

Cynthia Erivo Speaks Out on 'Wicked' Cyber-Bullying Against Ariana Grande: 'It's Easy' to 'Type Words About a Person You Don't Know Anything About'

Off the heels of the major global success of Jon M. Chu's "[Wicked](#)," [Cynthia Erivo](#) is already thinking of what comes next, including perhaps stepping behind the camera. Speaking at the [Red Sea Film Festival](#), the Oscar-nominated actor brought up Barbra Streisand as one of her great inspirations both as a singer and actor, adding that she "loved that Barbra was able to transform her career by not just being an actress but a director, which I am leaning towards."

Asked about the constant attacks co-lead Ariana Grande receives online, the actor said "cyberbullying is quite dangerous" and that it is "easy to be behind the computer typing words about a person you don't know anything about." Her course of action is to "be the counterpoint" to harmful narratives: "Be the person who tells the positive. What a person who has never met you thinks is never more important than what you think of yourself."

Erivo gushed about her experience of making "Wicked," highlighting that to have "a dream come true is very special, but to know you had a dream come true with people you love is extra special." When asked about portraying Elphaba as a Black woman, the actor mentioned she "asked for the braids and the nails" of her character and that she "wanted to imbue this character with the person underneath and the proudness I feel about being a Black woman."

"The green stands for every person who feels othered," she continued. "There is a layer of who I am underneath and Black women walk into spaces that are not necessarily welcoming. It was important to tell that story and have that as a layer and I was lucky enough to have a director who allowed me to tell that story. That scene when [Elphaba] is told that the green is a problem? Those tears were real. It comes from my understanding of what it feels like to feel that. I cannot tell that story without sharing those emotions."

The "Harriet" actor added that "Elphaba is a challenging character because you want to make sure people see her vulnerability and humanity." "You can be distracted by the green. You have to come past that so people can see her as a person, the pain in her eyes and the hurt she feels in her heart. With Elphaba, I had this beautiful challenge of humanizing her and even the green she lives with. She is a very special character to me."

Of the intricacies of the shooting, the actor spoke about the challenges of recording one of the film's main musical sequences, "Defying Gravity." "It is a complete ascension. You don't stop and come back," she said of the song's crescendo. "What was challenging about 'Defying Gravity' is that I was flying on a harness so I had no ground under me. I had to physically find where to put the sound and imagine a ground under me to push against and make the bigger sounds. If you have a corset on, you can't use your diaphragm so I had to replace the breath and use this imaginary ground to make the sounds."

The actor mentioned how she knew “Wicked” was “special” but could never have imagined “what is happening right now with this film.” The musical smashed the box office over Thanksgiving weekend in the U.S., amassing a whopping \$118.2 million in its first week. “Sometimes film adaptations don’t necessarily work but to watch people connect with it is really special,” added the actor.

Of her friendship with Grande, Erivo said that once they were cast, both decided that “we were going to make sure we protected each other. We were kind to each other, worked with honesty and built a relationship on that. We provided each other with the space, the kindness and the generosity that was necessary to play these roles.”

“Our voices work very well together,” she went on. “When you get to do something like [a musical], there is a real understanding of how the other person works. To sing with another person is very intimate and it has opened our relationship much more. Both of us were listening and hearing what the other could give and it was very special.”

Does the actor ever get Elphaba green with jealousy? Not really, she said. “I don’t get jealous in real life because I believe whatever anyone has is theirs, and whatever I have is mine. [Jealousy] is a natural emotion, but I’ve grown over the years not to have that because I learned that we all get what we’re supposed to get.”