



[TV]

Good Cop, Bad Cop

Between playing a villain on *Hannibal* and a hero on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, actor **RAÚL ESPARZA** has his hands — and his mind — full.

HE MAY HAVE APPEARED AS A LOVABLE rabbit in a theater production in elementary school, but these days, Raúl Esparza has crossed over to the dark side as the villainous Dr. Frederick Chilton on TV's *Hannibal*. Although viewers saw him gruesomely gutted in the show's first-season finale, he's been put back together for season two to continue running Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. The award-winning theater veteran and four-time Tony nominee, who grew up in Miami, is doing double duty for NBC, also appearing on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (aka *SVU*). *American Way* caught up with the busy actor — when he wasn't on a plane between locations.

AMERICAN WAY: How have your fans responded to Dr. Chilton?

RAÚL ESPARZA: People really seem to like Chilton. I'm surprised, actually, that I keep hearing that they find him attractive because he really is a kind of loathsome human being. I've also heard that he's a lot of fun, which makes me very happy because that's really all I wanted for the role.

AW: You must have been thrilled upon learning of the show's renewal.

RE: We were over the moon! I think that *Hannibal* is an exquisite series. I joke around saying we're making an art-house film but we're passing it off as a thriller. It's very, very detailed and a gorgeous show to work on. I found out it had been renewed and that they wanted me to come back the very day that I signed the contract to become a regular for *SVU*.

AW: What do you bring to your TV performances from your theater background?

RE: I'm really good with language. It's easy for me to memorize a lot of lines, but more than that, it's also easy for me to find character through language as opposed to just physical movements. And because I've worked with some seriously great playwrights and some amazing composers who are kind of language-based, that's been a key for me. I'm not the greatest at walking into an audition room and saying, "Freeze! Put down your gun!"

AW: Which is harder: *Hannibal's* medical terminology or *SVU's* legalese?

RE: The medical terminology is much harder. Half the time I don't know what I'm pronouncing. But I certainly know what psychotropics to use if I want to screw with your mind [laughs].

AW: If your *SVU* character, A.D.A. Rafael Barba, prosecuted Chilton, what would the verdict be?

RE: I think Chilton would be found guilty, 100 percent. It might not be first-degree murder, but he would definitely be an accessory to the murders that were committed. —JULIE JACOBS

