Claire Foy is nothing but versatile. In 2018, after winning an Emmy as Elizabeth II in *The Crown*, the 38-year-old Brit appeared on Jimmy Fallon’s show and threw down the intro to *The Sugarhill Gang*’s hit ‘Rapper’s Delight’. The same year, she was astronaut Neil Armstrong’s wife in *First Man*, but in Oscar hopeful *Women Talking* she plays Salome, for whom the moon landing is pie in the sky. Directed by Sarah Polley and produced by Frances McDormand, it takes place in a strict religious community where women and girls have been abused by their menfolk. A meeting is called: do they stay, or do they go?

**DEADLINE:** You must have known *Women Talking* was going to be hard work from the moment you saw the script. Why did you sign up for it?

**CLAIRE FOY:** Sarah, really. She was the gatekeeper to the whole project, and a pretty impressive one. I just had the loveliest time talking to her. It was during Covid. I did lots of Zoom meetings, and hers was the most relaxed and enjoyable Zoom that I had during that whole period. We talked about everything. I find her a really inspiring person to talk to: she’s incredibly intelligent and emotionally engaged. It was only when I found out I’d got it that I
realized what a responsibility I’d been given. I was slightly afraid because I didn’t know where it was going to take me. But she cast the most extraordinary group of people, and the crew likewise, so I knew that I was in a safe and respectful environment.

DEADLINE: How did you prepare?

FOY: Well, I was very lucky: there’s a book [by Miriam Toews]. Also, the film is based on a Mennonite community, and so there was a little bit of research I could do around that. But there were other things I couldn’t investigate for myself, so I had to trust that, through the writing and the living of it in the moment, it would all come out. What I didn’t expect was the camaraderie and support created by Sarah and the other actors. It’s irrelevant what I did or didn’t do, because we did it together. It was a completely collective experience.

DEADLINE: It does actually look like you were on a remote community, miles from nowhere. But I suspect that wasn’t the case.

FOY: Yeah. [Laughs] I think that was Fran’s dream. Fran’s dream was that we’d all live in the community: all our children would come, and we’d all live there in the Mennonite houses. We’d wash like Mennonites, we’d have no electricity, and then we’d go and shoot. But obviously, that’s impossible. And, who knows, it might not have gone as well if that had been the case, if we were living with each other day-in, day-out. So, yeah, we were on location for the exteriors and the barn was built in a studio in Toronto.
DEADLINE: The discussions are incredibly intense. How were they to shoot?

FOY: Though there was obviously a collective discussion that was going on, what was really fascinating was that everyone had their own point of view. I know that sounds a bit silly, but there were very distinct voices within the hayloft, very distinct characters. As an actor, when you’re preparing your part — looking at the lines and the beats of the scene — obviously, you can’t prepare for what other actors are going to do in the room. And with this, they really came alive. Your approach could be completely different, take to take, depending on what the other actors were giving you. I was constantly surprised.

It must have been incredibly difficult for Sarah to wrangle all those different performances and still get all the coverage she needed. We would do 10 pages of dialogue over a few days, then we’d do the next block, and then the next block. So, it was quite technical. There were some slightly delirious days, but it was an amazing experience.

DEADLINE: Were you always clear about Salome’s motivations?

FOY: Salome is always very clear that she wants to stay and fight. She wants to stay and she wants to have some sort of justice be done. I think the great injustice she feels is that these men will not know what they have done, and they will not feel the weight of what they have
done. That, quite rightly, infuriates her and makes her incredibly angry.

It’s similar to the way that someone in a war-torn country has to make a choice about whether or not to leave. Home is a very significant thing, especially for these women. They don’t have the freedoms that we have. They can’t read or write, they don’t know what a map is. They don’t believe there’s anything outside of their colony. What happens in their colony is their world, and we can’t underestimate the significance of that. The choice to leave is huge. Not just for them, but the next generations of their children. The impact is going to be wide-ranging for forever.

DEADLINE: Is it easy for you to get into a character like that?

FOY: With Salome, I didn’t disagree with her. I thought everything she did was bang-on. I was behind every choice that she made and all of her opinions. I’ve got a lot of tolerance in my life from doing my job, because I understand that people do things that hurt people, or they make the wrong decisions. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that they have done the wrong thing. My job is not to be in a position of judgment but to try to understand.

DEADLINE: Did your theater background help on this movie?

FOY: Yeah, it definitely helped. Having worked for as long as I have also helped. I’ve got a lot of experience now. I trained at drama school, so I had lots of training to fall back on, and I also had experience of having to make [scripts] fresh and alive, having done them 150 times on stage. It didn’t make it any easier, but it definitely helped quite a lot.

DEADLINE: Was there anything in particular that made you want to be an actor?

FOY: No. I didn’t understand that it was a job. I didn’t know any actors. It was like this magical, parallel world. I used to watch people on screen and I just believed that they were the character. I just didn’t put two and two together, for some reason. [Laughs] It all made sense to me when I was at drama school: that acting was about expressing and connecting with an emotional thought, or a feeling, and getting it out of your body so that it exists outside of yourself as an actual living, breathing thing other than you. I couldn’t live without it. I think I’d be an absolute nightmare if I didn’t do it. I already am a nightmare. [laughs] But ... imagine! I’d just be howling and crying every five minutes, probably.

DEADLINE: Was there anything you could’ve done instead? Was there a backup plan?

FOY: It’s really bizarre, now that I think about it. I just was in denial, because I didn’t want to expect anything of myself, and I also didn’t want anyone else to expect anything either. I just was so embarrassed by that concept that I pretended I didn’t have any expectations at all. I was like, “I don’t know what’s going to happen. Maybe I’ll make it, maybe I won’t.”
But I always had a job. I’ve had a job since I was 13, so I always had jobs while I was trying to find acting work as well. I’m sure I would’ve eventually found something I was also passionate about, but acting was the thing. Film acting was what I was most passionate about — from being a teenager — and theater, whether it involved acting or not. I probably would’ve done something else in that world. Something behind the scenes, I reckon.

DEADLINE: What was your first big acting job? When did you realize it was going to happen?

FOY: My first acting job was Being Human for BBC3, with Russell Tovey and Andrea Riseborough, which is an incredibly exciting cast. [laughs] I was absolutely shocking in it. We didn’t do film work at my drama school, so it was a baptism of fire, and — looking back now — I just am mortified. I didn’t know how to do it, so I had to learn very fast. Then I did a couple of plays at the National Theatre, then I did [U.K. soap] Doctors, and then, very quickly after that, I got Little Dorrit. And that was the point where I was like, “Oh, God, I’m doing it.” Basically, I had an existential crisis. [laughs] I was like, “But why am I doing it? I’m not good at it! What’s going on?”

DEADLINE: How did you get through it?
FOY: How could I not do it? [laughs] The BBC were asking me to do a period drama, and Matthew Macfadyen was in it, so I was gonna do it! I just had a bit of meltdown. Not because of *Little Dorrit*, I just had to come to terms with a lot about myself. It’s been a very long, long road to acceptance, of feeling, “I’m worthy of being here. It’s OK I’ve followed something that I wanted to do, even if everyone else thinks I shouldn’t be doing it.” So, yeah, it’s been a long old road.

DEADLINE: Am I right thinking your first movie role was a horror movie?

FOY: Yes, it was! *Season of the Witch* [2011]. I can’t believe you can’t remember what it was called! [laughs] I feel like I had a real insight into the good old days of filmmaking with that movie. It was before the financial crash. It was before lots of things, so I saw a really interesting side of my industry. I was the only woman on that job, obviously. It was me and lots of men in Budapest for six months. It was absolutely amazing, and very enlightening and hilarious. And I had lots of first experiences on that job, and it makes me so happy to think about it. It was such an innocent and debauched time, in a way, that — obviously now in my dotage — I’m like, “God, how did I have the stamina?”

DEADLINE: You segued back into the more sedate world of British cinema, with *The Lady in the Van* and *Breathe*. And then, of course, *The Crown*. If you’d struggled with doubt in the past, that’s a big role to be offered. How did you deal with it?

FOY: I know it sounds crazy now, but it was unknown territory. Netflix had never shot anything in the UK. I remember when I was doing the contract, there were things in it that just would never have never come up before — because they didn’t exist. And there were other things I couldn’t get my head around. I mean, Stephen Daldry is an extraordinary director, and I’d always admired him. Peter Morgan had won an Oscar for doing a film about the Queen, and they’d done *The Audience* together. So, in my head, I was like, “Well, this is going to be the clanger then, isn’t it? This is going to be the one that brings down the whole thing.” I was pregnant, and then had a very small baby, during the process of making it, so I had bigger fish to fry, which was quite helpful. But also, I was at a turning point in my career. I’d just done *Wolf Hall*, which I was incredibly proud of, and I felt like I didn’t need to prove anything to myself anymore.

I actually didn’t even think it was going to happen. There were loads of people who were in the mix for it, so the fact that it went my way is absolutely hilarious. And I’m so grateful that it did. It was real character acting, at the age of 30, which still felt very young in the profession. It was an incredible gift to be given, and a real leap of faith that they took.

DEADLINE: Did you ever get any unexpected feedback from royal channels?
FOY: No. But something really weird did happen with that show. I only know about it because people around me, especially Matt Smith, would tell me about it. People would say stuff on set to other people that they would never say to me. And he said, “It’s because they think you are the Queen.” I was like, “That can’t be the reason.” But he insisted: “I think that’s what it is. People don’t want to approach you.” It was really bizarre. Because everyone around me got lots of information, and I was just stood there going, “Oh, OK. ...”

DEADLINE: When the Queen died, were you bothered with requests for a comment?

FOY: My publicist was bothered, probably. I’m very grateful she doesn’t tell me about things like that. I was blissfully unaware. As far as I was aware, no one cared what I thought.

DEADLINE: You mentioned Steven Daldry. You’ve worked with some very accomplished directors, like Damien Chazelle, Steven Soderbergh, and now Sarah Polley. What is it about a good director that gets the best out of an actor?

FOY: What I loved about Sarah, as a director, was that, probably from being an actor herself, she realizes that, at a certain point, the actor knows more about the character than the director does. And it takes a really confident director to not be frightened by that. The best directors I’ve worked with know when to leave actors alone and when to encourage them.

DEADLINE: What’s been your favorite role in your movies?

FOY: Salome [in Women Talking] is up there. But, saying that, I’ve enjoyed everything I’ve done. I just think that with Salome there is a particular admiration I have for her as a character and an ease in which I was able to connect with her that is very rare. But that doesn’t diminish any of the other characters I’ve played, it’s just that I found her the quickest to connect with. I could spend a lot of time with her.

DEADLINE: Do you find characters easy to dispense with when you’re done filming?

FOY: Yeah, I do. The experience of making something not so much. The experience of making something lingers for me longer than the character. With this film, the experience was so unique and so visceral, I don’t expect — nor do I want — the memory of Salome to leave me.

DEADLINE: As well as Women Talking, there have been a lot of female-fronted movies this year, notably She Said. Are you seeing an upturn in good roles for women?

FOY: Well, obviously — I’ve been in this film, so yeah. But it’s a bit upsetting that I’m 38 and this is the first film I’ve done like this. That’s not a great assessment of the industry. But, that said, I’m not interested in films where the character is just a man in a woman’s clothing; I’d
love to see more films like this being made. I know there have been, like *The Lost Daughter* last year. Those films *are* being made, but they need to become part of cinema as opposed to some sort of outreach. They need to become the norm, and that will take a long time.

**DEADLINE:** What’s next for you?

**FOY:** I did a film in the summer with [director] Andrew Hague, with Andrew Scott and Jamie Bell, called *Strangers*. And then? Who knows!

**DEADLINE:** Is there anything on your bucket list?

**FOY:** I’m ready for a challenge again now. I needed a break after *Women Talking*, and I think I’m ready to do something which is going to push me.

**DEADLINE:** What if it was a sequel to *Season of the Witch*?

**FOY:** I have been begging — *begging* — for that to be made. [Laughs] I want to put those hair extensions back in and get back into that cage!