



Michael Hyatt

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Accomplished actress Michael Hyatt has built up a reputation for her ability to reach an audience with gripping portrayals of characters that run the gamut - perhaps it's her diverse background, or fantastic study of the art that gives her a leg up. Born in England of Jamaican parents, she was



surrounded by talented artists from the beginning - her mother working at the National Gallery of Jamaica, her father a respected actor himself, performing in theater for as long as Hyatt can remember. Michael eventually made to the US at the age of 10, where she grew up in PEV's backyard between Maryland and Washington, DC, studying acting at Howard University.

We should note that simply studying her craft was never enough for Michael, as she briefly left academia, taking a job behind the scenes at a

local theater, soaking up every bit of onsite education that she could. She then made the jump to NYC to challenge herself on an even more dynamic scene, and realized continuing education might be her best shot at taking the next big step. She finished her undergrad requirements and then completed her Masters at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts - sure enough, shortly after she walked the stage, her career took off running at a rapid pace.

Since then, you've seen Hyatt on so many screens, from PEV favorite *The Wire*, to *Big Bang Theory*, to her current role on *Ray Donovan*, to her recurring character Dr. Akopian, on The CW series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. We asked Michael specifically about this role - she told us, "Like so many of us, Rebecca (the main character) is on a mission and has a one track mind. The last thing she's looking for right now is to be woken up from her understanding of the way things should be. So having a relationship with a therapist (Hyatt) isn't something she is eager to embrace right now. Let's see if things change."

She continues, "Working on this show is...just...damn beautiful. Watching this 27-year-old woman do her thing is inspiring to say the least. I WISH I had it together at that age the way she does...I am also in love with the tremendous amount of diversity in front of and behind the scenes. How beautiful is it to see an African American cinematographer, women in crews usually dominated by men and an Asian man as the romantic lead. I'm elated and proud to be a part of that." Click to <http://www.michaelhyatttheactor.com/> to see just how broad Michael's range is - you'll realize just how many programs you've seen her work on. But first, do keep reading. There's still so much to learn in all the answers to the XXQs below.

XXQs: Michael Hyatt

[PensEyeView.com](http://www.penseyeview.com) (PEV): As an actor who has seen every bit of the entertainment world, what drove you to pursue acting from the beginning?

Michael Hyatt (MH): I was raised in the arts. My mother is a retired art historian and museum director and my father was an actor. It's all I've ever known. In hindsight, I can see that it was my calling all along.

PEV: What kind of movies or TV were you into growing up? Do you

remember the first thing you saw that really got you hooked?

MH: When I was a child in Jamaica, my favorite cartoons were *The Jackson 5*, *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, and *Richy Rich*. Then I graduated to *Good Times*. When I moved to the States, I fell in love with *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Love Boat*, *Fantasy Island* and...*Entertainment Tonight* (had to have that!). But, television wasn't what hooked me first. After school I would go to mum's office, at the National Gallery of Jamaica, and played in the galleries, surrounded by tremendous art, as if it was my personal playground. Then at night I would go to the theater and watch my father and his colleague perform and was at the edge of my seat in absolute awe. It was a part of my everyday life and I absorbed it as any child would, not ever understanding that my life was being shaped even then.

PEV: What was it like trying to break into the acting scene when you first started? What was your first show like?

MH: As grateful as I am for my undergrad experience, I was quickly bored with the routine of school. I wanted so badly to be out in the world doing what the professionals were doing. I took what I learned in my theater practicum classes and got a job at the local regional theater (which just happened to be one of the best in the country), Arena Stage, and became a member of the lighting crew and costume crew. At least I was with the actors again, like watching daddy as a child. I got to hang out with them and hear all their stories. But doing lights and costumes was soon not enough; I wanted to be on stage again. Unfortunately, I learned that all the actors were hired from New York. WELL WHAT THE HELL AM I DOING HERE????!!! So, I left school behind and moved to New York with \$30 in my pocket and shackled up with my uncle in Brooklyn. I did the cattle calls and subway tokens for pay jobs that Backstage had to offer but grew tired of that fast. To get where I wanted to be, I needed an in and graduate school would be it. I finished my college requirements, auditioned for NYU's grad acting program and got in.

My life after graduate school is when my professional career began. My first gig was playing a lady in waiting in *Henry VIII* at New York Public Theater's Shakespeare in the Park. Not one line but I had arrived. Pure

joy. I was legitimate now and there was no stopping me.

PEV: What is the first thing that comes to mind when the director yells, “Action!”?

MH: SHIT!!! Really! I spent too much time being afraid of the craft I was born to do. I was terrified to live in that power. Thankfully, I’ve healed those demons. Now I’m chomping at the bit waiting to pounce.



PEV: Tell us about the auditioning process. What is a normal audition like and what do you think it is that people - outside of the business - don’t understand about the process of auditioning?

MH: Every audition is a job to me. A performance. When an audition comes, everything else shuts down until it’s over. I used to hear actors question whether or not to go in for a role because they didn’t think they were right for it, which is a huge waste of an opportunity. I’ve read for parts that were specifically written for a white man - and got the part. Forget about being right for the part. Think of it, instead, as an

opportunity to give your best performance before the best audience - a casting director - who casts lots of things!!! Work begets work.

PEV: Was there ever a role that you auditioned for, didn't get, then later saw and really wished you had? You know, the one that still sticks with you.

MH: Oh...tons! Some shows I don't even watch because the wound is still too raw. But then I get the other job, or jobs, and you move on. And then, you run into that actor at the next audition and think "SHIT", and then you spend way too much energy trying to get over seeing them and end up giving half the performance you could have given in the room - thus giving the role away. Ugh! This life is not always easy. But you get your groove back, book the next one, and keep moving.

PEV: How do you think the industry has changed over the years, since you started out?

MH: I remember when I had to subscribe to every entertainment magazine to learn the business - now you pull it up on Twitter. I remember when you had to go to your agent's office to pick up a script or sides for the next audition, now they're just emailed. I remember when I was expected to watch every show on the air so that I was prepared to audition for them at any time. Now it's as simple as pulling it up on YouTube, Netflix, Hulu, or some other resource. But most importantly, back in the day we were limited to network television and HBO, now there's cable and internet shows all over the place. The possibilities are endless.

PEV: What can fans expect from your new recurring character, Dr. Akopian, on The CW series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*? What was the filming for this series like? What was the vibe behind the scenes?

MH: Like so many of us, Rebecca is on a mission and has a one track mind. The last thing she's looking for right now is to be woken up from her understanding of the way things should be. So having a relationship with a therapist isn't something she is eager to embrace right now. Let's

see if things change.

Working on this show is...just...damn beautiful. Watching this 27-year-old woman do her thing is inspiring to say the least. I WISH I had it together at that age the way she does. Every moment of the day, Rachel is working on the show; when she's not on camera shooting, she's in a corner somewhere working on a future script or song, or working on publicity for the upcoming episode about to air. It doesn't stop with her. What's even more amazing is the level of grace and class she approaches it all with. There is no doubt her plate is full, and sometimes overflowing, but at no time does she allow it to ever affect her behavior negatively. She is at all times kind, upbeat, grateful, generous, and completely present in the room. I am in awe of this woman's work ethic. She has taught me a lot.

I am also in love with the tremendous amount of diversity in front of and behind the scenes. How beautiful is it to see an African American cinematographer, women in crews usually dominated by men and an Asian man as the romantic lead. I'm elated and proud to be a part of that.

PEV: With all your traveling, is there one area you wish you could travel to that you haven't yet?

MH: One day my work will take me back to England and that I look forward to very much. I would also love to work in an African country telling a story there. Nothing is off the table. All in its right time.



PEV: How have all your friends and family reacted to your career?

MH: I am immensely grateful to have had parents who, because of their own respect and commitment to the arts, embraced and encouraged my choice to be an actor. My family has been behind me 100% my whole life. I know many people who take this journey alone and I have the deepest compassion for that challenge. This business is not easy; it takes a great amount of courage to do what we do and, without the proper support, it makes the climb so much harder. But we do it. We do it because it is our truth and we won't allow anyone to take away our truth. A way will be made.

PEV: What can we find you doing in your spare time, aside from acting?

MH: Ah, my dear. I am a single mom to a most wonderful child. When I'm not working, even when I am working, my world is beautifully wrapped up in his. Homework, play dates, one on one time...the stuff my dreams are made of.

PEV: Name one present and past actor/actress that would be your dream to work with. Why?

MH: Raul Julia is one, Spencer Tracy another. I'm moved by actors with quiet fire. It's so much more powerful that way.

PEV: We love music, so is there an up and coming band or artist you think we should all be looking out for now?

MH: Forgive me, my love, but I'm not the best one for that. I'm totally dependent on Pandora and Sirius/XM's Heart & Soul radio to keep me current, but names I know not. Come to think of it, there is a band called Magic System whose music I enjoy a great deal. I'm not sure what African country they are from, but I heard their song "Magic in the Air" months ago and it was my theme song for a while there. It still lights me up.

PEV: If acting wasn't your life, what would you do for a career?

MH: In another life I would have focused on religious studies and nestled in an ashram somewhere devoting my life to Spirit consciousness. For me, it is the driving force.

PEV: So, what is next for Michael Hyatt?

MH: I'm thrilled to be enjoying *Ray Donovan* for another season. Working with that team...what a pleasure. Other things have been happening here and there. We'll see what comes of them. This journey has been one poop of a roller coaster and I am grateful to still be in the game. Every year gets better as I embrace letting go and saying "YES!" For more information, click to <http://www.michaelhyatttheactor.com/>.