

PRESS PLAY 



THIS GIRL IS ON FIRE

JAINA LEE ORTIZ IS HEATING UP SHONDALAND AS THE STAR OF THE NEW SHOW STATION 19
BY ROSY CORDERO



SHE WAS RAISED IN THE BRONX, the daughter of a now retired NYPD detective. So it's no surprise that all these years later, Jaina Lee Ortiz has chosen to portray women with hard-hitting careers on the small screen. The second-generation Puerto Rican gained popularity in the role of Detective Annalise Villa on Fox's "Rosewood," which ran for two seasons from 2015 to 2017. Today, she is days away from premiering her latest series, "Station 19" as part of ABC's Thursday night popular block of Shondaland dramas which include "Scandal," "How to Get Away With

Murder," and "Grey's Anatomy," the series it was spun-off from.

On the Shonda Rhimes-produced drama, premiering this month, Ortiz will portray Andy Herrera, a tough-as-nails firefighter with ambitions of becoming captain. This dream might become a reality after her father Pruitt (played by Miguel Sandoval) is diagnosed with stage 2 cancer and is forced to give up the position. With her boyfriend Jack Gibson (Grey Damon) next in line to take over, Andy bravely throws her hat into the competition even though there could be romantic repercussions.

"That's what's great about Andy, she's not perfect," Ortiz said when asked about Andy's journey throughout season one. "She has a very interesting arc because she's going through issues at work, issues with her personal relationships, and she's also dealing with her dad who is sick."

She continued, "There will be friction [between her and Jack] because you can't shit where you eat. Sorry! There's not a nicer saying for it. It's really hard to mix business with pleasure, which is why I think, on a personal level, that it's hard to be in a



relationship with someone you work with. As they say, it's not interesting if it's not messy."

And messy it shall be because there is another man in Andy's life, her childhood friend Ryan Tanner (Alberto Frezza). They grew up together and they share a romantic past that comes to haunt them in the present.

"First and foremost, they love each other," she said about Andy and Ryan. "He knows all of her secrets and habits. They have this friendship that's filled with honesty, trust, and respect. They did have a thing in the past but that thing never really turned off. This is something that is very convenient for her. When she needs a friend to talk to or vent to, she immediately goes to Ryan. So that makes things complicated because it's hard to be friends with someone who you're sexually attracted to. All of this will cause a really interesting love triangle between Ryan, Andy, and Jack."

Even though she has two gorgeous men fighting for her attention, Andy's most important relationship is with her father. In the pilot episode, he ends up at Grey Sloan Memorial Hospital where he was welcomed by Dr. Meredith Grey (Ellen Pompeo) and Miranda Bailey (Chandra Wilson), the doctors and hospital from "Grey's Anatomy."

"Audiences will see a beautiful father/daughter relationship, which I think is great because a lot of women on TV have daddy issues," she said. "She gets her strength and courage from him. The fact that his health is



deteriorating is something she's going to have to deal with.

It's this balance of work, love and family that can be stressful and tear someone down. What really defines a character, is how they deal with the obstacles and challenging moments in their lives. How will they get up and overcome it? How they deal with it all is a true testament to who they are as a person."

Playing the passionate Latina on the small screen has helped Ortiz grow as a person. The role has helped her embrace her Latinidad in ways she didn't before.

"One way that I was able to show respect to my people and my culture is to tap deep into my roots," the professional dancer said emphatically. "If I'm going to be playing this Latina with the last name Herrera, I want to do what I'm most afraid of--- speaking Spanish. As a second-generation Puerto Rican I didn't grow up speaking Spanish. But I figure, 'There's this Latina on TV that is underrepresented, so I'd like to have her speak some Spanish.'

She added about what she's learned from playing Andy, "Truly embrace who you are and where you come from. Whether you're the odd ball or you're the only one in the room. Fall in love with who you are, love it and embrace it. The more you

do that, the more that others will learn to appreciate you. I think that's something really special."

It also meant a lot to Ortiz that Andy was not a typical Latina stereotype. Which isn't surprising since no Shondaland series does that to their characters. She represents all her leading women as professionals, albeit with not so perfect personal lives.

"What Shonda has been known to do is to put women in the forefront--- specifically working women whose careers come first. So just because I'm playing a Latina, I'm not the trophy wife, the maid, the accessory. I am the hardworking, smart woman who will go over any man she loves in order to get to where she wants to be in her work life. That's really a breath of fresh air."

She added about working with Rhimes, "She's the most intimidating woman I have ever met and I mean that in the best way possible. The fact that she owns a night of TV and that she's brought such a wide range of stories and color to this one network says a lot about who she is and what she represents. She's this icon that I will always look up to. I'm so appreciative that she took a chance on me, because there are not that many women leading TV shows, especially Latinas."