

Quirky, Nerdy and Brilliant: The Alexandra Cipolla story



Bloody good antibodies.

As far as expressions of self goes, you could do worse than Rhode Island. From supporting the creative arts in all their myriad splendors to providing global perspectives at world class universities, Rhody is a haven for those who want to be themselves — and be accepted — on an international stage. Many of our citizens embody this distinctly Rhode Island flavor, but if there was to be one who speaks for us all, local actor, comic and in-vivo antibody biologist **Alexandra Cipolla** might just be the name on the ticket. Amadeus Finlay caught up with this lover of Halloween and all things weird and wonderful as she prepares to celebrate the year's spookiest event.

Amadeus Finlay (Motif): In-vivo antibody discovery and theatrical performance ... two very different pursuits, yet you successfully weave them together. Tell us a little about your distinct worlds, and how they overlap to influence your personality and creative verve.

Alexandra Cipolla: Working in two completely different fields may seem bizarre, but it feels completely natural to me. It is almost as if I am two different halves put together. I have my nerdy science side, and I also have my artistic creative side. I have always been quirky and never really felt like I fit in anywhere, so it makes complete sense to me how I gravitate toward two unique industries. There is a point where I feel like each pursuit complements the other. There are times when being a performer has made me a better public speaker, and times when my creativity has assisted me in the lab.

AF: What has been your biggest challenge in each?

AC: The biggest challenge in both fields is balance. To be able to balance a creative endeavor while maintaining my professional career is quite difficult. I am a mother as well, so trying to weave so many intricate schedules together can be very tough. I have tried at times to focus on each field individually, but always find that I feel like I am missing part of my self. When I was taking time off from science to start a family, I missed it. And when my career gets too busy for me to create and perform, it feels like a

piece of me is missing. I need both in my life and getting it all to fit together is the most challenging thing of all.



With Michael Thunder in Severed

AF: Your IMDb profile says that you enjoy “making waves...” Can you define what that means for you?

AC: “Making waves” refers to the passion inside of me and how it manifests. If I set my mind to something, I can do it. I can recall many times in my life when I was told that I would not succeed at certain things. It started with sports when I was young. I joined the track team and asked what the longest race was because I craved what was most difficult. In high school, I wanted to play soccer, but did not know how. I took a book out of the library and taught myself. An advisor in college saw me struggling in a class and told me I would not succeed in science and to change my major. Yet here I am, a scientist. It is also what propelled me as a self-proclaimed tomboy to throw myself into the world of pageants and modeling. I love experiencing new and different things. Some individuals feel that after a certain age people need to settle down. That is not me. I will always be “making waves” no matter how old I am.

AF: It was initially improv and the thrill of hearing an audience laughing that turned your heart toward performance. Do you still do the comedy work?

AC: I do. Comedy can be exciting and wonderful. A large portion of my work has been horror, but I am always open to a vast array of projects as an actor. I have played a cheerleader from outer space on a mission to see Elvis as well as a vigilante nun fighting the mob. The original improv moment I performed as a child opened a brand-new world for me. I was painfully shy and anxious, and it consumed my identity. Hearing an audience laugh was honestly life changing for me. The chance to be something other than myself was freeing and not something I had considered at the age of 10.

AF: What have been your standout performance moments?

AC: There have honestly been so many amazing moments, but one stands out above all the rest. In 2018 I performed in an original musical titled *The Inside of His Severed Head*. I absolutely adore musical theater, but this collaboration by Lenny Schwartz and Duncan Pflaster was so unique. I had spent so much time working on films and modeling that I forgot how much I loved theater. Not only did I get to originate the role of Bernard, but we also traveled to New York City to perform. For a science girl from Rhode Island, it was a dream come true. The art of pouring tiny pieces of yourself into an original character that no one has ever played before was amazing. Growing up it became a goal of mine to pursue musical theater professionally, but it was always on the back burner. Having the opportunity to create and perform with such a wonderful group of individuals was incredible.

AF: Some corners of society have developed a distrust of science and those who live and breathe medicine. What's with that, and as a professional, how does it make you feel?



Alexandra loves to make costumes for her children at Halloween.

AC: The distrust of science is disheartening. I chose a career in science not just because it was something I enjoyed or was good at. I chose this path because I wanted to have a positive impact on people's lives. It is upsetting to see individuals who have no experience and background in the industry try to discredit the work and findings of others. Children in school are taught the scientific method growing up. They are taught that careful observation is required of any hypothesis. Through experimentation and analysis that hypothesis is determined to be true or false. These findings have data to back them up. At what point do people stop believing in facts and why? I cannot speak for these individuals. I can only speak for myself. Personally, science is amazing, and I truly believe that the work I do positively affects people's lives.

AF: Now, the question everyone has been waiting for: What are you dressing as this Halloween?

AC: As an actor I feel like I get to experience Halloween year-round working on different projects. I would love to say that I have an amazing costume planned for myself but as a parent, Halloween is now all about my kids. I have handmade every costume for them since they were born. When they were small and had no opinion, I loved to make movie costumes for them. My favorite was Barf from *Spaceballs*. And now that they are a little older, I am constructing cardboard garbage trucks and sewing superhero costumes.