

# 'Children are a great leveller'

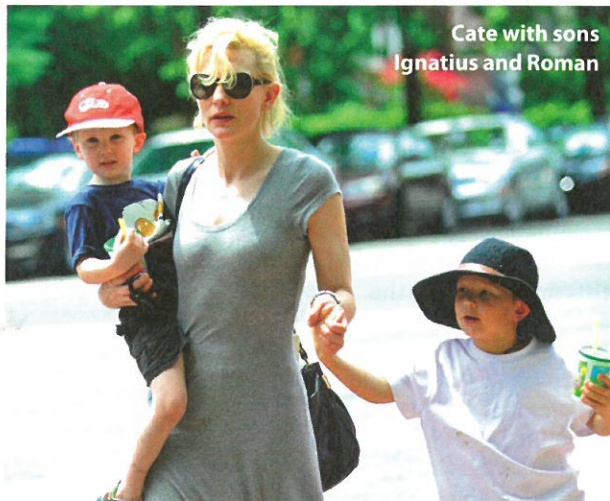
Cate Blanchett has five Oscar nominations and her latest project promises to bring a sixth. But, as she tells Susan Griffin, there's nothing like family to keep you grounded

**W**hen Cate Blanchett first met her husband, the writer Andrew Upton, she apparently thought him arrogant and he thought her aloof. They then bonded over a late-night game of poker and married the following year. It's a fine example of preconceived impressions being proved wrong.

Just as Upton did, it would be easy to pigeonhole Blanchett as an ice maiden. Perhaps it's her ethereal beauty - all porcelain skin, pale blue eyes and blonde hair - or the cool elegance she exudes, whether wearing the latest couture on the red carpet or dominating the big screen. So her reaction when asked who her black polka-dot dress is by, comes as a surprise.

'Oh, it's Givenchy,' she says. 'It unzips down the front, so it's very good for a quickie. Not that that will be happening to me today.'

In fact, it's soon evident that Blanchett isn't one for pretensions. She talks eloquently about her work, with the confidence and breadth of knowledge of someone who's devoted a large portion of her life to the theatre. It's where she began her career, and she's currently co-artistic director and co-CEO of the Syd-



Cate with sons Ignatius and Roman

ney Theatre Company with her husband, a role they step down from at the end of this year.

But she's also found the time to make much-loved films, such as *Robin Hood*, *Hanna* and *The Hobbit* series. Her latest role, for which she is already being tipped for an Oscar, is in the critically acclaimed *Blue Jasmine*, written and directed by Woody Allen, a man who's created many indelible female characters. The film has had rave reviews, with many critics naming it the picture of the year. Blanchett plays Jasmine (or Jeanette, as she was born).

'She was a girl who changed her name at school, so she already had a romanticised version of herself,' she says.

The film introduces the New York socialite shortly after she's suffered a breakdown, triggered by the cataclysmic collapse of her marriage to wealthy financier Hal (Alec Baldwin). Until that point, Jasmine's entire identity was wrapped around being an elegant, immaculate and culturally sophisticated woman living the Manhattan high life. Now that's over, her mental and emotional state is rapidly veering off course.

'I was terrified and excited about accepting the role,' she adds. 'It was such an incredible opportunity - so complicated - and there was so much to do, so many avenues to explore; her physical, as well as mental, state.'

'I mean what happens when you take [anti-depressant] Xanax and alcohol?' she says, laughing. 'I had a little bit of vodka but I didn't do the Xanax!'

Jasmine's freefall isn't dissimilar to that of Blanche DuBois' in Tennessee Williams's classic *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It's a comparison that hasn't escaped Blanchett, who has also portrayed Blanche on stage. 'The first time I read the script, I was sitting at the kitchen bench and saying to my husband, "Oh, I wonder if Woody saw me [in it]". He hadn't and he never mentioned it, but then Woody's sensibility as a writer is entirely different to Tennessee Williams's. >

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In her role as Jasmine in Woody Allen's new film