

FAN FEST EXCLUSIVE: 'Orange Is the New Black' Star Laura Prepon Talks Season 5, Directorial Debut, and Approaching Motherhood!

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Laura Prepon, the accomplished actress who plays Alex Vause on Netflix's *Orange Is the New Black*, made her OITNB directorial debut with season five's most disturbing episode yet. At the helm both on and off screen of "Reverse Midas Touch," the show's 10th episode took Litchfield's riot down a dark and twisty road of physical and emotional abuse, and an unwinnable war between inmates and prison guards. Directing, and starring in one of the most poignant scenes of the new season, Prepon seamlessly shifted from in front of the screen to behind-the-scenes, and I think it's safe to say her character will never be the same again.



Though Jenji Kohan's prison dramedy (aka our pop culture obsession) is known for showcasing insanely talented actors behind the camera, Kohan's visual world has an instant winner with Prepon, who not only directed this episode, but effortlessly executed her character's storyline as she was bound, gagged, and inevitably broken in front of our eyes. And to think, a power struggle between Red (Kate Mulgrew) and Piscatella (Brad William Henke) resulted in Alex's distressing scene where her arm was snapped like a twig, and the entire audience cringed in agony at what our badass Alex had to sustain at the hands of a monster. Amongst Piscatella's purge of everyone Red holds near and dear, of course fan-favorite couple Alex and Piper (Taylor Schilling) would be the ones abducted by the deranged head officer while taking a steamy hot shower, talk about bad timing- oh and being completely mortifying.

But, not all was lost when it came to season five and potential happy endings, as ***!SUPER SPOILER ALERT!*** Piper proposed to Alex, and the two are now officially engaged! Was the riot a catalyst for this permanent union? Will Vauseman be separated now that Litchfield is closing its doors to the rambunctious ladies? Prepon was kind enough to chat with me about season five revelations, speculations on next season, and offered some insight on how the heck she's going to balance all of the amazing projects she has coming up, in addition to becoming a mom!

MCKENZIE MORRELL: Season five of *Orange is the New Black* came on Netflix last month. For those who aren't like me who binge watched the season the night it came out [laughs], can you tell us a little bit about this season and really what we can expect from Alex and the women of Litchfield?

LAURA PREPON: Basically this season is a little different in that it takes place over the course of about three days and takes place during a riot. It's interesting because it's a lot like what's going on right politically, with people trying to stand up for themselves. It's interesting that our show, this season, is about the women standing up for themselves and not being allowed to be treated like that. It's about standing up for what you believe in and it ends up resulting in a riot. This year, the energy is really condensed. I also directed episode ten so I'm biased to this season. I love every season but having that opportunity was wonderful. It's a great season. People seem to be liking it. It's a little different but it's always *Orange*.

MM: It definitely was a little different but the evolution of the show has been really interesting to watch and I've enjoyed it so I think everyone else is going to as well.

LP: We we're going into the fifth season and you want to keep the fans interested and we definitely have no shortage of awesome storylines with all the different characters. I think the fact that this season was a little different was good. The writers were trying different things and it was really cool.

MM: You guys have already been renewed up until season seven right? That's amazing and crazy at the same time.

LP: Especially nowadays in the current climate where there are so many different outlets now and so many different avenues to watch content. With cable and prime time, there are so many things that are taking people's attention so being on another show that runs this long is really great.

MM: Obviously as an actor you've gotten to play a lot of dynamic roles. What do you hope to see from your character in season six? The women are being relocated. We're not sure if everyone is going to be separated. What are your hopes and dreams from season six?

LP: Our writers are so great and Jenn is such a wonderful storyteller. I never really have to worry about what's going on with my character which is a great place to be. They always write great stuff for her and I love playing Alex. She's such a badass. I honestly — I know as much as you do about season six, McKenzie. We don't know what's going to happen. We really don't. So it's hard for me to say because I don't even know what this season is going to bring, which is exciting. It's new and different. But I trust in our writers and whatever they do will be great and will always walk that great line between comedy and drama that made this show so successful.



Photo Credit: Netflix

MM: You mentioned you directed episode 10. What was that experience like wearing both hats?

LP: It was great. I've directed myself before. This was a little different because if you've seen the show you know that I was bound and gagged and tied up naked in a shower curtain, so that was very interesting. But it was an amazing experience and I know these characters so well because I'm on the show. Everyone was so supportive. Being able to switch hats between directing and acting, I can do it very well and I've done it before and I'm comfortable doing it. For me I was like a duck in water. It felt very comfortable and natural to me. I'll direct next year. They already gave me my episode. I am really excited. It was a great experience.

MM: One thing I love about your character is that she's an avid reader. What books are on your night stand these days?

LP: I'm always reading about food. Right now I'm reading a book called Elephant in the Cornfield It's about politics in agriculture. I love reading books about — especially with recently pulling out of the Paris Treaty and everything that's happening with politics, I'm always fascinated with how climate change affects farmers and crops. I'm a huge advocate for supporting local farms. So that's something I'm reading right now.

MM: That's not something you hear every day .

LP: My hobbies tend to be a little different.

MM: Different is always good! So more of a foodie question obviously, you cook you have a book out. If you were to construct a donut based off of Alex Vause's personality, what kind of donut would it be and what toppings would be on it?

LP: It would probably be really really rich dark chocolate, that's more on the bitter side. Not too sweet, more savory dark chocolate donut. Probably a little bit of spice like cayenne and different things. I'm experimenting with different spices. I'm super pregnant so I have to be careful. But I love different kinds of chocolates with spices in them and I think Alex probably has a little bit of heat in there. For toppings, probably some kind of chopped pistachios or something cool like that, more on the savory side.

MM: I'm a donut connoisseur so I always try to sneak that into my interviews.

LP: I wish that I could eat more donuts. I have a wheat allergy and all the donuts that are gluten free are never as good. It's never the same. And the Alex donut would definitely not be gluten free.

MM: What are your thoughts on the fans that are convinced that Kubra saw that viral video of you being tortured? Do you hope that storyline unfolds next year?

LP: I don't know. I mean it's always so fun to hear what the fans think are going to happen. I have no idea. We'll see what happens. I literally know as much as you do about season six. I don't know anything about what's going to happen and we go back to work at the end of July. I mean it's exciting but I don't know. The fans come up with some cool storylines by the way. Maybe, we'll see what happens.

MM: Obviously you're well known for your role on *That 70s Show*, amongst other things. How has that fan following changed over the years. *Orange is the New Black* has a pretty rabid fan base, especially on social media.

LP: It's interesting. It's just a little different. *That 70s Show* seemed like a more pure place. Also it was my first job and I was so new to the industry and it was my first real acting gig and such a warm, cozy family. It was the perfect gig for me to learn the business. We had the same director for eight years, every episode except that pilot. That experience was like home. It was at a time with shows like *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *Seinfeld* And *Friends* and all these long running shows that came on and people would come home and watch in their living rooms. Being able to record TV was a new notion. It's really interesting then jumping into something like *Orange* that is just lightning in a bottle and has been the most incredible experience ever. But it's a totally different time in my life.

MM: Can you explain some of those differences?

LP: *That 70s Show* was like high school and I graduated and went out into the world and *Orange* is like out in the real world, you know what I mean? We were like pioneers on this new frontier. *House of Cards* hadn't aired yet, nobody was streaming. There was one show that not a lot of people knew about. But everyone was like "what is this streaming thing" and I was like "I have no idea what this streaming thing is but this show rocks and I want to be a part of it. And Alex Vause is a badass and I need to play her." It was a huge leap of faith and we ended up just blowing the doors off of this thing along with *House of Cards* and everyone else followed suit. Hulu didn't make its own shows, or Amazon. It's a very different world now. The quickness at which things are consumed now in terms of entertainment is mindblowing. It's so mind blowing. Everything is changing and to be able to be on the forefront of all that is really special. I keep finding myself in these wonderful special positions where being able to be on a show like *That 70s Show* for six years then other projects in between and to end up on *Orange* was this new, wonderful experience. I've been very fortunate. I'm so glad that *Orange* came out when it did and not now when there are so many shows streaming. It made it so special. We were all new to this. It was a major learning curve. Being on a show that streams, and everybody is on social media now and everyone is on the internet in two seconds. It's surreal. You take the good with the bad. It's amazing that people can be able to have TV at the snap of a finger and stream. And there's also a — it also can be scary because everybody with a cell phone is a paparazzi and they have a place to — I don't know.

MM: Social media can be both good and bad when it comes to reaching the audience.

LP: It's a double edged sword for sure. It's interesting because social media can be a little scary. I'm about to have a baby and I worry about her. People compare themselves to other people on social media and keeping perspective is so vital and important, especially now because everything is so quick and online in two seconds. There is something about the authenticity of what's real and being able to sit in front of a real person and have a conversation that we all have to make sure that stays there. It's so important. I love when I go places that I have no cell service. It's amazing. And I'm terrible at social media. I'm trying to get better. But it's not my bag. The repost app and all that, I don't know how to do any of that stuff. It's a world that's kind of foreign to me but I'm trying to figure it out. It's a lot. Especially being on a show like *Orange* that is a streaming show and on social media, it's an interesting learning curve for me. But our fans rock and are always very supportive of the show and to be able to create the effect that we have with this show is amazing.

MM: You're trying. That's all we can hope for in terms of social media. Hopefully you take the positive comments and don't read the negative ones.

LP: I don't really read comments because it's crazy. I like to share things with fans but there's definitely a line. I'm a very, very private person so it's a constant balance of how do you share and open up to fans while also keeping your anonymity and your privacy. It's a really hard game to play sometimes.

MM: Yes, it's a very fine line. To conclude, you had a busy year already and we're only halfway in. What's next for you? Is being the best mom you can be your latest, biggest role?

LP: It's so crazy. There's so much going on. What's next for me is yes, I'm nine months pregnant right now and we go back to work in about four weeks. I'll also be directing this year again. I'm writing a feature I'm going to direct. I'm hoping to do another book at some point because that's a huge passion of mine, educating people about the purity of food. Girl, I can't even imagine what it's going to be like being a mother in light of all the stuff going on but it really shifts your priorities and I can't wait. We're so excited. My priorities are getting shifted and much more focused on things that matter. It's pretty incredible. I'm always a very focused, driven person but even more so now. It's pretty great. Right now I'm trying to figure out how to be a new mother and start work again.

MM: Well we wish you the best of luck! Keep killin' it!

LP: Thank you!

Season 5 of *Orange the New Black*, now on Netflix
