

Julie Benz on Her Marriage: “We Put Our Relationship First Even If That Means Turning Down Work”



By Kerri Sheehan

Unlike many performers, 41-year-old Julie Benz didn't have dreams of appearing on the big screen. In fact, she began her career as a competitive figure skater and didn't consider acting until an injury forced her off the ice. You may recognize her as Darla, the vampire from the television shows *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the popular spin-off *Angel*, or Rita, the wife of the title character on *Dexter*. Expanding her resume, she'll next be playing mother Stevie Parker in Lifetime's *Taken: The Search for Sophie Parker*, which premieres tomorrow night at 8 p.m. ET. Benz describes her character as "a tough NYPD detective who has to work against the clock to save her daughter and her daughter's friend from

the Russian Mafia and sexual slavery ring.”

The bubbly blonde was drawn to the role for a number of reasons. “The issue of human trafficking and violence against women is important to me,” she shares. “And the script features a woman in power instead of a woman in peril.”

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Given these two factors, that actress had to prepare for such a demanding job. “The role required a lot of physical strength and stamina from me.” On an emotional level, Benz had the “honor of speaking to a woman who had been abducted, sold into sex slavery, and rescued by her family when she was a teen,” which helped to personalize the story for her. Thanks to her diligence, she truly understands the actions taken by her character. “If I had a daughter and if she was kidnapped, I’d do whatever was in my power to find her. I just hope I’m never put in the position to find out what extremes I would go to.”

While Benz is not yet a mother herself, she is a newlywed: The Pittsburgh native married Rich Orosco in May 2012. They both work in the entertainment industry, so hectic schedules and travel often keep the couple in different cities. “We never go more than two weeks without seeing each other. We Skype every day that we’re apart,” Benz says. “Our careers are busy, but we put our relationship first even if that means turning down work.”

The couple was originally fixed up by a friend “just to have fun,” and neither of them were looking for a commitment, but as Benz says, “That’s why I think it worked.” They got the chance to know each other without the pressure of questioning where they wanted their relationship to go. “Just spending time together was – and still is – the best!”

There was, of course, a turning point in their coupledness. Her husband knew she was a keeper when he tasted her cooking. “My

husband claims that he knew I was The One when I made him my chicken wings. We now refer to them as my 'marry me chicken wings!'"

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Benz first married at the age of 22 and divorced her ex-husband after 13 years together. "Dating in your mid-30's is tricky, especially in Los Angeles," she says of learning to date as an adult. "Plus, I hadn't dated in over a decade. I'm blessed that I have a great group of female friends that helped me navigate the dangerous waters of finding love."

For other women looking to get back into the dating game, the actress believes that "second chances are a gift, and they should be treated that way. Do the work on yourself after your divorce, so you don't end up making the same mistakes again."

For more on Benz, you can follow her on Twitter @juliebenz. Be sure to catch her in Taken: The Search for Sophie Parker on Lifetime on Saturday, September 21st at 8 p.m. ET. You can also see her in the new season of the sci-fi show Defiance.