

STRAIGHT-A'S AND THE DORA CRAZE

From walking the red carpet at the Oscars to voicing the sweetheart of kids' TV, this child star is unstoppable. Can you say Fátima Ptacek?

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Photo by Valeria Misubata



Fátima Ptacek has a thing for shorts. But not the kind we've all been dying to wear for the past six months.

"I feel like short films don't get enough recognition," says the 13-year-old actress, who's the bubbly belle behind the voice of Dora the Explorer. She's just landed in Toronto after a buzzing weekend at the Kids' Choice Awards (her nails are still lacquered in a custom lime-green-and-orange Nickelodeon-themed manicure). We're now sitting in the humble headquarters of the Vaughan Film Festival, an event she avidly supports — and that is set to kick off mere hours after our interview.

"It's great to have a festival like the VFF that celebrates short films, and I'm proud to be a part of it," continues Ptacek. Her gung-ho attitude toward the subject stems from her own roots in smaller-scale films, having starred in the Academy Award-winning short *Curfew*. Acting next to Shawn Christensen and Emmy Rossum, Ptacek's role called her

into the school uniform shoes of Sophia — an 11-going-on-30-year-old who teaches her estranged, troubled uncle a thing or two about life.

While Sophia and the real-life Ptacek are two very different girls (Ptacek seems to smile a lot more), that's one thing the actress has in common with her character: she's just the right amount of kid and grown-up, drinking in the world with excited, wide eyes while also carrying a maturity that soars far ahead of her 13 years. In other words, she's the youngster you want yours to look up to.

"Being a role model is probably the best feeling in the world," she says. "I know that people are watching [me], but not in a way that's bothersome — it's because they admire me and really care about what I do. It fuels my actions and makes me want to be a better person, because I couldn't live with letting my fans down by doing something irresponsible."

Yes, Fátima fans can rest easy. The only trouble this star ever seems to get

into is for staying up too late reading novels and screenplays under the covers ("I just can't put them down, they're too good!"), and she's a straight-A student (which is a must, or else she'll lose her acting privileges).

"I have great parents who keep me on track," says Ptacek, who's also a competitive gymnast. "I'm so lucky to have the family and friends that I have. I think that's an important thing in this business, constantly surrounding yourself with people that are supportive and understanding."

So far, 2014 is unravelling quickly for Ptacek, who's excited to continue her time in the recording studio as she gets started on *Dora and Friends: Into the City*, a spinoff dedicated to Dora-loving kids who've outgrown their preschool years. And with oodles of auditions on her agenda, Ptacek plans to explore all that showbiz has to offer.

Despite her on-camera malleability, there's one thing Ptacek will never act: her age.

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