

Chicago's Dante Brown 'in awe' of his dad on TV's 'Lethal Weapon'

Dante Brown | Isaac Sterling photo



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By the time he auditioned last May for Fox's popular new show "Lethal Weapon," 17-year-old Dante Brown was already a veteran of TV — as much as is possible at his age. But the Chicago native was still surprised how easily he landed the role of the son of a cop played by comedian Damon Wayans Sr., who stars in the TV series loosely based on the late '80s action films of the same name starring Danny Glover and Mel Gibson.

"It was a very quick process. I went on one audition, and I guess they liked what I did," says Dante, who grew up in Chatham but was moved to Hollywood by his agent mom at age 11 to pursue a budding career.

"They called me back, and I got to act with [Chandler Kinney], who plays my sister on the show, in a mix-and-match. That's where they mix you up with others to see if there's chemistry. I got to meet the show creator and director, Matt Miller and McG, and we started filming two days later," he says.

In the series, which premiered alongside "Empire" in September and became an instant hit for the network, Wayans and Clayne Crawford star as Roger Murtaugh and Martin Riggs, mismatched L.A.P.D. detectives. Dante plays Roger "R.J." Murtaugh, the good but slightly rebellious teenage son of Wayans' character. R.J. is trying to carve out his own place in the world outside of his parents' expectations.

"I was definitely in awe of meeting Damon Wayans," he says. "It was a really big moment for me, because I watched every episode of 'My Wife and Kids.' ... And so now, working on the side of him is like a dream come true."

Dante is one of two sons of Tracy Brown, longtime operator of a chain of barbershops and salons in the city, and Joyce Kelly Brown, who has nurtured her boys' innate talents seemingly since they were babes.

When Dante was 12, attending Hyde Park's **Murray Language Academy**, Mom packed up him and younger brother Dusan and moved to Hollywood for a six-month trial to see if she was right about her kids' potential, while Dad stayed put in Chicago.

Turns out she was right. In those six months, both Dante and Dusan, now 14, got good paying gigs: Dante in the 2012 movie "Won't Back Down," starring Viola Davis; and Dusan playing a role in the traveling theater production of "The Lion King."

"We've been working ever since," says Dante, a home schooled high school junior.

After “Won’t Back Down” came appearances on CBS’ “NCIS,” Fox’s “Touch,” the made-for-TV film “Mockingbird Lane,” Nickelodeon’s “Deadtime Stories,” NBC’s “Law & Order: SVU” and NBC’s “Southland,” starring one of his favorite actresses, Regina King.

“That was really cool to meet her, because I’m a big fan of ‘The Boondocks,’ and she’s the voice of both Riley and Huey on that show,” he says.

Before landing “Lethal Weapon,” there were also the six episodes as a wisecracking but musically gifted teen on NBC’s “Mr. Roberson,” alongside fellow Chicagoan Craig Robinson, and three episodes on Showtime’s “Shameless,” among other gigs.

He’s also a budding musician and dancer, recording music under the moniker DanteThePoet, and just released his first single as an independent artist on iTunes, entitled (what else?), “Lethal Weapon.”

His advice to youth seeking to enter the entertainment business?

“Never give up. If they tell you no — and you’re going to get ‘no’s’ until you get a ‘yes’ — try to take that constructive criticism and move on and make yourself better. Never get stuck on a no,” says Dante, who last week was in Chicago and rode in the city’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

“Also, try to be multi-talented,” he says. “Right now, I’m writing two animation shows that I’m pitching. You’ve gotta know how to create content. You’ve gotta know both the front of the camera and behind the camera too.”

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