

"MY MOVIES...THERE'S 20 PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE SO THIS IS DEFINITELY DIFFERENT!"

BRIGHT LIGHT

Katherine Turman catches up with Sara Gilbert—from TV to big screen.

SARA GILBERT

photo **Sye Willams**

Although she chose a restaurant called Out Take Cafe (as in movies and TV) in an area called Studio City (as in movies and TV), Sara Gilbert is not a "Hollywood" sort, even though she spent her formative years in America's living rooms. The 24-year-old Gilbert strides in the back door of the crowded lunchtime eatery, surprisingly diminutive, low-key and casual, and apologizes for being late with a slightly ethereal handshake.

The ladies who lunch don't give the brunette actress a second glance, though as Gilbert settles into the banquettes, in close proximity to her dining neighbors, it's clear the Roseanne star is indeed recognized, as she later graciously accepts compliments for her best-known role, in which she has been dubbed by the press the "wise-cracking Darlene Connor."

Though in person, Gilbert's persona is more dry and aloofly pleasant than wisecracker, and she appears entirely unselfconscious, it may be a conscious sort of unselfconsciousness.

"My mom was really helpful," she begins, picking up a small piece of bread, buttering, then salting it before eating. "She always talked to me about how you would be perceived and how you want to present yourself to the press. It's a funny thing to think about because it causes you to be really self-conscious, really self-aware, from an objective place, like you're marketing yourself. It's a strange thing to admit you have to do."

The year 2000 will see Gilbert taking plenty of silver screen time. *Light It Up*, a dramatic opus about a high school held hostage, also features singer Usher (who tried to teach Gilbert how to dance, but "to no avail!"), Forrest Whitaker, and Babyface. It is essentially Gilbert's first "Hollywood" movie, though she's been in *Poison Ivy* with Drew Barrymore (who she terms "free, open with a loving kind of spirit") and has worked on diverse projects in movies, on cable TV, and on stage. Before Gilbert's recent pre-release screening of the finished project, she was a bit dazed. "I don't really think I saw it. I was so in my head. It was a hard film to make, and it brought up a lot of memories. I had to be in a kind of dark place making it, so in a way, I'm not really ready to see it."

But, she says, it was a careful choice to take on *Light It Up*, as it was for two other forthcoming projects in 2000, *High Fidelity* with John Cusack and *The Big Tease*.

"It's so hard to make choices on what films to make; there are so many factors, and you really have to take inventory, and decide what makes it worth it to you to sit in your trailer for 14 hours a day," she observes, taking a quick and quiet call on her cell phone.

"I've never been in a movie that's this big, my movies you usually see the trailer at the Laemmle and there's 20 people in the audience, so this is definitely different!" she furthers. "Who knows how it will do, but it seems pretty mainstream, which is exciting on one hand, but a little bit scary."

Now, [post *Light It Up*], I feel like I'm in an entirely different head space, an entirely different person since I made that film," she confesses. "I let myself get more and more unattractive as the film goes on. So that was a little weird, watching yourself take that decline. You watch it and go, 'wow, I look like shit.'" But, despite her often self-deprecating vibe, Gilbert furthers, "I feel like an attractive, sexy, confident woman, so it can be fun to explore those other places."

She's also an in-demand woman: "I've been taking meetings. I think I'm going to go back to television," she confesses. "I'm trying to figure out what I want to do. I imagine I'll probably do something that's a cross between comedy and drama." But, unlike *Roseanne*, it will lean more toward the drama. "I like TV," she says, not at all defensively. "I think it gets kinda a bum rap."

One thing's for sure: she won't do anything like her older sister did; the cutesy Melissa Gilbert was sweet Laura Ingalls on *Little House on the Prairie* for years. But a role was not forthcoming for her younger sibling. "I think I was a little acidic," she grins in her best Darlene Connor style.

Another role you might not find her in is nonetheless one she would enjoy. "I've always wanted to be a rock star," Gilbert offers. "I just don't have any of the gifts that are required. Except for the charisma," she notes with a grin. "The charm."

"That lifestyle appeals to me, but that's like my altar ego maybe," she furthers. "I'm so mellow. I like to go to dinner; I shouldn't admit all this, but I'm totally boring. I'm asleep by like 11 or 11:30. But secretly," she concludes with an ingratiating smile and lascivious tone, "I probably have a side of me that could get into the decadence of that kind of lifestyle." ☺