



# Carrie Preston

The *Claws* actress talks about Season Three, directing, and marriage

WORD BY VANESSA PASCALE

Carrie Preston and I are seated in the lobby of The Nomad Hotel in New York City. The diminutive, Emmy Award-winning actress is the picture of glamour in her short black dress, stunning chandelier earrings, and that killer manicure (she's attending an event here after our interview). "I live here [NYC], but we shoot [*Claws*] in New Orleans and I'm there 6 months out of the year now for the last three years," says Carrie, who is right at home in the south, since she was born and raised in Macon, Georgia.

PHOTO CREDIT: VINCE TRUPSIN

## What would fans be surprised to find out about you?

“Let’s see. [She asks her publicist, who replies, ‘You’re the opposite of all your characters.’] This is true. I’m very together, down-to-earth, not flighty. I’m not crazy. I’m not emotionally unstable. Certainly not a con artist. I play a lot of histrionic characters. I don’t know what that says about me because I’m kinda drama-free.” Well, that’s the reason to play them. “I guess so, I get to go there in a safe way and come back to me.”

*Claws* is a TNT drama that follows five female manicurists working in a West Florida strip mall nail salon. Polly Marks (Carrie’s character) and her fellow co-workers (portrayed by actresses Niecy Nash, Judy Reyes, Jenn Lyon, and Karrueche Tran) don’t just do nails — they’re involved in organized crime, fraternize with the Dixie Mafia, launder money... “So, they’re up to a lot of things that are usually reserved for men and Hollywood... It’s fun to be a part of a show that’s about a bunch of badass women taking charge.”

As soon as *Claws*’ pilot script came Carrie’s way, she knew it was something special. “It was written by Elliot Lawrence... It had been in development at HBO for a long while and then they never made it. Everybody in Hollywood knew of this script. TNT snatched it and let him develop it into a drama. When I read it, I thought: *Here’s an opportunity to do something really interesting, in a show that I think people are going to watch.* I rolled the dice and luckily, it came up.” The fact that women are the epicenter of this show really appeals to Carrie. “We have a real bond — all of us. The actors get along really well. We’re very diverse, not only in race, but in size, shape, and personalities and somehow the alchemy of that really gelled the minute we met and it’s just really gotten stronger over the three seasons.”

So, what can viewers expect when Season Three of *Claws* returns on June 9th? Polly — the identity thief who steals people’s credit cards and their personalities— gets a love interest and “very much like the first two seasons, is going to assume a new persona.” For Carrie, portraying Polly is like playing ten different parts in one role; it’s her favorite part about playing Polly. “She takes it on and off just like you would a hat. She’s very manipulative that way. I’ll come into the set and I’ll say to the writers, to the director, ‘Hey, I’m going to do a persona here.’ And they go, ‘OK.’” She laughs. “And they kinda just give me carte blanche. It’s really an honor that they would trust me with that.”

Season Three of *Claws* presented Carrie with another exciting undertaking —the opportunity to direct episode eight. Carrie has directed films, features, docs, shorts, and web series for fifteen years now, but this was her first time directing an episode for television and her first time acting in something she’s directing. “I felt really blessed that they trusted me with it. The crew really brought their A-game ‘cause they

wanted to do well for me, same for the cast. It was an extraordinary experience.”

Carrie —who has over 70 acting credits under her belt, including acclaimed films like, *My Best Friend’s Wedding*, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, and *Doubt*— just finished up filming, *Avalanche*. “I read that script and felt like the writer [Bastian Günther] wrote it for me, even though he’d never met me and didn’t know my work. Have you ever heard of these competitions called Hands on a Hardbody? Contestants will sign up and they put their hands on the car...and the last person to have their hands on the car, wins the truck. Well, if that’s not a metaphor for capitalism in our country. Materialism... I play this character who is in charge of the competition. I really connected with her, I think, ‘cause I kinda feel like I knew her ‘cause of where I grew up. Doing it, I went to some dark places and connected with it emotionally.”

Over the last thirty years, Carrie has transformed into dozens of characters, but there are only three that she holds closest to her heart: Arlene (*True Blood*), Elsbeth (*The Good Wife*), and Polly (*Claws*). “When people come up to me and say, ‘I love you on the show,’ I kinda can sorta profile them and guess which one they’re talking about. Sometimes I’m right, sometimes I’m wrong. Sometimes they know all three.” Landing the role of Arlene in HBO’s *True Blood* was a big deal for Carrie as she had previously done around-eight pilots that didn’t go anywhere. “To be a part of something that was a cultural phenomenon, that was something I hadn’t experienced before. But also just to play this complicated character that got a really great journey... To be able to play somebody that stretches in that way, plus, she’s the comedic relief...that’s what you want as an actor.”

And then there’s *The Good Wife*’s Elsbeth, which Carrie received two Primetime Emmy Award nominations for and won once. “That

was a great role and they did do a spin-off called *The Good Fight*, and I’ve done a little bit on that.” Carrie is always eager to reprise the role of Elsbeth when her schedule permits, even if it is just once a year. “She’s very mercurial, but she’s a genius. And you kinda think she doesn’t know what she’s doing because she’s talking to you while she’s checking out your blouse, she’s solving the case, then she gets a phone call, she texts, then will compliment you on your nail polish —all within 5 seconds.”

When Carrie isn’t acting, she likes to slip on her director’s hat. This August and September, Carrie is directing the play, *BUZZ* at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. *BUZZ* playwright Susan Ferrara and Carrie have been developing this play for years, and now, it’s finally ready for its debut. The play is about director Mary Ann ‘Buzz’ Goodbody, who in the 1970s was only one of three female directors in all of the U.K. “She kept hitting the glass ceiling because she was a woman in a man’s world, which is a very topical thing right now. Her production of *Hamlet*, starring a then unknown Ben Kingsley, became the *Hamlet* of their generation... It’s very meta, and it’s like a love letter to theater. And the fun story about this is that 25 years ago, I was at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in a production of *Hamlet*, and that’s where I met my husband. So there’s a bit of a full circle that’s happening... Yeah, it was meant to be, so I’m excited about that. And because Mary Ann directed in these alternative spaces, I’m going to be directing *BUZZ* in their scene shop, which is a space they’ve never used,” she beams.

Carrie’s husband, actor Michael Emerson, was supposed to be in *BUZZ*, but his pilot was picked up by CBS, so that might not be possible now. “But I’m hoping that he will ‘cause he’s been working with me in the workshops along the way.” The happy couple have been married since 1998 and are always looking for ways to work

together. Both have had cameos on each other’s shows and Carrie has directed Michael in some of her projects. Carrie even played Grace Hendricks, the love of Michael’s character’s life, on his CBS show, *Person of Interest*. “That was not a stretch,” Carrie laughs. While Carrie and Michael love working together, they don’t really talk show business with one another. “We don’t give each other feedback on each other’s work —unless you ask for it. But it’s sorta understood that we don’t really help each other with auditions; we kinda keep that separate. I think it’s healthy that way. We’ve been together 25 years, so something must be working,” she laughs.

So, what’s the secret to a lasting relationship? “I think it’s respect for the other person. Not trying to change the other person. Acceptance, compromise. Absence really does make the heart grow fonder and we’re apart from each other a lot for work, so when we’re together we really do try to relish that and enjoy it because we know that its limited and one of us is going to have to go off and have to do another job, so logistically it can be complicated. We’re good life partners —romance, of course— but just the logistics of life. We have a really good partnership.” You look like you have a very sweet relationship; I saw all your pictures on Instagram. “We get along. Yeah, I think a lot of it might just be luck.” And fate? “Yeah, and fate. Met the right person at the right time and knowing it.”

The two are crazy about their almost-ten-years-old, rescue dog, Chumley. “We never wanted to have kids, but we really like having a dog. We love sharing the responsibility of it. He’s a great dog for us, ‘cause he’s portable. He goes under the seat in front of you and you don’t even know he’s on the plane, he’s so quiet.” Sometimes Chumley joins Carrie on set. “I’ll take him to the trailer. I just don’t like to leave him in a strange place. But everyone loves it when I bring him. He’ll just sit in my lap when I get my hair and makeup done. He’s a good boy. Both my boys are good boys —my husband and my dog,” she laughs. **ML**

Don’t miss *Claws* on TNT Sundays at 9/8c. Keep up with Carrie by visiting: [carriepreston.com](http://carriepreston.com) and follow her on Instagram, Twitter: @CarriePreston and Facebook: OfficialCarriePreston