



Man of many faces - D'Onofrio's film career is filled with 'Happy Accidents'.(Arts and Lifestyle)

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Vincent D'Onofrio has played a wide variety of characters in a wide variety of movies. He has immersed himself in roles in everything from "Full Metal Jacket" (as the tragic Private Gomer) and "Ed Wood" (an astonishing cameo as Orson Welles) to "Men in Black" (as an alien) and "The Cell" (as both a serial killer and the dark spirit within his subconscious).

The eclectic span of the 42-year-old will be especially impressive during the rest of the year. "Happy Accidents," the new romantic comedy by former Bostonian Brad Anderson ("Next Stop Wonderland"), is just one of several upcoming movies he's in. He also stars in "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," an NBC series that debuts next month.

During a recent local visit, the New York native said he chooses his projects based on their story, even more so than what role he may play. That's what happened with "Happy Accidents."

"It was written in a very clever way," he said. "It turns and twists, and you never know how seriously to take it, or not to take it."

Most of those twists come courtesy of D'Onofrio's character. After he and Marisa Tomei's neurotic single woman fall for each other, he informs her that he's from the year 2470 and, a la "The Terminator," he "back traveled" from the future to be with her. Like Tomei, the audience is suddenly unsure of what to make of this seemingly nice guy.

"It's a real good character to play, because there are levels in every scene, to each sentence that I'm saying," said D'Onofrio. "Sometimes I'm lying to her, and the audience knows I'm lying to her. Some scenes I'm lying to her, and I'm lying to the audience, too. Some scenes I'm telling the truth, and they seem like a lie. There's all these levels."

D'Onofrio will follow up "Happy Accidents" with the thriller "Impostor," the gritty "The Salton Sea" (in which he plays a drug dealer named Pooh Bear) and "The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys," with Jodie Foster.

Though he earned an Emmy nomination for a memorable guest appearance on "Homicide: Life on the Street," D'Onofrio has shied away from doing a television series for fear that he'd become overexposed. But writer-producer Dick Wolf hooked him for the latest "Law & Order" series.

D'Onofrio described the series as "straight-out crime story . . . more about psychology than law and order." He called his police detective a modern-day Sherlock Holmes, with partner Kathryn Erbe a sort of Dr. Watson.

"I've been really lucky that I've been able to play so many types of characters, and it doesn't seem to me as if (the TV series) is going to change anything," he said.

"When the show starts in late September, they'll show 13 episodes. And during that time, five movies are going to come out with me playing completely different parts. Hopefully, I will always be the actor I've always been, and the perception of me will be as just an actor, not a superstar or leading man or this and that. Just an actor who's working and can tell a story."

The series schedule still allows D'Onofrio time to do one or two movies a year and, as a producer, he's developing two projects, including a biography of the late rock critic Lester Bangs. But instead of playing Bangs himself, D'Onofrio said he's "trying to talk one of my buddies into gaining weight and playing him."

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