

What makes a great casting director?

You need to be good at listening and forward planning is pretty important. Things can go wrong at any moment. Actors' attentions can be caught by another project - you are four weeks into casting them and finalising the deal, and their agent calls and says, 'Oh my God, Game Of Thrones have phoned.'

Do you have a Spidey-sense when something like that is about to happen?

Casting is like dating for actors. How do you get a second date? Doing a deal is like being in a relationship. You can just sort of tell when their head has been turned another way. Although it's a business, it's emotionally driven so you have to be good at



Ready for duty:
Martin Compston

TIPS FROM THE TOP

With casting director **Kahleen Crawford**

THE AWARD-WINNING SCREEN CASTER, 42, ON SENDING ACTORS TO THE FREEZING ARCTIC AND TURNING MARTIN COMPSTON INTO A BADDIE

dealing with other people's emotions and also regulating your own emotions, as you are not the star of the show.

You've cast a lot of Ken Loach films since 2003. What have you learned from him?

Ken Loach changed my life and career. I was a runner for a digital TV

channel and he hired me on casting, aged 23, for *Ae Fond Kiss*. On set he knows every person's name, all the background artists, all the crew, the trainees and the person who owns the location.

Was submarine drama *Vigil* easy to cast?

Dan Jackson and I were the co-casting directors on *Vigil* but as soon as World Productions executive producer Simon Heath called us and said, 'It's a really high-octane thriller on a submarine', I said yes. Because World also do *Line Of Duty*, all the actors were like, 'Yup, I'll do it.' I think Suranne Jones read the first episode and said she was in.

What is it you admire about Martin Compston, who is in *Vigil*, as an actor and who you previously cast as a villain in ITV's *In Plain Sight*?

Martin is bright, interesting and funny. He's a lovely guy but when I cast him in *In Plain Sight*, that darkness was something new. He sent me a bottle of champagne afterwards and it says on the label, 'Thanks for seeing the serial killer in me. Love Martin.'

How do you choose the scenes for actors to read in auditions? Paterson Joseph has a great dramatic speech at the end of episode one of *Vigil*. Is that the sort of thing you'd plump for?

Yeah, two contrasting scenes are what we're after but sometimes an actor only has one and it can be a tricky scene. I've even had to do birth scenes in auditions for that reason. All these poor actresses screaming but we had no choice. This was in the days before self-taping, when the actor films themselves at home. If that had existed then we would have asked them to do it in the comfort of their own home because it was quite exposing. Actors usually want to do something that is challenging but if it's a scene where the actor is coming in cold to a casting room with no other actor and no props, and they are expected to suddenly go from 0 to 10 emotionally, that's too much.

New BBC2 period drama *The North Water* was filmed on board a boat on frozen Arctic seas. Did you consider good team players when casting for it?

Yes, we absolutely avoided the s*** list.



Where we were filming was very isolated. I cannot tell you the number of times I said, 'It's Travelodge on water. Don't expect anything more. And no mobile reception.' People were not only going to be on a boat in the freezing cold, sharing a room with someone they hadn't met before, but they were not going to be able to reach those people they loved most for three months. So there was a lot of pastoral care to think about in advance. You wanted actors with a sensible head.

Are there times when an actor has done a terrible audition but still got the part?

Yeah, there's one that I remember very well. I won't name the actor. He's quite famous now. I had known him since he was a young teenager. He was probably in his twenties at this point. He used to get terribly nervous in auditions so he came in and just got it all wrong. He ballsed up his lines, he wouldn't make eye contact, he was pulling his sleeves over his hands. He just looked terrorised. The producer said, 'I can't cast that guy. What are you talking about?' I basically launched a campaign saying that they were making a huge mistake. The producer did listen and cast him. But I've had people come into an audition and break down because it makes them incredibly vulnerable. It's economic and emotional.

TOP TIP
'If something is playing on your mind, say it out loud. And if your gut is telling you something is wrong, it usually is'

THE FACTS

CASTING DIRECTOR

SALARY: In my first year of trading solo in casting I made £8,000. My parents had to pay my rent. I don't know what a casting director's starting salary would be.

REGULAR HOURS? I try to keep castings in business hours for the protection of my team. In terms of when you are contacted by producers or actors, that's 24 hours a day, seven days a week

SHORT AND SWEET ADVICE: Be a problem solver, not a problem maker

Mistakes, you've made a few?

Once I forgot to check an actor could drive and his character drives for half the film. We only found out he couldn't drive at the last minute. It was on *Ae Fond Kiss*. I was inexperienced. I didn't look at the script in the same way I do now and go, 'OK, that person handles a dog. That person swims. That person drives a car.' And then check with the production how much of that needs to stay if the actor can't do those things. So that was an absolute clanger. Luckily, we sent the actor, Atta Yaqub, on an intensive driving course and he passed his test.

INTERVIEW
BY PAUL SIMPER

Vigil is on BBC1 at 9pm on Sunday and on iPlayer. *The North Water* starts this Friday at 9.30pm on BBC2 and iPlayer