



Movers & Shakers

Interview with actor Valmike Rampersad: known for his role in *Open Secrets* and now plays Sri in *Right Hand Drive* – a romantic comedy out this summer.

You know those people who live outside of the Caribbean and swear that *everything* is better abroad? Well, it's never as easy as they make it out to be. So, when one of our own really is making it big—then that's reason to celebrate!

A colleague hollered, “Who’s the hottie?” as she scrolled past the first of my downloading images. It took me half a second to realize she was referring to the very talented, very handsome Valmike Rampersad—A Trinidadian-born, UK-based actor who plays ‘Sri’: the principal role in *Right Hand Drive*, a romantic comedy out this summer.

His list of accomplishments is impressive.

He graduated from the prestigious *Central School of Speech and Drama* in 2007. That’s the same institution that schooled the likes of film icons, Laurence Olivier, Vanessa Redgrave—think, *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (2000) and *Atonement* (2007)—and Dame Judi Dench, who most of you will recognize as ‘M’, James Bond’s boss in *Casino Royale*.

Valmike has played the lead roles in *Open Secrets* alongside renowned BAFTA (British Academy Film Awards) nominee, Saeed Jaffrey, and in the Danish film, *Get To Know Me*, which will be out this fall.

But do you know what really held my interest from the moment I began speaking with Valmike? It was his unpretentiousness, his generosity in word, and his affable persona. He’s one man who redefines what it is to be a *Mover and Shaker*.

BELLE: Did you always want to act?

VALMIKE: Acting is something that I was always interested in. I took part in school plays as a kid, but coming from an Indian family where everyone is a doctor, lawyer, or businessman, it wasn’t encouraged. My folks were very supportive when I decided to change careers, though.

BELLE: That’s always a plus. What were you doing before acting?

VALMIKE: I had a ‘real’ job working in Communications at Ralph Lauren which was a great company to work for, and a fun job.

BELLE: Impressive! So you left the corporate world for acting. How did you get started?

VALMIKE: I started pursuing acting at night at a Method Acting school after work just to see what it would be like. The classes soon took over my weekends and before I knew it, it was all I was thinking about. I was doing classes at every free opportunity. I got the chance to shoot my first professional film, *Aisha and Nadeem*, over a couple of weekends whilst still in my full time job. That was my first real taste of what it would be like on a set. Performing gave me a different type of buzz from my day job, so I decided to take a risk and enroll in the Central School of Speech and Drama full time. I guess I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life thinking, ‘what if?’

BELLE: That was a very gutsy decision. Not everyone has the gumption to leave the perceived stability of a steady job to pursue their dream. Good for you! So, what would you most want people to know about ‘Valmike the person’ as opposed to ‘Valmike the actor’?

VALMIKE: That we are two very different people. I’m simply a very private person who happens to love acting.

BELLE: You can’t get more straightforward than that! Tell us, what do you wish someone had told you before you began on this career path?

VALMIKE: Expect to work in all conditions—you can be shooting at 5 am in the freezing cold because the light happens to be good at that hour. And avoid eating too much whilst filming a scene that involves food! When we were shooting my first feature, *Right Hand Drive*, it was almost midnight and we had many takes which involved eating chips. By the fourth take, the chips tasted like cold cardboard!



BELLE: Speaking about *Right Hand Drive*, you play the character, Sri. What’s he like?

VALMIKE: Sri is alone in the UK. He has a dry sense of humor, is a little cerebral, and occasionally comes across as a bit nerdy. He plays the church organ and misses his family in India. He is the lead character’s jiminy cricket...the good conscience trying to put him on the right path.

BELLE: And how did the film *Aisha and Nadeem* come about for you?

VALMIKE: *Aisha and Nadeem* was nominated at the Satyajit Ray Awards, being made into a feature film, and was picked up for International Distribution at the Clermont-Ferrand International Film Festival (the biggest short-film festival in the world, apparently).

BELLE: What’s the best advice you could give to other aspiring actors out there?

VALMIKE: I’m not sure I’m in a position to give advice, but I would say that if acting is what you really want to do, stick with it. Nothing good comes easy, but remember to take some time out for yourself and don’t get too consumed by the process.

BELLE: And what would be some of the pitfalls to watch out for?

VALMIKE: Be prepared for disappointment. You can get down to the last two candidates for the job and something as minor as the other person ‘looking more right’ for the

part means you lose out. At the same time, it’s important to focus on the positive stuff—the jobs you get and the experiences you have along the way. Be sure to fill the time in-between jobs with constructive things; keep busy.

BELLE: Many actors are passionate about various causes, charities, etc. Is there a philanthropic side to you?

VALMIKE: I recently became involved with the Cyril Ross nursery in Trinidad, but being based in London, it is difficult to do as much as I would like. In my previous job, we always tried to tie our launch events to charities to help raise awareness and money. But, the Cyril Ross nursery looks after about 40 kids with HIV. Some are there because they were born with the disease that their parents died from. The kids were asked to leave the government-sponsored schools because of their illness. Discrimination against those with the virus is prevalent. These kids just want love and attention. There were so many of them pulling me in different directions to show me their artwork and to play with their toys. Just seeing them smile was a very rewarding experience.

Want more? Get the ‘buzz’ behind this man. Visit Valmike at www.valmike.com 🐦

Salisha Baboolal is the powerhouse behind *ImagEngineer*; her firm specializes in strategic self-marketing and corporate communications. Visit her at www.image-engineer.com