

Like the pointy-eared Vulcan he portrays in the “*Star Trek*” films, Zachary Quinto is always on the hunt for strange new worlds, and he wants to bring viewers along for the ride. Whether serving up delicious villainy or barbed innuendo, the enigmatic Quinto has a knack for drawing us into uncharted territory. He is now appearing as the acid-tongued Harold in the Netflix adaptation of “*The Boys in the Band.*” Like his character, this Renaissance man is “turning on” while others are, well, just turning.

He spoke to ODDA about getting into character, championing new voices through his production company, and forging his own way in the industry.

ZACHARY QUINTO

In conversation with RICHARD PALLARDY
Photographer
SHANE McCAULEY

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RICHARD PALLARDY. What was your upbringing like? Was your family supportive of your desire to perform?

ZACHARY QUINTO. Eventually, yeah. I had a pretty traditional upbringing, I was raised in suburban Pittsburgh. I have an older brother. My mom and dad were a pretty conventional happily married couple. My dad got sick when I was young and died when I was 7; so that changed the whole dynamic of our family. My mom had to shift gears pretty drastically and became the sole provider for the whole family. So obviously a tremendous sense of upheaval. And it was in this that I found my way to performing, almost as a necessity in terms of my mom being a single parent, and needing someplace for me to go. She was really supportive of me when I was a kid because it was something I loved to do and it seemed like it was a good infrastructure for me. Then as it moved away from being a hobby and more toward becoming a vocation, the conversation was a little bit more meaningful. There was more at stake. Then it became like, oh, I don't know, this is what you should do with your life. There was a period of time of me really having to fight for my passion to pursue this and to study it in college. Luckily, she

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came around to my way of seeing it and supported me. So I'm grateful for that.

R.P. I was interested to learn that you run a production company as well. What made you want to start that project?

Z.Q. Well, that came along much later. I graduated school, moved to L.A., and spent my requisite formative years waiting tables and cobbling work together. Finally, in the late aughts, I was in a position where I felt like I had some leverage. I had some recognition for the work I was doing. I was on a TV show and I had just gotten cast in the “*Star Trek*” films. I felt it was a moment where I could parlay some of the opportunities I had been lucky enough to experience into participating more directly in the stories that I want to tell, the kinds of projects I want to put forward. So I started the production company with friends of mine from college in 2008. And we had no real idea of what we were doing, frankly. We wanted to tell stories; we were inspired by certain things and certain people. We knew that I was in the position to open some doors that might be more difficult to open otherwise. We put all of that together with our creative ambition and we started Before the Door Pictures. We were looking for a feature script the whole time that we could galvanize behind. We found it in a script called “*Margin Call*.” That was the first movie we produced. That sent us off to the races and we produced a number of other films over the years. A few years ago, we all decided to move in different directions. I still have the company and I have new people that I work

with now producing projects under the Before the Door banner. It's focused a little bit more now on television and it's amazing.

R.P. What kind of projects are you drawn to producing? Do they differ from the types of projects that you enjoy acting in?

Z.Q. I'm interested in diversifying my experience creatively, professionally, and personally as much as possible. I'm drawn to complex stories that are character-driven and relevant creatively and socially. We have a wide variety of projects that we're developing right now for TV and film. The glue that binds all of the projects, I think is the complexity and some unexpected quality in storytelling, whether that's the point of view of the filmmaker or material itself. But I'm really interested in not getting locked into one way of doing things, but rather cultivating as many different ways of experiencing storytelling as possible. I love to champion new voices, first-time writers, and directors. That's a throughline of the work that I've done for sure.

R.P. You have done some hosting work on the show “*In Search Of...*” and narrated a couple of episodes of “*NOVA*.” Did you find yourself interested in those topics personally or did the interest come later, after you got the job? What drove the decision to do that kind of work?

Z.Q. Well, in terms of “*In Search Of...*” Leonard Nimoy hosted the original series and I was approached about rebooting it and revisiting it as the host and executive producer of that show. It was an interesting opportunity to carry on Leonard's legacy, which is something that I feel really connected to. We were very close. So any opportunity I have to feel that closeness to him, I like to take it. I was really interested in reimagining what that show could be. It was incredibly popular in the 70s and 80s. I thought, what would it look like to bring it back around? So that was a fun experience that I think was born directly out of my connection to Leonard and the role that we shared. Those “*NOVA*” episodes were about the planet, so there's that sci-fi connection. I found them incredibly well produced and really interesting. I learned a lot, I'm really proud of it actually.

R.P. You mentioned sci-fi as a sort of unifying thread in your work. Were you a fan of that genre before you started working on it, or was that something that came with time as you picked up the conceits of the genre?

Z.Q. I wasn't really a huge sci-fi person growing up or, you know, into supernatural horror. “*Heroes*,” “*Star Trek*,” “*American Horror Story*,” “*NOS4A2*;” there's a throughline there that I can't necessarily account for. I don't know why, but I'm grateful for the experiences. I've also done many other things over the years. It comes back to me wanting to do as much of a variety of work as possible. You build a foundation and my foundation happens to be built

on some of those really indelible franchises that had a huge impact on people's familiarity with me and my work. So it makes sense after a while. Hollywood is many things, but wildly imaginative isn't always one of them. When opportunities like that come along, I weigh the balance between what people want to see me do and what I want to do.

R.P. Is there a certain type of script or project that regularly comes your way that you'd rather never see again, or something you'd like to see more of?

Z.Q. I don't know that I would never want to see them again, but I would say 85 percent of the things that I get offered are either sci-fi, horror, or LGBT-QIA+ themed projects. So, you know, if it's a great project, with great people, and it happens to be in one of those genres or realms I would be open to it. But I am constantly looking for opportunities that might require me to flex a different muscle or work a little harder to be seen in that particular light. I'd like to do some [period work]. I'm watching “*Perry Mason*” right now. That kind of period, character-driven, Earth-bound drama is something I'm interested in. I really want to do more comedy. I love comedy.

R.P. I want to ask you about the episode of “*Little America*” called “*The Silence*.” Almost your entire role was without dialogue. What was that process like for you? I read that you initially had more lines and that kind of evolved.

Z.Q. Yes, it's true. We didn't shoot it that way, but I thought it was a really effective episode of television. One of my closest friends from college, Sian Heder, is a showrunner on “*Little America*.” She directed that episode, actually. So, yes, we shot it with a lot more dialogue. And then as she was editing it, she just had this idea. The whole episode is about this relationship between two people who don't have the language to connect initially because they're on this silent meditation retreat. Then when they finally are able to speak to one another, they realize that they don't even speak the same language. She thought there was some real resonance and power to the idea of taking the majority of the dialogue out of the episode. In the end, that vision was different than what it was when we set out to do it, but I think it was better.

R.P. This season we get to see the event that seems to have created Christmasland. What do you think initially drove Manx towards evil? Do you think he is mentally ill or is this kind of like a normal person who reached some kind of breaking point?

Z.Q. I think it's a combination of things. Any time you're looking at a villain or someone who is quote-unquote “*evil*” you have to understand as an actor where that comes from in a psychological and human way. For Manx, he was incredibly abused, abandoned, and neglected as a child. He had some real trauma in his life when he was very young, and that obviously is the source of incredible damage. From there, I think he tried to cobble together a



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respectable life, a life that was meaningful, significant and productive. Circumstances simply kept conspiring against him. You add into that these supernatural elements, like this car he procures. There are a number of different motivations. I don't think he's inherently evil. I don't think anyone is inherently evil. The desperation, the anger, and resentment, the sheer weight of his failure, all of that add up to this breaking point. There's no turning back.

R.P. You starred in the Broadway revival of “*The Boys in the Band*” in 2018 and are now starring in the Netflix film based on it, which is debuting on the streaming channel on October 2nd. In light of your experience both acting the role onstage and onscreen, did you find that you preferred one approach over the other?

Z.Q. We had about a year off between the time we finished the play and when we did the film. I'd never done that before. It was a pretty special journey. We had such an incredible experience on Broadway in 2018. It was a real joyful summer, a real celebration of Mart [Crowley, the playwright] and the work. It was really well-received. At the 50th anniversary of the play, it was a special time to be doing it. To have a year off and then come back and play the same role

with the same exact creative team was really unique and special. I can't say that I preferred one over the other. One wouldn't have happened without the other, so I feel like it was a real natural progression. I'm really proud of it. I don't normally say that about the work I do. As I get older, I'm less interested in watching myself. I'm less attached to outcomes, I'm more interested in the process. With this film, I feel like it captures something unique and I daresay, beautiful in terms of what we were able to achieve on stage.

R.P. How did you guys work out the tempo of the dialogue? It's so quick and sharp. Did the stage chemistry automatically translate, or did you have to recalibrate for the film?

Z.Q. There's always a slight recalibration when you're going from one medium to another like that. It's definitely a different scale of performance doing something in an 800 seat theater as opposed to for a screen. All the groundwork had been laid. We had spent so much time with these characters and each

other. There was a lot of trust, a lot of familiarity, a lot of shorthand between us as actors, so no, we didn't have to spend very much time rebuilding that. It was really kind of magical.

R.P. You mentioned Mart, who passed away in March. Were you able to speak to him at any point during the process of the revival and get some feedback?

Z.Q. He was very involved in the Broadway production. He was around as we were rehearsing. He was very much there during the summer of 2018, and he was on set when we made the movie. We got to share that experience with him. I'm sorry he won't get to see the finished product obviously, but I think it was such a meaningful culmination for him having written the play over 50 years ago and it has never been a Broadway production until ours, [which won] the Tony for best revival. It was so meaningful to see him have that experience after so long and after such a significant contribution to the American theater and to the LGBTQIA+ community.

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