

LANCE LEE DAVIS

Biography, March 2009

Lance Lee Davis was born in Singapore and grew up in Arkansas. His father was an American engineer and his mother worked for an airline; the two met in Vietnam during the conflict in the 1970's.

From an early age, Lance showed a love for performing and writing but it was not until college that he began working professionally. He was awarded a merit fellowship from the University of Arkansas which gave him the opportunity to study in Britain and travel in Asia. While writing a novel in Thailand, he somewhat randomly appeared in a Close-Up toothpaste commercial.

“That was a big eye opener for me. I was nearly finished with college and hanging out in Bangkok where the cost of living was practically nothing so I could focus on learning to box (Thai boxing is a style of kickboxing) and finishing my novel. A local talent agent found me and sent me out to audition for this commercial, which I booked. Afterwards she took me aside and was like, ‘look kid, you can really *do this*.’ That stuff happens everyday in much more glamorous ways but up until then it hadn't occurred to me that I could walk

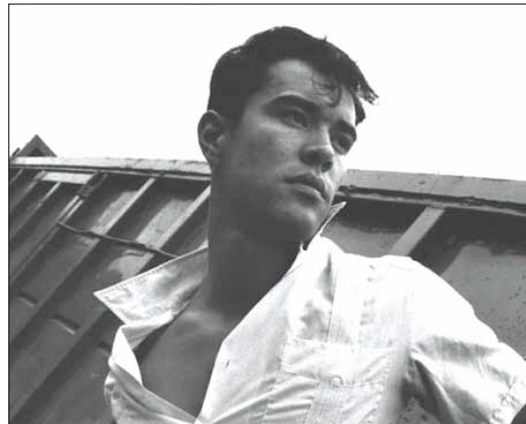


Photo by C. Fretzin 1999

through that particular door. I'd grown up in a small town in Arkansas and had come to feel very out of place—my mother is Chinese and my father's ancestors were Welsh and Scottish. I thought I'd maybe make something of myself as a paperback writer. I stayed in college but was a proper tramp, hitch-hiking across America in the summertime, backpacking around Southeast Asia and Britain, sleeping rough and breakdancing in the streets to meet people.”

More modeling work followed and in 1999, Lance relocated to Los Angeles to study acting. He spent the next three years training intensely in a mixture of classical forms (performing a season of reparatory theater with the Will Geer Theatrum Botanicum), traditional ‘method’ techniques with Howard Fine and his teachers, and Spolin based improvisation with a variety of coaches.

“Being relatively untested as an actor and without any showbiz connections, the only avenue I could find which allowed me to work on quality material with professionals was theater—and not the tiny showcase theater that dominates Hollywood, but classic reparatory—performing Shakespeare and the like—in front of hundreds of people who'd paid good money to watch the show. I learned some big lessons in humility and commitment over the course of that year.”

After establishing a solid grounding in the craft of acting Lance began working more on camera, appearing in—and soon additionally producing and writing—short films and television pilots. Together with childhood friend and Texas filmmaker, Kristopher

Hardy, Lance formed a production company. The duo's first film together was an eight minute short entitled, 'Jack Eliot.'

"I had gotten to know an older actor named Paul Sand, who was a really wonderful guy and something of a mentor—he'd won a Tony award and done a lot of television in the eighties. We convinced him to fly down to Texas and be the villain in our 8 minute neo-noir thriller. I wrote it and played opposite Paul and a lovely actress named Keitha Lind Wells." Shot entirely on 35mm short-ends (discarded scraps of film deemed too short to be saleable or practical on larger productions) and donated equipment, the 8 minute piece premiered at the 2001 Deep Ellum Film Festival in Dallas, Texas. "I already had the acting bug in a bad way, but that's when I caught the filmmaking bug. We screened to a packed house on a Saturday night; these people were complete strangers. Their genuine applause absolutely stunned me. I was still really struggling with confidence and the city and the business side of my career—my first talent managers turned out to be so disreputable that the State Attorney General shut them down—so filmmaking became for me a way to create opportunities for myself as an actor, on my own terms."

Lance continued to study, train, and appear in independent films and the occasional television pilot or commercial. He supported himself and his productions during this period primarily by bartending and working as an office temp. "I was still just very much trying to find my way, another hopeful, but I had this mission. I was no longer 'hoping for the right part.' Instead, I was building it."

By 2004, Lance was putting finishing touches on the script for *Good Chemistry*, which he had written to shoot with Kris Hardy on an old Arkansas friend's family farm. A dark, minimalist thriller about an act of kindness gone awry, the movie was centered on characters from his unpublished first novel, *Love and Chaos*. Shot over the course of 19 days in the summer of 2004, the film took three and a half years to finish.

"*Good Chemistry* needed to be good, and since I had financed it with a handful of credit cards and a bank loan, it had to be done for laughably little money. All I really had left to invest was my own time. I learned post-production in order to finish that picture, and I had to put my acting on hold for much of

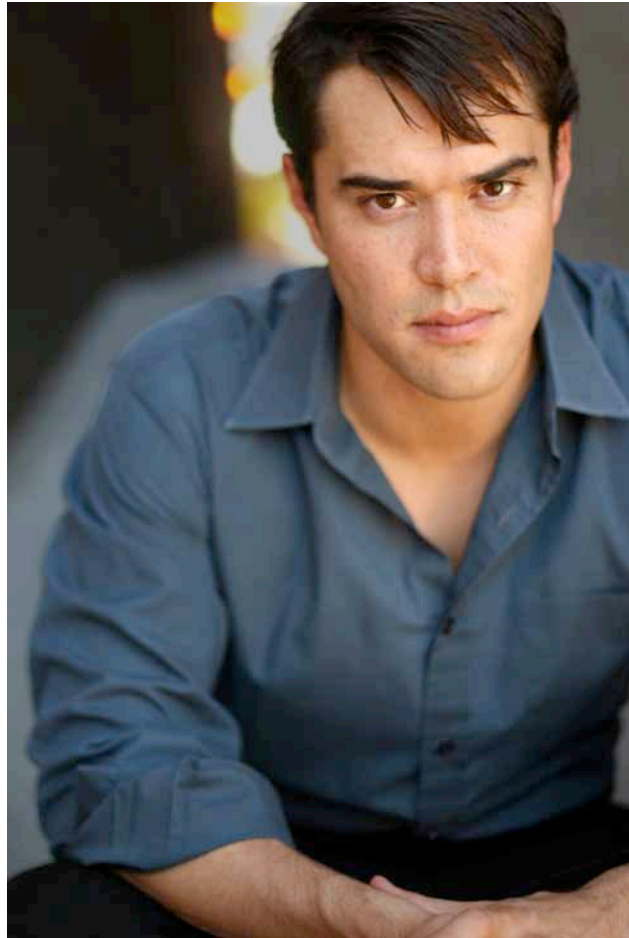


Photo by J. Philips, 2008

that period. Sure, I played the protagonist in *Good Chemistry* but the acting, that was like breathing to me. I would have liked to go much, much deeper with the character of ‘Toby,’ but that’s a typical actor gripe, and on a film shoot with an eight man crew where you’re both a lead actor and the producer, it’s inescapable. Finishing the film though, once we’d gotten it in the can, that was really tough, and something I am proud of.”

Notable for it’s strong all around performances from the talented but unknown cast led by Davis, as well as surprisingly polished production value given the guerilla nature of the shoot, *Good Chemistry* premiered in January of 2008 through Warner Brothers VOD. In the US, the film is widely available on DVD, and while official international distribution has been spotty, the film has been downloaded by overseas peer-to-peer (pirate) users in the tens of thousands. Other leading film roles to date include queer-punk street activist, ‘Spencer,’ in Everett Lewis’s *FAQs* (available internationally through TLA Releasing).

“*FAQs* came out before *Good Chemistry*. I did that movie because I loved the character—Spencer was tough and angry, but a wreck inside. TLA [the distributor] really keeps that film in circulation, so people see it and I get these random emails and letters every so often from people who connected to that character. I thought at first they were jokes, but it’s sobering, too. As story-tellers, we have a responsibility.”

Davis is currently at work on developing an original action/comedy web series with writer/director Devin Lawrence, and packaging the action/crime/drama *Smugtown*, also written by Devin Lawrence. He is based in Hollywood. Hobbies include gymnastics, full contact martial arts (primarily Thai boxing), and digital visual FX.



Scene from ‘FAQs’, 2005