

# A Few Minutes With...

# DAVE FENNOY

**S**ince being one of Voicetrax's first students 25 years ago, DAVEo, multi-award winning voice actor, Dave Fennoy, has enjoyed a career with an extensive list of varied credits that include the animated series, Archer, the video game Star Wars: The Clone Wars and for the last 15 years has been the announcer of The NAACP Image Awards. Recently, Dave has been playing the main protagonist, Lee Everett, in the uber-successful The Walking Dead video games series, for which he won Spike TV's 2012 Best Performance by a Human Male Award, not to mention that he's the only voice actor to have ever been The Hulu Guy. (The following program is brought to you with limited commercial interruptions by....) In anticipation of his visit as the next Inside The Voice Actor's Studio guest, we dropped in with Dave to give you a glimpse of his career and philosophy...

**Voicetrax:** What did you do for a living before voice-over?

**Dave Fennoy:** In the years right before I got into voice-over, I was a disc jockey on several radio stations in the Bay Area including the morning show at KSOL, the legendary R&B station. I discovered voice-over when I was in radio and started investigating it because I knew I wanted to stop spinning records for teeny-boppers at some point. At first, I was booking once every one or two months. Then, all of a sudden, Toby Gleason, a friend of mine who started in voice-over about the same time I did, started booking every couple of weeks. I asked him what he was doing different and he told me he was taking voice-over classes from a woman named Samantha Paris. I signed up right away.

**VT:** Were you always interested in performing as a young child?

**DF:** Definitely. As a child actor, I was a member of the Karamu Community Playhouse in Cleveland. We learned modern dance, to play a musical instrument, drawing, sculpting and acting, anything artistic. My parents made sure I was exposed to as much art as possible and I had an affinity for all of it. I was in several productions in high school and then went to college as a theatre major. I was only in college for a short time when I went on the road as a musician playing guitar, signing and writing songs. After a few years on the road, I decided I needed to finish my education, so I enrolled at Howard University and graduated with a jazz major and a minor in guitar. After college, I got married and moved with my wife to the Bay Area. I thought I would still do music, but I had started investigating radio. When I got to the Bay Area, I started knocking on radio station doors and was very fortunate that in a fairly brief amount of time, I got a job at a radio station in Concord.

**VT:** You probably walked in with that million dollar voice of yours and they said, "Where do we sign you?"

**DF:** Well, there are a lot of guys in radio with great voices. In radio, the voice is definitely part of it, but just like in voice-over, it's what else do you bring to the table. What are you interested in? What's your sense of humor like? Do you show up on time? In voice-over it really doesn't matter what type of voice you have. If you listen to the current landscape of voice work, you hear every kind of voice. There's a place for anybody who can take the words off the page, make them their own and get an emotional or intellectual response from the listener. If you go back 20-30 years there were a lot of guys with big announcer voices, but now, nobody wants to be shouted at anymore. You share your experience and reasoning with the audience. If I'm narrating a documentary and I want the listener to be interested, I need to find a way to show up with a genuine interest myself.

**VT:** You are well known for work in video games, but you've had lots of success in the other voice-over genres including commercial, narration and promos. Is there one of those genres that's nearest and dearest to your heart?

**DF:** I like all of them for different reasons. I like narration because I get to learn something. I like promos because they're quick, really fun to do and they pay well. I like video games and animation because you get to play all sorts of crazy characters. I can't say that I like one more than the other. I am blessed to have a career where I get to do a variety of things.

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**VT:** You're the main man in the Walking Dead video game series. Zombies are all the rage right now...

**DF:** Zombies are the new vampires...

**VT:** True! The Walking Dead video game series has won over 80 different Game of The Year awards. What's it like to be part of such a phenomenon?

**DF:** I've been very fortunate to be a part of a few iconic video games, but to be a part of the Walking Dead has been truly amazing. My co-star, Melissa Hutchinson is a remarkable actress and we've become good friends, so The Walking Dead has become the gift that keeps on giving.

**VT:** Do you guys record together?

**DF:** Actually, like most games, the whole thing is wild-lined alone.

**VT:** What challenges does that present for you?

**DF:** You don't have the energy of the other actor to play off of, their look, their feel. It's just lines on the page and context from the director and writers, who don't always know or agree. What's most important for me to deliver a great performance is making sure I clearly understand the context and my character's relationship to the person who's not there by asking all those fundamental questions that start with Who, What When, Where, Why. The Walking Dead is very different from other games I've done. In a lot of games, you have your standard greeting lines, attack lines, taunting lines and injured lines. In the Walking Dead, it's all dialogue based on your relationship with various characters. Another character will ask my character a question and the player will have three responses to choose from to forward the scene.

**VT:** What do you think makes the Walking Dead video game so popular, other than the zombies, of course?

**DF:** One thing that makes it distinctive is that it's an individual player game as opposed to an interactive drama game where different people geographically spread out are playing other characters. In that scenario, deciding the course of the story line becomes a bit of a democratic process with conflicting ideas. But because The Walking Dead is an individual player game, what the player chooses for my character to say or do makes a major difference in what happens next and further down the line. The decisions the player makes in Episode One can affect things in Episode Five.

**VT:** It's a more personal experience for the player?

**DF:** Absolutely. The majority of the comments I hear from fans of the game is that never before had they become so emotionally involved with the characters in a video game. They've told me that my character and Melissa's character, Clementine, have made them cry.

**VT:** As one of Samantha's very first students, what do you think about Voicetrax going strong 25 years later?

**DF:** I'm incredibly pleased and I think it says a great deal about Samantha and what she has to offer. She really gave me my foundation for my career. What I learned from her 25 years ago, I still use today. She explained to me the reality of this business, how it works and what you need to be successful. She was always talking about making your performances real and believable. The listener needs to believe you. And if they don't believe you, you're not going to work in this industry. That's been my guiding principal throughout my career and it's certainly worked. Had I not taken classes from her, I'm not sure where I'd be right now. Samantha means the world to me.

*Don't miss Inside the Voice Actor's Studio with Dave Fennoy and be sure to check out his new class, Get In The Acting Game.*