

Michael Ealy: 'Unconditional'

By Kam Williams Special to *The Skanner News*

Michael Ealy is already back on the big screen, fresh off the phenomenal success he enjoyed earlier this year in *Think Like a Man*, the \$100 million box-office hit that knocked *The Hunger Games* out of the #1 spot. Michael first found fame in 2002 for his memorable performance as Ricky Nash in *Barbershop*.

His other feature films include *Seven Pounds*, *2 Fast 2 Furious*, *Never Die Alone*, *For Colored Girls*, *Miracle at St. Anna*, *Takers* and *Underworld: Awakening*. In 2007, he received a Golden Globe Award nomination for his role in Showtime's *Sleeper Cell*. Meanwhile, on TV, he's appeared in ABC's *Flashforward* and CBS's *The Good Wife*.

Here, the versatile thespian talks about starring in *Unconditional*, an inspirational, faith-based feature based on actual events. In this bittersweet tale of redemption, he portrays Papa Joe Bradford, a guy with kidney disease who teams with a recently-widowed, childhood friend (Lynn Collins) to make a difference in the lives of needy kids in Nashville.

Kam Williams: Hey Michael. Thanks for another interview.

Michael Ealy: I'm good, Kam. How are ya?

KW: What interested you in *Unconditional*?

ME: It started with the script. I

kind of fell in love with some of the miraculous, lyrical and poetic nature of the writing. Ultimately, I still had to respond to the role. And I did respond to the character. The fact that this guy was a real person, someone who, after turning his own life around, was doing everything in his power to influence the development of youth in his neighborhood made me feel like this was an important movie to do.

KW: Did you get to meet the real Papa Joe Bradford in the process of making the movie?

ME: Yes, sir, and we're still good friends to this day.

KW: Editor/legist Patricia Turnier says she loves your performance in *Think Like a Man* because you made your character really believable. She asks: What does Papa Joe's philanthropy mean to you?

ME: It's tough for me to see Papa Joe as a philanthropist because I generally think of philanthropy on a grander scale. For instance, I consider Bill Cosby a philanthropist because of all the colleges and charities he supports. I see Papa Joe as more grassroots. With him, it's not so much about big changes as it is about an individual's daily effort. It's a lot like what a teacher does. When I visit a school, and students get excited, I always tell them, "It's not me you should be listening to, it's your teachers, because they're here every day." It's that sort of commitment that Papa made, even

though he had his own family, seven kids. Yet, he still finds the time to be daddy to a lot of other children, too. He's there on a daily basis. I can't give that. That means a lot. That is special. That is extraordinary.

KW: Patricia goes on to say that friendship is one of the main themes in *Unconditional* where the lead character reconnects with an old friend. She's wondering whether you have a best friend with whom you would like to reconnect.

ME: No, me and my three best friends from childhood never stopped being boys.

KW: Patricia also recognizes you as the love interest in music videos by both Beyonce' and Mariah Carey. She wonders whether you plan to play the hunk again opposite a pop diva in another upcoming video.

ME: No, not really.

KW: On a similar note, children's book author Irene Smalls asks: Is being so good-looking ever a drawback because people try to typecast you in your career?

ME: [Chuckles] Yes.

KW: Irene would also like to know what's up next for you.

ME: I am about to start shooting the remake of *About Last Night*, an adaptation of David Mamet's play *Sexual Perver-*



Michael Ealy in a scene from 'Unconditional.'

sity in Chicago.

KW: Last time we spoke, I asked you to come up with a generic Michael Ealy question. Did you think of one yet?

ME: Yeah, I did, Kam, and I had it emailed it to you.

KW: My bad. I don't remember receiving it. Hope they can send it again, because I want to start using it when I interview other celebrities. Let me ask you the Pastor Alex Kendrick question: What motivates you at this stage of your career?

ME: Good question. It's impor-

tant to me to start challenging myself more as an artist. I'd like to try different genres, and not always take the popular role or the favorite part. I'm highly motivated to be flexible. I don't always have to play the picture's moral compass. And I also want to have a lot more fun.

KW: What would make your life easier?

ME: [LOL] What would make my life is easier would be being able to keep my private life private as long as possible.

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