



'The Cell's' Vincent D'Onofrio recounts the secret of his successes

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(The Daily Aztec) (U-WIRE) SAN DIEGO -- Sex is a great motivator.

Or lust for that matter.

And while this has very little to do with New Line Cinema's psychological thriller "The Cell," it is very much a part of how the film industry was first introduced to Vincent D'Onofrio, who plays serial killer Carl Stargher in the movie.

Or, in his case, it is how he began a love affair with the craft of acting.

"It was in New York, just before I turned 20," said D'Onofrio, who admits it wasn't the acting bug that bit him. "I followed some girl into an audition. I had never even acted before."

Having entered thespian life under such circumstances, one would think all the wiles and vanities of Tinseltown should have, by now, caught up with him.

D'Onofrio, however, has remained a quiet one among his colleagues -- a choice of habit that has caused him, for better and for worse, a lack of limelight, despite his 20-year tenure as an actor.

In fact, though he is very much celebrated among peers and critics, (Best Actor award for "The Whole Wide World" from the Seattle International Film Festival), D'Onofrio, a student of both New York's prestigious American Stanislavski Theatre and the Actors' Studio, still remains to be fully recognized as a star -- which he says is fine with him.

He'll simply leave that task to the George Clooneys and Tom Cruises of the industry.

The 41-year-old father of two is quick to explain why his name is not a household one.

"I've been working for a long time and I've been able to keep my privacy," said D'Onofrio. "I don't do a lot of press. And I'll only do press for movies that I believe in. And the thing I won't do is promote myself. I don't sell myself; I promote the work that I do."

Sitting across from this actor, it's quite easy to see how anyone could mistake him for a regular Joe. Hair dyed blonde (for "The Salton Sea," currently in production), donning nothing that would be found on the pages of "GQ" (seeming, instead, to be a t-shirt and jeans kind of guy) and armed with very little jet-setting lifestyle composure, Vincent D'Onofrio comes off as a simple man.

D'Onofrio's straightforward, unassuming demeanor -- especially considering how conducive his career is to celebrity-hood and red carpet luxuries -- is something to marvel at. Regardless, he is still a force to be reckoned with in Hollywood.

This is, after all, the same man whose film debut came after getting pulled off of Broadway (in which he appeared in a run of "Open Admissions," as well as off-Broadway productions of "Of Mice and Men" and "Sexual Perversity in Chicago") to star as the unsound Private Pyle in Stanley Kubrick's 1987 film "Full Metal Jacket."

For D'Onofrio, it was a landmark role, one that required him not only to gain 70 pounds, but to endure rigorous boot camp training. His performance was striking and served as a tiny peek into the kind of depth of acting which would surface in future roles.

His is the face you know you've seen somewhere before, but you can't quite pin down. A resume that boasts working in both blockbuster hits and obscure indie favorites, D'Onofrio has become a screen gem; a prolific character-actor whose presence is hardly dismissible, despite his non-celebrity status.

He has not only gone under the wings of some major filmmakers (Robert Altman, Tim Burton, Joel Shumacher and Oliver Stone to name a few) and appeared opposite such acclaimed actors as Julia Roberts ("Mystic Pizza," "Dying Young"), Tracey Ullman ("Household Saints") and Tommy Lee Jones ("Men In Black"), but he has also moved on to the helm of producer, resulting in 1996's "Guy" and "The Whole Wide World," and the upcoming "Steal This Movie," based on the life of civil rights activist Abbie Hoffman.

His acting style is hardly categorical, and his choice of projects and roles is equally versatile.

"It's usually the story that gets me wanting to do a film," said D'Onofrio. "That's why I've played so many different types of parts and so many different sizes. I'm not picky at all. I'll do two minutes of a film if I like the story and if they'll have me."

His dedication, on the other hand, is something that's consistent and evident.

From altering his appearance to bending the rules, there's almost nothing D'Onofrio has not tried

and tackled.

He's even locked lips with actor Thomas Jane, whose kissing scene for "The Velocity of Gary" (another film he executive-produced) has gone down as "one of the most intense male kisses in the history of film," as D'Onofrio puts it.

And for his new film, "The Cell," the drive is no less different. In preparing for his role, D'Onofrio read up on case studies, observed the art of the insane and spoke with the FBI about serial killers.

"I tried to avoid playing killers. I get cast a lot as a bad guy and so I really didn't want to do it again," said D'Onofrio. "But then when I realized what (director Tarsem Singh) was trying to do I decided to (go for it). I wasn't familiar with his work until afterwards, but I saw all of it; his eye is so fantastic. And his filmmaking style is very visual and very story-driven.

"I look at everything as a whole and as a story, so whatever part of that story I need to tell, I'll tell. And whatever that takes me to and however that influences me and the way I execute my character, and the way he ends up looking and sounding and being in the story, then that's what it ends up being.

"I only hope there are more interesting stories around that people will let me do."

Hardly something to lose sleep about.

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