

Michael Flynn

INTERVIEW BY **ANDREA PEARSON** | PHOTOS BY **GREG DEAKINS**

WEB: **MICHAELFLYNN.BIZ**

Michael Flynn is an actor with an extensive résumé in television, film, and theatre. He has played a variety of roles including a sheriff, a stake president, a doctor, a lawyer, and a Pharisee. He also portrayed Pontius Pilate in The Lamb of God. Recently, Michael has made available a series of classes called the Actors Workshop where he devotes his time to teaching others about the acting craft.

What acting role models do you have? Have your role models changed as you've gained experience?

There are a lot of actors whose work I really admire. The usuals — Meryl Streep, Tom Hanks, Gene Hackman, Peter O'Toole, and many others — but I've never really been a role model kind of person. Other than Mickey Mantle, center fielder for the New York Yankees, and that was when I was eleven.

How did playing sports influence or help your acting career?

Competition. I like competition. When I'm playing racquetball I have the same mental attitude as when I walk into an audition. Auditioning is enjoyable because of the competition. I do admit I like to win.

What was the deciding factor in becoming an actor?

The fact that I wasn't a good enough athlete to make it in high school sports. I needed to do something with my time in high school, something that would keep me after school so I wouldn't have to go home. Theatre worked really well. We had a lot of rehearsals after school. And I enjoyed the work, the people.

Who were your early influences in acting?

My dad is the earliest influence. Back in the day of double features, he would drop me and my brother off at the movies on Sunday afternoons. I saw a lot of movies as a kid and had an interest in film, but it never occurred to me that I



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could actually do it. Then one day while I was a sophomore at George C. Marshall High School, outside of Washington, D.C., I was walking down the hallway when the drama teacher approached me and asked me to come in and try out for a play. I'd never done that before, but I auditioned and got a small part. I realized it was something I could do; something I could be good at.

The teacher's name was John Reese. He was terrific and very influential, more so than any other acting teacher I've ever had. I didn't know anything about acting before him and he taught me a lot. Especially a love and respect for the theatre. I've never lost that.

What was your big break to getting on the big screen?

I'd always done stage up until about 1980 when I moved to Utah. The filming industry here was pretty big at the time. I got an agent right away and auditioned for the film *Footloose* and I got a pretty small role in it. But for some reason, almost 30 years later, people remember I was the cop. That blows me away. I don't even remember myself in the film. I guess that was the start. I remember reading the script and thinking the film would never fly. Silly me.

How does TV differ from movies?

You shoot a lot faster with TV. After a twelve-hour work day on a feature film you might get two minutes that you can actually use, often less. In television it's not unusual to do seven or eight, sometimes ten pages a day, which comes out to about eight to ten minutes a day. But then you have small-budget independent films. They are similar to TV in that you shoot upwards of ten pages a day. It all depends on the budget, the script, and a lot of other factors.

As far as acting goes, it's pretty much the same. You bring the

passion to it, you bring the emotion to it. That's really what it's all about. The passion.

Which project have you most enjoyed being a part of?

The Best Two Years was the most enjoyable. That was a blast. The writer/director Scott Anderson is a long-time best friend of mine and we actually did the play called *The Best Two Years of My Life* together. Scott wrote and directed it in the early eighties and we produced it in the mid-eighties.

We put together a videotape of the play and used it to raise money to make the film. We spent two weeks in Holland and shot all the exteriors there, then came back here, rehearsed for a week, and shot the interiors in Alpine, Utah. We used an older home, a vacant house that had a European feel to it.

What projects are coming up and are in the planning stages?

First, I'm playing the part of Emma Smith's father in an upcoming film about Joseph Smith. Next, we're producing *Midway to Heaven*, based on the novel by Dean Hughes. Lastly, we have the film rights to the first three books Anita Stansfield wrote. She's written the screenplay for her novel *First Love and Forever* and we're in the process of raising money for that, along with the Dean Hughes production.

What was your favorite role to play?

I like being the bad guy and have done it a lot of times. One of the more interesting roles I did was an LDS film done by the Church where I played Pontius Pilate in *The Lamb of God*. It was interesting to play a historical character and to do research into him, to find out what he was about. There isn't a whole lot written about him, but he was an interesting individual to portray.

On stage I've been able to do a lot of enjoyable roles. A few of my favorites are Arthur in *Camelot*, Harold Hill in *The Music Man*, John Adams in *1776*, and Michael in *I Do, I Do!*

How has your acting evolved over the years?

I hope it's gotten a lot better. I try to improve all the time. I think I've gotten more subtle, more intense in some ways.

Why did you start the Actors Workshop?

I like actors. I like working with actors. I thought, "If this is something I really like doing, I need to be doing it for myself, as a business." I've taught acting classes before, but someone else has always hired me to do it, and I thought, "Hey, I should just do it on my own." And it's worked out quite well.

Tell us about it.

The Actors Workshop is a four-to-six-week course for groups of ten or twelve. We meet once or twice a week for a three-hour segment. We focus on monologues, scenes, and improv. I like to see actors work and I like to push them to become better, to understand the core issue of being an actor, which is showing passion in their work. Passion is what drives the industry — you need to really understand what your character wants, why they do what they do. Hopefully I help actors achieve this passion in our workshop.

Did you ever see yourself doing what you're doing now?

No. I decided I was going to be an actor at sixteen, but it never occurred to me before that. I come from a background of government workers. Everyone worked for corporations, but nobody was entrepreneurial. I decided early on that



I wanted to be completely different from everyone and everything around me.

That had something to do with why I joined the Mormon Church — I would be the only Mormon in my family. I still am the only member.

Of course, I love the Church and have always had a very strong testimony of it, but an added bonus for me was that I'd be the first Mormon, the first missionary, the first guy to live out west.

The only thing I ever saw myself doing was anything completely different from everything I knew. And I have done just that.

Tell us about your conversion.

I was raised in a fairly non-religious home. As I think back I can see that there was a belief in a higher being, but organized religion was clearly not a part of my upbringing.

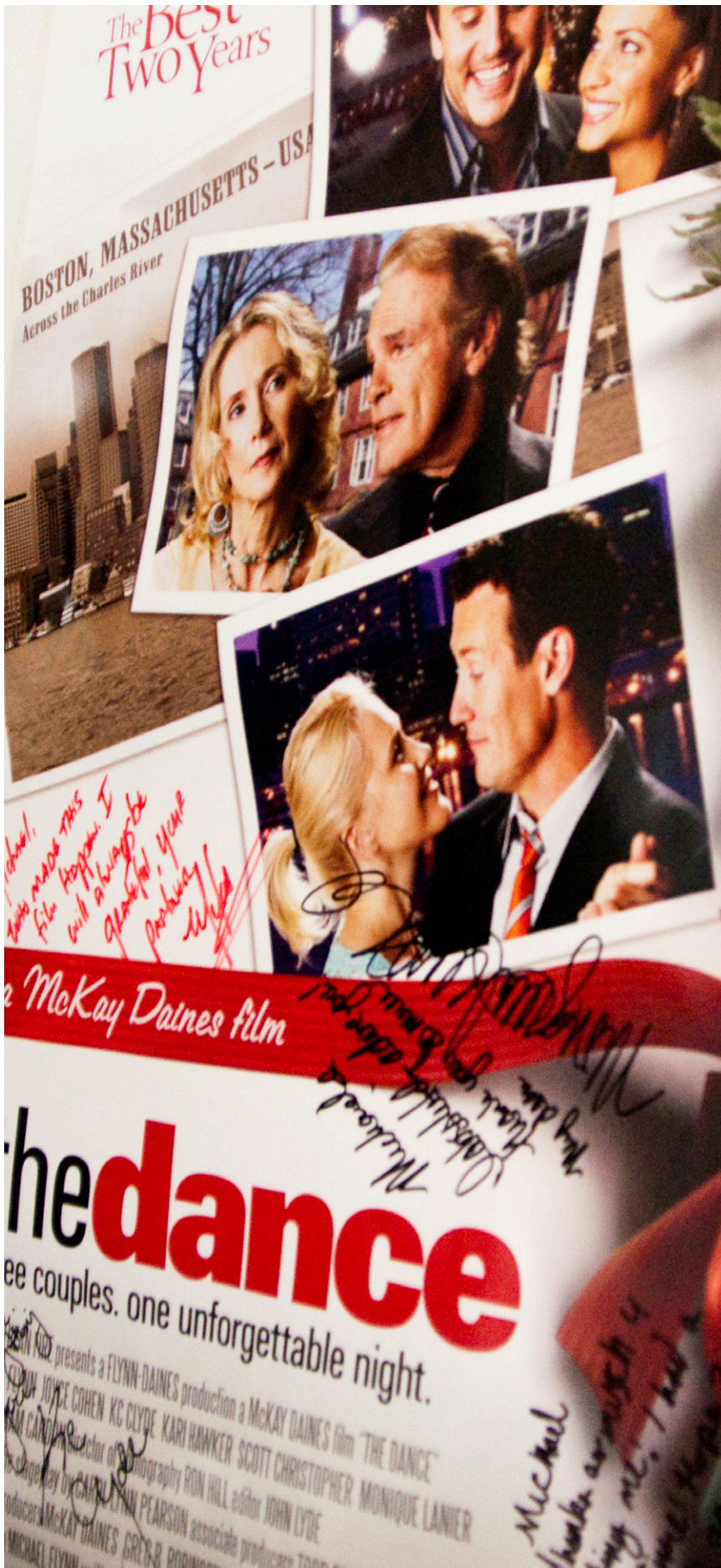
When I was seventeen years old living in the Washington, D.C., area, a friend of mine joined the Church. She had a lot of enthusiasm and would pass me notes in our U.S. government class telling me I needed to look into this Mormonism thing. At the time I had no clue as to what a Mormon

was; I'd never even heard the word. She wanted me to go meet with the missionaries and that was about the furthest thing from my mind. I was into theater and girls.

She was persistent and I finally told her if she could get a bunch of cute girls into this missionary meeting then I'd be happy to show up. She did it — got a bunch of girls together and had the missionaries come over. I had no idea or concept of what a missionary would look like. I probably thought they'd be dressed like Catholic priests because I'd gone to a Catholic school for a year when I'd lived overseas.

When I first walked in I saw a flannel board they were going to use with pictures to help tell the stories. My initial thought when I saw the flannel board was that we'd pour gasoline on it and light it on fire and dance around it or something.

They started talking about Joseph Smith and I remember thinking, "Wow, that's really cool." I'd never heard of Joseph Smith before, and I don't know that I could've even found Utah on a map. I thought how cool it was that this guy had seen God and Jesus Christ. It never occurred



to me that they'd be lying. Why would they? They taught me the six discussions and I was in right from the beginning.

I told my parents I wanted to be baptized but they asked me to wait a month to be sure. After the month I told them I still wanted to be baptized and they said, "That's fine, whatever." A year later I went on my mission to France.

How was it serving a mission as a new convert?

I was in the field with missionaries who'd been missionaries longer than I'd been a Mormon. I found out pretty quickly that I knew absolutely nothing about the Mormon Church. When I went on my mission I hadn't even read the Book of Mormon all the way though yet. Back then they didn't teach French at the LTM, so I served a two-and-a-half-year-long mission — the extra six months were for me to learn the language. I picked it up fairly quickly because I'd taken French in high school.

I must say that my mission has had a huge influence in my life. It was difficult. There were times when I just wanted to give up. But, through persistence and a lot of thought and prayer, I was able to hang in there and get through the first six months. After that it was pretty smooth.

It was a great experience and a tremendous blessing in my life. Not a day goes by that I don't reflect on some aspect of my time in France. I still speak the language, and I vacation in France often.

How has being a member of the Church influenced you while acting with non-Mormon actors?

There have been a lot of times when I've turned down roles because of the story, the language, or not wanting to be associated with a particular project. I was called into read once for the role of a

godfather who had a lot of disgusting, foul language in his speech. My agent told me up front that she didn't think I'd be interested in it, but that they really wanted me to read for it. So I read the material and found that I liked the character. I rewrote the monologue and took all the offensive stuff out. The director really liked it, but the producers wanted the bad language. So I passed on it.

Sometimes you'll audition for a role and the scenes you read for the audition are fine, but after you accept the role and get on the set you'll find they've been rewritten, or there are new scenes you didn't have up front with offensive or inappropriate material in them. Occasionally I've had to go to the director and ask if we could rewrite sections. I've never had anyone tell

me I had to say it the way it was written. But I've had to make the decision where if push comes to shove I will walk away. Either they rewrite or get someone else. This hasn't ever happened though. Every time I've had a problem they've told me to say it the way I want to say it and I'm good to go.

There was one time I was at a wardrobe fitting and I went through five or six wardrobes that I'd be wearing in the film. Then the wardrobe lady told me that was all, except for the scene where some guys and I would be naked in the hothouse, run out of it, cross a field, and jump into a river. I called my agent and told her about the scene, telling her there was no way it was going to happen. She called the producer who said we'd get a body double, but that wouldn't

work for me because people would watch and think it was me. They finally cut the scene. I'm not sure if it was because of me, but in the end I didn't have to deal with it.

What do you most hope to accomplish through your acting, directing, and producing?

Accomplish? First and foremost, I want to support myself and my family. Then the question becomes, "How do I do that?"

I like making family-oriented films — films my children and grandchildren can enjoy.

My greatest hope would be to create a library of films that families want to see over and over again. So far it seems to be working. Time will tell. I still have a lot of movies to make and a lot of stories to tell. ■

