



D'Onofrio from 'Cell' talks about films, large and small

University Wire; 8/29/2000; Erin Steele

University Wire

08-29-2000

(Daily Texan) (U-WIRE) AUSTIN, Texas -- Vincent D'Onofrio may star in this weekend's highest-grossing gross-out film, but box office receipts were the last thing on his mind when he joined the cast of *The Cell*.

In fact, D'Onofrio has fashioned a career out of seemingly unshakable obscurity he's plagued by the Dan Hedaya "I know I've seen him before" syndrome and he couldn't be happier.

"I have the kind of career as a character actor where I don't have to worry about box office receipts it's not like the guys who run the studios are saying 'I have to put another D'Onofrio movie out this year,'" D'Onofrio said. "I don't have to think about that kind of stuff. I can jump from small films to big films depending on what the stories are like and if I want to help tell them."

D'Onofrio has helped tell more than 30 stories since his debut as the homicidal Private Pyle in Stanley Kubrick's 1987 release *Full Metal Jacket*. D'Onofrio's full-to-the-brim filmography includes his turns as the screenwriter menacing Tim Robbins in *The Player*; as Orson Welles in *Ed Wood*; and as Will Smith's alien arch-nemesis in *Men in Black*.

In *The Cell*, D'Onofrio slips into character as literal lady-killer Carl Stargher. The film explores the littered landscape of Stargher's unconscious via Catherine Deane (Jennifer Lopez), a child psychologist who enters the comatose killer's mind in order to discover where he has imprisoned his latest victim.

The *Cell*'s questionable content including child abuse, torture and neo-S&M made D'Onofrio reluctant to sign on initially, despite what he felt was a unique script.

"I read the script I thought it was well-written and everything but I think society is pretty clear on that whole subject," D'Onofrio said. "But then the director [Tarsem Singh] insisted that we meet, and then I met him and I was very impressed with him. I realized it was mainly going to be a visual

movie and I hadn't really done a lot of stuff like that."

D'Onofrio said Tarsem's extensive education in art and film, as well as his extraordinary vision for *The Cell*, convinced him to do the film.

"Tarsem had quite a vision for this particular film," D'Onofrio said. "He approached the script as kind of a blank slate and took it off the page in a way it wasn't really on the page, so I figured 'Why not?'"

Once committed to the film, D'Onofrio had to find the correct approach in bringing the disturbed Stargher to life, as well as providing each of Stargher's internalized idealizations with their own unique persona.

"I did a lot of research about psychotic behavior, case studies about the evolution from childhood to adulthood of a person who might commit these kinds of heinous crimes," D'Onofrio said. "For the aesthetic stuff that happens inside the mind, there's like five characters of different postures and sounds I had to come up with. I watched a lot of documentaries on animals and for postures I was looking at painting and sculptures, things like that."

Costumes also played a vital role in differentiating D'Onofrio's characters in *The Cell* in one scene D'Onofrio, as master of Stargher's domain, is cloaked in a massive robe that encompassed an entire room and allowed the actor to morph into Stargher's various personalities.

"Costumes are always important; you put a hat on, you feel different," D'Onofrio said. "If you go to a fancy hat shop and you put on a hat that is not really something you would buy, but you just put it on, it makes you feel different. That's what a costume does. It's not exactly the kind of stuff I would want to wear, but it makes you feel different, it helps."

The amazing costumes are just one layer of the critically lauded visuals that have won *The Cell* comparisons to techno-chic films like *The Matrix* (although very few computer graphics were employed in *The Cell*, with Tarsem instead opting for in-camera effects involving lighting and set tricks). D'Onofrio said he thinks the only true correlation between *The Cell* and other films of the genre are that the directors behind the projects are innovative people.

"For instance, with *The Matrix*, the Wachowski brothers are so clever, and they have such a unique style and had a really neat concept," D'Onofrio said. "I think Tarsem also had an amazing concept and a really good aesthetic eye. I guess you could say they're close to being unique in a context where there is very little originality in filmmaking these days."

The Cell has also been linked to films such as *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Se7en*, which likewise drew critical fire because of their explicitly violent subject matter. *The Cell*'s content has resulted in its mixed reviews, a response that D'Onofrio expected from the beginning.

"I think people were really bothered by it and I thought they would be," D'Onofrio said. "The good reviews have been about the style of the filmmaking and how important they think Tarsem is going to be. The negative stuff is basically about the content and I agree with it."

Coincidentally, D'Onofrio's follow-up to the controversial *The Cell* is the soon-to-be-released indie flick *Steal This Movie!* in which he plays the always-under-fire political activist Abbie Hoffman. D'Onofrio said portraying the emotional ups-and-downs of Hoffman's life made *Steal This Movie!* a tough shoot.

"The shoot was a little draining not in a romantic sense because I was living the character or anything, but the scenes we were depicting were tough," D'Onofrio said. "Not just me, but the other actors as well. It was exhausting and emotional. There was a lot of homework to be done. We all had to execute our characters properly, so it was a tough job."

D'Onofrio said roles such as the flawed but sympathetic Hoffman are more available in smaller, independent films, as witnessed by his more villainous turns in Hollywood vehicles.

"I have a pretty eclectic career so far and I just go according to the stories I like it doesn't matter what genre, or whether it's a good guy or a bad guy," D'Onofrio said. "In the smaller films, I tend to play the good guys, and in the bigger ones I play the bad guys. In the studio world, there's the leading man and then there's the bad guy and I'm not the leading man type, so I get the bad guy. In the independent world, it's kind of wide open for anybody to play the heroes, or the unsympathetic heroes, or the storytellers."

D'Onofrio doesn't resent his leading man status, a destiny he has been content with since he began acting in his late teens.

"That was it for me," D'Onofrio said. "That was what I did in the theatre, and then I got *Full Metal Jacket* and that put me exactly where I wanted to be."

(C) 2000 Daily Texan via U-WIRE

HighBeam Research, LLC. © Copyright 2004. All rights reserved.