

## Gay Times Magazines October 27, 2016

### **How's it been playing Detective Walti Merian so far?**

Playing Walti has been an unbelievable trip on so many levels! It was my first job working in the UK, my first role for British Television, the first time I played a gay character, and the longest I have ever worked on one project. A lot of 'firsts' there... :-)

### **What makes this character different for audiences?**

Close your eyes and think of a male, middle-aged detective on the police force of a major German city. Now, I can promise you that your mental image most certainly doesn't look like the Walti Merian you see on Paranoid. It's hard to explain what makes him different from the typical TV cop. All I can say is that I tried my best to steer clear from any stereotypical portrayal of the *tough detective* we so often see on today's television screens.

### **Detective Walti Merian is an openly gay character - how do you approach taking on a role like this?**

Just like any other role. As simple as that. You look at the character as a whole, with all the facets of his being. All the little bits of information you can get out of the script. You read it and read it again, and you take in everything the text gives you. And the rest you simply make up. That's your job as an actor. So yes, Walti is openly gay. But he's also a detective, a friend, a German, a little child at heart, a tough interrogator etc. So you have to blend it all together and make it a whole character.

### **Does it take a different approach as you're playing a gay character but you're not gay?**

Not really. When it comes down to it, what does it really mean that my character is gay? It means that I as a man love another man. So it's love. Pure love. That's what you play. It doesn't matter a bit if that love goes towards a woman or a man. Love is love.

### **LGBT characters on TV often get pushed into a specific stereotype or direction — were you conscious about not doing this? Or maybe did you want to play a stereotype?**

I was very conscious about not playing the stereotype! As you said, a lot of LGBT characters on TV are played as the typical overdrawn and sometimes cartoonish "token queer". And yes, sometimes the story calls for such a flamboyant character. But a lot of times those roles are played in a gratuitous manner. And I am so happy that the whole team of Paranoid, starting with Bill Gallagher's script, but reaching across all aspects of production, like direction, wardrobe etc., and finally ending with my personal take on Walti's character, stayed clear from him being a stereotype.

### **How do you separate the characters sexuality from him as a person? Or do the two blend together?**

Like in real life, you cannot ever separate your sexuality from who you are. It's one aspect of what makes you whole. So I would never try to separate them as an actor. Doing so would only set me up for failure.

### **What's the reaction been like so far?**

My mom liked my Walti. But then again, she always likes everything I do... Other than that, I always try to stay away from reading too many tweets/posts/reviews. When they're good, your head gets too big for your own good. When they're bad, it crushes your heart. Either way, you lose. So I just listen to my mom.

**We also know that Detective Alec Wayfield, played by Dino Fetscher, is a gay actor playing a straight role in the show. Did you guys tackle your characters together?**

That would have been lovely! But we didn't really communicate beforehand about our characters, and how we wanted to play them. We just did our own thing. That being said, I love Dino's take on Alec! He's definitely one of my favourite characters. The way he plays him with such ease, it's wonderful to watch.

**Was it something you could both assist with in the characterisation?**

Please see answer above.

**There's been many conversations before about gay actors often not getting cast in gay roles. Do you think this is a fair comment?**

Sadly, yes, even nowadays, some producers and directors shy away from casting minority actors for their projects, be it because of their sexual orientation, their race, or their age. And I agree that it's appalling when that happens. But we also have to be honest. Most of the times, filmmakers want to get the best-suited actor for the part. And there are times when a straight actor fits the part of a gay character better, just like there are times when a gay actor fits the part of a straight character better. Dino and I are the perfect example for that. He gave the best read for Alec, and I gave the best read for Walti. Nobody should care what Dino's or my sexual orientation is, as long as we bring the character to life.

**Has there been a backlash at all to the character? Roles like this in mainstream media can often divide public opinion?**

I haven't heard or read anything of that sort. But then again, I just listen to my mom and try to stay away from twitter. But I can guarantee you, if I would hear anybody making intolerant or prejudiced remarks anywhere, I would have a hard time staying away from my keyboard. You have to fight bigotry where you can find it.

**And finally, in your opinion, is there a fair representation of LGBT characters on mainstream TV shows?**

There are great shows that portray wonderful LGBT characters in different forms of life! Transparent! Cucumber! Banana! The L Word! But if you're asking me if there should be more shows like that, then of course I will say YES!! Television and film is art. All art should be diverse. All art should also be a reflection of life. There are a lot of LGBT people in the world. Represent them!