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LOVE BITES

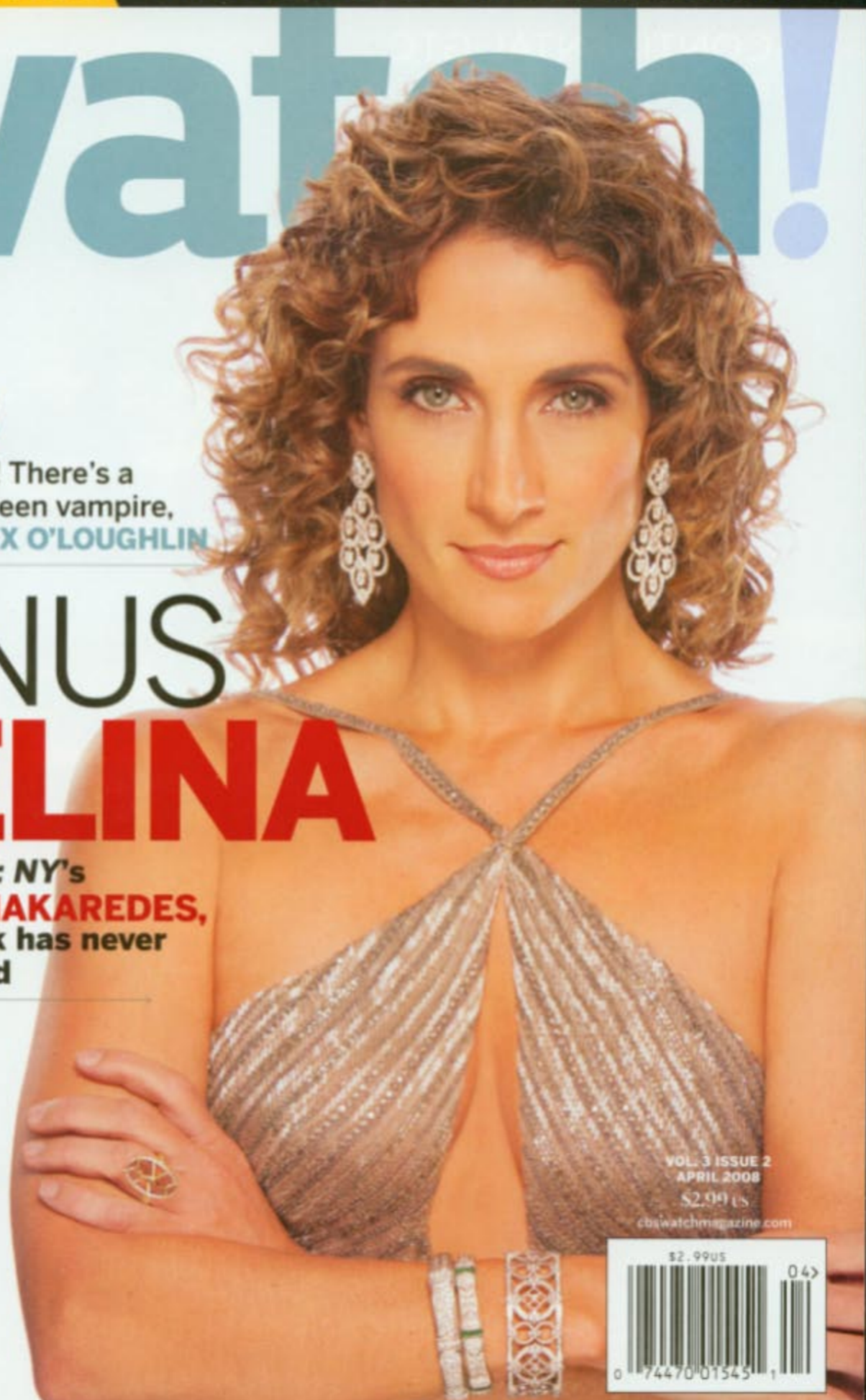
Look out, ladies! There's a HOT, new on-screen vampire, *Moonlight's* **ALEX O'LOUGHLIN**

VENUS MELINA

Thanks to *CSI: NY's* **MELINA KANAKAREDES**, detective work has never looked so good

Star Style!

From LASHES to LIPSTICK, makeup pros share their secrets



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TAWK this Way

Some of your favorite television actors are hiding something ... their British accents



In *Cane*, Polly Walker plays a Southern vixen. Marianne Jean-Baptiste is a native-New Yorker FBI agent in *Without a Trace*. And Lennie James' *Jericho* character, Hawkins, is a Missourian struggling to survive in postapocalyptic Kansas. But at the end of the day, when these three are done drawling and tawking like the Americans they play, each reverts to his or her proper English existence.

For the bumper crop of Brits now popping up on American TV, there's an obvious extra challenge: to nail not just the words but also the accent in which they are said. So just how does an English(wo)man in New York convince us she's from the U.S.? It's a skill that you've either got or you don't, theorizes Jean-Baptiste. Oscar-nominated for her very "British-speaking" role in *Secrets and Lies*, Jean-Baptiste had already played American in several other films pre-*Trace*. Her background in music also has been helpful, she adds. "Because of that, I probably analyze sound and rhythm in a different way."

For James, the city of London and its many tongues proved to be the perfect training ground for a young actor. "There are an immense number of accents in Britain," James says. "Different forms of Scottish, of Welsh, of Irish. Growing up in the U.K., you try them all out."

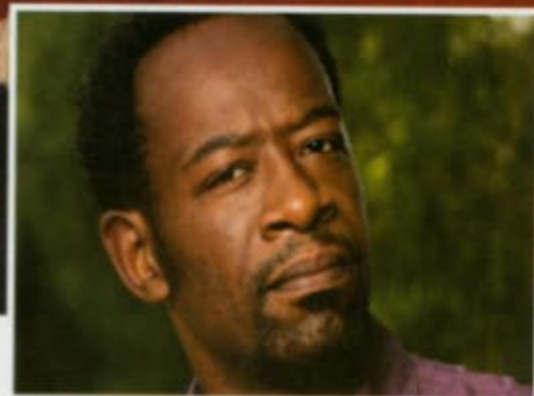
James also credits some of his ability to the ubiquity of American pop culture. A fan of Motown music, he learned to sing mainly with an American accent. And since many of the most popular U.S. shows air on English television, "I could have my TV on and be watching American shows 24/7," he says. "I would hazard a guess that I was hearing the variety of American accents almost as much as someone living in America."

FROM THE QUEEN'S ENGLISH TO QUEENS-SPEAK

Perhaps that immersion is why British actors seem to have an easier time assaying American identities than vice versa. But as accent coach Sarah Boes explains, an actor can take on any other accent simply by doing homework in linguistics. An actress herself, Boes had not always been successful in disguising her Canadian cadences upon first moving to Los Angeles. Eventually, she learned the International Phonetic Alphabet method. As Boes explains, by first learning the most vanilla of vernaculars—a neutral, Midwesternish speech pattern called Standard American—an actor can downplay her own regional identity.

James worked with coach Sean Nelson to layer on the regional St. Louis sounds that he uncovered while researching what he presumed to be Hawkins' background. Walker, too, began prepping for *Cane* months before shooting the pilot, learning how to go from southern England to Southern belle. "I learned how to say TAY-un and FAY-un and ahl THAY-ut," Walker demonstrates. "But actually," she adds, "[soon after the pilot], they decided they want me to be more generic American, because I'm too Southern. But because I've been studying all this time, it keeps on creeping back in."

Jean-Baptiste didn't use a coach, but she does tout the usefulness of the phonetics classes she took at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts back home. To envision Vivian Johnson, the actress says she took strolls through the character's home borough of Queens, on the lookout for idioms, speech patterns and even physical movements she could incorporate. "There's a looseness among Americans that British people don't have," she says.



From left: Not-so-native New Yorker, *Without a Trace*'s Marianne Jean-Baptiste; Brit turned Southern vixen, *Cane*'s Polly Walker; and an Englishman in Missouri, *Jericho*'s Lennie James.

'R' WE AMERICAN YET?

Walker says that her young children—thrilled to be temporarily transplanted from their Victorian home in London to the exotic land of swimming pools, hummingbirds and *Hannah Montana*—decided early on that “Mum, as soon as I get there, I’m going to speak American.” But they add in too many R’s,” Walker says, laughing.

Indeed, Boes notes, the American “R” sound is one of the trickiest for a Brit to master and is often the dead giveaway. In trying to harden the letter to American standards, an Englishman may overcompensate by overpronouncing it.

And Jean-Baptiste says she, too, has become accustomed to paying special attention to her R’s—only to have trouble with a few other words. “Like in England the word is ‘rec-ORD,’ but you say ‘REC-urd.’ Or remembering to pronounce the ‘c’ in ‘schedule.’”

James says that upon receiving each new script, he takes one pass at it just to flag words that are potential trouble spots—a method Boes recommends. “I advise actors to read the whole thing aloud first in their own dialect,” she says, “and then again in Standard American, jotting down any phonetic marks they need. At that point they can mark any regional dialect changes on top of that.”

TO BE AMERICAN, OR NOT TO BE?

There are extra pressures on British actors playing American—and extra decisions to be made, too. For instance, is it better for a British actor to stay “American” all day while hanging around the set? Both James and Jean-Baptiste say they don’t bother. For one thing, James notes, no one else remains in character during downtime. Jean-Baptiste says she’ll

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even switch back and forth within the space of a sentence—especially when screaming out a British expletive upon blowing a line. “The crew just falls apart laughing,” she says.

How any foreign-born actor chooses to handle an audition is “a very individual call,” says Peter Golden, CBS’ executive vice president of talent and casting. Similarly, he notes, as early as the audition process, he or she has to make the choice: Do I let them know I’m not American? “An actor who comes in the door with an English accent does run the risk of leaving that sound in your mind,” Golden says. “And even if they read the scene convincingly, you’re going to be looking for the English.” But ultimately, he advises actors to “come in with whatever’s honest about you.”

“It just comes down to this,” says Golden. “If you’re believing that this is a living, breathing person, saying these words for the first time, and you’re not thinking, ‘What accent is that?’ then these actors are doing something very right. It’s a very difficult thing to do, but the good ones make it look easy.”