

Talk Nerdy



With Us



Michael Hyatt may not be a name that you recognize from any of the shows that you may watch, but it should be. Michael is a unique individual with a lot of positive energy who is very passionate about what she does. She was born in England to Jamaican parents and comes from a family of entertainers. In the past, you may have seen her in *Dharma & Greg*, *The West Wing*, *Ally McBeal*, *24*, *Veronica Mars*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *ER*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Criminal Minds*, *Bones*, *Medium*, *Glee*, *The Mindy Project*, *Castle*, *Shameless*, *True Detective*, *Ray Donovan* and more.

In the midst of her busy schedule, she took the time to speak with us about her recurring role on *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* as Dr. Akopian, the therapist that main character, Rebecca Bunch, turns to when absolutely nothing is going her way.

I have to ask...how'd you get your name?

“(laughs) It’s funny. I got it when I was in high school and I was an avid fan, a Michael Jackson fan, and my friends would call me Michael. And I liked it, so I kept it. That’s it. That’s all it is.”

That is awesome! I knew there had to be a story.

“I like being different. I’m not a very traditional person. I just really liked the weirdness of it.”

Understood. So what made you decide to get into acting?

“Acting has been in my blood. It’s just who I was supposed to be or what I was supposed to do. My father was an actor in Jamaica and in England and – which is where I’m from – and my mom is a retired art historian so I’ve been in the arts my whole life. And it sort of called me to it.”

Oh wow. So when and where did you get your start?

“When I was a teenager I was doing amateur, performing anywhere I could. In high school and small little dance troupes or other performing troupes that would go around the East coast because I’m, I was born in England and then grew in Jamaica. Then we moved to the States when I was ten and lived in Maryland. So I was part of a Caribbean performing troupe. We would sing and dance and do little cliffs and stuff. That was when I was a teenager. Then I went to college and studied acting. I went to undergraduate school at Howard University. And then went to NYU for graduate school. So it’s always been there, you know? And then after a while, it was just all I ever did.”

You don't hear that very often. Where it's kind of just always been there.

“Oh yeah. Well, you know, many times what you end up doing in undergrad isn't what you end up doing in your life. I remember in grad school meeting a lot of my colleagues who came from families of doctors and whatever who thought that their child was insane because they decided to act, yeah...and it's so unfortunate to me to see that there are so many people who would love to do this because it's their passion and they just want to make it as an artist and, they get asked, 'What's your REAL job?' For me, it was easier, because my entire family lived this life in one way or another so it was natural for me to step into it. I mean, I've had my family support my whole life. That doesn't mean that my journey has been easy, but at least, I didn't have to fight that 'What are you REALLY gonna do?' kind of question.”

I bet that was such a blessing.

“It was. I'm a mom, and I see the possibility of the artist in my son. And, certainly, I'm not going to push him to be an artist, but if that is what he wants to do, then do it. Because to me, it's really important that people follow their dreams. How the hell else are you gonna be happy?”

Exactly. You've been doing a little bit here, a little bit there. Some of everything. Do you like being a 'guest star queen' or would you rather be a regular?

“(laughs) I love that! Hell yeah, I would LOVE to be a regular! I’ve worked on a lot of shows and I’ve had that experience. Absolutely I would like to be a regular, but until that comes, I’m really fucking grateful that I’m able to work doing what I love and that is, unfortunately, something that not a lot of people have the chance to do. You know? So you take it as it comes as an artist. The opportunity will come again and when it does I’ll be ready and until then I’m just going to keep busting my ass.”

Exactly. (laughs) You know, looking through your IMDB credits, one of the performances that stood out to me – I’ve seen you in several things – but I love Veronica Mars.

“Yeah, yeah that was lovely. That was really lovely working on that show. It was right down in San Diego. I think it was lovely to just go down there for a week and work on it and come back. It was beautiful. I enjoyed it.”

Good! Is there anything, in particular, you remember from your time on set? Or not really? I know it was a long time ago. (laughs)

“It was a long time ago. I don’t remember and that’s a good thing. I don’t remember it being a negative experience. I certainly remember those and there have been those -Ah! I do remember that the script, every word had to be absolutely as it was written. I remember that because a lot of times with scripts there’s room for interpretation. You can put your own spin on it. But I remember with Veronica Mars, same as

True Detective, it was poetry to them and you had to say it exactly as it was written and I was like, 'Okay...'
When you sign, when you commit to that, you find freedom within that, and that's what I love most about the art. The art of the writing, which is where it all comes from, you just interpret it. I love that once you embrace whatever the framework of the particular piece is and bury yourself in it, you can find all kinds ways to make it your own. I found that with Veronica Mars."

Right. That is something that I think I've heard from everyone who has worked with Rob Thomas, that it has to be precise. I just think that's funny and also a little bit amusing just that it does have to be that precise. But then, I hear what you're saying. There is the freedom to kind of interpret it and bring that line to life, however, you want still.

"Well, I mean, nobody steps on a stage doing Shakespeare and thinks you can add your own spin on it. (laughs). You just don't. You respect the words on the page because it is perfection. I think we contemporary artists can sometimes get lazy at times, but maybe us who are theater trained – You don't create your own thing, but within that there is an absolute beauty. When you are able to respect the beauty of what is written, and not let it take anything away from your own creativity, but choose to honor the words that have already been created, there're all kinds of stuff you can make unique to yourself within what already exists, and I think it's a wonderful challenge. I like it. Actually, you know, I think that it requires more of artists. And why not?"

Part of the experience and the joy of what you do is to live up to that challenge.

“Well, and I think that we are all capable of that if we allow ourselves. The bottom line for me is that – and believe me, I’ve worked on all kinds of projects – you live in the reality of wherever you are, whatever set you’re on. Every set has a different energy and you step into it, and you embrace it, and you become a part of whatever exists. You know, there’s room for doing your own thing. There’s room for improvisation if that’s the stage you’re on. There’s room for the script, too.

I just think that I respect and really appreciate the work that goes into a script, a story, you know? One of the things I have to do as an actress, especially working in television, is to surrender to the reality that you’re in. Especially when you’re working with different directors. On this show, this director has a completely different thing going on and then you go to this show and it’s a whole different thing. I think it’s a beautiful thing to give yourself to this. Then you work on other shows where the writers have to be on set because everything’s up for grabs, and in the moment, some things are rewritten, which is fine, too. That happens a lot in television, but something like Veronica Mars, it’s done. They’re wonderful with this. They’ve gone over it. The writers have scrutinized every comma, exclamation point and they’d like you to respect that and, alright, that works.”

Oh yeah, absolutely. Crazy Ex-Girlfriend is another extremely unique show. What have your impressions been of the whole experience? Cast, crew, scripts,

overall what has been your impression?

“I am in love with Rachel Bloom. The damn thing is so personal to her. I love working with Rachel. She is – you should just see this woman on set. I’m telling you, someone should invite you to the set one day. Watching Rachel work is incredibly inspiring to me. There is not a moment of Rachel’s time that is not occupied with this experience. When she’s not on set in front of the camera, doing her thing, she’s in a chair somewhere in a corner writing the next episode, or creating the next song, or doing publicity for the episode about to air. The stuff that comes out of her is beautiful. I mean, look where she’s taking the show. I mean, come on!

She’s 27 years old! Who at that age has the kind of consciousness to bring that stuff to television? I think it is a tremendous thing that she’s doing and I applaud her over and over again. She and Aline, both of them, they’re not afraid to talk about anything. It’s not like they’re standing up there with a sign and protesting. They’re just speaking their truths. You know? Why not have an Asian man on television as the main love interest? Why does everybody have to be a size two? Why does everybody have to be in skinny jeans? She’s just addressing everything and not really making a big deal of anything. It’s just there, as it is in the world, and she embraces that, and I love it.

I love Rachel and her consciousness and Aline. I don’t mean to keep leaving Aline out because they are partners, and they have created this amazingness together and I applaud them both. I’m so proud of them. The cultural diversity, the racial diversity you see on-screen you also see off-screen. I

go to work and I see an African-American cinematographer and I'm just like, 'Hello! Where am I right now?' I just, I love it. And I'm very proud to be a part of it."

Now that it was picked up for another season is there a possibility you could become a regular?

"Oh geez! Wouldn't that be beautiful? I would love that so freaking much. But you know, Rebecca is a complex being and she is, right now where we are in the episodes, she is a very – she has a one track mind. And she's not ready to consider that maybe she's a little left of center. So we'll see if there's room for someone who could possibly shake her off the march that she's on."

Definitely.

"We'll see what happens."

I just – I love seeing everything that they have on-screen right now. I want to see her ready to deal with everything so much.

"What would happen if she woke up to the reality that maybe this, her stealing Josh, is not the best idea? And maybe, what would happen to Rebecca? Where would the show go? I personally think there's a whole bunch of life outside of it, but we'll see what happens."

Yeah. You did such an amazing job with playing the calm and collected therapist who could just recognize that Rebecca wasn't ready to deal with anything, that

she wanted that quick and easy fix of being medicated and that's it. Have you had any experiences like that to draw from? Or was that just kind of –

“(laughs) I've done years of therapy. I know the therapy. I know the moves very well. (laughs) I know that room very well. My therapy was a time of serious transition for me. I know that my nature is to be a – let's see, my son sometimes refers to me as earth mother. My nature is just to cut the shit. Let's get to the chase. It fits to have Dr. Akopian – we fit very, very well. I love her.

I enjoy portraying women who are strong and for real, you know? And to the point. It suits my nature. I think I'm best in that kind of role. I don't know if I would be believable as a flighty kind of person. I'm more grounded and I enjoy portraying women who are grounded. Someone that I can see out on the street and relate to.”

Yes. And that's what we need to see portrayed. Because we've seen the flighty. We've seen all of that for so long that real, grounded, 'this is what a strong woman looks like,' is what is needed today. I'm just so glad you get to portray that.

“Me too, me too. I look back on the things I've done over the years and sometimes – I was thinking about the casting process. I used to go out for a lot of roles that were written for men because those were the characters that worked for me. And, thankfully, they would look at me and say, 'You know what? Yeah. It can be done by a woman. It can be done by a woman who is strong. It doesn't have to be a

man.' I'm grateful for that now. That they were sometimes able to see that this can be done by a woman."

Definitely. So, having been to therapy I am sure you are aware of how difficult it can be to find a therapist who is really going to listen and help you work through things, and not be the typical therapist that Rebecca was used to seeing who just passes everything off with medication. Do you have any kind of message or advice for anyone who is wanting or who is getting to that place where they're ready to deal but are getting so frustrated trying to find someone to help them work through those things? Something to help them keep going while they're discouraged?

"I think that therapy – and I don't know if it's going to sound lame, but I truly believe that therapy is what you bring to it. Even the lamest therapist, if you are willing to come to the table and to the underbelly of it all, it doesn't matter who the therapist is because the answers are truly within you. I believe that completely.

I remember when I was a kid in grad school and didn't have any money but when you're in these intense programs, the acting programs in grad school you're standing there naked for just three years exploring every aspect of your being and questioning everything about yourself. I had the therapists in training. The ones who are getting their degrees and so they're doing internships and you are their subjects. They don't have as much experience but this is what you can afford. It doesn't matter where they came from. What mattered was what I decided to allow in the moment. You

know? Ask me a generic question of 'How are you feeling?' or 'How does that make you feel?' It really is just a matter of 'How deep am I willing to go to find the answer to that question?' The therapist is really just a sounding board for what's going on inside you.

So again, it's really...it's just a matter of, 'Are you willing to open up your soul and find the answer?' Are you willing? If you are then I don't think it matters about the therapist. I'm not knocking medication. There are some people who need it. But if it is possible to not hold on to that Prozac, and just go digging...believe me, you will find the answer. I know it!"

That is an awesome answer. I love that.

"Thank you!"

Do you have anything else that you're going to be working on? Something we should be checking to see you in anytime soon?

"Yeah. You know, thankfully I have the opportunity to return to Ray Donovan in its new season coming up. Those guys are really tremendous. The writers. They enjoyed the work that we did together last season and came back and said 'Let's do it again,' and I was elated to say yes."

See Michael in Crazy Ex-Girlfriend TONIGHT at 8pm ET/PT on The CW!