



In pursuit of her Indian celluloid dreams, a little known gal from Mumbai found a British godfather! Her role in Danny Boyle's 'Slumdog Millionaire' is not only going to jet start her film career in India but is also going to propel her name in the international film circuit.

Freida Pinto's very first film was a rage at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival and went on to win the People's Choice Award. A rag to riches story about a boy from the slums was an instant hit with both the audience and the media. Journalists have been asking her about the 'pulse of Mumbai' and Pinto seems to have all the answers.

She is beaming and clearly ecstatic with all the attention. The knockout success of her first venture is sure to take her places, maybe even to the Oscars!

Pinto plays the character of Latika, the girl Jamal (Dev Patel) falls in love with. The story is about how he lands up on the 'Who wants to be a Millionaire' show in a bid to win her back. The film also stars Anil Kapoor and Irrfan Khan.

A model turned actress and travel host, Freida Pinto speaks to Preeti Thandi for CityMasala about 'Slumdog Millionaire' and working with Danny Boyle, the godfather she luckily found.

COVER STORY

By: Preeti Thandi **Freida Pinto - A Million Dollar Mumbai Gal**

CM: How has the Toronto International Film Festival experience been for you?

FP: Actually it's my first time ever to any film festival and the Toronto Film Festival is obviously a very prestigious festival to be a part of.

It's been wonderful, overwhelming and exhilarating because of the kind of reception that you receive from the press and the people. The film has been received so beautifully. I think I am over the moon. I can't believe that I am the same girl from the Bombay suburbs who is here today. It's like *Slumdog Millionaire* is a story about any of us from Bombay who have been struggling and chasing our dreams. The Toronto Film Festival is just a realization of all of that in a nutshell.

CM: Is it a dream come true for you?

FP: Yes, it is literally like a dream come true.

CM: Did you have the dream before?

FP: I had the dream but little did I know that Danny Boyle is going to make it come true. I think that's more like being blessed rather than just having a dream. It's a dream that Danny Boyle has made possible in many ways.

CM: How did that come about?

FP: I actually auditioned for it through the usual process. I had nothing, no show reel to fall back on and say, "this is me, have a look at it". But Loveleen Tandon who is the co-director and also the casting director of the film, called me in for an audition. I have never had any formal training in acting and that's when I heard Danny Boyle was looking for someone who is like a clean slate and someone whom he could mould. I did my first audition and then one month later, Loveleen told me Danny is coming down to India and that I had to audition for him. I was a bit nervous but when I met him, I found him to be such a warm and down to earth person. He just doesn't make you feel that he is one of those high profile directors. Anyway, this process of auditioning went on for six months. I didn't understand what was happening and why I was being called over and over again and after every audition Danny would say, "fantastic! We will see you soon." It was after six months of heavy duty auditioning that I finally got the role!

CM: So you have no formal training in acting?

FP: No, but I did something post the film because I was so intrigued at that point of time. There was this long gap between the release of the film and having completed the film so I did an acting course with Barry John in India. He's trained everyone from *Irrfan Khan* to *Shah Rukh Khan*. I did an acting workshop with him and I think the natural process of actually being part of a film like *Slumdog Millionaire* helped me the most.

CM: What is your background? Is it mostly modeling?

FP: I was always part of amateur theatre. I loved acting in musicals. In college, I did a lot of absurdist plays. I enjoyed the darkness of those characters. Modeling happened because Indian cinema is



Freida Pinto & Dev Patel at the premiere of *Slumdog Millionaire*

so huge to crack. Modeling gave me that visibility. I got into it and enjoyed it for as long as it lasted. It does have its shelf life and acting was something that was more fulfilling so it had to be the next step.

CM: Did you have it in mind that you would get into acting eventually one day?

FP: I would have gotten into it if I had a chance earlier. It's just that with no godfather in the industry, no one to guide you, you have to do it on your own. I had to find ways and means to do it and I did!

CM: You had to find a British Godfather...

FP: Exactly, and I am so happy that it was Danny Boyle. I couldn't ask for anyone better.

Freida Pinto - A Million Dollar Mumbai Gal

CM: How was the experience of working with him?

FP: Actually, working with Danny Boyle has taught me a lot. He has this childlike energy in him that we have to learn to bring to the set all the time because we shoot for days on end and we have to be consistent, and have to sustain the energy which Danny Boyle has in him. Just looking at him and being in the same space is contagious. It kind of rubs off on you.

CM: What did you learn? How was filming?

FP: The most important thing that I learned is to bring something fresh to the table all the time because you do re-takes all the time and you can't do the same thing over and over again. They need to see something different as well. So Danny would ultimately push you to do something different. This is such a multilayered and complex film and so is my character. Danny has the right way of churning the right emotions out of you. He did a great job of helping and coaching me through the entire film. He's passionate.

CM: Are you looking for more international exposure now?

FP: I would love to do more international projects. It's like the bug has bitten me, it's the venomous bug so I would like to stay forever. Being in India I have tried so hard and it's so difficult to crack the industry and I don't have the patience to find out why. I would like people to see the film and work with a couple of Indian directors who are phenomenal.

CM: How was it like working with Dev Patel?

FP: Dev is such a



Freida Pinto from a still in Slumdog Milionaire

wonderful actor. He's got the experience of having worked in a hit television series like *Skins*. He obviously had more experience than I, but he's a completely unselfish actor. He is willing to help you out. There was instant chemistry and we connected when we met each other. It just felt right being in the same frame as Dev Patel. In a lot of scenes, we coached each other through them.

CM: What kind of research did you

do? Did you read the book?

FP: I didn't read *Q&A* but I did read *Maximum City*. The thing is that I am from Bombay and the most research I could do is what I had already done traveling in trains to and fro - crowded and sweaty - with little kids begging for money and you have to tackle those situations, some of them are cheating, some of them are lying. You are living that life day in and day out and I think I did my research for 22 years.

CM: What do you enjoy besides acting?

FP: I enjoy watching films and I enjoy traveling. I used to anchor a travel show called *Full Circle*.

CM: What kind of response have you been getting from the western press?

FP: Everyone's loving it. I am very happy with what's happening with the film over here. They keep asking me about the pulse of Bombay city and I have all the answers. I have 22 years of experience in that city and I love that city so much. An outsider's perspective is so true to the heart of Bombay and people are going to go ga-ga over it.



Freida Pinto & Dev Patel from a still in Slumdog Milionaire

