



Beyond blonde

New direction: Lisa Kudrow as Mamie, and Bobby Cannavale as Javier, in *Happy Endings*

YOU know her best as blonde, ditzy Phoebe from *Friends*, but have you met Lucia DeLury in *The Opposite of Sex*, or Sharon Holmes in *Wonderland*, or Mamie Toll in *Happy Endings*?

It's not that Lisa Kudrow has been avoiding the ditzy roles. It's just that they haven't come her way.

"I haven't been offered any," the 42-year-old says. "So it feels like *Friends* and *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion* and that's it."

Don Roos, who wrote and directed *The Opposite of Sex*, created the part of Mamie, the smart, slightly uptight brunette in his new film *Happy Endings*, just for her.

Kudrow heads a terrific ensemble cast that includes Tom Arnold, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Laura Dern and British comedian Steve Coogan. The story traces the entangled, dysfunctional lives of Mamie and her stepbrother Charley (Coogan). Charley turns out to be gay – but that's after the pair sleep together as teenagers, resulting in Mamie's pregnancy.

"There were certain things that really struck out when I first read the script that I connected with," Kudrow says.

"Her uncertainty – she gave a child up for adoption, told everyone that she had an abortion. Making up her own story about her life. I understand that. I say it's a fine line between coping and denial."

Kudrow reckons that most people are dysfunctional in some way, "ranging from most areas of their lives to just a couple of areas".

"That's what I love about Don Roos' writing. Everybody's got something."

Tom Arnold's part was also written especially for him. The usually loud-mouthed funny-guy plays a kind, fortysomething single dad, who has more money than sensible women in his life.

"I've known Tom Arnold socially for a few years and that's the guy that I know," says Kudrow. "Not the guy that most people see, but that's more like the guy I've been to dinner

She found fame as New York's dumbest blonde, but Lisa Kudrow has always had a darker side. She told **SALLY BROWNE** how she is leaving Phoebe and *Friends* behind her

parties with... emotionally generous. He's available and he's nice and warm."

Kudrow says she doesn't have too much in common with the complicated Mamie. Far from being a rebellious teenager, the young Kudrow was "responsible, fearful, cautious".

In fact, it's been reported that she remained a virgin until her marriage to Michel Stern when she was 31. But Kudrow is happy to set the record straight.

"It's not true," she says. "What happened was I said that, as a young girl, my plan was that I would be a virgin when I got married. But that's fine if people think that. I don't mind young girls thinking, 'Oh, it's possible.'"

She's not much like Phoebe, either – the only hint of the bubbly

ress Ursula, which in turn spawned her twin Phoebe. Kudrow had no idea how successful *Friends* had become until the cast was on the set of *Oprah*.

"She showed us some clips of college students getting together to watch it and our mouths fell open," Kudrow says. "She said, 'You didn't know?' How did you not know about this? We didn't know."

Kudrow doesn't see much of the cast now because "everyone's scattered and busy".

"The six of us had a lot of fun. It wasn't a hard workday either. We were able to make each other laugh and then do our work."

Does Phoebe feel like a friend? "I guess so, 'cos you inhabit someone or let someone inhabit you for a while. Ten years is actually more than a while. So it's more intimate than a friend."

Don Roos told Kudrow that he thought Phoebe contained "reservoirs of pain", and Kudrow agrees.

"That's what was funny about her," she says. "Whatever happened to her she would skew the story, to turn it into something else, into 'See, it's OK'."

"My audition piece was about how her mother killed herself and her stepfather was in jail and she was homeless and living in a car and it was all OK."

"Over 10 years she did deal with some of those things – met her father, met her real mother. She was less ditzy as time went on."

Kudrow is also busy writing and starring in the US TV series *The Comeback*, in which she plays actress Valerie Cherish, a character she invented many years ago. She'll be changing her hair colour again.

"I'm headed back to blonde," she laughs. "My husband likes me blonde. Blonde is lighter in every way. It goes all the way through."

Happy Endings is out on March 23.

As a child I always wanted to be an actress. I thought, 'Oh, I can do better than that'

blonde you'll hear is when Kudrow says "OK" or "You know".

A "Valley Girl" and a natural brunette, Kudrow grew up in LA and famously studied the un-ditzy subject of psychology at college. None of her family or friends were in the acting business, apart from her brother's best friend, Jon Lovitz.

But that's all it took. "As a child I always wanted to be an actress, and then I put that away for high school and college. After college I was home in LA driving around and I'd hear promos on the radio for sitcoms and I'd think, 'Oh, I can do better than that.'"

With Lovitz's encouragement, she joined the improvisation troupe the Groundlings, which led to a part on TV's *Mad About You* as dumb wait-

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