

Q&A: ‘Spider-Noir’ villain Andrew Lewis Caldwell guiding WNY performers through Hollywood’s web

BEHIND THE SCREENS WITH JOSHUA MALONI

One of the standout stars of “Spider-Noir” is making a notable mark within the Western New York acting community.

In the Prime Video miniseries, Andrew Lewis Caldwell plays Dirk Leyden (aka “Megawatt”), an electricity-charged thespian all-too-eager to squash Nicolas Cage’s Ben Reilly (“The Spider”).

In real life, Caldwell is a purpose-driven performer keen on sharing what he’s learned across 20-plus years in the entertainment industry with Buffalo-area actors.

“I have a studio here in Buffalo where I work with actors, and we produce content – we produce shorts and scenes and things like that,” Caldwell said in a recent phone interview. “One of the members of our studio wanted to work on a demo reel. And so, what we’re doing is we write scenes in the studio, we produce the scenes, we direct the scenes, and now we’re on location shooting some of the scenes. In the long term, we’re trying to sort of connect all of the scripts into one big universe.

“Basically, just getting actors on their feet, and then giving them the experience that it takes to be on set and do everything we can to recreate that experience of working on a real set.”

The ALC Acting Studio is located in West Seneca. The second-floor space boasts both a stage and a recording studio – not to mention some cool “Spider-Noir” props, including a Dirk Leyden “Megawatt” head.

It’s there that performers including “Tea It Up with Phil and Cindy” podcast hosts Phil Buffone and Cindy Sanoian hone their craft.

“Let me say that Andrew is a tremendously talented actor, director and writer,” Buffone said. “He started ALC Studio to give individuals the opportunity to create art. When you walk through the doors at ALC Studio, you are given the opportunity to perform in front of the camera and release all your creativity. From a beginner to a polished performer, Andrew has a way of bringing out your best effort and artistic talent. He provides a family of actors with knowledge, technique and skills that translate into real-world experiences. It is a joy to be part of his studio.”

Sanoian said, “Andrew Lewis Caldwell’s performance in ‘Spider-Noir’ is nothing short of extraordinary. Seeing our teacher from ALC Acting Studio bring that level of artistry and authenticity to the screen was inspiring beyond words! We were completely over the moon. He is an exceptional talent, a gifted teacher, and a truly remarkable human being. Being his students is an honor we don’t take lightly. We are incredibly fortunate to learn from him.”

In addition to “Spider-Noir,” Caldwell starred in Nickelodeon’s “Henry Danger” and “Danger Horror”; The CW’s “iZombie”; in the horror-thriller “Haunt”; and alongside Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss in “The Matrix Resurrections.”

He shared more in this edited Q&A.

BTS: You’re a Michigan guy – so, how did we get so lucky as to have your acting studio in Western New York?

Andrew Lewis Caldwell: (Laughs) Well, so, I moved to Los Angeles from Michigan when I was 15, and I lived in L.A. until about two years ago. My wife (Jennifer Giaccot to Caldwell) is from Buffalo. We had our son, and I was able to book a lot of things off tape. I wasn’t really doing in-room auditions anymore. And so, it was kind of one of those things where we’re like, “Let’s move to an area where we can be closer to family, and raise our son in a better community.”



From left: Jack Huston (Flint Marko/“Sandman”), Li Jun Li (Cat Hardy) and Andrew Lewis Caldwell (Dirk Leyden/“Megawatt”) in Prime Video’s “Spider-Noir.” (Photo credit: Prime Video) • Andrew Lewis Caldwell and his wife, Jennifer (front), run the ALC Acting Studio.

She won. That’s where she’s from. So, Buffalo it is.

BTS: Tell me about the school. I mean, obviously you love the craft – and I’ve heard good things from actors you work with – but what motivated you to actually start working and training and teaching others?

Andrew Lewis Caldwell: I’ve always liked to share it. It’s like I get better, and I get to do my form of art by sharing it with people. Iron sharpens iron. And so, I’ve always enjoyed teaching. I’ve always enjoyed sharing the experience, and helping people do things the right way.

I grew up in Los Angeles, and I grew up in the entertainment industry, and so I have a very clear idea of how things work. And so, coming here and sharing that with people was always something I planned on doing.

I think the excitement of the people around here and the commitment was inspiring and level up a little bit and take it much more serious, rather than just something we kind of do for fun. I am definitely trying to pave a way for actors to break into the entertainment industry now, because it’s so different than it was when I started. The avenue in is a different avenue than it was. And so, my purpose here – because I see all this passion, I see all this talent – is to sort of help people navigate their way through this new path.

BTS: You mentioned the word “excitement” – and obviously your frame of reference for Western New York is only the couple of years that you’ve been here – but there is palpable excitement among the actors in Western New York. Also, we’ve been inundated with these productions that have come and shot here the past two years – whether it be Hallmark, whether it be Great American Media; we’ve had HBO come for “Hard Knocks.” There’s just been so much activity over the past two years.

For you, what is appealing about Western New York? We hear a lot about architecture; we hear a lot about people; but what do you think makes Western New York a good place to film?

Andrew Lewis Caldwell: There’s a lot of educated people here. There’s a lot of people who know how to make films. There’s also a lot of people that don’t know how to make films and do it anyway.

The ability to come here and execute is a big thing. Execution in the film industry is the No. 1 thing, and you can execute here. There’s a lot of people here who know what they’re doing, who like the work, who are passionate. I think that’s the main appeal.

And, listen, having a tax incentive doesn’t hurt either. You give a production some money back, they’re going to want to come here and shoot.

BTS: “Spider-Noir”: I have to say, you are fantastic in the role. You’re really, really good. I really enjoyed what you brought to the series.

Andrew Lewis Caldwell: Thank you.

BTS: Tell me how this opportunity came your way.

Andrew Lewis Caldwell: Well, just like any other opportunity, really. I mean, my agent got me an audition. I auditioned. I sent in a self-tape from my studio here in New York. In fact, I did the self-tape in front of a few members of the studio. And you wait – you wait to hear back. They call you if they want to do another session. I did a four-hour chemistry-read session via Zoom, again in front of members of my studio, and then they booked me for the role. It’s the same as any other role, really. The same process exists, whether it’s “Spider-Man” or in any film. Audition, callback, book.

BTS: When I talk to actors who have particularly impressed me with their work, and I ask them to give me a little bit more of a deep dive into the character, they always point to the writers and the script, and if there’s original source material – and I appreciate that – but actors are the ones who have to bring it to life. You’re the one who has to bring their words across in such a way that it resonates with the audience – and like I said, I think you’ve done that masterfully with this part. Tell about creating this character, working with the writers, and what your process was to bring this character to life.

Andrew Lewis Caldwell: I got lucky. You know, sometimes you just get a guy. Sometimes you just can sit in a character’s thoughts, and you can sit in that intentional developed character, which we talk about in my studio a lot. It’s pretty much my main approach, is helping build intentional characters. And so, once I put together the pieces of who this guy was at the core, and what was his desire, and what he was after, it all just fell into place. It was one of those sort of magical moments where it just happened. I mean, my audition, I did it in one take. It came very natural to me – finding this guy.

Listen, the writing was great, and it helps a lot, and I give all the credit to our creator, Oren; but you’re right – there is a level of having to own those words at a certain point. Luckily for me, the words were right in line with the emotions, and so I felt really comfortable in this guy; and it was pretty easy for me to find this character and hold on to this character once I was able to establish that intentional character development.

BTS: Back to the school. For people who are interested in acting, who are getting into it, what is the process connecting with students? I don’t know if you have enrollment; if you’re looking for a particular age group. How can people get connected with you, as far as the school goes?

Andrew Lewis Caldwell: We mainly work with adults. We have kids classes. My wife, Jennifer, does the kids class, and I help out a lot with the kids class, but we mainly have adults – and 16 and up in my class. My class’s goal is really production. It’s like everything we do, we do for a purpose to shoot.



You can find us on Instagram. We have a link tree where you can register and sign up.

Listen, we want everybody to be able to get involved and enjoy it. I think I think we’re moving towards a time where we’re becoming a bit more intentionally driven. And so, I think it’s best for people to get in and sign up to be kind of a part of this thing at the ground floor, because the

more we commit to these on-location shoots like we’re doing today, and these full projects, it makes it harder for the teaching.

You know, there’s only so much you can really teach. At a certain point, you have to experience it. And so, we’re about creating the experiences. I would love for people to come in and do what we’re doing, and jump in.

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