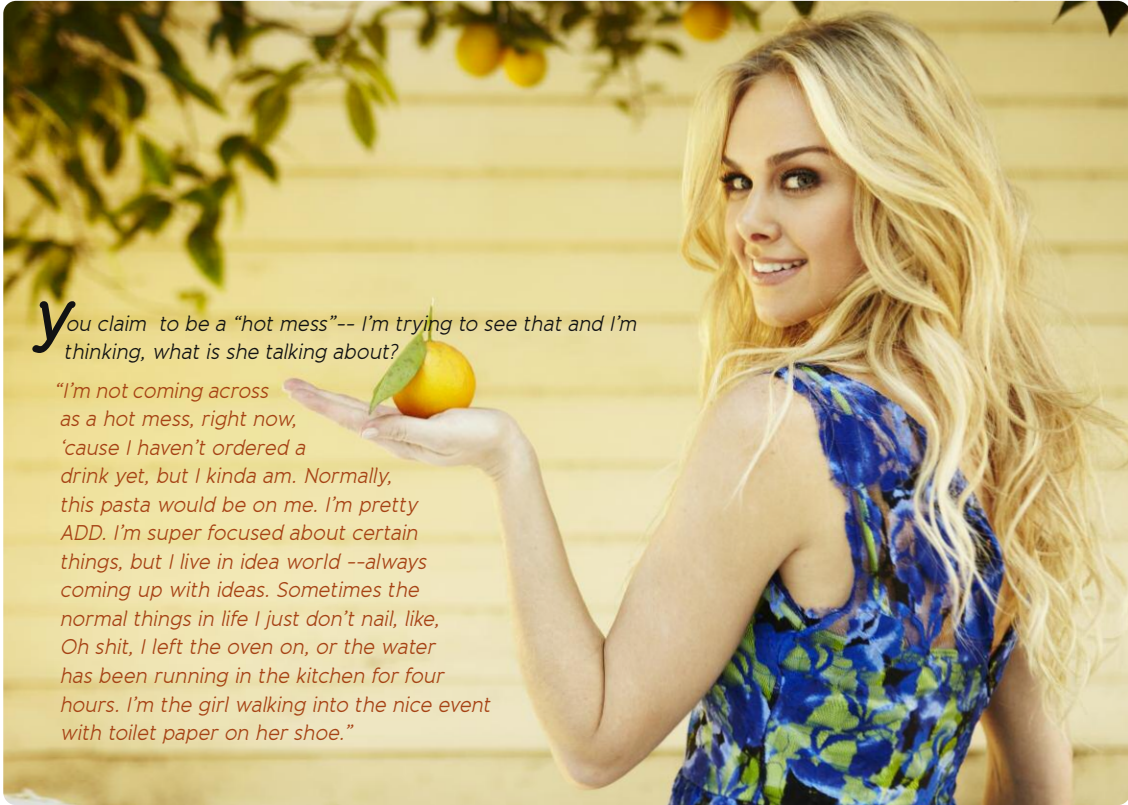
recently had the opportunity to take on a more emotional role than she's used to in the movie, *Home is Where the Heart Is*, where she played an actress who returns to her small town to take care of her half-sister when their sick mother passes away.

Considered a triple threat in the entertainment industry, she downplays her multi-talent. "Back in the day, movie stars like Doris Day, Marilyn Monroe, they had to sing, dance and act or they wouldn't get the movie parts. It was a given." Her absolute

looks down at the recorder. "25 minutes? Good God, you're going to hate me. You're going to be like, 'This. Bitch. Chats.'" [For the record, the interview lasted an hour and twelve minutes, and I was entertained the entire length of it. Even while transcribing it, Laura.]

In conjunction with the release of her songs, Laura has partnered with the American Heart Association and has been traveling as a spokesperson for them.

A heart disease survivor, Laura was born with a hole in her heart, discovered when she was 6-weeks-old. She's been seeing doctors her entire life for her condition, but this year, Laura had "a bit of a scare" when her doctor told her she needed open heart surgery to close the hole. She reached out to her local chapter (Kentucky) of the American Heart Association --as they'd recently



You claim to be a "hot mess"-- I'm trying to see that and I'm thinking, what is she talking about?

"I'm not coming across as a hot mess, right now, 'cause I haven't ordered a drink yet, but I kinda am. Normally, this pasta would be on me. I'm pretty ADD. I'm super focused about certain things, but I live in idea world --always coming up with ideas. Sometimes the normal things in life I just don't nail, like, Oh shit, I left the oven on, or the water has been running in the kitchen for four hours. I'm the girl walking into the nice event with toilet paper on her shoe."

favorite thing is to perform live. "Nothing feels as good as that. I'm not a 9-5er. I don't have certain skills that other normal people have, but I do understand how to create for entertainment's sake."

Untainted by Hollywood, Laura's southern roots still have a strong grip on her. Named one of CMT's "Next Women of Country" after releasing her song, "Two Step" last year, this country singer is releasing a new album, *Another Piece of Me*, featuring songs, "That's What Angels Do," "Two Step," "Kentucky Dirty" and a number of new tracks that represent her multi-faceted personality. Since September, and until National Heart Health Awareness Month in February, individual songs are being released that correspond with the letters that spell out the word heart.

Her gluten-free pasta bolognese and side of broccoli rabe arrive. "You sure you don't want some?" she asks me. "It's a lot." While it would be fun to have a *Lady and the Tramp* moment with Laura, I decline as I have dinner plans later on. Laura

contacted her to acquire memorabilia for auction (not knowing that she had a heart condition)-- and they connected her with the larger organization to help her find the right doctors and obtain a second opinion. "This last year has been..." She exhales.

"I have a doctor who is 50/50 on surgery. I might be able to just continue to be cautious," she says hopefully. This is great news for Laura. "I'm putting my energy and effort into the release of this album, hoping to make a difference and a change for people out there and make them more aware of their health."

Last month, Laura shared her story on Capitol Hill and urged Congress to make medical research a priority. This commendable trip led people to compare her to Elle Woods, who goes to Capitol Hill, too, to advance animal rights. The similarities are certainly there --both are smart, perky, kindhearted women on a mission to change the world. **ML**