

DeRay Vision

by Kam Williams
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A born hustler from Chicago's South Side, DeRay Davis began his career on the comedy club circuit and was first noticed by Hollywood while onstage at Atlanta's Laffapalooza Festival. Shortly after moving to LA, he won the Comedy Central Laugh Riots Competition and was subsequently a standout on the Cedric the Entertainer Tour and at the Montreal Just for Laughs Festival.

DeRay's film credits include "Jumping the Broom," "Get Him to the Greek," "Semi-Pro," "Barbershop," "Barbershop 2," "Johnson Family Vacation," "Old Dogs," "Life as We Know It," "Imagine That," "License to Wed," "School for Scoundrels" and "Scary Movie 4." And on the small screen, he has appeared in HBO's "Entourage," "Comedy Central's Reno 911," "Comedy Central Presents DeRay Davis," "Comedy Central's Premium Blend" and "BET's ComicView," along with doing various voices on "The Boondocks."

In terms of record albums, he wrote and performed the comedy skits on Kanye West's "Late Registration" and "The College Dropout" LPs, and he also performed at the 2006 Grammy Awards with Kanye and Jamie Foxx. Here, he talks about his latest screen role in "21 Jump Street," where he plays a Dominican drug dealer named Domingo, opposite Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum.

Kam Williams: Hi DeRay, thanks for the interview.

DeRay Davis: No problem, Kam.

KW: What interested you in 21 Jump Street?

DD: My initial interest had to be the hype of the show. I'm from the generation that watched it growing up. So, I was pretty happy and excited that they were even making the TV show into a movie. Plus, I wanted to see what kind of spin they were going to put on it. And to hear that they were going to turn it into a comedy was pretty intriguing to me.

KW: How did you feel about your character Domingo's wearing shades the entire film, given that your green eyes are almost your trademark?

DD: They were really only covered towards the end of the film.

KW: Editor/legist Patricia Turnier says: I loved you in "Jumping the Broom." Did you watch episodes of the TV series to prepare for your role in "21 Jump Street?"

DD: No, because my character was created for the film. When they told me that he was a biker and a bad guy, I looked at some eighties biker videos on Youtube. And because he's Dominican, I also listened to some accents. And even though it's a comedic film, I had to tone down the "funny" in order to play this bad guy. I started thinking about all my bills to get in touch with my angry side.



DeRay Davis

KW: You definitely looked bigger, buffer and more intimidating than usual.

DD: I was glad I was playing opposite Channing [Tatum]. Two tall actors. That's pretty unusual in Hollywood.

KW: I'm always surprised to learn how short some actors are.

DD: Yeah, I heard Al Pacino's about 4' 7". [Chuckles] I'm joking.

KW: Patricia also says: In your life, you probably met naysayers who tried to deter you from pursuing your dreams. What message do you have for young people who are surrounded by individuals who do not believe in them, and who would like to follow in your footsteps by becoming a comedian?

DD: I think the role of comedy in your life should supersede anything and everything negative. Just by virtue of the fact that you have to be funny, you can't afford to focus on the negative. As a comedian, your challenge is to turn negative stuff into positive energy. You should be able to hear anything that sounds bad, that people normally wouldn't laugh at, and make it feel funny to you. No one should be able to deter you, once you have your mind set on comedy. Your survival as a comedian should be as natural as breathing. I need to breathe and I consider my career my air.

KW: Harriet Pakula Teweles asks: How much fun was it making this movie?

DD: It was a lot of fun and a lot of work. We had to hit the notes and hit the points, but we did plenty of ad-libbing in the midst of it, once we had the script down. There was also a lot of crazy, high-speed stuff that I wasn't used to, but that was fun, too. It was like riding a roller coaster.

KW: Harriet also asks: What's the difference between doing standup comedy and acting in movies. How does each challenge you as an entertainer and how does each play to your strengths?

DD: I believe they parallel each other as far as the strengths. The difference is that when I'm onstage doing standup, no one yells "Cut!" or tells me what to do. I'm DeRay, and I use my own words. With acting, you're portraying a character with someone else's words. Still, you definitely want to inject a little of yourself into every role, the way that Samuel L. Jackson does. Following the script is one thing, but the unique way in which you deliver your lines is what makes them your own.

KW: Film student Jamaal Green asks: Are you currently writing any projects that you hope to bring to the screen?

DD: Yeah, we've actually been working on three or four for a few years. It takes a while for a movie to get on its feet. That's when believing in yourself really matters, when people start giving you money to fund a project. But I definitely have a lot of ideas and original thoughts I'd like to see up on the big screen.

KW: Attorney Bernadette Beekman asks: Are you going to expand your T-shirts with hashtags beyond the "S.A.L.T.S." one which is already available on your website? [http://deraydavis.com]

DD: Yeah, I definitely plan to expand well beyond the hashtags T-shirts. I'm very creative when it comes to apparel.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

DD: Yeah, "How are you doing?" [Chuckles]

KW: Is there something about you that no interview ever addresses.

DD: I'd like the world to know that I would do what I do for no money. If I could trade my comedy for food, I'd walk into a grocery store and give them 15 minutes for \$100 worth of groceries. My passion is beyond the financial. I don't think people are aware of that about me. I'm not a flashy guy, and I want people to know that whatever they do is just as important as my craft.

KW: The Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

DD: Yep, I'm terrified of failure.

KW: The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

DD: Half the time. When I'm with my daughter, I'm elated. That's what makes my work pay off, knowing that she's here, and she's healthy, and that regardless of how I'm received by anybody else, I'm funny to her.

KW: The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good laugh?

DD: 20 minutes ago.

KW: What is your guiltiest pleasure?

DD: I can't tell you that.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

DD: Playboy.

KW: The music maven Heather Covington question: What was the last song you listened to?

DD: Young Jeezy.

KW: Which song of his.

DD: It doesn't matter. They all have pretty much the same message: that I should stop doing comedy and sell drugs. [LOL]

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

DD: Hmm... I love soup, and my homemade chicken noodle soup is my favorite.

KW: The Sanaa Lathan question: What excites you?

DD: This is going to sound weird, but I'm excited by quiet. When it's quiet, I get a rush because I start wondering what's about to happen, like in a horror film.

KW: Have you ever made a horror film?

DD: Yes, The Fog, and I apologize for it. [Laughs]

KW: That's right. Were you the first to die? In most horror flicks, the black guy dies first.

DD: No I wasn't. I'm mixed, so they let me live a little longer.

KW: The Uduak Oduok question: Who is your favorite clothes designer?

DD: Target! [Laughs]

KW: Dante Lee, author of "Black Business Secrets," asks: What was the best

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