

# Days

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# Come

To act is to create a world of your own, to embody a story. It can give audiences a brief distraction from reality – or it can help bring real-world issues into sharp focus.

In the era of #MeToo, women's stories are being set free, and actresses have found themselves front and centre of a debate about professional and personal equality for all women.

Are we entering a more empowered era, where women can feel safe to speak up? If they speak, can they trust that they will be understood? Or does everything feel more confusing than ever before? Is the battle for equality only just beginning?

Seven talents tell us how it feels to break into the industry at a time when the rulebook for being a successful female performer is being torn up – and about the changes they want to see, both on and off the screen.



# Debbie Korley

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Debbie performs as a member of The Royal Shakespeare Company and is a returning cast member of BBC radio drama Home Front.

**There's so much more conversation now about equality in the acting industry.**

There is a huge conversation. I'm part of the 50/50 Movement [to create gender parity] and a lot of women are championing it. These huge actors, like Olivia Colman and Denise Gough, are coming together and talking about the pay discrepancy between women and men. And now The Act for Change Project has come through, and so diversity is really improving.

**Is it getting better for older actresses?**

I think so. We've still got a long way to go. Actors who get to motherhood, and their forties... There's so many roles for men—like, so many—within that bracket, but for women, it's really difficult. I feel for a lot of my colleagues who are like, 'Oh, I've only had one audition all year.' We really need to work on that ratio. I just want stuff for women that's interesting, that will change peoples' perceptions.

**You mentioned it was only two years ago that you got the role of Regan [in *King Lear*]. What has kept you going?**

This business can be really, really difficult and lonely. I've always done a lot of work with young people, and it's important for me to stay in the business because being a woman of colour, when you go into a drama school, they see me and go 'oh—it's somebody not of the norm.'

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I feel like I'm somebody who may influence people and their careers, and also change peoples' perceptions about the industry. I love being an actor, but I also like being a spokesperson. I like passing on my experiences to people coming through. People who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, or young people in foster care who can't look people in the eye...



Opposite:  
Dress MOLLY GODDARD  
Tights JONATHAN ASTON

This page:  
Dress STELLA MCCARTNEY  
Beret EUGENIA KIM



# Aiysha Hart



*This page:*  
Top and skirt  
CHRISTOPHER  
KANE

*Opposite:*  
Dress ERDEM  
Boots STUART  
WEITZMAN



*Aiysha plays opposite Keira Knightley in upcoming historical drama Colette, about the life of the French novelist, actress and feminist Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette.*

**Women have always written, but do you think there's more interest in getting work by women financed and off the ground?**

Absolutely, and I think for a long time we haven't had enough female viewpoints in the arts. It's still rare to see stories told by women, but it's becoming more common. I think people are more open to hearing women's stories now, because they're interesting.

**Post-Weinstein is the door opening for more work to be made by women?**

I think all these issues are things that producers and writers and directors want to explore more. The work has to come from women. I want to see women as the authors. We need to be making work by women that's personal and autobiographical. We need more stories by women from different parts of the world, too. If you don't see actresses like you growing up, you don't think it's a possibility. It's the same with women of colour—I didn't see anyone like me growing up. There were no Arab actresses and it's still very rare. I know a few in the industry now and we're all very supportive of each other.

**Which modern women's voices do you particularly admire?**

I love Lena Dunham. I think Abi Morgan is amazing, and Phoebe Waller-Bridge is making waves and opening the door for more women. There's a strong, younger generation of women telling stories that haven't been heard before, and that's really exciting.

**You're of British-Saudi heritage—how much time did you spend in both countries growing up?**

I spent a very small amount of my childhood in Saudi, until I was six. I love London. I'm a city girl. I love culture and museums and art and big sprawling metropolises.



# Ellise Chappell

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Ellise stars in the BBC's *Poldark* and has just completed filming a musical by Richard Curtis and Danny Boyle.

## What are you up to now, Ellise?

A new season of *Poldark* is coming out, so I'm working on that—promotion, going to screenings and things like that. I'm also working on a film at the moment. I'm fundraising too, because I'm going on a voyage in July. It's with this non-profit called eXXpedition. They take all-female expeditions to different parts of the world to test and sample the ocean water for plastic pollution and toxins. The whole voyage is four weeks but I'll just be joining for a week. We're doing everything—sailing the boat, cleaning it, cooking, helping with the experiments, testing the water with scientists and academics.

## Has acting become more politicised recently?

Yes. There's so much more conversation. I think if you're talking about issues and then doing small actions to counteract them, that's when things really start to change. It's the small things.

## Is acting quite an isolating industry? People are always in competition for roles and women tend to get set against each other. Is it doable?

Totally. I have some amazing female friends. Obviously, you want to win roles. You want to work and do what you love, but there's also a need for support, and I've found so many relationships through my job. I mean, *Poldark* was one of my first big jobs. I kind of came into it like a deer in the headlights and [lead actress] Eleanor Tomlinson was incredible. She was always there to give me advice whenever I needed it.

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With acting, you become so close in quite a short period of time. You create a bond because you're spending so much time with each other.



Opposite:  
All clothing and  
shoes GUCCI

This page:  
Dress ISA ARFEN



# Sarah Greene



Opposite:  
Dress ORLA KIELY  
Tights and shoes CHANEL

This page:  
Dress TORY BURCH



Tony-award nominated Sarah is known for her stage roles across Broadway and the West End, and will next be on screen in Irish film drama *Rosie*.

**Are things shifting when it comes to better roles for women on stage? Or is it slow progress?**

It's always slow, isn't it? There are just better parts out there for men. People write for men better than they do for women. That's why *The Ferryman* was ground-breaking, in that all the women in that play have fantastic roles. I took over from [actress] Laura Donnelly when she became pregnant. It's her part and a role that I play for her. It is quite rare to get a part like that. Hopefully times are changing.

**Has the playing field changed for women since your own start in the business? Is it a safer world for a woman starting now?**

The past few months have changed how people conduct themselves in the business. Accountability is in place. People are no longer afraid to speak up, and as a female actor, I feel guarded and galvanised because of the conversations that have taken place, all thanks to the brave women and men who have come forward. We are essentially solo in our careers, but there's a stronger sense of community now.

**Who holds the power in the film and TV industry right now? Do you think the balance is shifting towards women and people who haven't always held positions of power?**

I think it's naturally going to shift after all these conversations. *Rosie* was spearheaded by two brilliant female producers. I think we will see a lot more of that in the future.

**What would make the biggest difference in terms of women getting paid more for their work in film and on stage?**

Transparency is a good starting point... it's the beginning of equality. If we can be honest and open on the ground, on set, we can help each other to get better deals.



# Sorcha Groundsell

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Sorcha stars in upcoming Netflix sci-fi series *The Innocents*, as a teenager in the midst of an unconventional romance.

Violet Book

**Do you think films representing a broad spectrum of girls are being created?**

I definitely think it's changing. That's more to do with the women who are currently in the industry than the industry itself, though. Women are creating their own stuff, there's more encouragement, and these women are saying to younger actresses, 'What is it you want to see? What is it you want to play? We'll make it.'

**Who are these people?**

Women like Greta Gerwig, for example. She's not just waiting for the industry to change on its own, she's actually participating and forcing that change. Jessica Chastain and her production company, too. It just proves that there is the capacity for change.

**I was on YouTube last night and I saw a monologue you did from *Good Will Hunting*. I loved it, I thought it was so good.**

Oh my god, yeah. That's actually one of the kind of things I'm talking about. My best friend made this web series where she flipped the genders of famous monologues.

**Because a monologue in a film is always a pivotal moment that ties everything together. Glenda Jackson said recently that women are rarely the narrative engine of anything. I was like, oh, that's so true.**

Exactly, women aren't allowed to be the conclusion to anything. They're very often just sort of reactive rather than active.

**God forbid a woman drive the narrative of the film.**

I've gotten into a lot of arguments with people saying, 'Oh you know, like, does that just mean you want more, like, films about women?' But it's not even necessarily about that. Basically, the more women you see on screen, the more ways into a story you have.



Opposite:  
Dress CECILIE BAHNSEN

This page:  
Dress ALEXA CHUNG

Hair: Ben Talbot at *The Wall Group*, Make-up: Kay Montano at *The Wall Group*, Manicure: Sophia Stylianou at *Frank Agency*, Set Design and Props: Emma Larsson-Revitt, Photography Assistants: Berit von Enoch and Tom Frimley, Fashion Assistant: Sophia Lazzari, Hair Assistant: Christopher Gatt



# Tallulah Haddon



***The Violet Book* is an ongoing conversation about femininity, something, it seems, you delve into in your own cabaret and drag work. What expectations, ideals and ideas about femininity do you explore?**

I play with the idea of femininity—almost clowning or overdoing femininity as commentary on it. When I dress in a feminine way, I over-line my lips and wear a wig. I'm constantly drawing femininity out as much as it can possibly be, in response to the incessant patriarchal gaze. I present ideas of the abject, hand in hand with femininity, as a funny and dark juxtaposition.

**What do you think needs to happen to make women feel safe and supported and empowered on set?**

There needs to be structural change, from the top down. For too long the onus has been on the individual. We also vitally need improvement in the way the media represents women, POC, disabled, queer and trans people. Without visibility and representation there will never be any progress and we'll just continue to be stagnate in a climate of prejudice and hatred.

**There's been a lot of controversy around casting decisions recently—what needs to change there? Does it come down to how much money the people who are being cast can bring in?**

The issue behind it is often money. I think producers aren't willing to invest in unknown talent. Ultimately, there's no excuse; ignorant casting will make films look dated! 'Queer' and 'female-led' is very trendy now, but I think what is important is for the industry not just to monetise on marginalised groups, but to actually involve those groups in telling their own story. They're missing out. Nothing about us, without us.

Tallulah stars in Netflix series *Kiss Me First* as a girl exploring loneliness, connection and identity through her online relationships.

Opposite:  
Jumper ALEXANDER  
MCQUEEN

This page:  
Dress PRADA