

A MAN OF MAGIC
AN INTERVIEW WITH

MICHELE MORRONE

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It's 11:00 a.m. in Los Angeles and the lingering heat of summer sheathes the exterior of my loft like a weighted blanket. I sit comfortably and eagerly prepare for my Zoom interview with Italian artist and lady-killer Michele Morrone. It is 8:00 p.m. in Rome and my mind wanders to thoughts of the actor embracing his chocolate sex hair and chain-smoking cigarettes in a bed of silk because a girl could dream a thousand dreams.

Originally from the commune town of Melegnano where magical worlds were only to be found in beloved childhood films, Morrone found light in cinema and was the sole member of his family to pursue a career in entertainment. Most memorable for his steamy lead role in the Netflix explosive film *365 Days*, the singer and actor has quickly risen to global superstardom, releasing his debut album *Dark Room*, which peaked at No. 1 on 19 Spotify Viral Charts as well as the single "Hard For Me", a fan favorite amassing over 20 million streams and counting. Balancing his passion for many forms of artistry, Morrone has continued to steal the hearts of audiences and admirers across the globe with his magnetic charm and undeniable sex appeal.

BASIC: What is your philosophy of life and why?

MICHELE MORRONE: I am a loyal man and I am really honest and respectful to other people because I really trust that if you are that way to others, you will get the same in return.

BASIC: You grew up the youngest of four children in Apulia, a southern Italian region near Milan. Talk to me about your upbringing. Were there any particular events throughout your childhood that influenced your creative calling or shaped the man you are today?

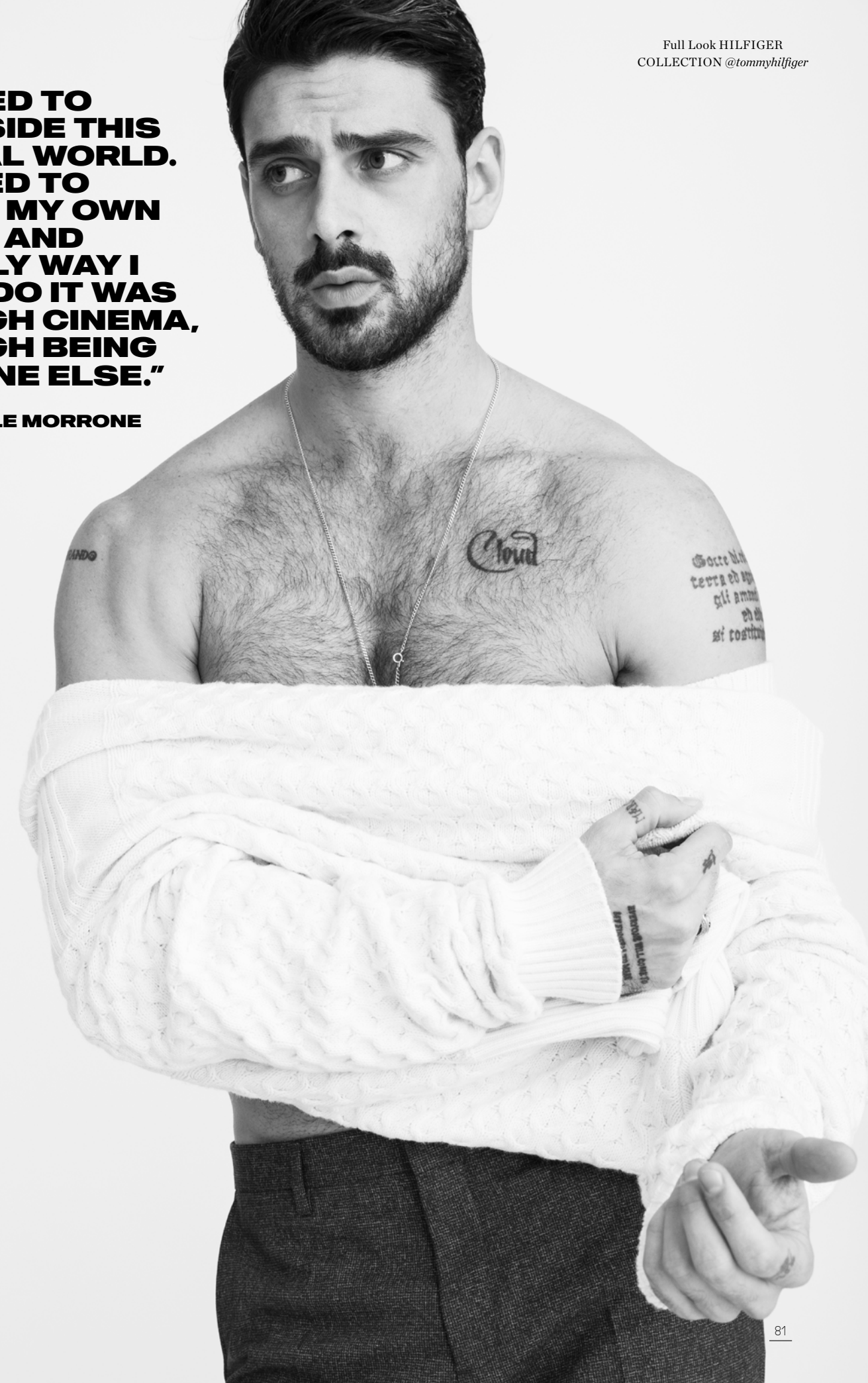
MICHELE MORRONE: I grew up in a poor area. My childhood was always a struggle between not having money and not doing too good in school, but I was always trying to reach my dreams. I have a lot of friends that I grew up with who are now in prison, some are lost in drugs, and others are alcoholics. So, I really think that this dream and passion I had for acting saved my life. As kids where I grew up, we didn't really have that passion in our schools because our families didn't come from money and they weren't doctors or lawyers, you know? They had to work hard to put food on the table and provide us with the best life they could. I started having the passion for art when I was around 11 years old, one year before my dad passed away. It was incredible because it really started to grow inside me when I first saw the movie *Harry Potter [and the Sorcerer's Stone]*. I was watching that movie and living in a place that wasn't really magical, but I wanted to live inside this magical world. I wanted to create my own world. And the only way I could do it was through cinema, through being someone else. I didn't always have a passion for acting, but once I was introduced to that world, I started to love it.

BASIC: Your erotic Netflix thriller *365 Days* released this year and has quickly ignited your global stardom. What was it like working on this film and taking on the role of Massimo Torricelli, a subversive sex addict who seems to be quite the opposite of your more down-to-earth persona?

MICHELE MORRONE: It was so interesting and exciting because as an actor, I have always loved to be someone else. When I first got the script I thought, what the hell? I have to play someone who is a sex addict and is the complete

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opposite of me. So, I said, okay, let's open up and start this adventure. Let's study the psychology of this. I was so excited and it was an amazing experience. I actually felt like something big was going to happen and I was so enthusiastic about it.

BASIC: While learning the psychology of the leading character, did you find yourself connecting with him or adapting some of his mannerisms into your personal identity?

MICHELE MORRONE: No, not at all. Massimo comes from a very big mafia family and I did not. He is super rich and I was not. His way of thinking and the way he acted in life was so different from me. Growing up in a mafia family brings up a lot of issues. You don't really know how to express yourself, especially when it comes to love. That's why he kidnapped her. He felt he didn't have another way.

BASIC: Since the film's premier in February, your life took a wildly beautiful turn, especially after struggling with depression, a divorce, and financial instability. Not to mention, you had

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given up on your creative dreams and began working as a gardener. What was the transition to overnight fame like for you?

MICHELE MORRONE: The transition was totally insane because I started living and being the man I had always wanted to be. Let's be honest, when you are financially comfortable and you aren't suffering from any kind of addiction, you realize so many more dreams you have. The lucky thing with me is that I understood

what I had inside my hands and I started to open up everything to plan my future. What I had was incredible, but it is also very easy to lose everything. So, if you spend many years without money and you're hungry to be someone, I think you need to be smart enough to think further into your future.

BASIC: We hear ongoing conversations about sex trafficking and consent. While fictional, *365 Days* fetishizes the reality of kidnapping and sexual violence, which viewers seem to either love or hate. Do you think there is a balance in terms of how controversial content is presented when creating art or do you think there is this sort of moral collapse of standards when it comes to the film industry?

MICHELE MORRONE: It's very important for me that people know I do not think sexual violence is okay. Massimo is a fictional character, and of course, I do not support his behavior in real life. It is unacceptable. There are a lot of movies that are controversial. There are a lot of movies that have mob bosses, like Massimo, and "bad guys" and while the audience knows they are doing bad things, they like to watch it for entertainment. But these other films didn't affect people the way *365 Days* did for some reason. I cannot judge what people think because they are free to have their opinion. If someone tells me the movie was good, then I will say, "thank you" because I appreciate that. When I see comments from people or criticism, I try to listen to it and learn about it. I don't think we should limit art or the creative process. I think it's good that the movie is making people talk about these issues, so we can create more awareness about them in our society. I also think there is a love story in this movie that no

one talks about. I don't know if you ever watched the film *Beauty and the Beast*, but it's kind of the same. Because of his past, Massimo doesn't know how to love until Laura teaches and changes him. He's filled with anger and violence because that's all he knows from growing up in the mob.

BASIC: You released the debut album *Dark Room* earlier this year, which also became the soundtrack to your film. Can you talk to us about your journey in developing this album?

MICHELE MORRONE: One night I was with the director of the film after shooting. We were at his house hanging out and we were very tired, but he asked me what else I wanted to do besides acting and I told him I liked to sing and write songs. Then he asked to listen to something that I had so

I let him hear an old song I wrote called "Dark Room" and while he was listening he said, "Man, I want this song inside the movie." And I thought he was drunk, but the day after he came back to me and was like, "Man, where's the song?" And I thought, oh fuck, this guy isn't drunk anymore! I was kind of shocked he was serious, but he came back and asked if I could write more songs. I said I could try, so after we finished shooting the movie, I literally closed myself off in the studio and pushed myself to write "Hard For Me", "Watch Me Burn", and "Feel It". That's how it started, but then I was asked to try to make an album and I was like, dude, I don't know how to make an album. But then I earned two gold records and one platinum and I thought, what the fuck? Eventually, Universal Music came and

knocked on my door. The thing is, throughout my life I have always written poems, but writing poems is so different than writing a song because with a song you have to follow the music. But when I tried, it just came so natural for me and when I finished I was like, how the fuck did I do this? Now that I'm working on the second album, I swear, it's so easy to build up a song, but I still ask myself how I do it? It's like I was sleeping for so long.

BASIC: Let's dig into your art. Describe your state of mind when you are painting or sculpting. Do you create work with the intent to tell a story or send a message?

MICHELE MORRONE: Absolutely not. I just paint or create whatever comes to mind. There are some paintings I create based on a message, but I'm not asking people to understand my art. I paint because it's a hobby. It's funny because during quarantine I was painting a lot and I was getting a lot of messages from people asking if I sell my work. I said no because I don't want to make money off of it. I'm not Van Gough, you know? I just paint because it's a hobby. I will give paintings away to friends sometimes, but I don't want to make money out of it because not everything has to be a business.

BASIC: Aside from artistry, you have established yourself as a model and fashion icon. You were recently named the new worldwide face of Guess Men for fall/winter 2020 and have launched the Italian swimwear collection Aurumroma. What sparked this pathway for you?

MICHELE MORRONE: I became the face of Guess after the movie. Paul Marciano just called me and said he wanted to do something with me. Then we became very close friends after starting our partnership. I am just starting to shoot the second part of the campaign this month. With my brand Aurumroma, it was more about business because I really wanted to do something based on my taste. I got the idea during quarantine because I had a lot of time to think and I thought about what I'd like to see on a woman. I actually designed a few things and then hired people to help put everything together and build a brand. The main reason why I created this brand is more simple than people think. I just had another dream and really wanted to do something for women. I am actually currently working on a perfume because that was another dream of mine.

PILLOW TALK:

What's the one thing that people always misunderstand about you?

That I'm not actually Massimo Torricelli.

Do you believe in fate or do you think things happen because of our decisions?

I really believe things happen because of our decisions.

Do you think creativity is innate or learned?

It's inside of us.

If you could collaborate with any artist, living or dead, who would it be?

For music, I would love to collaborate with George Harrison and Billie Eilish. For cinema, I would love to collaborate with Gary Holman.

What is one of your most inexplicable fears?

Waking up without my kids.

Describe your sense of style in three words or less.

Eclectic, old soul, gypsy.

How many cigarettes do you smoke a day?

Oh my God, that's my weakness. I can't answer this one. I don't want to be a bad example. This is why I have a weird voice!

How do you define true love?

I still don't know.

Out of the many passions you embrace—artistry, acting, singing—which makes your heart beat the fastest?

They are all running in the same way. They all give me such different emotions, but they are always on the same level.