



ACTOR'S CORNER



Richie Stephens is not only pursuing what he loves, but chasing his dreams with fierce determination. Best known for his roles as the savior in *Florence* + the Machine videos, Stephens has also made a name for himself within the entertainment industry as a gifted actor. Richie recently set aside some time from his busy schedule to talk with Feevr. Check out our complete interview with the actor.



Can you talk about landing the role on *Criminal Minds* as the serial killer and abductor Jacob Dufour and a bit about the interview process? Did you do anything unique to show you would be perfect for the role?

I had auditioned for the show one time before, last season, so they (the producers / casting director) would have been a little bit familiar with my work. I do play a lot of bad guy roles, so this wasn't too big of a shock. I don't know anything about serial killing in real life though! I'm originally from Ireland, but I specialize in doing lots of different kinds of accents. I was told this character was from Texas, so I actually tried to copy what Matthew McConaughey might sound like if he was a serial killer! I remember re-watching "Dazed and Confused" again the night before the audition to get familiar with the accent.

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Guess it worked... In terms of playing bad guy roles, I think I get selected a lot because I can have a bit of a mean look. When playing antagonists, an easy trap to fall into (as an actor) is to play them extra mean. It's often much more effective to play them casually. It can be scarier to see a bad guy who doesn't necessarily believe he is a bad guy. Hannibal Lector is the perfect gentleman. I actually wore some cowboy boots for the audition as well...

Can you tell us about your role in the film Soy Nero?

I play a role as a military police officer near the end of the movie. Without giving away too much about the plot, I'm with the lead actor Johnny Ortiz in the desert. Originally I shot two scenes but one was cut for the final edit. It's a powerful story about the journey of a young Mexican boy who crosses the border near Tijuana and then joins the US Military so that he can get a Green Card. The movie came out well and was nominated for a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. It raises the issue of racism and highlights the plight of "Green Card Soldiers". They haven't given us a release date yet for the USA.

You started acting at ten. Can you tell us about some of your earlier acting memories?

I did a lot of plays as a kid and really enjoyed them. My mother took me to regular speech and drama classes during these years. I was always mimicking people and doing voices etc. so this gave me an outlet of sorts. I remember auditioning for a big Irish movie called "The Butcher Boy" at the age of 13. It was my first film audition and it went really well. The casting director told me: "Oh you're great . Not sure if we can use you in the lead but we'll probably use you for one of the other roles!" - I was delighted. Went home and waited for the call. But it never came. I was so disappointed. I thought if you go in for one audition and you don't book it, then you aren't supposed to be an actor! Nobody told me any different - there aren't many screen actors from my home area, so most people probably would not know any different. I learned later on that sometimes it can take hundreds of auditions before someone books a role! I ended up being friends with the lead (Eamonn Owens) from the movie later, as he happened to go to my high school. We last bumped into each other when we were in college and ended up going to a house party together. Haven't seen him for years now but I think he's still doing some acting at home in Ireland. I recognized him in a bit part role in one of my favorite shows "Love / Hate" in 2013.

You previously trained at Lesly Kahn, Margie Haber, Upright Citizens Brigade, and The Beverly Hills Playhouse. Can you tell us how training prepared you to become the actor that you are today?

Everyone has some degree of natural talent, but training is essential for improving what you start out with. There's a reason why the top agents sign people from the top schools. They consistently produce some of the best actors. It's no accident. As a result, these schools can be expensive or difficult to get in to. Sometimes we hear stories about people who taught themselves how to act or they had so much natural talent that they never went to school and still became successful. Unfortunately this is rarely true. If it was then this would be a cheap career path. Decision makers in the industry can be biased too sometimes about where someone has trained. Think of it like this - if you own a Ferrari that needs work, would you prefer to take it to the mechanic that went to the Ferrari mechanical school or to the guy who "taught himself engines"? The guy who taught himself might do a fine job, but your Ferrari is an investment and it's probably best to not take risks with it. Films and TV projects are investments too. I've spent money and continue to spend money on the best classes, schools and coaches available to me, but it has paid off for me when I book jobs as a result. Having another person evaluate your work is always helpful because a qualified person can see things about your work that you can't see by yourself. Different environments work for different people. Some people respond well to criticism because it can motivate them, while others respond better to encouragement. Some teachers are humble while others pontificate to the students. Some are laid back / casual, while others are very formal. I've experienced all of these types. It's about finding which one works best for you. Making you most comfortable. One thing I will say is that I have learned things of value from all of the schools I have attended. An actor's training is an investment in himself.

You have been in a variety of productions and played a variety of roles. What kind of roles do you prefer?

To be honest, I enjoy the roles I get. Often, I'm cast as a bad guy and that can be fun. It just so happens that I have that look and that works for me. I have the ability to pull off many other types as well. Comedy roles can be enjoyable too for me. As a professional actor, I'm grateful to be offered any role of any type. It can potentially be so competitive and difficult to book anything, especially at the start of your career. When someone is new people can be reluctant to give you your first of anything - first indie role, first co-star, first guest star, first union credit... Even the crappiest low budget amateur production might have several thousand submissions for one part, so an attitude of gratitude is best for being offered a role of any type.



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What character was the toughest for you to change into?

Probably some of those roles I played for Japanese TV a few years ago. Sekai Goyten – World's Astonishing News. It's shot up in the San Francisco Bay Area, but goes on prime time Japanese TV. Some of the episodes were so bizarre – like one where I play a father whose daughter falls in love with him, after them being apart for many years. I acted in English for those ones and they got dubbed later, but the way it was done was a bit strange. They wanted it to be over the top and very emotive. In the Western world, acting tends to be more naturalistic. It's kind of a comedic news dramatization show, so the sense of humor is different from over here too. One of the directors didn't speak English, so her instructions were going through a translator the whole time. The only words she spoke were "Rolling, rolling. Action!" They were a lovely group though and I had a lot of fun working with them.

What is the most extreme change to your personality, hair, body weight, etc, that you have done to land a role?

I like to transform as much as possible to go for auditions. Usually I'm not auditioning for an Irish role, so unless the Casting Director already knows me, then I'll go in speaking with an American, German or Russian accent: whatever the role is. I'll walk, talk and look like the role as much as possible. Some people think that looks desperate, but I've gotten results by doing that. For Soy Nero, the role was an army officer, so I went all out army for that. I wore an olive t-shirt, slacks and black boots. I also got a fresh high and tight haircut that morning from my lucky hairdresser Kristina. In the audition I even rolled up the script and held it like a gun! Not going to give away too many of my tricks, but I try to be creative as possible.

As a seasoned actor, what is some advice that you would give to someone aspiring to become an actor?

I would say to aspiring actors to be persistent. It's very rarely I've met successful actors who had an easy time getting to where they are at. The journey is usually difficult. It can take years to hone your skills and get a break. During that time, the majority of people need to work other jobs to pay their bills. Even having a sugar daddy or being a rich kid comes with enormous pressure, because whoever is giving you money will expect to be seeing results at some point (sooner or later). Being an actor is the same as any career. It will take years to become successful. Talk to successful actors and ask them for advice on what to do next. Ask them how they got their first agent. Which school they went to. Who took their headshots. Then you can find some direction. People ahead of you can teach you how they got there. I'm always open to learning from those ahead of me too and have some mentors I still consult with. It's important to have fun too as an actor. It can't be all about the results or bookings. If it is you'll never be happy. Have fun playing the characters. That's what it's about. The people who are happy in their work are the people who book the roles. If you're comfortable it shows in your work. You look confident because you're at ease. If you go to an audition thinking that you need to book this role to pay your rent, then you are in trouble. Unless your role is someone who is worried about paying their rent! Desperation / fear show on camera. Living in LA can be overwhelming for actors too. The stakes are high and all everyone seems to talk about is the business. This can take a toll on your head, so one thing I find important is to have something outside of the business to retreat to on a regular basis. My buddy Ross Le (from Stitches) likes to play golf. I have another friend who likes to rap. Another who cooks. For me, it's English soccer. I'm a lifelong Manchester United fan and I follow them every week to see what the latest news is. Having these interests leaves you coming back refreshed and happy – leading you to do better work.

Are you working on any current projects that you can tell us about?

I just shot another music video with Florence + The Machine. It's for the track titled "Third Eye". We wrapped last week. Can't reveal any details about it but I will tell you that it's going to look very impressive like all of her videos do! Last month I shot a short film titled "A Soldier's Song". It's set in Belfast in 1992 and I play an IRA terrorist. It's directed by an up and coming young director called Trevor Riley and co-stars him and Anthony Skordi. It's real festival material, so I'll be interested in seeing where we get in. I've been working on a screenplay about British gangster Paddy Conroy with my co-writer Patrick Q Roberts. We have some people attached but I'm not allowed give any details about it yet. I've been going on auditions too as usual lately. We're in the midst of pilot season right now so hopefully I'll book some. I just found out I'm on hold for a big movie to be shot in Atlanta next month, but it hasn't been confirmed and I'm not allowed to disclose any details about it yet. Fingers crossed!

Any personal ambitions yet unattained? Directing? Producing? Writing?

My main career ambitions are to work with people I admire. Every actor would love to work with his favorite filmmakers. For me that would include people like: Martin Scorsese, David Fincher, Guy Ritchie, Paul Thomas Anderson, The Cohen Brothers, Clint Eastwood, Oliver Stone, Stuart Carolan, to mention just a few. At this point I don't have any interest in directing or producing, but I do write. I've written some screenplays and another ambition is to have one made that is on a large scale.

How can people find out more about you or connect with you.

People can find out more about me on IMDb.com and RichieStephens.com You can contact me on social media like Twitter or Instagram.