



A fictionalized White House is Bellamy Young's battlefield in the hit show *Scandal*.

Born Amy Young, she grew up performing in dance recitals and singing in the mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, before leaving to study English and theater at Yale, with a semester at Oxford University. After graduating, she embarked on national theater tours before transitioning to television. She appeared on shows like *Scrubs* and Rhimes's *Grey's Anatomy* until that supposedly low-stakes audition for *Scandal* changed everything.

"We could never have expected the love that we're getting," she says now of her costars, who include Tony Goldwyn, her onetime director for TV's *Dirty Sexy Money*, and George Washington University alumna Kerry Washington.

Though Young has become a star since *Scandal*'s start in 2012, she's remained dedicated to her craft—still working with her acting coach and studying up on past first ladies. (She doesn't have a favorite—"way too hard to pick," she insists—but she admires Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton for their "marriages of style and substance.")

Does she see her fractured character as a villain? Mellie is cunning and vindictive, yet understandably hurt that her husband (Goldwyn), the president of the United States, is in love with high-stakes fixer Olivia Pope (Washington). And when viewers send as many as 2,200 tweets per minute during airings, many voice approval for Pope.

"[Shonda Rhimes] writes complicated people, so we're all gray," Young says. "[Mellie] definitely gets a nice tirade frequently, which I love to lean into, but there's always heart and pain and humanity underneath it." Young can even relate to her character, who is often seen wearing pearls and a pretend smile. "I overthink things and I'm doggedly loyal," she admits good-naturedly, but "I'm nowhere near as volatile."

After traveling to Israel this summer, she is now planning to work on an album. She sings "every day, all the time," and calls music "everything." Going forward, she'll continue working with her *Scandal* family, shooting DC scenes on a Los Angeles green screen and ruminating on the real Washington.

With season three set to premiere on October 3, Young says she is blessed to appear on *Scandal*, which shocks viewers and cast members alike. "We throw scripts and laugh and gasp and scream," she says of the cast's thrilling table reads. "I'm lucky to have a job at all, but this job is beyond my wildest dreams." **CF**

INSIGHT

Local love: "A walk in DC is absolutely transformative."

Best part of your career: "The surprises."

Words to live by: "You are the sky. Everything else—it's just the weather."
—Pema Chödrön

A *Scandal* Star

THIS FALL, BELLAMY YOUNG BEGINS HER THIRD YEAR PLAYING THE FIRST LADY ON THE WILDLY POPULAR DC-BASED DRAMA. BY LESLIE QUANDER WOOLDRIDGE

Bellamy Young almost wasn't a regular on *Scandal*.

"In the pilot, I had two lines," she reveals from her home in Pasadena, California. Fresh from a hair appointment and wearing a black T-shirt and flowery pants, she remembers how she was one of five actresses to audition for the bit part: "Initially, they thought maybe I'd have a three-episode arc."

That "arc" turned into a key role on the political thriller. Today, Young expertly plays Mellie Grant, the ambitious and scheming first lady of Shonda Rhimes's United States of America. She's so convincing, in fact, that audiences may be surprised to know she's actually approachable and kind.