

Sex and the City - The Movie: exclusive on-set report

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Will Carrie ever wed Big? Will Charlotte finally succeed in having children? And just how many more men will Samantha bed? Will Lawrence gained exclusive access to the set of the long-awaited Sex and the City film to find the answers to these and other questions - such as, are the actresses even speaking to each other?

- [Sex and the City in pictures](#)
- [The Sex and the City premiere in pictures](#)

The day before I visit the set of Sex and the City: The Movie thousands of onlookers gathered to gawp at the cast as they shot a scene on the New York streets. Gangs of assistants barked at the crowds, ushering them away. 'By the end of the television show,' begins Sarah Jessica Parker, 'we'd become accustomed to curiosity when we were shooting on the street. With the film, though, even more people are coming, and in between each scene it can take half an hour just to move the crowds back.' She smiles. 'But we're grateful people still have affection for these characters. Anyone who looks that gift horse in the mouth is mad.'



Turning heads: Sarah Jessica Parker (far right) as Carrie Bradshaw in the film of Sex and the City

When the American television network HBO first broadcast Sex and the City in 1998 it could hardly have imagined how successful it would be. By the time the sixth (and last) series was showing in America, the programme was being screened in 150 countries, and the final episode drew an audience of more than ten million in America and 4.5 million here.

Ten years earlier Sex and the City was a weekly column in the New York Observer, written by the journalist Candace Bushnell. The column, in which Bushnell wrote about her own and her friends' sexual adventures, proved so popular that in 1997 she published a book. One year later the first episode of the television adaptation was broadcast.

At the show's core were the adventures of four thirtysomething, single female friends working and dating in New York. There was Carrie Bradshaw (played by Sarah Jessica Parker), the journalist and narrator based on Candace Bushnell. There was the bed-hopping publicist Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall), the sweet-natured art curator Charlotte (Kristin Davis) and the no-nonsense lawyer Miranda (Cynthia Nixon). The characters were based on Bushnell's friends, though she admits that 'most of my girlfriends were like Samantha. They had sex with whomever, whenever they wanted and they made no apologies.'

The storylines invariably involved little more than one romantic escapade after another - was Carrie back with her on-off boyfriend Big? Had Charlotte and her impotent husband,

Trey, slept together yet? - but it was the focus on female friendship that was so groundbreaking and was the key to its success. The girls' banter balanced romantic comedy with sometimes shocking lewdness, articulating the thoughts of many women over (and under) 30. 'I think Sex and the City was an expression of something that people had been thinking but no one said,' says Parker, her slender frame wrapped in skinny blue jeans and a white T-shirt, when I meet her on the film set at Steiner Studios in Brooklyn Navy Yard. 'We got to make fun of sex, and make sex fun. And I think the single woman was an audience that had no spokesperson.'

advertisement Since then several shows have latched on to the four-female-friends formula in an attempt to recapture the magic - Mistresses on the BBC; Cashmere Mafia and Lipstick Jungle, also by Bushnell, in America - but none has achieved a following to rival that of Sex and the City.

'I think what's great is how different all the characters are from each other,' offers Cynthia Nixon when I speak to her later, 'but how devoted they are, too. Whatever happens, we're all there for each other.'

Fans have clamoured for the girls' return ever since the show finished with Carrie reunited with Mr Big, Samantha battling cancer, Charlotte and her new beau Harry bidding to adopt, and Miranda and her ex-boyfriend Steve seeking relationship bliss. As I drive through the sun-dappled streets on my way to the set I wonder what's next.

When I arrive hundreds of extras, all immaculately dressed in designer attire, are at the catering tables. Kim Cattrall wanders by while Kristin Davis picks at the food. She is wearing a 'pregnancy suit' - Charlotte is pregnant in the film.

Just as the cast take their seats for a scene (today's set is an exact replica of the catwalk at New York fashion week) the studio's vice-president, John Steiner, proposes to his girlfriend over the loudspeaker. The extras cheer and whoop - he chose the location on account of her devotion to the show - and it seems odd, amid such enthusiasm, to remember that the characters' return to the screen almost didn't happen.

Sex and the City: The Movie was scheduled to start filming as soon as the television show ended, but Cattrall openly refused to participate unless she was paid more. There had been tensions over money ever since Parker was promoted to executive producer in the second series, at a salary of \$300,000 (£150,000) an episode. Cattrall's attempts to negotiate her own raise did not, according to insiders, endear her to the other three, and crew members claimed the girls 'wouldn't even sit with [Cattrall] at mealtimes'. Cattrall was conspicuously alone at the Emmy Awards in 2004, too, while Parker, Nixon and Davis sat together. When she was asked about it, Cattrall said, 'Are we the best of friends? No. We're professional actresses. We have our own separate lives.'

A quick glance at the gossip sheets suggests there may still be acrimony between Cattrall and Parker, with reports of the pair even disagreeing over their characters' outfits in the film (rumour has it each coveted the other's costumes).

'Honestly, we are all friends and I wish I saw more of Kim,' protests Parker. 'She mentioned money and no one should vilify her for it. People made a decision that we had vilified her. No one bothered to say [to the rest of us], "Are you disappointed by not making the movie?" Yes. "Do you respect and support her choice to not do it?" Absolutely.'

I catch up with Cattrall, who is already dressed in Samantha's fashion-show outfit of black trousers and white fur coat. 'Looking back four years ago to when we were discussing a movie,' she says, 'it was a really tough time for me. I was going through a divorce and my job of seven years was coming to an end. Then my dad was diagnosed with dementia. So I took a step back and returned to Canada, where my family is - that's the reason behind it. It wasn't all about the money.'

advertisement Parker returns an hour later, transformed. Her jeans and T-shirt have been replaced by an extravagant, puffy white dress. She settles in the front row of the grandstand - the rapper Lil' Kim and the singer Kelis are also among the fashion-show crowd, although Victoria Beckham, apparently, declined a cameo - nestling into place between Cattrall and Davis. Nixon sits one place down and all four chatter happily as the assistant director, 'Bullhorn Betty' (so called because of her deafening voice), bellows through her loudspeaker, ordering extras into place. If there is any lingering resentment between Cattrall and Parker, they conceal it well.

The music starts, the cameras roll, and a procession of models parade the autumn/winter 2008 Vivienne Westwood collection to enthusiastic applause. The four girls gossip excitedly - the fashion show is, apparently, a major reunion in the film. Samantha has returned from Los Angeles (where she's now living) and has secured them front-row seats. Carrie, meanwhile, has been somewhat reclusive (possibly prompted by a jilting at the altar, courtesy of Big), and this marks her return to the social circuit.

The story for the film has been wrapped in secrecy, with several endings being filmed to keep fans guessing. Needless to say, though, the likes of Manolo Blahnik and Thierry Mugler are back on the scene.

'I love the fashion. It's a fantasy,' says Parker when she settles down at the end of the day. She laughs when I mention the outfit she was wearing earlier. 'Carrie has a very demonstrative way of dressing! I enjoy it, but it's nothing you would do in real life unless you were a narcissist.'

Every major fashion house is involved in the film. 'The access to clothes has been amazing,' Parker agrees. 'Lacroix, Westwood, Dior, Chanel - the list is endless.' The cast were permitted to keep their costumes. Well, all except Kristin Davis. 'I went up to get my clothes, and there were none left, because all of mine were samples [and had to go back to the designers],' she says, laughing. 'I got the really lame deal - totally coincidentally. But I got my shoes, thank God!'

Patricia Field, the flamboyant costume designer, is also back for the film. When the show came to an end, there were rumours Parker and Field had fallen out, after Parker failed to name Field in a list of designers she admired. 'Don't be so silly,' counters Field, when I ask her about it. 'I've known Sarah Jessica since we made a movie called Miami Rhapsody, and she was the big leader [in *Sex and the City*] because she recognised the power of the fashion.' There is no denying that the parade of Prada dresses, Jimmy Choo shoes and Marc Jacobs handbags came to define the show as much as the characters and the plotlines. 'We all owe a debt to Sarah Jessica,' says Field.

Indeed, no one has invested more energy in bringing Carrie and co back than Parker, but she is careful to distance herself from her character, saying of Carrie and Big's relationship, 'I can't handle that kind of disappointment. I don't like being thrown a bone every now and then.' She is far more settled than her on-screen incarnation, having married the actor Matthew Broderick in 1997.

She receives countless letters from women begging for tips on everything from whether you can wear wedges with eveningwear to whether affairs are always wrong. But, she says, 'I'm

not a fashion icon. And while people often ask me for relationship advice, I really avoid giving counsel; I'm just a married woman with a young son. I only played the part.'

With that, Parker gets up to gather her things. As I leave I spot the studio vice-president and his new fiancée chatting happily in a corner. Will Carrie and Big get their fairytale ending, too?