TV Close-Up: Lee Pace

by Eirik_Knutzen

Lee Pace was born in Chickasha, Okla. - just down the road a spell from Muskogee and Tulsa - but raised in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates for six of his early years. Jim and Charlotte Pace - a petroleum engineer and a domestic engineer - brought him back through New Orleans in time to graduate from high school in Houston.

LEE PACE - In 'Pushing Up Daisies,' Lee price, left, seen here with co-star Chi McBride, plays a young man had a very special gift: He can bring dead entities (ranging from dried fruit to boring human beings) back to life with one touch. CNS Photo courtesy of ABC Television. Growing up in different parts of the world was the greatest gift his parents could possibly have provided, according to the 28-year-old actor. An eye-opener, it gave him a glimpse of the vast universe beyond the prairie, survival tools and an insatiable lust for adventure.

"I really thank my parents, my father in particular, for showing us (he has a younger sister and a brother) a world beyond our imaginations - because the rest of my family never left Oklahoma," said Pace. "My mom and dad - who really love life - are the best. Pretty young, they still work and move around.

"And they love my new series, 'Pushing Daisies,' thinking it is the coolest show on television," he continued, laughing. "They see the comedy show the way I do, offbeat and fresh. It's about a (pie maker) named Ned who, as a kid, discovered that he had a very special gift: He can bring dead entities (ranging from dried fruit to boring human beings) back to life with one touch."

Unfortunately, if Ned touches that person a second time - whether by the accidental brush of an elbow or a passionate kiss - he or she will die instantly and stay among the dead forever. When his secret is discovered by a slightly shady private eye, Emerson Cod (Chi McBride), they become partners solving murders (and collecting rewards) by raising the dead just long enough to name their killers.

Matters are immensely complicated when Ned's childhood sweetheart, Charlotte "Chuck" Charles (British actress Anna Friel), is murdered on a cruise ship and he is called on to bring her back to life ever so briefly. Still in love with her, he simply can't bring himself to send her back to the Great Beyond anytime soon. But

the fact remains that one more touch will send Chuck back to her Maker in a flash.

"I really wasn't looking to do a TV series, but I heard a buzz a few months ago that Bryan Fuller - who co-created and produced 'Wonderfalls,' where I played Aaron, the brother of a girl who communicated with inanimate objects - had a hot new project called 'Pushing Daisies.' I got ahold of the really good pilot script and loved the Ned character. I could see myself playing him for six years.

"A few days later, I called Bryan to wish him luck with the new show," Pace continued, "and that's when he told me that he had written the Ned character specifically for me. He had contacted my agent a couple of weeks before to see if I would be interested in the part. He was told that I wasn't interested in doing TV."

After the misunderstanding was taken care of, Pace reported for work on "Pushing Daisies" when he finished off production in London on the comedy movie "Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day" with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Busy, he's been hyping "The Fall" - an "action-adventure psychological thriller" - on the film-festival circuit for the past two years, about to get a wide release in Europe.

Back at the ranch, Pace is having the time of his life on Stage 18 at Warner Bros. Studios in L.A. engaged in sword fights, swinging from ropes and stabbing curtains on the same sound stages where Errol Flynn shot the prop-laden pirate epic "Captain Blood."

"It's fantastic - this show is the most exciting thing in my life and I love shooting here," he enthused. "I love being on a set 17 hours a day."

"To be honest, acting was the only thing I really knew how to do when it came down to making a living doing something," continued the 2001 graduate of New York's Juilliard School, drama division. "A high school student in Houston at 17, Juilliard was the only drama school I auditioned for. It was foolish thinking. ...

"I was an arrogant little (jerk) - I just knew I would get in - and luckily I got in," he laughed. "Of course, the one thing about Juilliard is that they take the arrogance right out of you. They let you know how you'll be a much better actor if you think less about yourself and more about the work at hand. I'm not arrogant anymore."

But before foraging for work in New York and Los Angeles, he took a couple of months off to traverse India by train and bus, living on $4 per day. He was in hot and humid Rajasthan as the monsoons were drifting in, which led to a panic attack. A great weekend with his dad in Mumbai allowed him to resume the adventure in frenzied Jaipur and find peace in a Tibetan monastery near Bangalore.

The actor - who remains single and totally detached - gained immediate attention with his off-Broadway debut in "The Credeaux Canvas" and made his TV movie breakthrough in the true story "Soldier's Girl" as Calpernia Addams, the transgender girlfriend of an Army enlisted man who was beaten to death in 1999 by members of his unit who thought he was gay. A thoughtful individual, Pace sent a pair of his prosthetic breasts to his 14-year-old brother when the film wrapped.

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