

Interview: Columbus Short Lets Down His Guard in ‘Armored’

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CHICAGO – Meeting with Columbus Short is encountering a true force of nature. Focused, intent and with a varied perspective, this up-and-coming young actor and performer has the centerpiece role in the new film, “Armored.”

Columbus plays Ty Hackett, an Iraq War veteran who takes a job with an armored car company to care for his 14 year-old brother after their parents die. After going through initial training, an obsessive co-worker reveals a surefire way to stage a robbery and split the cash among all the participants.

Ty is initially reluctant to join in, but the financial pressures eventually allow him to relent. The pick-up of the cash goes smoothly, but an unexpected interruption throws the operation into a tailspin. What happens next becomes more than the money, and has implications that will change everyone involved.



Columbus Short as Ty Hackett in ‘Armored’
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HollywoodChicago caught us with Columbus Short during a visit to Chicago in October. He talks about his role in Armored and being a triple-threat talent in the current show business atmosphere.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did you get involved in this film? What quality did you bring to the audition that the producers felt was right for the role of Ty?

Columbus Short: I read the script and basically wanted the movie. So I called the president of the studio and told him that you need to give me this movie. He said that he would, but the director is really bent on this character not be African American. He then said if I could convince the director, I could get the movie. So he set up a dinner and we just talked, and hit it off personally. Then he gave me the movie.

HC: Not having enough money in a prevalent theme during the Great Recession. What spin is put on that in ‘Armored’ and what moral dilemma makes this different than any other heist movie?

CS: We did this before the true recession hit, so it just happens to be more prevalent now. It is going to hit home with people because they’re

going to feel the weight that these guys feel and with extreme pressure you see what kind of character a person has. That is really what this film is about. The moral quandry is how far people are willing to go for security and happiness.

HC: You are working with a classic ensemble cast of veteran actors. What kind of lessons do you get as an actor when working scenes with each of these individuals like Fred Ward, Matt Dillon, Laurence Fishburne and Jean Reno?

CS: You take the bits and pieces. I liken it to Mark Sanchez starting for the Jets as a rookie and playing against Peyton Manning. When he watches Manning play, there are little idiosyncrasies that Mark watches and learns by, but at the same time he has innate abilities that makes him a dynamic quarterback as well, he’s just young.

So it’s the same thing with me, I watch Laurence make a moment out of nothing. He can do something mundane like pull a box out of the back of a truck and make it a moment. These are the little things you get here and there from them, and there are also new fresh things they get from me. It’s a symbiotic relationship.



Left to Right: Columbus Short, Laurence Fishburne and Matt Dillon in ‘Armored’
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HC: How closely did director Nimród Antal work with you as an actor, since it is your character that motivates most of the action. Is he hands-on when it comes to performance or did he allow you more leeway in finding the character?

CS: He allowed me a lot of leeway. He trusted me a great deal to do what he hired to me to do...which is act. A famous director once had John Travolta come up to him and ask what he wanted. He replied, ‘I don’t know, that’s your job, I hired you to act.’ (laughs) Nimród had ideas on getting more real and intense, but he was really an actor’s director. Myself and everyone in the cast were comfortable with him. That’s what got the crew on board and the set working, because he was the commander-in-chief.

HC: What kind of qualities do you feel you need to give a working man, such as an armored car guard? Are there character traits that you think define such individuals?

CS: There is a work ethic, a gravitas and weight they carry because of their stress and worry. There is a seriousness to this job in protection, a sense of heightened awareness like a soldier. You are a target like back in the wild west, when the Wells Fargo wagon came, they knew they’d be the target of bandits. There is the same type of thinking with these guys. Being blue collar, the way the country is now, it is that weight and people are looking for relief. I wanted to show the truth in that.

HC: You did a script from a first time screenwriter, James V. Simpson. What kind of passion did you find in this script that you immediately connected to?

CS: It was the moral stand my character Ty took. I agreed with that and the way James went about it spoke to me. It was something I wanted to attack. The character is one of those guys who is everyman, and you want to play an everyman. He’s not an extraordinary human, he’s just a man, and those are the type of characters I want to play.

HC: You are a dancer, singer and actor, the old triple threat. Which of the great triple threat artists of the past do you admire and want a similar career to?

CS: Sammy Davis, Jr., Frank Sinatra, Gene Kelly...the old masters. Sammy, there is a reason he is the only black man in the Rat Pack. He is an exceptional talent, and a true movie star. All of those guys were. That is what is missing now, the true movie star.

HC: What type of background dance knowledge helped you the most in designing the modern choreography of a Britney Spears show?



Columbus Short in Chicago, October 27, 2009.
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

CS: I was thinking visually rather than step. Creating a world on the stage. My fascination with film really helped me with that stagecraft, stuff like ‘A.I.’ and ‘Guys and Dolls.’ What would a futuristic Guys and Dolls look like? How would that look on stage? That’s how I approach the choreography.

HC: You’ve completed production on the Chris Rock/Neil LaBute film ‘Death at a Funeral.’ What spin did Rock and LaBute put on this remake, and does it include issues regarding African American attitudes towards certain family secrets?

CS: It kind of does, but the spin itself was hiring an African American cast. They just let us go, they let Martin (Lawrence) be Martin, Chris be Chris, they let Tracy (Morgan) just go. There was a lot of improv and a lot of just zany moments, based within the structure of the film. Improv is my favorite part of acting. And if you master comedic timing, it helps your dramatic timing so much.

HC: What did you learn about the obstacles that performers had in the past when you played Little Walter in Cadillac Records?

CS: The things that they went through are very similar to what is going on in the music industry today. It wasn’t that far a stretch for me (laughs). There is still that mindset, so I believe in ownership for artists. Diving into Little Walter showed me a lot about that fundamental ownership issue.

HC: As a multi-faceted young actor and performer in the dog-eat-dog world of show business, what individual performance ability gives you the most peace in times of stress and why?

CS: In times of stress I sit down at a piano. Music is my spa treatment. That is what does it for me.

“Armored” opens everywhere on December 4th, 2009. Featuring Columbus Short, Matt Dillon, Laurence Fishburne, Jean Reno, Fred Ward and Skeet Ulrich, directed by Nimród Antal. Rated “PG-13”



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