



The Magical Life *of* Toni Collette

THE ACCLAIMED
AUSSIE ACTRESS ON
HER THREE BUSY
DECADES IN SHOWBIZ,
LIFE AS A MOM AND
WHY SHE HAS NO
PROBLEM WITH AGING
By **GILLIAN TELLING**

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She has played nearly 100 different characters onscreen in her 33-year career—but Australian actress Toni Collette has been able to use her native accent only a handful of times. “I wish I could do more roles at home, but the industry’s not as big in Australia,” she says. So whether she’s starring in blockbuster films like 2018’s *Hereditary* or on prestigious TV dramas like HBO Max’s *The Staircase*, she plays, yep, American. “I don’t even have to think about it,” she says of slipping into her perfected Yankee twang. “It just comes out. I also don’t think about driving on the right side of the road even though we drive on the left side. It’s so strange!”

In her latest series, *The Power* (now streaming on Prime Video), the supremely versatile actress, 50, plays another American, this time

‘I just want to bring joy to myself and to others. And I’m not above any kind of silliness’

—TONI COLLETTE

the mayor of Seattle and mom to daughter Jos (Auli’i Cravalho), one of many teenage girls who develop the ability to produce electricity from their hands. Collette says the series, based on the bestselling novel by Naomi Alderman, delivers a powerful message of what the world might look like if women didn’t carry an inherent fear that they could easily be harmed.

“It’s so incredibly moving to see the stories of these girls, all from different backgrounds, finding this power within themselves, which has evolved out of necessity from living in a patriarchal world,” says the mom of two, daughter Sage, 15, and son Arlo, 12. It’s something she can relate to. “Sadly fear is part of what it is to be female,” she says. “I’m a big walker and spend a lot of time jet-lagged in new places. I’d love to go out at 3 in the morning and have a walk under the stars—it would make me so happy—but you can’t do it. You just can’t.” She adds, “To lose that fear is a big, beautiful fantastical idea that hopefully can come into our reality. I think we all deserve to be free in our lives.”



Collette’s own superpower? The ability to play any role—regardless of accent, class or era—and bring her signature depth to characters who are complex yet relatable. “She is a master of her craft,” says her *The Power* costar John Leguizamo. “Working with her and discovering she is a truly kind and generous team player was so heartwarming.” Growing up in Sydney with her two siblings and her parents (dad Bob was a truck driver, mom Judy a customer service representative), she had zero showbiz connections but fell in love with musical theater. She left school early to pursue acting and at 18 landed a role in *The Efficiency Expert* alongside Anthony Hopkins and Russell Crowe. Then 1994’s *Muriel’s Wedding*, in which she played a depressed twen-

An Adaptable SCREEN QUEEN



Muriel’s Wedding (1994)

“That character is so beautiful,” says Collette (with Daniel Lapaine).



The Sixth Sense (1999)

Collette earned an Oscar nod for playing Haley Joel Osment’s mom in the psychological thriller.



United States of Tara (2009-2011)

She won an Emmy as a mom with dissociative identity disorder on the Showtime series.



The Staircase (2022)

Colin Firth starred opposite Collette in this true-crime-based HBO Max limited series.



tysomething who thought getting married would fix her problems, ignited her career. Soon she was starring in everything from indie dramas to horror films, comedies and period pieces, and earned an Oscar nomination for 1999's *The Sixth Sense*. "*Muriel's Wedding* was the greatest gift of my life," she says. "It gave me a career that I never could have envisioned. People still talk to me about that film. It was the saddest funny movie ever."

In the upcoming *Mafia Mamma* she plays an unassuming middle-aged mom who becomes the head of an Italian crime family. "How I work is just about instinct," she says of choosing her roles. "I just listen to my gut. It's a very clear yes or no." *Mafia Mamma* was a no-brainer. "We shot in Rome last May and June, and it was the happiest shoot of my life," she says. "Italy has always been one of my favorite countries, and I feel so much joy there. I feel like I'm meant to be there.... Maybe I lived a past life there, but life just makes sense for me in Italy."

Of course she's not retiring under the Tuscan sun anytime soon—at least not until her children finish school in Sydney. "I love traveling and am very accustomed to this nomadic lifestyle, but I do need to have a home base," she says. "And Sydney is where my family and friends are." When she's not on-set, she relishes time off with her kids. "Sage just really lives up to her name," she says of her daughter. "She's so self-possessed and has such an awareness. And my gorgeous son Arlo, he's

amazing in the way he thinks and expresses himself. I'm completely in love with both of my children. They're just incredible people on their own."

Collette made headlines last December when she confirmed that she and their dad, musician Dave Galafassi, were divorcing after 20 years of marriage, but the actress says she now feels nothing but peace. And she embraced turning 50 last November. "I wasn't fussed about the number," she says. "I know some people are, but I think accumulatively over time I've gotten to know myself, accept myself and love myself, and all of those things further enrich your life. The more you nurture that internal world, the richer your experience is with engaging in the external world. It just makes everything deeper and more beautiful."

And it's not like her career is slowing down. "I know from the outside it seems like I never stop working, but I live a very balanced life," she says with a laugh. "But I do keep getting offered jobs where there's some sort of correlation in terms of what I need to learn as a life lesson. I don't think these things happen by accident, which is just so magical and magnificent. I'm so grateful for all the experiences I've had, and I'm now in a position where I can really see life clearly. And life is still happening!" ●

POTENT New ROLES



The Power

"It was a really intense shooting schedule," Collette says of the Prime Video sci-fi show about (literally) empowering women. "But it was ultimately so satisfying."



Mafia Mamma

"It's so hilarious," says Collette, who stars with Monica Bellucci in the comedy (in theaters April 14) about a woman who becomes an Italian crime boss after her grandfather dies.

