



Extreme characters appeal to D'Onofrio.(Entertainment)

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Byline: Joshua Mooney / Entertainment News Wire

NEW YORK -- Vincent D'Onofrio sees a distinct line between his on-screen presence and his off-screen life. In fact, the 41-year-old actor doesn't even like to discuss that line.

"I'll talk about it a little," he says warily, "but I hate to seem too romantic about things."

D'Onofrio is well-known for keeping the essence of his acting to himself. He doesn't like to talk about how he prepares for a role, or what those roles mean to him personally. He's also known as one of Hollywood's pre-eminent character actors, a man of commitment and craft.

You might not recognize the name, but it's very likely you've seen D'Onofrio's work. He burst on the scene in 1987, playing a disturbed Army recruit in Stanley Kubrick's "Full Metal Jacket." D'Onofrio gained 70 pounds to play the role -- talk about commitment.

Role reversal

He went on to play a lovelorn fisherman in "Mystic Pizza," a screenwriter in "The Player," a cop in "Strange Days," a blind football player in "Good Luck," and Orson Welles in "Ed Wood."

He was also a farmer whose body is taken over by an alien in the smash hit "Men in Black." In all, D'Onofrio has made more than two dozen films since "Full Metal Jacket." It's as diverse a body of work as you'll find on any Hollywood resume today.

Celebrity, D'Onofrio says, has never been his goal.

"The more of a celebrity you become -- let's say a Jack Nicholson -- the less seriously we'll take you as an extreme character," D'Onofrio says. "If people know who you are, they see that instead of the character."

Audiences are about to see quite a bit of D'Onofrio. He's got two films coming out, and they

showcase just how versatile this character actor is.

In the big-budget thriller "The Cell," D'Onofrio plays a psychotic killer who terrorizes psychologist Jennifer Lopez and detective Vince Vaughn. It's one of the creepiest movies of the year.

In "Steal This Movie," a low-budget independent film, D'Onofrio takes on the role of real-life '60s radical Abbie Hoffman. Of having two very different films coming out at the same time, D'Onofrio says, "It's not perfect . . . but it's not bad."

D'Onofrio was so convincing as the overweight, deranged private in "Full Metal Jacket" that in the wake of the Kubrick film he ended up being offered a slew of dark roles. Casting directors, he says, simply assumed that's what he was best suited for.

Patiently waiting

But instead of jumping at the chance to work in another film, D'Onofrio waited patiently, lost the excess poundage, and showed up in a small, sweet-natured love story, "Mystic Pizza," which was a surprise success.

When it comes to movies, people have short memories -- and that includes Hollywood casting directors.

"I only get seen as the last part I've done," D'Onofrio says. "I have to prove myself over and over again for every film I do."

D'Onofrio says he is rarely asked to play a specific role. He typically has to find a part he wants, and then pursues it.

"I usually have to chase parts down," he says.

Occasionally, he says, a good role lands on his doorstep.

"It's shocking to me every time a director sends me a script and says, 'Please do this.' Especially when that character has nothing to do with anything I've done before. That's always really nice."

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