

THE BLOG

WU-ING THE WORLD! New Star Of MARCO POLO, LEONARD WU Is Heating Up Screens!

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Andrew Cristi

Writer and author, "The Peter Pandrew Trilogy"



Photographer: Diana Ragland
Groomer: Sienree
Wardrobe Stylist: Bruno Lima

From its sprawling sets, to outrageous fight choreography, to the impeccable detail that goes into the show, *Netflix's Marco Polo* has shown to always gravitate toward the best of the best, and newcomer to the cast Leonard Wu is certainly no exception. Playing fierce warrior Orus, Wu quickly fits right in with his top-notch surroundings in a role he claims is "a dream come true." And Wu plays it with all the passion that he speaks about it with, throwing himself into the part full-force as he truly embraces his character the way all actors should.

But, listening to Wu speak about his career and his passions is such a pleasure because they are so intertwined- he truly takes pride in what he does and vehemently puts his heart into his work and beliefs- whether that be his acting and the roles he is drawn to, bringing more visibility to Asian's in media- an important subject that the world has only begun to tap into, or animal activism, where Wu has found himself to be a huge friend to the furry kind.

Whatever it may be that the heartfelt actor is giving himself to, you can bet he is giving 110 percent. Here, he sits down and talks about some of those passions, and what you can expect to see this season on *Marco Polo*;

You have just joined ***Marco Polo*** on ***Netflix*** as a series regular for season two. Talk about the show a little and what fans can expect. Was the cast welcoming to you?

Season two is going to be pretty epic. It's really dealing with the political/war games of Kublai and Kaidu. There's going to be so much political intrigue and great action scenes. I play the character of Orus, who is this fierce Mongol warrior that is really intent on bringing back the ancient traditions to the Mongolian empire. It was great to film. This is truly one of the most amazing casts I've ever worked with. I remember getting there and being completely intimidated from the first day and getting to meet Benedict Wong, who plays Kublai, and just being in awe of this amazing actor. I had admired him since season one and I immediately told him, "It's such a pleasure to meet you, Benedict!" And he was so welcoming and said, "Mate, my name's Benny! Just call me Benny!" And that was a reflection of the entire cast- very sweet and welcoming to the new kid on the block!

You are an avid martial artist and have trained in southern style Kung fu, Tang Soo do, and Wushu. For this show you trained with the Hitz International stunt team. How much of your own stunts did you do, and how grueling was this training?

The process was incredibly grueling! If you're playing a warrior on this show, it's absolutely an integral part- you have to get there a couple of months prior to start training and lifting and getting into shape. And training with Brett Chan and Hitz International was a fantastic learning experience. I had a background in a lot of stand-up martial arts, specifically Kung Fu, Tang Soo Do and Tae Kwan Do, but for this show we really studied a lot of wrestling, Judo and Jiu Jitsu, and that was all new to me and basically whenever you're not filming you're training- which can be exhausting. So, it can be grueling, but it so rewarding and it was really a fantastic learning experience, and

again it helped me form the character of Orus, and we were trained in a way that when we performed battles we could handle about 95% of the fighting- and for the rest, we really have the best stunt doubles possible. But the mandate from the directors is to try and be as confident with the action as possible and we really look great because of Brett Chan and his team.

One thing people might not realize about the production of **Marco Polo** is the attention to authenticity. You don't do any work in front of green screens and they have created entire villages for the show. Talk about the level of detail that goes into the production value.

I knew this show was big from watching season one, but I remember when I first came to film this and it was in Hungary and I walked through this clearing and from what I saw my jaw dropped. They had built an entire village from scratch. This village was so detailed- it had horses, goats, sheep, camels, two hundred authentic Mongolian extras- it really was like we stepped into that time. The producers do such a good job at making everything real. Even the fires are real. So, you don't have to make believe because you're just there. As an actor, that's about the biggest thing you could ask for!

Talk a little bit about working on the Martin Scorsese produced **Revenge of The Green Dragons**, where you got to act alongside Ray Liotta and **Glee** actor Harry Shum.

That was in many ways quite the opposite of *Marco Polo*, whereas it was shot in New York on nuts and bolts, very bare-bone and gritty. I had an amazingly good time on that one as well. Stylistically, it was very Cinéma vérité- it felt very documentary like and very kinetic. Andrew Lau is a great director, he had directed *Infernal Affairs*, which Scorsese's *The Departed* was based on- so to work with these two heavy-weights was like checking something off my bucket list. And I had such an amazing time with that wonderful cast and crew.

Asian visibility has been an increasingly talked about issue in Hollywood. Why do you think Asians are the most underrepresented group in media? Can you give any times in particular where Hollywood really treated you unfairly because you were Asian?

You know, it's a really interesting situation where I don't really think it's an intentional exclusion on Hollywood's part, it's a necessity of having people in power, whether it be producers or creative executives, who are either of Asian descent or understand Asian stories. We're in a place right now in our country and the industry where we might want to look at those stories, but there's no paradigm for them- so it's about truly creating that template. It's both exciting and daunting, because mistakes are going to be made and I think Hollywood does was to learn and grow and embrace these stories, but it's all new so there will be hiccups along the way. I try not to take it personally. I know from my own experience that during pilot season I can go out for about six or seven roles that are intended for Asian males, and once cast they go to Caucasian males. What those reasons are? I'm not aware of. I don't think it's intentional, I think it's just the unfortunate

default of what the industry falls upon. But the good news is that I do see growth and I think Hollywood wants to grow and learn, so it makes this an exciting time where we will see a lot of changes for the better in the next couple of years.

This issue is not exactly a new issue. Growing up, did you feel underrepresented or misrepresented? What kind of roles, actors or characters made you want to get into acting, Asian or otherwise? It's funny, as a martial artist, big movies for me growing up were a lot of Hong Kong movies like Jackie Chan movies, Jet Li movies, obviously Bruce Lee was a big hero. Those were people that looked like me that I could look up to. But, at the same time, being American born and having that sensibility, a lot of my obsessions were in American cinema. And for me, one of my favorite films is *Braveheart*. As a kid, that was the kind of character I always wanted to play- a passionate, magnetic warrior inside this period piece. And I never knew if someone like me would be able to get that chance to play that character that Mel Gibson plays. Fast forward to now and I get that opportunity on *Marco Polo* with Orus, and I am so grateful that this dream came true. And I think that's also a great example of how things are changing. Ten or fifteen years ago, a show like *Marco Polo* would have never happened or been on Hollywood's radar, and now here it is, which opens the door to the idea that someone like me can indeed play anything.

You're also an avid animal activist, talk a little bit about that and how you got into activism?

I've always loved animals, but when I was away filming *Marco Polo* I just became even more globally aware of what was happening. Specifically, the group I work with is called *Animal Hope and Wellness*. I got in touch with the founder, Mark Ching, who lives here in LA but was doing such amazing things like rescuing dogs from slaughterhouses in Asia and putting his life on the line. It just felt like such a pure, altruistic thing he was doing and I knew I had to get behind it.

What else is next for you? What kind of role would you love to play? Right now I'm working on a few of my own projects, like writing. I like to be behind the camera as well. As for another bucket list role I would love to play? Military soldier in modern times- so I want to just put that out there and see what happens!

With the way Wu's dreams seem to come to life, it wouldn't be surprising if he got his wish real soon! Until then, audiences can enjoy him on *Marco Polo*!

The second season of *Marco Polo* starts streaming as of July 1st on *Netflix*.