

INTERVIEW

One of Hollywood's leading openly gay actors, David Marshall Grant is also one of Tinseltown's most successful and hardest working actors. With nearly 20 years in the business, he has done it all: movies, Broadway and television.

"Being gay is not a big deal with who I am in Hollywood. I'm well past that place. In terms of my professional life, I'm much more interested in being an actor than being gay. I don't think I've been particularly limited or pigeonholed as a result of it," says the 42-year-old actor. "But I'm glad if someone takes pleasure in knowing I'm gay and is in any way positively affected by knowing that I'm a gay man being successful in trying to pursue a career."

Grant is starring on the small screen in *Labor of Love*, a made-for-television movie airing in May and June on the Lifetime cable network, in honor of Mother's Day. It's the story of a gay man and a straight woman who decide to have a child together, and do it the old-fashioned way.

"I responded to this story because I thought it was an interesting example of two people searching for a family, searching for others," he says. "Certainly whether you are gay or straight, if you are single, there is a certain universal need for connection and family. This movie discusses everyone's right to have a family."

This isn't the first gay role Grant has taken on. He made television history on ABC's *thirtysomething*, appearing in that show's highly controversial episode showing two men in bed together, and was in HBO's movie version of *And the Band Played On*. He also starred on Broadway in *Bent*, which is about homosexuals persecuted by the Nazis during the Holocaust, and in Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Angels in America*, for which he received a Tony Award nomination.

Grant hopes the Lifetime movie has some impact on the way people think about gay men as parents.

"By its sheer example of two people who have decided to put aside what they thought they were supposed to be and supposed to do in order to have a child, [*Labor of Love*] is making the statement that we, as people, need to follow our dreams," he says. "If we care that much about being a parent and have that much to offer, we shouldn't let speeches or arguments stand in our way."

But he knows that a lot of society does not believe it is suitable for gay men to be parents, simply because of their sexuality.

"It's kind of illogical reasoning. If they want to give the argument some validity then they should look at other limiting factors people have in being the perfect person—like alcohol abuse, which is far more damaging to a child's well-being," he says. "The logic starts to break down when you begin to separate a specific thing for someone who is a suitable parent."

discovered his theatrical calling when he was in high school.

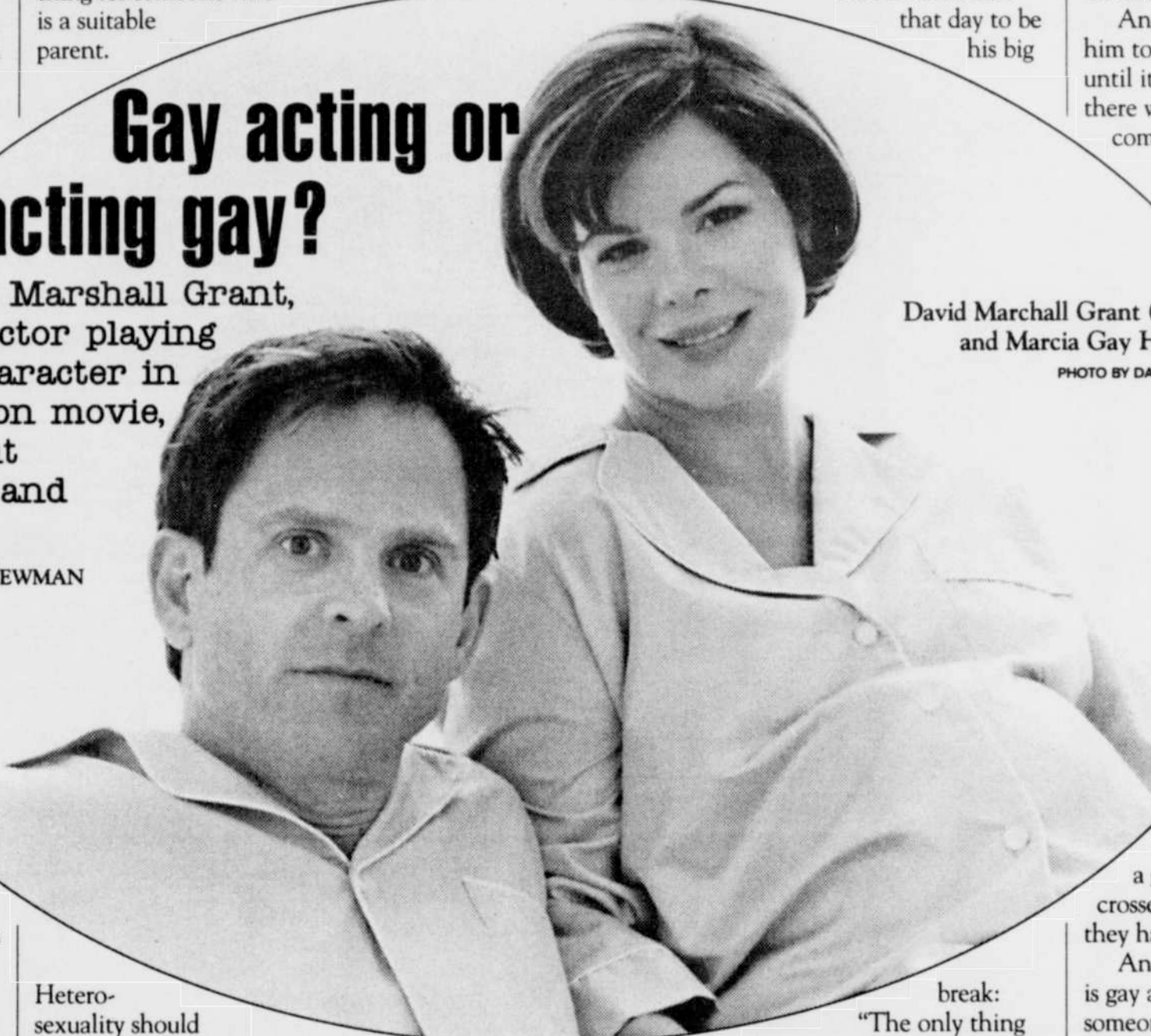
"There I was one day, just smoking cigarettes on the blacktop in the parking lot, and someone asked if I wanted to hang lights for a show at the school. When I got to the theater and walked across the catwalk, I looked down at the two actors on the stage and said, 'That's what I want to do.' It hit me immediately and I've never looked back."

He also considers that day to be his big

Gay acting or acting gay?

David Marshall Grant, a gay actor playing a gay character in a television movie, talks about parenting and profession

BY JEFFREY L. NEWMAN



David Marshall Grant (left) and Marcia Gay Harden

PHOTO BY DARYL ESTRINE

Heterosexuality should not be the litmus test for being a parent. The only thing that makes a good parent is love, attention and devotion."

The actor, who has no children of his own, says that he could see himself co-parenting with a straight woman if the circumstances were right.

"I don't think right now that I'm in a place where it would be necessarily practical. But I am interested having children," explains Grant, who lives in Los Angeles and currently has a boyfriend. "I don't know how I would do it. I haven't thought that far ahead. I could conceivably do it the way my character did. I don't see anything intrinsically wrong about it."

Born and raised in Westport, Conn., Grant

break: "The only thing that matters in this business is finding the desire to wake up everyday and keep going in this industry. There are always set backs, always challenges. Your big break comes when you figure out what you want to do and what excites you in life. No other break lasts or matters more than that one."

Grant, who graduated from Yale School of Drama, is beginning work on his second screen play. 20th Century Fox recently optioned his first movie script, though he doesn't know if it will be made into a film. His play *Snake Bit* was produced in Chicago last year.

He also just completed filming on the movie *Remembering Sex*, which is due out this summer. It's the story of three young women

waiting for the results of their HIV tests.

Grant says being an out actor is not as difficult as it used to be.

"It's relatively benign in terms of the damage that can happen to a person's career. In one respect, people get typecast, but that is more the liability of an actor and not of a gay actor. If you're fat with an Italian-New York accent, you will be typecast as a Mafia thug," he says. "They typecast all the time in Hollywood, but it's not particular to being gay."

And though it's never been a problem for him to be open about his sexuality, he says until it becomes financially lucrative, he doubts there will be an openly gay leading man in a commercially produced movie.

"There is still a threshold that Hollywood isn't ready to cross. There hasn't been an openly gay movie star or romantic leading gay man. Characters tend to be eccentric or the kind, sweet-hearted best friend. I don't think Hollywood is ready to encourage the gay leading man phenomenon to happen," says Grant.

"Hollywood would make movies about pigs having relationships with horses if it sold tickets. I think Hollywood is amoral, which means they can produce great works of moral fortitude and immoral dreck. As long as it makes money, Hollywood doesn't care what the message is," he adds.

"Some day soon some actor will prove it's not a financial liability to be a gay man and that boundary will be crossed. It's purely economics. I don't think they have any moral issue with it."

And Grant believes that if knowing that he is gay and successful in his career can affect someone positively, then it's worth putting it out there.

"I think that if anything I can impart at all makes a difference to someone, then it's important. The idea that because someone is gay they can't have a family, or can't be an actor or be successful, is a tragedy. Gay kids need to know they can be anything they want to be. Sexuality has nothing to do with the success they'll be."

■ *LABOR OF LOVE* airs on Lifetime at 9 pm Monday, May 4; 9 pm Wednesday, May 6; 4 pm Sunday, May 10; 6 pm Saturday, May 16; and noon Sunday, June 7.

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