

An interview with Australian Actor Paul Ashton: On his new film, "Serial Buddies" and his move to Hollywood.

Australian actor Paul Ashton recently wrapped shooting the feature film "Serial Buddies," an indie comedy labeled as "the first serial killer-buddy film of all time," produced by Maria Menounos and directed by Keven Undergaro. In it he plays one of the two starring roles, and performed opposite the likes of Christopher Lloyd, Christopher McDonald and David Proval. It was an experience and opportunity that seems a far cry from Wagga Wagga, the small town in Australia where Paul grew up.

Ashton started acting at the young age of seven performing with Louise Blackett's Theatre Workshop. It was simply a natural inclination at the time, and he had no idea of the huge role acting would play in his life in the future.

He hails from a creative lot - though his parents are both in medicine (one orthodox, one alternative - a lively combination he assures me) his three siblings are all artists too. One of his sisters, Alexa Ashton, is also a successful actor. She starred in 'Home and Away' and like Paul has worked for the prestigious Bell Shakespeare Company .

In asking him about his family's thoughts on his career choice, Ashton was quick to state: "My family is extremely supportive. I think my Dad would've preferred it if I'd finished my law degree before heading to drama school, but never once have my parents tried to stop me from doing what I love to do. They've been there supporting and providing 100% and are proud of the paths we've all chosen."

After his family moved to Canberra when he was 12 years old, Ashton saw a school production of 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' by Tom Stoppard. It galvanized his love for performing on stage, and shortly after he saw the first ever Bell Shakespeare Company production - it was 'Hamlet' - and he knew this was what he was destined to do.

EARLY INFLUENCES

In speaking of early influences, Paul notes Rob Sitch, the Australian actor/director who was part of "The Late Show" and who with his colleagues, went on to produce some of Australia's best-loved films, most notably "The Castle."

Other early influences included Baz Luhrmann, Kenneth Branagh, Anthony Hopkins, John Cleese, Mike Myers, Jim Carrey, Michael Winterbottom, Ben Kingsley and Kate Winslet. He trained at VCA Drama School in Melbourne, where teachers such as Lindy Davies, Tanya Gerstle and Leisa Shelton, and directors Peter Evans and Brian Lipson also had a big impact on him during those formative years.

But he sites John Bell - who created the renowned Bell Shakespeare Company - as making a particularly large impression on him. Paul recalls: "Watching their productions every year in Canberra, and meeting him and some of the other actors as a teenager was really inspiring for me. I was a drama nerd in its purest form - I used to get their autographs. It was a dream of mine to work for them."

In a true career defining moment, John Bell came and watched Ashton play Orlando in As You Like It in his final year of drama school (Paul had written a letter inviting him to come along, and was shocked when he received a call from Bell's assistant confirming the dates). He worked for Bell's company a year later - a dream come true.

Earlier that same year, Paul had been cast as the role of Ben on the award winning Australian show "The Secret Life of Us."

It would be four years of living and working in Sydney before Hollywood called. During this time, Ashton also was the frontman for popular local indie rock act, Minder.

He reflects back to that time, "I made the move to Los Angeles, like so many other of my compatriots because it is the centre of the global entertainment industry and provides the most diverse range of opportunities possible. That diversity appeals to me, and I think is a better fit for me as an actor."

In a sit-down interview at The Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills, Ashton shared his thoughts with me about his new life in the mecca of the entertainment business.

SITDOWN:

Bobbi -Q: Paul, what is one of the main differences between being an actor in Los Angeles versus Australia?

Paul -A: Undoubtedly the first thing you discover when you arrive is the scale of it. The sheer size of the city itself is a good indicator, there are just so many people and it's so competitive. It can be hard to know where to start. You go from knowing most people in the industry and most people knowing you, to knowing no one and in a way, starting again.

But there's a real sense of possibility and that anyone's got a shot. There's a 'yes' attitude that underpins much of the American psyche, and I really respond to that.

Bobbi- Q: How did you get the role in "Serial Buddies?"

Paul- A: I got the role by auditioning. Casting Director Jen Cooper had seen some of my work last year and she called me in to read for the role. At first they didn't think I was right for Gregory, but fortunately I won them over.

Bobbi -Q: Was the character easy to play for you?

Paul -A: There were certain parts of Gregory I had to work very hard on - he has a very dark past and was damaged from years of abuse and neglect.

But his flamboyance and physicality were a huge amount of fun to take on, and in that sense, came more easily. But he was demanding at all times and I had to stretch as an actor to get there.

Bobbi-Q: What acting technique do you use? Are there elements that are essential to success?

Paul-A: I don't work with any specific technique. Certainly my training had a big influence on how I approach my work, and over the years I have adapted the principles I learnt into more of my own thing.

Elements that I think are essential? Nothing new - research and script analysis, using the imagination and understanding the point of view of your character. And then, most importantly playing the moment.

Bobbi-Q: What was it like working with the cast of "Serial Buddies?"

Paul-A: I felt extremely privileged to work with a long list of well established and very talented actors.

We had core group of guys that were a joy to spend time with on set. The other 3 guys all have comedy and improv backgrounds, so there were always plenty of laughs, with lots of innovation and creativity when the cameras were rolling.

To work with an iconic actor like Christopher Lloyd. Playing my dad! It was wild, and a career highlight for sure. He was a gentleman and a joy to work with. And Chris McDonald too? No way. Comic genius right there. We had a lot of fun doing our scene together.

And to top it off - to have Hal Rudnick as Gary, to my Gregory—perfect.

Bobbi-Q: What characters or roles do you want to see yourself playing?

Paul-A: I love both comedy and drama, and never want to restrict myself to just one genre or form.

Bobbi-Q: What are you currently doing?

Paul-A: I'm currently in post-production with a short film I made before I shot "Serial Buddies." It's called "Champion" and I'm planning on entering it into Tropfest in Australia early next year. It was a script I wrote, directed and produced.

Other than that, auditioning and entertaining lots of friends from Australia!

Bobbi-Q: What is your goal for this upcoming year?

Paul-A: To continue to challenge myself to be better. Of course, I'd love to see "Serial Buddies" make the submission deadline for Sundance and then of course get in - though that's now out of my hands. That would make it a good year straight up. And I want to start working on my next self-devised project. I'm just not sure what it's going to be yet.

Bobbi-Q: How do you have fun and relax?

Paul-A: Spending time with friends, going to the movies, exercising, playing music, yoga, and when I can— skiing.

Bobbi -Q: Are you married, single, or dating?

Paul-A: Single, but open to meeting someone.

Bobbi -Q: What city did you live in before here?

Paul-A: I lived in Sydney before I moved here, but my family is based in Canberra, so that's home really. Mum and Dad have a beautiful house there, big garden out the back, and the place is full of amazing organic and biodynamic food and life-affirming healthy things. My mum is an alternative medicine practitioner, and Dad's a doctor, so it's always interesting.

Bobbi -Q: Tell us about your music.

Paul-A: I played music since I was 5. I started on the piano, and then later also played the Viola and guitar. I played in my school orchestras and sang in my school choirs, Music's just always been there as something I did. But it wasn't till I taught myself the guitar at the age of 18 that I started writing and playing on my own a bit. Before moving to LA I actually was part of an indie rock band in Sydney. I'd written a bunch of songs over a few years and a mate suggested we start a band together so we did.

I'm actually playing my first gig in LA in a month's time. Just some low key acoustic originals. Should be fun.

Bobbi -Q: What ‘original music' are you providing for the film "Serial Buddies?"

Paul-A: There's a song in the film that Gregory sings to his father. I was trying to come up with a tune for it - so I knew what I was doing when we shot it. It developed into a little more than what was on the page. I liked the sound of it, so recorded and sent it to Keven. He loved it and so we arranged and recorded it with genius musician, Giulio Carmassi. It should appear in the film now, which is great.  

Bobbi-Q: Tell me about these YouTube video blogs you posted while filming "Serial Buddies". That was original, why did you do it?

Paul-A: They were just a way to document/blog about the time on set so that there was a fun record of it, and so that anyone , including my friends and family, could have a peak behind the scenes. And to try and get the name of the film out there a bit. With indie films, every little bit helps.

Bobbi -Q: Do you have any special thanks to give anyone in your life?

Paul-A: Where do I start? First and foremost my parents. They're the most generous and unconditionally supportive people I know. Even outside of looking after our family. And my siblings too - just wonderful people who've helped shape who I am. I also have an extraordinary group of friends stretching right back to my early days in Wagga Wagga. They know who they are, and we're still in touch regularly, and they've always believed in me and that's a rare feeling.

Oh, and of course, Steven Waugh - the greatest Australian cricket captain of all time. The ultimate inspiration of my life.

Paul Ashton lives in Los Angeles, CA and is a writer, director, actor, musician and stage performer.

He is managed by Prodigy Talent Group.    

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