

Reid Scott

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY



Playing a “political hit man,” actor **Reid Scott** breaks out in “Veep,” HBO’s new must-see series for Washingtonians.

Brief bursts of activity directed by someone else. Lots of hand waving and photo ops. Hours of twiddling thumbs in private, waiting to be called on set. And with a lucky break—the coveted role is suddenly available—an overnight ascension to becoming the biggest, most powerful star on the planet.

Such is life for the vice president of the United States. And if any professional understands what it’s like to wait in the wings, it’s the Hollywood actor. HBO’s newest comedy, “Veep,” examines what happens behind the scenes in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, where the vice prez and staffers, um, **toil**. Veteran funny lady Julia Louis-Dreyfus stars as VP Selina Meyer, with a team of hilarious (and winningly wonky, in real-life) players to support her.

“Working on the Hill is kind of like going back to high school, just without detention ... but there’s not a dummy on the Hill, not like Hollywood.”

“I’m the dark knight,” says actor Reid Scott, 34, best known for his turn as Laura Linney’s oncologist on Showtime’s “The Big C,” plus a run on the TBS series “My Boys.” He’s referring, however, to his “Veep” character Dan Egan, the deputy director of communications, a euphemism for press slayer and scandal snuffer.

“He’s Machiavellian,” Scott tells **Washington Flyer**. “Very driven; nothing but ambition. That’s why Julia’s character hires him. He’s a bad guy, so she can send him out to do the dirty work—to glad-hand and do all the back-door, dark-hour deals that would be inappropriate for her to do. He’s a political hit man ... and it’s so, so fun to play!”

Scott amply researched his role. He chased down Washington insiders and hung out with them at their favorite watering holes.

“I met with a dozen or so young men and women, some lobbyists,” says the actor, whose swoon-worthy handsomeness is just right to assume the skin of a master manipulator. “It was an incredible experience to get a gleam of the backdrop of what actually goes on.” Scott also learned that the cuisine matched the tenor of the meeting. Stuffy lunch? Steak. And hip? Quinoa. “We went to Capital Grille for a couple ... and Founding Farmers. Every time I’d ask where someone wanted to go, they’d say: ‘I’ll meet you at Founding Farmers!’” he says.

Scott also reached out to old-friend-turned-D.C.-power-broker Doug Thornell, senior vice president at SKDKnickerbocker, a public affairs and communications strategy firm. The two met years ago through a mutual musician pal from L.A.’s music scene, Scott’s other world

where he produces the blues/funk/reggae band “Get Licious.”

Thornell gave his pal the skinny on D.C. “Working on the Hill is kind of like going back to high school, just without detention,” he told Scott. “Everyone knows everyone. Either they met at a reception, played in the same softball league or regularly went to the same happy hour at Cap Lounge or Top of the Hill.” So, “being a jerk doesn’t pay [because] everyone starts out in the proverbial mailroom. The really successful, respected people understand that you never know when the intern who was once working for you could be a House member’s chief of staff, or in the White House deciding whether to take your meeting. This place is small, and people advance pretty quickly. Be a jackass at your own peril.”

“What was most surprising,” Scott adds about his undercover reconnaissance, “is how **young** [these D.C. insiders] are. Even when I got

the part I assumed [Egan] would be in his mid-30s, but no; this guy is 28. I thought: **Who does this at 28?** Then, during my research, everyone was 24, 25, 26, right out of college and making **huge** decisions. They were very smooth; all were guarded ... very much like the Ryan Gosling character in ‘Ides of March.’ Young, slick, and very, **very** smart. Everyone has an opinion on politics; an overwhelming majority of people like to bash the so-called ‘idiots’ in Washington. I might not agree with half the decisions they make, but there’s not a dummy on the Hill ... not like in Hollywood,” he jokes.

Scott, a self-described “political junkie” who fondly recalls heated debates over the issues at family gatherings when growing up, thoroughly enjoyed his immersion into Capitol Hill culture. He laughingly describes the night he and a posse of Hill politicians hit “heavy metal” bar The Pug on H Street.

“Here were these clean-cut, J. Crew-looking kids,” he says. “They came in, and every one of them took out two phones and laid them on the table, like they were gunslingers, saying: ‘There’ll be no crossfire here.’”

“Veep” is the brainchild of British writers Armando Iannucci and Simon Blackwell, the team behind 2009’s scathingly funny political farce “In the Loop,” with political op-ed commentator Frank Rich serving as an executive producer.

“Frank makes a call and three senators show up to talk to us,” marvels Scott. “Through the course of the season, a lot of congressmen and women came in, tons of assistants—and the assistants proved to be more insightful than

their bosses! It was funny to see the underlings actually doing everything.”

Unlike that other iconic D.C. series, “The West Wing,” which presented the dramatic tension within the executive branch of government, “Veep” focuses on its absurdity—and its comedic undertone may be closer to truth. “A lot of the plotlines are of [Julia’s character] fighting against the futility of the office she’s in,” Scott explains. “It’s a lame-duck office. You’re a heartbeat away from being the most important person in the world but, until it happens, nobody cares. My character is backing this horse because this will lead to something else.

Dreyfus Effect

What does Scott think about acting opposite comedy legend Louis-Dreyfus? “It can be intimidating,” he admits. “I had the same experience with Laura Linney, someone who’s an incredibly well-regarded actress who’s had gobs of success ... you want to impress them. It took Julia 30 seconds to dispel all of that. She was like: ‘I want to be good and have some fun.’ She’s the best quarterback you could ask for on a show like this. Incredible work ethic [and] encouraging ... She’s a producer and the star, and still has energy at 2 o’clock in the morning to say: ‘Come over to my apartment and have some wine and chips and play the ukulele!’ She’s great. Everyone knows her as Elaine Benes [her iconic character on ‘90s classic “Seinfeld”], but this is going to be the role that people will remember her for.”

Shot on location around Washington and in a studio in Columbia, Md., “Veep” delivers an authenticity that eludes a Hollywood sound stage. Scott spent his downtime exploring both D.C. and nearby Baltimore—but confesses to having a special spot in his heart for the District. “I trolled the museums. They’re all free!” he enthuses. “My mom’s an artist and art teacher. So I grew up loving modern art. The Hirshhorn was my weekend treat. I love the building, and the collection at the time was beautiful.”

A native of upstate New York and a former resident of New York City, he can’t help but compare Washington to its northern counterpart—and to another famous city across the pond. “D.C. reminds me of Paris. You can see it in the broad avenues, no tall buildings. I love it. I used to come to D.C. quite a bit as a kid, and I always just thought it was the most beautiful city. I love the architecture of it. I’m an architecture nerd. You can drink it in, in a way that you can’t in New York. New York is so overpowering, so overwhelming. You strain your neck looking up. In D.C. you can sit back on a park bench and take it in, the vista of the city. I love having a job—[knocks on wood]—that will have me returning to Washington every year.” ☺

CHRIS BALDWIN