

Anthony De Longis has built two careers, in action cinema and television. On one hand he's a familiar face, often playing a charismatic baddie. On the other he's the man behind the camera teaching many Hollywood names the art of swordplay, fencing and whipwork - three of the most visually exciting and exhilarating action-related disciplines. Hollywood is full of actors who have made a career out of looking good and saving the day. The jaw is chiselled. The complexion spotless. The fighting skills seem to be enough to make small countries quake before them. But as Peter Diamond pointed out earlier in this chapter, to a large extent it is all built on the art of deception. Acting is about creating a fantasy and making it believable. How many actors could actually hold their own in a real no-holds-barred fight? How many would last ten seconds against an opponent who really knew how to handle a weapon? Probably less than a handful. But Anthony De Longis is one such actor.

Not only can he create complex and believable characters, he has little use for a body double or choreographer when it comes to staging fast-moving scenes. Here is a gentleman who doesn't disappear when the director yells 'Cut!' Instead he continues to use the sword, whip, horse or whatever 'extension' of his character's armoury - without the assistance of a body double. In fact, he's willing to teach and instruct wherever it will make the scene better.

"I started out in theatre. I think a play in high school doomed me!" De Longis laughs. "I went to play a

villager and ended up being the lead. When I got to college I dabbled briefly as an English major before transferring to drama - perhaps the most useless of all majors (laughs), I'm joking...but there are days when I wonder if I should have taken something more practical! But it was all part of a process

towards what I really wanted to do, which was act. My first professional job was in San Diego, which has the best Shakespeare festival in America. I worked there moving scenery and being the 'third judge' in productions such as *The Merchant of Venice*, being an apprentice if you will. But then a part ('Edgar') opened up in *King Lear* and from there I was seen by 'people' in Los Angeles. I came up to audition for Richard Chamberlain's theatre company and his production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. I had the opportunity to do that (and get my Equity Card) or go up to full scholarship to ACT - The American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. I opted for the professional chance."

Above:
Anthony De
Longis.



That was a solid enough grounding in acting, but what about the extra training that has served him so well?

"As far as being on the other side of the camera, I've never been much of a sportsman," De Longis admits. "At school I was pretty awkward at sports. Not seeing well and having to wear braces didn't help...it took a lot of time for me to be able to walk with one foot in front of the other and not bump into things. I decided that I had to make some changes in my body so I started lifting weights. I got stronger, but I had no awareness of how those parts fitted together and moved as a whole. So my first semester in college, I went up for gymnastics. I also did wrestling...which got my hip dislocated for me! That pulled me out of gymnastics and I found out that I could do fencing. I found I enjoyed it and went up

you walk onto a set. I love the challenge of seeing a problem and turning it into an opportunity - finding a solution that is both creative and satisfying. It's horrible to put it this way - but it's almost God-like (laughs). A benign God! What I mean is that I arrive on a set ready to work. Everybody has a contribution to make and those of you who aren't going to contribute, please get out of the way because we are going to make this happen. It's a feeling of such vitality."

De Longis has starred in numerous television and film projects. During the 1980s he regularly popped up on shows such as *Matt Houston*, *MacGuyver*, *Kung Fu* and *Renegade*. He also appeared in numerous films including *The Sword and The Sorcerer*, *Roadhouse*, *Far & Away* and *Batman Returns*.

Right:
De Longis is also
a master of the
whip.

for the Nationals a couple of times. Then I started doing the choreography for some of the plays I was in. It was another creative outlet - I hate to be inactive. I found it a useful tool. It improved my actor's eye and director's eye and it taught me how to tell a story with my body."

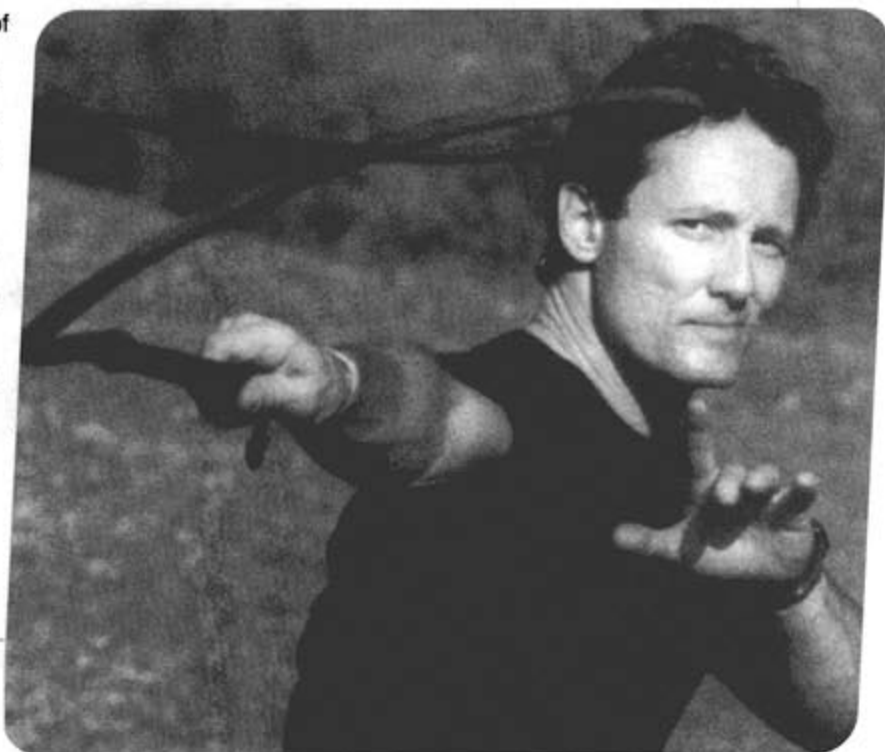
For some actors and stuntmen, their job is just that - a job. With Anthony it's very clear that here is someone who

passionately believes that no job is worth doing if you don't do it well...

"I love my work. I never feel more alive than when I'm working on a set. I feel as if I can do the impossible. You embrace the impossible every time

It was this latter film in which he taught Michelle Pfeiffer how to use Catwoman's whip to best effect.

"Usually there are time problems with many films, but as it happens I had six weeks to train Michelle Pfeiffer for *Batman Returns*. That made all the





difference. With her, we'd walk in, look at the scenes, look at the problems, the opportunities and block something (choreograph it) and then shoot. She had been able to cultivate her skill-levels to that point. As an actor you have to be honed and ready, because when you usually walk onto a set, you won't get any rehearsals...so you had BETTER have been rehearsing for the last twenty years!"

"I'd already met Michelle and won her confidence", he continues. "She recognised the acting opportunities that I wanted to afford her character. She was wonderful. They didn't give me the credit on screen that they were supposed to. But Michelle went out and was very vocal in her praise for me 'He was a great teacher. I really can't imagine Catwoman without the whip and also without Anthony's whip.' Pfeiffer admits. That was great to hear. We had a couple of rehearsals where I used to work at UCLA.

Michelle told me that she'd tell me what she could do. She wasn't saying that unkindly, but she wanted to make sure her trainers didn't limit what they thought she could do. She wanted to do as much as she could. I respected that a great deal."

Though he always loved the traditional sword movies, De Longis grew up with the classic Hollywood Westerns.

"Yeah, I grew up in the Fifties, the time of the Westerns. They were the morality plays of the day. (Now we have 'Doctor' shows). I loved Errol Flynn and one of my earliest memories is nailing two bits of wood together and going out to buckle my swash! My other dream is still to do a Western. This last year I've actually had the opportunity to use some of the horse-riding skills I've cultivated and get in front of the camera. It's another opportunity.

Above:
De Longis taught
Michelle Pfeiffer
(For Catwoman) in
Batman Returns.

Suddenly I had this 1200lb ally whose spirit and fire I could use. Otherwise I'd be another actor who claimed he could ride but secretly hoped he wouldn't fall off! I'll never say I can do something if I can't do it well because people are depending on you to deliver and deliver well."

Anthony De Longis is in a prime position to discuss the differences between stage, films and episodic television. Each medium tests the actor and Anthony has a clear view that it's only a determination to be the best you can be in a role that will see you

through. He has great admiration for those who put in the time and effort.

"I have had the opportunity to work with some top draw talent and the best ones are certainly very aware of the process. They have their own artistry, they are masters of their craft, masters of their own instruments. Yet at the same time, depending on the media they are working in (the stage, television, film), each one has slightly different requirements. They know how the elements work and can capitalise on the opportunities and avoid the pitfalls of each of those mediums."

They say that timing is everything and no more so than in television. Popular actions shows often air once a week and though filmed months in advance, the shooting schedule is just as punishing with many shows averaging a seven-ten days turnaround.

"In a film you can very often go over (though you try not to), very often you get a second shot at it. In



episodic television where you have a seven or eight day shoot, if it doesn't get shot, it doesn't get in! You have to make your day. From that standpoint, it really tests your mettle and at other times it can be frustrating because you have to settle. If you watch a good director, they have their plan of attack, they know what they want and if they arrive on the set and something's different they can hit the ground running because they've done their homework and can improvise. I've been

rehearsing for over twenty years!"

Rehearsing a scene can make all the difference to the quality of the final cut. Too often, the time taken to refine performances is at odds with the time allocated to film it. If you don't know what to do BEFORE you arrive, you won't know what to do on the set itself.

"Occasionally I see people working these days and I don't know what they are about - they haven't done their homework", De Longis says. "You very often get the chance to earn while you learn these days, you have the skills that you show up with on that day. In episodic television there is no rehearsal time. They want it yesterday and there may be no time to choreograph, no time to rehearse. You basically have to bring it with you. In plays you have four to six weeks of rehearsal so you can cultivate the skills. In films there are time problems, but you have fortunate cases where people like Bob Anderson had

Right:
Anthony De Longis
grew up with the
cinematic adventures
of heroes
such as
Errol Flynn.

behind the scenes

six weeks to train Mandy Patinkin for *The Princess Bride*."

Anthony regularly takes part in live shows, highlighting his horse-riding and whip-cracking talents to a ready-made audience. The swordplay activities are very popular and the shows give him a welcome rest from the restrictive time-frame that performing for a camera and director creates. "People are definitely seeing me at my best because I'm out there to have fun! It's an intriguing challenge because, of course, anytime you do a live show, anything can happen. This year, we had had the chance for only one rehearsal and then we were essentially going out there. We're the Light-Horsemen (duplicating the last real cavalry charge from Bethsheba in 1917), we have a grand time. We

want to put you into a small niche, then they know what to do with you.

They don't want you unless they need you.

One of my frustrations is that I've cultivated all these additional skills to make myself more marketable (and, more importantly, to give me, personally, more choices and options which is vital) but it has a

tendency to confuse them because they don't want to give anybody credit for being REALLY good at something. The idea that you can be really good at

more than one thing seems to baffle them. So they look at my credits and they go 'You're a stuntman?'. Well, no... I've got an extensive acting background as well. 'Oh, so you're an actor?' Well...yes I am but I'm also a specialist in these other areas of physical roles. Everyone is looking to make less of you. Sometimes I do like to do something which is just 'acting' to remind me and the rest of the world that I don't have to be swinging on a

rope or swinging a sword.

"But just doing the acting is kinda neat. As I told my students at UCLA, I was teaching them how to tell a better story with their bodies, when you can play your entire body like an instrument, you are a walking symphony! The fact that you know you CAN do something changes the way you carry yourself, changes the power of your presence in any scene."

Though less familiar to British audiences, the television version of *Sinbad* also proved an outlet for



Above:
Ultimate horse power, Anthony De Longis charges in...

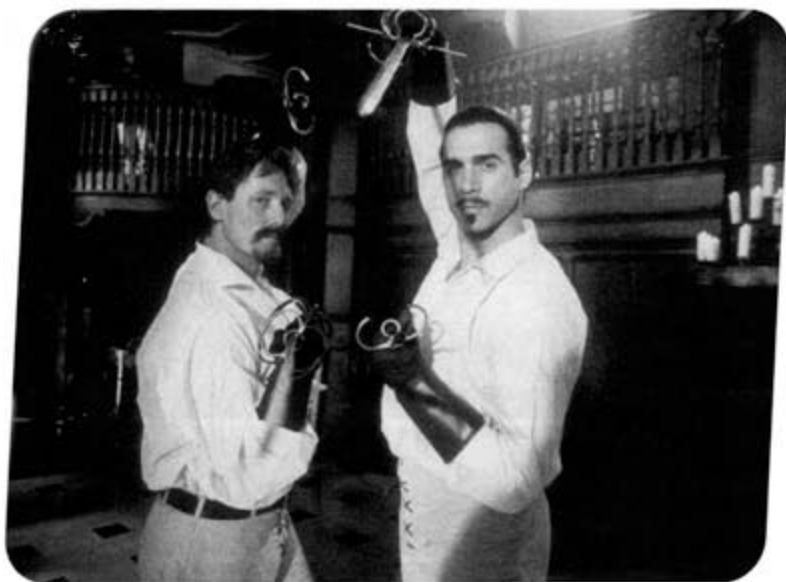


Left:
De Longis and Adrian Paul worked out a difficult sword routine for the Highlander episode 'Duende'.

did a live ammo shoot, four stages of mounted shooting, some fancy horse-riding, jump jumps and hit targets. It's something we try to never stop - it keeps the momentum going!"

Given that Anthony is a definite all-rounder, does he relish the chance to take on the occasional job which simply requires him to act, rather than plan scenes himself?

"Very often I prefer it," Anthony admits. "That's because it's the nature of the business that they



Anthony's talents.

"I remember watching the first season of *Sinbad* and thinking that this was a show that hadn't quite found itself yet. I guess they made some personnel changes and some story changes and by the time I

of sword-work that saw him return to the show (he'd previously guested as Lyman Kurlow in the episode *Blackmail*). *Duende* was named after a flamenco dance, a combination of movement and footwork that tells its own story of love and betrayal. De Longis introduced one of the most tight and interesting stories of the season as he and Adrian Paul duelled to the death (at least their characters Otavio Consone and Duncan MacLeod did!) within the Magic Circle - a very specific art of swordplay.

Given that the technique needed was difficult to master, even more complications were created by rain and slippery surfaces. Despite this, the climax of the show is quite majestic in execution.

"The only reason we were able to do it so successfully was because Adrian Paul has

Above and right: Anthony De Longis and Adrian Paul clash swords in the *Highlander* episode 'Duende'.

did an episode in the second season they had a nicely running team. They had survived the rigours of the first season's twenty-two episodes. John Stead, the stunt co-ordinator, had gone over to Capetown and there wasn't anybody there, so he literally trained his entire stunt-team. They were trained the way he needed them and therefore they were better ready by the second season and he knew what they could do - ready to make the most out of each impossible situation that

- in episodic television - happens every eight days!" For one episode of *Highlander*, it was Anthony's wish to create a story with the emphasis on the discipline



tremendous skill and confidence in me and I have skills and confidence in him," De Longis explains. "We both knew that if something went wrong, we'd adjust to it. You are able to go a lot closer to the edge in that case. Adrian and I discussed on *Highlander* that they do a small movie every eight days. That's a rather amazing feat. I hope to sometime get the challenge to do that myself (on a regular basis). They say: be careful what you wish for, but I think I'd quite enjoy stepping up to the plate every week and

deliver what is, usually, almost impossible situations. Well...this certainly tests our mettle doesn't it, boys! (laughs)."