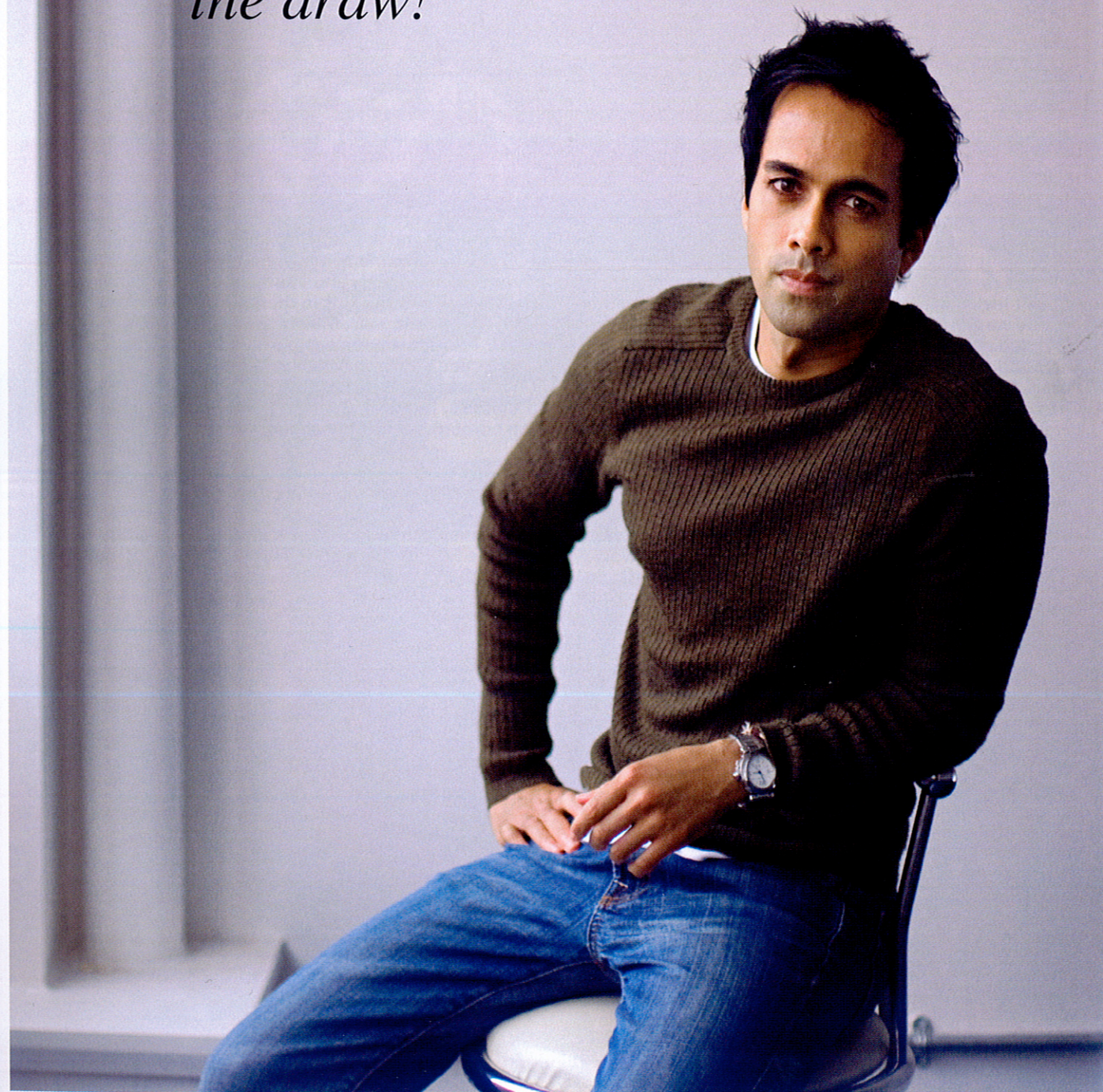


ACT OR PRO FIL E : Valmike Rampersad

*"Luck of
the draw!"*



Trinidad and Tobago born actor Valmike Rampersad is modest about his achievements. Not only has his most recent short film "Hotel" scooped Best Drama at the L.A. Annual Short Film Festival (leaving it open to Oscar nomination), his previous works have been equally well received, the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival's official selection "Aisha and Nadeem" to Buffalo-San Festival's Best Film "Open Secrets".

"To be honest, you read a lot of scripts, but most of them don't strike a chord." Valmike tells me "When you find one that resonates, you take notice. Those are the ones I go for, the ones where I think to myself that THAT is the sort of film I would want to see or the type of character I would like to play."

Having made wise decisions, Valmike is not about to sit back on his laurels. Valmike left T&T aged just 16 and for two years had to balance working for Ralph Lauren (in communications) and his Method acting training. However, the hard work paid off with Valmike gaining a full-time place at Central School of Speech and Drama.

"When I finished Drama school, that was when reality set in - not knowing when your next job is has taken some getting used to." As every student discovers on completion of studies, the real world is a lot harder than the security of the safe world of study. Valmike need not have worried. Having already worked with an array of screen stars including Saeed Jaffrey and Art Malik, Valmike has realised that you learn something from everyone. Sometimes simple observation can reap the highest rewards. "Well everyone thinks they give good advice, I just remember the good bits." Valmike has heard his fair share of words of wisdom, however he realises that his career choices are his own and you can only heed advice to a degree. However, one piece of ad-

vice he has not forgotten came from a well-respected actress, whom Valmike wished not to know; "Look for something you can identify with so that you can be truthful."

Within two years of his graduation from Central School, Valmike has chosen to always undertake challenging, offbeat roles. "The abductee in 'Aisha and Nadeem' was purely improvised and shot while at drama school. It was my first professional filming experience. The manic-depressive in 'Open Secrets' was a lot of research and physical transformation to become the dishevelled character in the script. He attempts suicide, which was mentally demanding. In 'Hotel', it was pretty challenging to play a believable rookie assassin who has just attempted his first hit, gets arrested at gun point and has seen his father (played by Art Malik) die - all in a very short space of time."

"The Asian arts scene here is still relatively small. There are a number of very good Asian theatre groups who are pushing the boundaries. Compared to the U.S., there is such a wide range of mixed ethnicities in most of the U.S. Dramas, in roles that have nothing to do with the colour of their skin. I think we are slowly moving away from stereotype in the U.K." Despite his successes, Valmike feels that as an Asian actor in the UK, there are still challenges to overcome. Having briefly appeared in BBC Asian Network's radio soap 'Silver Street', Valmike is aware of the limited opportunities in the field of acting that are open to ethnic minorities both on stage and screen.

"It is very small. Mostly theatre, although there is now a Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival. They are encouraging film companies to shoot on the island by offering various tax incentives. The local crew have access to state of the art technology and are very experienced and talented people. I would love to shoot a film there." T&T still has a developing acting scene, however they have not missed out on

celebrating their rising star. "I did an interview in one of the main newspapers while visiting my folks last Christmas and it being a small island, meant that my parents' phone was busy as their friends were calling, which was nice!"

With a buzz currently surrounding him, Valmike is not about to rest on his laurels. In a move away from the manic, Valmike's new roles will ensure he won't fall subject to typecasting. "I have just finished shooting a new British indie feature called 'The Cost of Love' currently in post production (www.thecostoflove.com). It is a Comedy/Drama and I play a cardio thoracic doctor. I also recently started work on another indie flick called 'Grasshopping' which is about infidelity (www.grasshopping.co.uk). I play a computer games programmer. He treats everything in life as a game, even marriage. We hope to start shooting in February. There are some fun opportunities for designers and musicians to get involved. It has a really strong cast and a brilliant director. A definite challenge for me as I have to get my kit off and it'll be my first sex scene!!!"

Exciting times lie ahead for Valmike, but he still has a burning desire, one common to screen actors. "I am itching to get a meaty stage role. There was a nice stage opportunity recently but the filming schedule meant that it clashed and I was unable to do it." Who's Jack are sure one will be just around the corner...

image : Kriss Myhre | words : Jeremy Williams