

WEEKEND

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Alexandra

THE

Great

ALEXANDRA BURKE TELLS SIMON GAGE ABOUT SECURING HER DREAM ROLE AS ROXIE HART IN CHICAGO, CHASING BUSES AND WHY LADDERS GIVE HER A COMPLEX

'LL BE on the sides of buses, won't I?' shouts Alexandra Burke to one of her people with a honk of laughter. 'Because I was for The Bodyguard and Sister Act!'

We're in the Gertrude Lawrence bar of London's Phoenix Theatre, where she's in rehearsals for Chicago and Alexandra is telling me about when she spotted herself in an advert on the side of a bus - like Carrie Bradshaw in Sex And The City - and started chasing it. 'My friend was filming me. I loved it, it's not every day that happens.'

Fresh and bouncy, and with so much energy that if we had the right cables we could probably run the air conditioning off her earrings, Alexandra is raring to go as Roxie Hart, the part Renee Zellweger bagged an Oscar nomination for, in the classic Kander & Ebb - of Cabaret fame - musical about a bunch of merry murderers treated as

celebrities off the back of their notoriety. It may have been written in the 1970s and based on a play from the 1920s, but it has a very contemporary streak.

Currently learning classic tunes like All That Jazz and Razzle Dazzle, Alexandra was recently appearing in Chess in the West End. She's less than a year out of Strictly Come Dancing, and has squeezed an album in along the way. Not bad for a humble X Factor winner.

'I think I needed the distraction of Strictly,' she says, referring to the death of her mother last year, which hit her really hard. 'The flipside of it was the press. I got hammered, for no reason but from one particular journalist. He made life hell for me. It was only about 11 weeks into the process that I opened up and said, "You're mentally hurting me so much that I want to quit the show," and the day that I spoke out people got behind me. Alesha Dixon, Sir Alan

Sugar, Gary Lineker, Peter Andre, everyone was, "Leave the girl alone. Let her live her dream and dance." It was so nice to see such support.'

But the part of Roxie is one she has always wanted. 'I saw it about three years ago and nudged my boyfriend, now my fiancé, and went, "Josh, I'm

'The ladder is the part I hate with a passion. I haven't even tried it in heels yet'

going to play that role one day!'

'I bumped into a friend of mine, who's the dance captain on Chicago and the cast turned up when I was doing the Jane McDonald show and I basically said to him, "What's going on? Who's leaving? Who do I have to

kill..." to keep in with the theme of the show, "...to get a part?'

As something of a West End phenomenon, you wonder whether Alexandra still has to audition for parts, but she won't say yes to anything before she's tried it out. 'I walk into the workshop and I know pretty much everyone there. And the director said, "Well, this is a formality because you've already got the job!'

But it's a tough gig. Not only is she on stage most of the time, rocking through some classic Bob Fosse dance routines and singing, but she also has to do it in high heels - and, sometimes, up a ladder.

'The ladder is the part I hate with a passion,' she laughs. 'I haven't even tried it in heels yet.'

'You don't understand the complex I have. It's the swinging around with no security, because once you're sweating you can swing round and slip out into the audience or onto the

boys below. Which could be worse!' She's proud of the fact that she and Aston from JLS were the first X Factor contestants to make Strictly, and was recently chatting with Matt Cardle, another X Factor alumni, who has just taken over the Will Young part in Strictly Ballroom in the West End. 'We were saying we should be so proud that we're still doing what we love, because there is a point where it plateaus, where it can just stop. You have to keep pushing it.'

So what about the sexy aspect of the show, as it's the steamiest musical now, maybe ever...

'I don't consider myself sexy,' says Alexandra, fresh from the gym and looking foxy. 'I was hanging off that ladder the other day going, "How is this sexy? I look like an idiot!'

■ Alexandra stars as Roxie Hart in Chicago with Martin Kemp at The Phoenix Theatre, London, atgtickets.com