

gianni paolo

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FROM HOCKEY PRODIGY TO improv student to horror star, Gianni Paolo has worn many hats in his 23 years of life. The one constant throughout it all? Comedy.

Growing up in Rhode Island, hockey became Gianni's life at age 5. Despite being skilled at the sport, "I remember always wanting to make everyone laugh on my team," he shares. One coach even encouraged 9-year-old Gianni to quit hockey and pursue entertainment instead. With Division I offers coming in and a draft from a Canadian league, Gianni was hesitant to abandon a promising hockey career, but he continued to feel drawn to comedy.

At 13, Gianni finally verbalized his desire to act, but it still felt impossible. "You never really [saw] anyone who played hockey become an actor, until maybe Taylor Kitsch," he recalls. At 18, he signed up for classes at the Providence Improv Guild and "immediately fell in love" with comedy. "It was one of the biggest highs I've ever had," he recalls. His teammates gave him a hard time for a while but eventually grew to appreciate Gianni's sense of humor, especially through his social media.

At first, Gianni planned to play junior hockey and take improv classes in Rhode Island for a few years after graduating high school, hoping to later study theater at Princeton. At 19, however, he decided to move to LA and capitalize on high school roles while he was still young. "[Right now], I'd be a sophomore [in college]," he reflects. "It's crazy to think [that] everything I've done

up to this point ... wouldn't even be a thing."

Gianni's first role was on Hulu's *Chance*, but it was *The Mick* "that really changed everything in my mentality," he recalls. Working on the Fox lot for three days made acting feel much more attainable and taught Gianni to appreciate the process — when his recurring role on *The Fosters* was cut to one scene after the show's cancellation, he was able to enjoy the experience despite not getting the career boost he had initially hoped for.

Gianni had only been living in LA for two years when he booked *Ma*, the thriller that put him on the map, but each day felt like forever while he was working at a restaurant to make ends meet. One night, he remembers, Gianni was catering an event at the Sony lot and had to serve the stars of *Riverdale* and *13 Reasons Why* — shows he came close to booking. Almost exactly a year later, he was filming *Ma* with that party's host, Oscar-winner Octavia Spencer (something he has yet to bring up with her).

Although "I really wouldn't find myself gravitating towards horror, ever," Gianni reveals. But *Ma*'s unique juxtaposition of horror and comedy is closer to the teen slashers Gianni appreciates than the dark, supernatural storylines more common today.

Despite mixed reviews, "everyone who went to a packed theater said [*Ma*] was one of the most electric experiences they've ever had because it was just a fun and over-the-top horror movie," Gianni shares. "That's what I loved about it. I don't care [about the

critics]," he adds. "I'm not trying to make *Call Me By Your Name* every other week, you know what I mean?"

Shortly after booking *Ma*, Gianni landed a small role in *Power*, a crime drama produced by his childhood idol 50 Cent. After watching Gianni add depth and humor to Brayden through his improv, the show upgraded him to a recurring role rewritten from "a generic, douche rich kid" to better suit Gianni's strengths. Brayden becomes a more important player in Season 6, as he and Tariq are roommates and team up together.

Later this year, Gianni will be filming a new television show, which he hopes will run for a full six seasons, as he has never worked consistently for more than two months. Eventually, he hopes to write, produce, direct, and run his own show.

Ultimately, he is excited to finally have his dream job: stepping into someone else's shoes each day and getting to make people laugh. "If I was working a desk job, I'd probably do this on the side just because I love doing it, but the fact that I get to do it and get paid for it is just amazing to me," he remarks. "I was doing a self-tape for an audition the other day," he recalls, and "it was [the] most insane dialogue. They were talking about Smurf porn, and I was orgasming," he laughs. While watching the tape back, it really struck him that this was his actual profession.

"I'm happy to be able to do what I'm doing," he concludes. "And I hope I get to do it for a long time." ❧