



# Made Man

*No longer the kid we met in Barbershop, 38-year-old Michael Ealy has grown into a seasoned, award-winning actor with a diversified portfolio. Personally, he has grown as well, evolving his views on romance and happiness; he's through with the one-night stands and industry flings and has matured into a man with a firm grasp on life.*

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**T**hose dreamy blue eyes entranced us in *Takers*, tantalized us in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, intrigued us in *Miracle at St. Anna* and *Sleeper Cell* and horrified us in *For Colored Girls*. In fact, whenever you meet their gaze on screen, it's hard to pull away—but then again, why would you want to?

Today, they appear recessed in the shadows under the brim of a driving cap. Michael Ealy, the man behind those piercing blues, seems to be aiming for “inconspicuous” as he nearly drowns in an oversized denim jacket while slouching into the back corner of a leather love seat. But when you're blessed with his freakishly stunning looks (he's the only one in his family with blue eyes and, yes, both of his parents are African-American), why would you want to be so demure?

“Whatever mood I'm in, then that's what I'm going to put on. And sometimes I want to be the cover of *Jet* magazine,” Ealy says, assuming a pose in a spot-on impersonation of Eddie Murphy in *Boomerang*. “And then, sometimes the Maryland in me wants to put on a pair of Tims and a sweatsuit.”

The Silver Springs, Md., native is, surprisingly, a jokester. Ealy had previously done an awkwardly long impression of his *Think Like a Man* costar Kevin Hart for the amusement of a handful of journalists at the movie's press junket in Los Angeles, challenging the comedian at his own game. He admits that he's hidden this more personable side of himself from public view, but now, just two years shy of the big 4-0, he's made the soul-searching decision to lighten up—in life and in love.

“I think in public there is a certain persona that I have to have in order to kind of protect not only my privacy, but



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I don't want to let in what's not wanted," he says.

Though you won't catch him tweeting or "checking in" on Facebook too often, he says he is now finding more enjoyment out of life by relaxing some of those self-restraints and opening himself up to new things.

And he has done so in part by taking on new comedic roles like his latest USA series *Common Law*, about two L.A. detectives who are ordered to attend couples therapy because they can't stand each other.

"Life is hard—I kind of made that turn [that] I just want to have some fun," he says of his new role on the show, which debuted in May. "Comedy rules right now."

While attempting to be funny 15 hours a day on the set of the crime-busting comedy series was challenging, Ealy says he enjoyed letting the "serious actor" go out the window. Additionally, his newfound happy-go-lucky approach has even yielded to him dating "better" women.

"In the past, I was definitely known as a guy who took himself and his relationships a little too seriously. I won't say that I always knew how to have a lot fun," he says, and as if remembering his own proclamation, he shifts to the center of the couch, leans forward and fills his voice with a little more animation. "All of a sudden, I realized it doesn't have to be über-passionate and so serious.

Have fun with whoever you are dating."

Ealy is currently dating monogamously, although he skims on those details.

"I don't kiss and tell," he says with a devilish smirk.

But he does reveal who he is not dating: industry chicks. He's been there and done that enough to write the book on it (watch out, Steve Harvey). He most notably was involved with Halle Berry, was paired with rapper/actress Eve and was spotted spending time with yet another costar, Kimberly Elise.

"I've been done with [dating industry women]," he says. "You do it for years and years and years—theater, television, film. It's a workplace thing. It is not that difficult to comprehend; when you're at work, she is at work, you are working together late night, things happen, you hook up. If you spend that much time together, things are bound to happen. But the difference for me now is that I'm mature enough to know that this is a work thing. The minute we stop production, I'm not going to feel this way anymore."

He's also marked one-night stands off his list, instead preferring to get to know a woman a little better before intimacy. For that matter, he has since changed his overall taste in women.

"I think there was a part of me that was just attracted to the crazy," he admits. "I tended to involve myself with women that brought drama. And I had a bit of a savior complex. I thought I

could save them from whatever daddy issues or cheating issues [they had]."

He continues, "In the last three or four years, I have finally stopped doing that. And what I seek now is someone who complements me. [I realized] that is not my job. And it's helped me. It's helped me relax a little bit. It's helped me to pick better women."

Likewise, Ealy says he has evolved into a better mate as well. He admits that he was always a good listener and communicator, though at times to a fault. But now, he intends to share what is on his mind while balancing it out with a little more sensitivity. And after seeing how he destroyed the esteem of a college girlfriend, he relegates cheating to a mistake made in his 20s.

Although long-term companionship—not so much marriage but not ruled out, either—is the goal, he is completely happy with where he is in his life right now. After suffering a demoralizing 11-month stretch of unemployment, aside from a two-day gig on the set of *Hawthorne*, the roles have since flooded in for Ealy. He's had four major projects this year alone: *Think Like a Man*, the adaptation of Steve Harvey's book, where he heats up the screen with fellow DMVer (D.C., Maryland, Virginia) Taraji P. Henson; the sci-fi fan favorite *Underworld Awakening*, which opened in first place at the box office to a whopping \$25.4 million and the upcoming fall release of *Unconditional*, where he plays a do-gooder nearing the end of his life.

"I have been blessed to be able to work in television and film with no real limitations [and] play very different characters. When I took *Think Like a Man*, there was a part of me that was like, I really need to do this for a lot of the women who saw me in *For Colored Girls* and thought 'that's him,'" he says of the child-tossing monster he portrayed. "Many of them who saw me said, 'I hated you in that movie, but damn, you were good.'"

So good, in fact, that other actors—to his puzzlement—have asked him for acting advice.

"The first time someone asked me to mentor them, I remember feeling like, 'what do you mean, mentor you?' And it's not that I had any kind of reaction to mentoring them. It was more like, when did I become the mentor?"

Just over a decade ago, Ealy was considered the baby in the industry. Good friend and director Tim Story worked with him in both *Think Like a Man* and *Barbershop*, where he remembers the latter film's cast referring to Ealy as "the kid."

"Michael is such an amazing actor. And I had always told him he is just going to get better as he gets older," Story says. "But now he has got some scruff on his face, and he is starting to look more and more like that leading man. I would do every movie with him if I could; he is just that good."

And Ealy has no apprehension about getting older; he welcomes that change and is excited about his new direction, which includes showing the world the true man behind the baffling blue eyes.



"My family is so happy that I'm in a movie where I'm not dying, and they feel that they are going to see more of the real Michael in...my television series," he explains. "So at this point in my life, I'm starting to feel a little more comfortable letting that side out."

Most of his fans would surely agree—and be delighted to see Mr. Ealy expose more of himself. In a figurative way, of course. **U**