

# Kat Dennings continues to steer her acting career towards uncharted, creative territory.

by Nancy Dunham  
Photography by Beth Herzhaft

**E**ven if you've already seen it, grab a copy of *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*, because watching the film again (and the extra DVD features) is the only way you'll begin to understand how truly gifted actress Kat Dennings, the 24-year-old Philadelphia native who stars as "Norah," truly is.

No matter how much we love the film, she's not Norah who is perfectly comfortable in New York's Lower East Side club scene. She's also not the pierced misfit she portrayed in *The House Bunny*, and she's miles away from the lost addict she'll play in *Defendor*, coming out later this year. So, just who is this exotic girl with the very pale skin, dark hair and elegant stance? Someone you might never suspect – and perhaps the next "Monster."

**YRB: I see you all the time on various sites where they write glowingly about your clothing and personal style.**

**Kat:** Oh, that's weird. Well, first of all I didn't know I was on those, but I think fashion goes hand in hand with a love of acting. Not in my personal life. I look like a mess most of the time, then. But on the red carpet it's an expression of your personality and fun to play with.

**YRB: What designers do you like?**

**Kat:** Zac Posen, Dolce & Gabbana are pretty fabulous. Their clothes are cut just right for my body. I am a fan of the art of fashion and the shows. They are like Vegas-style productions. The clothes are amazing, but it's this whole thing, the whole production that is so beautiful. It's all part of the same scene.

**YRB: So many people want to be actors, to get into that scene, and you made it. Did your family always support your dream?**

**Kat:** They didn't at first. My dad is a biochemist, and my mom was a speech therapist at the time. I had been asking to act since I was a baby, since I was talking, and they said 'You want to be what?' One day, I borrowed my mom's Steve Martin stand-up records and memorized [the routines] and went up and recited them to my mom and my aunt. Then I'd recite them to my stuffed animals. We'd go to the library and I'd get all kind of Madeline Kahn movies and memorize [parts]. They saw I was serious. My mom finally caved and said, 'We'll try it for a month and then if you don't like it we'll stop.' My brother's friend was in a Nickelodeon show, and we went to his manager who was a real cool chick. She had me sing "Happy Birthday," and that was it. I started to regularly book things, and I loved it. My mom knew I was serious because I missed my dance lessons and my saxophone lessons, and I'd miss my own birthday. I just loved it.

**YRB: Were you ever concerned about the competition you faced?**

**Kat:** I never really thought about it. I thought about it as this thing that I love, that I always wanted to do. I'm not very competitive, and I don't really think about the odds. If I did I'd likely lose my mind.

**YRB: If I was your agent how would you describe what scripts you want or how you're trying to mold your career?**

**Kat:** I definitely am not trying to mold into anything. My agents know "awesome" is the only thing I'm looking for.

**YRB: Well, how do you define "awesome?"**

**Kat:** It just is. I would love to do a period piece - something with corsets. I would love to do experimental things with interesting directors. I would love to do a musical. I'm interested in everything, really. I'd love to do a foreign language film. I really don't discriminate. The generic cute girl roles, often in scripts, are kind of boring.

**YRB: So, you're not choosy about roles?**

**Kat:** Earlier I would do anything just to get the experience. But [lately] I've consciously started to choose more roles that would be fun and interesting to me. When I find a script I really love, that is really interesting or amazing, I flip out and hope and dream and think about it.

**YRB: Is your latest role a cute girl part?**

**Kat:** No, I'm working on *Defendor* with Woody Harrelson. It requires no vanity whatsoever. It's been the most freeing, amazing time for me. I don't have to worry about my hair or how my face looks. I just want to do things like that.

**YRB: Would you want to go even further and do something like Charlize Theron did with *Monster*?**

**Kat:** One hundred percent - I would love that. In this movie I am playing a prostitute who is also addicted to crack cocaine, so I look absolutely bananas and trashed at the end of this – I just love, really love, this stuff. I have to tell you, I live for it.

**YRB: How do you seemingly move so effortlessly between a role like *Nick and Norah* where you played the smart, creative but somewhat cynical girl to a role where you're a drug addicted prostitute?**

**Kat:** It depends on the story and how much you prepare for it. With *Nick and Norah* we did rehearsal and Mike (Cera, who played Nick) and I spent a lot of time together - that was all that was really necessary. Getting to know each other was all we needed. For this [*Defendor*] role, I spent a lot of time with people. I've learned some people have tragedy in lives from beginning to end – it is just astounding, and I've just learned I have no right to ever complain about anything ever again.

**YRB: As your work has become better known have you had to deal with paparazzi?**

**Kat:** Luckily I haven't had to deal with it too much, but the few times I have it's a hard, jarring and icky feeling. Having a guy chase you and yell at you in the middle of the street is really scary for any woman. It's awful. If I'm telling the truth it's really awful. I am not scandalous. I don't go to clubs, I don't go to parties, I don't seek that type of attention. I wish it wasn't part of my life.

**YRB: A lot of young Hollywood actors do love the whole West Hollywood scene. You don't?**

**Kat:** As corny as it sounds, I like to be with my mom and brothers and cat... I like going to the park and running around and going to Little Tokyo and eating noodles. It's all the same at those [clubs]. I've been there because of wrap parties. They're weird. They're full of people who are drunk. It's not my type of scene.

**YRB: So, you like to be creative. What other things do you want to do along those lines?**

**Kat:** Oh, I have to say this because if I do I'll have to do it. I want to take a course in aromatherapy. And my brother (Geoffrey) and I wrote a [comedy] screenplay that's getting some good attention. It's going great. We're looking for the right director, and when we find it we will be off to the races.

**YRB: So, writing - is this an extension of the work you want to continue to do in film?**

**Kat:** It's all part of the love of art. On the *Nick and Norah* DVD there is an extra of a puppet show that I do. I don't know. I like to make things. They are all pieces of the same thing.

KAT DENNING

