

## All that Laz

Written by Kam Williams

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Laz Alonso was born in Washington, DC, to first-generation immigrants who were refugees from Cuba. Although he developed a passion for acting at an early age, Laz initially pursued a seemingly more practical career in finance after his graduation from Howard University where he had majored in business. However, since he found it impossible to ignore his true calling, it was not long before he began going out on auditions while working in New York City as an investment banker.

After first finding work in TV commercials, Laz began landing bit roles on such TV series as *Soul Food*

,  
*The Practice*  
and  
*CSI: Miami*

. His big break in movies arrived in 2005, when he had the chance to appear opposite Jamie Foxx in

*Jarhead*

. Since then, he's starred in

*Stomp the Yard*

, *This Christmas* and, most notably, Spike Lee's

*Miracle at St. Anna*

, where he played the picture's pivotal role as corporal Hector Negrón.

Here, he talks both about his performance in *Miracle*, and about his portraying Fenix Rise in the *Fast & Furious*

. The fourth installment of the muscle car series features a reunion of the original's principal cast, including Vin Diesel, Paul Walker, Michelle Rodriguez and Jordana Brewster.

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**KW:** Thanks for the time, Laz.

**LA:** Oh, my pleasure. Thank you.

**KW:** How did you enjoy making *Fast & Furious*.

**LA:** Man, everybody who loved the first one, which really built the franchise, is just going to be absolutely ecstatic about this next installment. It brings everybody back from the original cast, only it injects about ten times the amount of testosterone. It's like the original on steroids, so to speak. The budget is a lot bigger and technology has come a long way since then which together allows for more elaborate stuff. At the end of the day, the hero of the movie is still the cars, so any auto enthusiast is really going to love this movie.

**KW:** So, is it safe to assume that your character, Fenix Rise, is a car thief.

**LA:** No, I don't play a car thief. I play something a little less morally substantial, but the movie ends up being a fun game of cat-and-mouse between Vin [Diesel] and myself. [Chuckles]

**KW:** What interested you in playing Hector Negrón in *Miracle at St. Anna*?

**LA:** First and foremost, the historical aspect. I remember growing up seeing The Tuskegee Airmen and what a profound effect that had on me. I didn't really know at the time that I was going to be an actor or be able to play military roles, but it just really stuck with me. I think part of the reason why was because I was seeing people who looked like me in combat and other situations that were relevant to a kid's history growing up. When you study black history, you always study the Civil Rights Movement, which encourages you to turn the other cheek. But watching a story about the Buffalo Soldiers, you see that these guys were also fighting for rights, but they didn't turn the other cheek. They actually bore arms. So, it was a different side of Black History that I didn't know existed outside of The Tuskegee Airmen. So, it was really interesting for me to be able to be a part of it.

**KW:** I loved *Miracle* because I have an uncle who was wounded while fighting in Italy during World War II with an all-black regiment, yet I never saw any war movies with any African-American heroes in it when I was a child.

**LA:** Yeah, even during Black History Month, rarely do you hear anybody mention the Buffalo Soldiers, how they fought, or what they accomplished, although they existed as far back as the Spanish-American War. So, I think the fact that black people also sacrificed their lives for this country is a story that should be told, in order to give a balanced account of how we've contributed.

**KW:** How was it shooting on location with Spike Lee?

**LA:** I'm glad Spike was at the helm of this, because he's not somebody who's going to pull any punches, so to speak. He's going to tell the story the way it was. Sometimes, people accuse him of having his own agenda, but seeing from the inside how he operates, I have to say that he

was very, very committed to being accurate, historically, on all accounts. He was true to what was going on at the time, not only with the American soldiers, but with the Germans and Italians portrayed in the picture.

**KW:** I recently interviewed two of your co-stars from *Miracle*, Derek Luke and Omar Benson Miller. How was it working with them and the rest of the cast?

**LA:** Oh man, to this day, we're all still friends. It's really special when you can leave a film set with some lasting friendships. We still call to congratulate each other and to hang out and go grab a bite to eat. So, from that standpoint, I really enjoyed the experience. It was an environment that, for the most part, was not competitive.

**KW:** Why do you think the film did so poorly at the box office? The September release? Or because it was so long?

**LA:** I don't think there was just one culprit. I know we're not the only war film that has not done well since the country has been at war. I did *Jarhead* in 2005 which also didn't do well. And that was directed by Sam Mendes who had just come off of two Oscars and had Jamie Foxx and Jake Gyllenhaal as its lead actors, both of whom were very hot at the time. I think that during a time of war and economic crisis, people are looking to escape to a happier place, or fantasy. They don't necessarily want to visit something that might be very close to home when home ain't looking too good.

**KW:** Speaking of the economic crisis, you used to work at Merrill Lynch. Are you glad that you left the world of investment banking behind?

**LA:** Not really, because it's still affecting us hard. [Laughs] If anything, I wish I could have been in there and hopefully helped curbed some of this stuff, although it's much bigger than one person. What's happened on Wall Street, as President Obama said, has affected Main Street. Look at how so many companies like Pfizer and Home Depot are laying off people while others like Circuit City are closing down. And even the movie studios are extremely lean right now. So, you realize that this is a problem that's bigger than just Wall Street. It's affected the entire nation and me too, even though I'm no longer working on Wall Street. It has affected me by virtue of limiting the number of movies being made, limiting which projects are greenlit. That's killing working actors.

**KW:** There was a provision in the stimulus package designed to help Hollywood that the Republicans forced the Democrats to take out, saying it was just pork.

**LA:** Here's what the Republicans don't understand. Hollywood has had to go to Prague and to other places in Eastern Europe because they're getting bigger tax breaks overseas than they get domestically. It's cheaper to take a production to the Dominican Republic or Canada. Runaway production has been killing the economy of Los Angeles. A film is more than just two or three stars. Hundreds of people are out of work when a production goes overseas and uses a foreign crew. The Republicans don't understand that Obama's plan was to invest in domestic films. That's no different than trying to get people to buy American cars instead of imports. So,

you see, we have some economic terrorists, right here in the Capitol who, in the name of partisan politics, are sabotaging programs that would make America better.

**KW:** I remember you from the famous “Whazzup!” ad Budweiser ran during the Super Bowl years ago. What did you think of this year’s crop of Super Bowl commercials?

**LA:** Man, I hate to sound like everybody else, but I was very disappointed. But I think that’s indicative of the economy and where we are right now. Companies don’t have a lot of money to spend on elaborate ads like they did in the past.

**KW:** Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

**LA:** How can I help you? At least in my world, that question is never asked. My mom is the only person who asks me that and truly means it. And I’ve found that a lot of people run from friendship because they don’t want to be forced to offer help.

**KW:** I love that question. Okay, how can I help you?

**LA:** [Laughs] you know what? You are helping me right now, by helping me promote myself and the projects that I’m working on. That’s a very unselfish act that I appreciate. You could be interviewing anybody else right now, but you’re spending your time with me, and I really appreciate that.

**KW:** The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

**LA:** I made *Stomp the Yard* with him. Am I happy? Happiness is fleeting, like a butterfly. You can have it in your hand, and then it flies away. Even though it does fly away, you can enjoy watching it go, knowing that another one will come back. Happiness, to me, is a collage of moments. I’m happy at times, at others, I’m not. My goal is to always make sure that the times that I am happy outweigh the times that I’m not.

**KW:** The “Realtor to the Stars” Jimmy Bayan question: Where in L.A. do you live?

**LA:** I live in the San Fernando Valley. I’m a warm weather climate person. People complain about the heat of The Valley. I love the heat of The Valley.

**KW:** The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

**LA:** I’m just starting to read a book by Texas oilman T. Boone Pickens called, “The First Billion Is the Hardest.” I want to hear his perspective, because it’s interesting to see how people on that level think and work.

**KW:** The music maven Heather Covington question: What music are you listening to nowadays?

**LA:** I go through phases, but right now, I’m listening to some Russian music actually that I got

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when I spent four months in Moscow while making this film called Captivity. It's pretty depressing, but I draw inspiration from it. Before that, I had been going through an Eighties phase for about four or five months where I was listening, you name it, to everything from Al B. Sure to DeBarge.

**KW:** You're into creating music, too. Any plans to produce an album?

**LA:** I'm producing. I eventually want to launch independent music production as a part of my business. I haven't done so yet, because I'm very protective of it until I get up to speed technologically.

**KW:** The Rudy Lewis question: Who's at the top of your hero list?

**LA:** God. To me, God is unconditional love. And the unconditional love that I share with the people closest to me is only possible through God. As much as I love my mother, Sylvia, who is a hero of mine, my love for her can only be materialized through God. He is the link that holds us together, and holds me to my grandmother and to everybody who means something to me.

**KW:** Sweet. Well thanks for another great interview, Laz, and I'm expecting even bigger things from you down the line.

**LA:** Cool! Thank you very much.

To see a trailer for Fast & Furious, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdSnZvseggw>