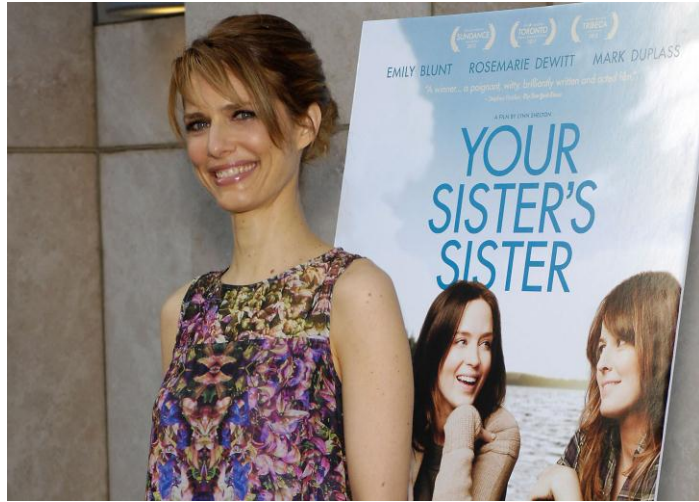


**Jan Chats  
with  
Writer/Director  
Lynn Shelton**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Chicago Press Day  
for  
*Your  
Sister's Sister***



Lynn Shelton was in Chicago on June 5<sup>th</sup> to promote her new film *Your Sister's Sister* starring Emily Blunt as “Iris,” with Rosemarie DeWitt as her sister “Hannah” and Mark Duplass as her best friend “Jack.” There is no convenient genre label for *Your Sister's Sister*. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad, *Your Sister's Sister* deftly walks the line between comedy and drama, and I would never have predicted the resolution midway through. Shelton had my total attention from the first scene to the last. Brava!

Shelton's last film, *Humpday*, won a Special Jury Prize at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival, and a John Cassavetes Award (Best Indie made for under \$500,000) at the 2010 Independent Spirit Awards.

**Jan:** This is our second face-to-face chat, Lynn, so I went back and looked at the things you told me last time to prepare. You're the oldest of four, and you have three siblings: a brother and a step brother and a step sister... right?

**Lynn:** Yep.

**Jan:** Based on your own experience as filtered through *Your Sister's Sister*, can siblings ever really be friends?

**Lynn:** I have to confess that my relationships with my siblings are unbelievably boring. They really are. They're just completely uncomplicated. But my sister and I, we never lived together growing up, so we never had a chance to build up real resentments or to betray each other or to do any of those things that make a more rich and complicated-looking sibling relationship.

I really had to come at *Your Sister's Sister* as a sociologist, much the way I did with *Humpday*. I had seen so many sibling relationships around me that were so fascinating and I've always been a real people watcher, an observer, so it was the same here.

I have friends who have these relationships with their sisters that are so deep and so intense that I would just be really jealous, but then find out upon further examination that there were all kinds of layers of rich complication...

**Jan:** In the opening scene of *Your Sister's Sister*, you set the theme. Siblings know each other really, really well; we spend years learning how to push each other's buttons!

**Lynn:** Yeah, it's true.

**Jan:** So I'm going to connect that idea with something you said last time about the search for self in *Humpday*. You said: "I'm really interested in the self and our sense of self and how that shifts in relationships to other people."

In *Your Sister's Sister* you've deepened that same theme with the sibling tie—how the past puts constraints on the building of a new self, especially given family relationships. In the opening scene, while friends are mourning Jack's brother Tom, Jack just spews it out: "I knew Tom and he fooled all of you!"

**Lynn:** Well that's the thing about people who know you from the get go. You're already trapped by your own perception of who you think you are, but then you've got what you think they think you are.

Everybody has had that experience of going home for Thanksgiving and starting to act ten years old again because they're in the same situation with their parents and their siblings. So you get back into this rut again of who you were when you were first becoming a grownup. It's not until you get out that you can break out of those bonds, but we still get trapped by them when we return.

Behavior patterns get repeated, and that was actually part of the back story between these two sisters (Iris and Hannah). We had a very elaborate narrative written about what had happened between them in the past involving similar kinds of betrayals. Lots of shit is coming up within this drama. It's not just on the surface.

**Jan:** And as older siblings, we both know the power of the older sibling, because the older sibling remembers things that happened even before the younger sibling had a "self" to defend... right? In a certain way, part of what Jack and Iris both have to do in the course of *Your Sister's Sister* is liberate themselves from their older siblings?

**Lynn:** Exactly. Very well put, yeah. Tom is definitely the fourth character in this movie for sure. Even though you never physically meet him, he weighs so heavily on Jack's soul and hangs right between Jack and Iris.

And this also informs how Jack interacts with the two sisters—Iris and Hannah—because it's deeply, deeply important to him that their bond remain intact. It's very close to his heart because Jack wasn't on the greatest terms with his brother Tom, and he really desperately wishes that he had been.



Iris with Jack.



Iris with Hannah.

**Jan:** Heavy stuff! In the press kit, you say: "I still don't know if *Your Sister's Sister* is a comedy. It encompasses drama and humor alike." And the IndieWIRE folks picked up this thread in a recent profile they did of your work: "Honing in on that sweet spot between drama and comedy with a humanistic edge."

Does it matter anymore what we label stuff? How would you feel if somebody called *Your Sister's Sister* a romantic comedy ("RomCom")...?

**Lynn:** I'd say they were wrong. I don't think it's a RomCom. If you have to pigeonhole it into a genre, then "Dramatic Comedy" seems the most accurate to me. That has a little more dignity than "Dramedy." But really, to me the comedy and the drama go hand-in-hand.

When we were on set, it was really essential that none of us—not the actors or myself either—think that we're in "a comedy," because that's when I find (especially with improvisation) you start reaching for jokes. You start sort of "soft-shoeing," and trying to entertain people, and I don't want that.

I want us to just always be playing to the truth of the scene and I really have no idea how many laughs there are going to be. We're playing it so straight that it's really hard to tell the forest for the trees. It was the same thing with *Humpday*. I never really knew exactly how funny it would be.

**Jan:** But do you worry at all about the marketing? The trailer is cut to be funny, so does it worry you if people arrive expecting a comedy?

**Lynn:** I'm fascinated endlessly by how a movie changes depending on the audience, as if they become a character through the experience of watching it. I think that people can expect to laugh.

**Jan:** But if they do, then will they also experience the drama?

**Lynn:** I don't see how you can avoid it, but it will be interesting to see. I don't think the trailer lies about the film. I think it does point to the drama as well as the comedy. But I know what you mean because we worked hard to make it [the trailer] funny. *Your Sister's Sister* is "a feel good movie," meaning I don't think people are going to leave feeling sad.

**Jan:** I agree, Lynn. Moved? Yes! Sad? No!

© Jan Lisa Huttner (5/24/12)—Special for Films for Two®

June 5, 2012 chat conducted, condensed & edited for posting by Jan Lisa Huttner.

Top Photo: Lynn Shelton at LA Premiere (6/11/12).

Photo Credit: Michael Germana/Everett Collection/NewsCom

*Your Sister's Sister* Photo Credits: © IFC Films

To read my review, visit:  
<http://www.thehotpinkpen.com/?p=3012>