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Michael Hyatt: TV's Hardest Working Actress

Samantha Ofole-Prince, Caribpress News-Magazine, Interview, 06/13/16

Hyatt plays detective Sheila Muncie on the Showtime series "Ray Donovan."



If Michael Hyatt's face is a familiar one, it's because you've seen her in several television dramas. Whether it's "The Wire," "Shameless," "Castle," "CSI," "Dexter," "The West Wing" "True Detective," "Ray Donovan" or more recently belting out a song on the musical comedy "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend," she is television's hardest working actress having been on more than 50 shows.

"I am a limitless energy," laughs the genial performer who we caught up via phone from her Los Angeles home. "There's a lot of stuff I have learned from the women that I've played and there are aspects of these women in me," says Hyatt actress whose screen roles have largely been authoritarian. "If there is a role that's offered to me that doesn't speak to my spirit I just don't do it."

On CW's "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend," Hyatt plays the unconventional Dr. Akopian, a straight-laced no nonsense doc who is always armed with a dose of reality for her patients.

"She's very hippy on page, is very liberal and very clear. She is not the kind of doctor that would prescribe medication to get over what it is you are going through, but wants to talk about it," shares the actress who carefully seeks out her screen roles.

"I am not so interested in the type of character, but in the story that is being told and the message and overall writing of the character and story. It has to speak to my spirit. The energy of the story is more important."



A show now in its second season, "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend," follows the exploits of Rachel Bloom (played by Rebecca Bunch) who abandons a choice job at a law firm and her life in New York in an attempt to find love in the unlikely locale of West Covina, California. It's a show, which immediately struck a cord with audiences when it premiered last year due to its relatable theme.

"Rachel really is the woman next door or the next cubicle and is someone you can identify with. She is so simple and awkward and full of mistakes that everyone one of

us has made at one point in our journey," adds Hyatt.

With over two decades of work in movies, theater and television, the Caribbean/British actress has enjoyed a successful acting career, and knows all about the grind of being a working black actress in Hollywood. Whether it's the gripe about the glaring lack of diversity on screen or the discrepancy in pay between her and her male counterparts, Hyatt's seen it all but feels these are issues that are slowly changing.

"I am so grateful to have Ava DuVernay, Shonda Rhimes, Oprah Winfrey and all of the creators and producers of African descent that exist now in American television. That is a great change from what it used to be. There is certainly more work than there was in the '80s and '90s, but so much more needs to be done. Diversity needs to happen across the board and in terms of pay we are going to get to a point where that will change."



One of modern TV and moviedom's most sturdy and reliable character actors, Hyatt, who returns as the gritty Sheila Muncie on the Showtime series "Ray Donovan" on June 26 can also be seen in the independent film "Dara Ju," a drama about a young Nigerian American man trying to balance the true understanding of being an African American and the challenges he experiences along the way.

"People who need to adjust to a new life, country and culture will be able to relate to this man's journey," continues the actress who plays Ife Ogunde, a Yoruba mother and relished taking on a Nigerian accent. "I am Jamaican and lived in London and then America and remember having to adjust as a child to the new accent that I was asked to live in. I have learned over the years how to manipulate the sound and adjust and found it flattering when I came to set and they thought I was Yoruba. Hopefully my Nigerian brothers and sisters will feel the same way when they see the film."

Samantha Ofole-Prince is an entertainment journalist who covers industry-specific news. Follow her on twitter @SamanthaOfole