



BLONDE BOMBSHELL

Sophia Myles is captivating in ITV's *Colditz*, says **Daphne Lockyer**

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▶ Sophia Myles perches prettily on a chair in a photographer's studio surrounded by fallen locks of her own corn-blond hair. She has been desperate for a haircut for months, she says, but a whistle-stop work tour has left her tresses neglected.

Today, however, her favourite crimp arrived for a photo-shoot brandishing scissors. "Do I look like a minger?" she asks after the cut. Fortunately, Sophia (pronounced So-Fy-Ahh), is in the curvaceous, Kate Winslet mould of porcelain British beauties and would still look like a billion dollars if she had taken sheep shears to her mop.

We're meeting today to discuss her role in ITV's glossy two-part Second World War drama *Colditz*, in which she plays Lizzie Carter, a woman loved by not one, but by two handsome heroes, Jack Rose (played by Tom Hardy) and Nicholas McGrade (Damian Lewis). Rose and McGrade try to escape from the German POW camp, but only the latter makes it out. The wounded Rose implores McGrade to find his sweetheart (the beauteous Lizzie) if he makes it back to England. And "find her" he does, of course, but not perhaps in ways that Jack himself would approve of.

"It's difficult to judge the characters because *Colditz*, for me, is a tale about people driven to extremes by the dangers of a time in which you could be

killed at any minute. In a different era, she wouldn't have gone to bed with McGrade. But love and war are a very powerful combination."

Disappointingly, however, for red-blooded males, who would doubtless appreciate the chance to see the comely Sophia in the buff, the love scenes are of the kind that you could happily sit through with your aunt. Myles — a vicar's daughter — may be only 25, but she's admirably tough about these issues and insisted on a "no nudity" clause in another of her forthcoming projects, the movie *Tristan and Isolde*.

"Sometimes nudity is essential to the story, but often it's gratuitous," she says. "The human body — especially a woman's body — is incredibly beautiful, but it's special and shouldn't be flaunted."

Such a principled stand meant she was happy to take a leading role in John Malkovich's forthcoming film *Art School Confidential*, a hugely groovy oeuvre based on Daniel Clowes's graphic novel — she plays Audrey, "a curvy girl who likes to eat a doughnut or two".

"Hopefully, in that film, my body doesn't look as though I weigh seven stone, and yet men still fall for me." In this case the doting lover is an aspiring artist-cum-hoodlum, Jerome (played by Max Minghella (son of Anthony)).

Work-wise, it has been an amazing year for Myles, who watched her father

"go to work in a dress every day", but never considered the acting profession until she was spotted in a school play at Richmond College by the Oscar-winning screenwriter Julian Fellowes.

He cast her as Lady Jane Grey in the BBC production *The Prince and the Pauper*. A succession of TV corset dramas followed (Alan Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*), as did movies, including *The Abduction Club*, *Out of Bounds*, *Underworld* and the recent *Thunderbirds*, in which she took the role of Lady Penelope.

When she was discovered by Fellowes, Myles had been on the brink of taking a place at Cambridge to study classics. "But I'd discovered the thing I was passionate about," she says. "And besides, acting has been an education in itself."

She has learnt, for example, to be circumspect about her private life. She won't discuss whether she's in a relationship. She's learnt, too, that things said in interviews can be mortifying in print. "I was flown first class to LA by a studio and, in an interview afterwards, I said: 'Once you've turned left on a plane, you can never turn right again.' My brother called me the next day laughing and calling me a poser."

Which is unfair, of course. Good looks aside, Myles's utter lack of pretension happens to be her very best asset. ■
Colditz, Sun & Mon, ITV1, 9pm