

Celebrity Interview: Michael B. Jordan of “Fruitvale Station”

Born in Santa Ana, Calif., on February 9, 1987, Michael B. Jordan is one of Hollywood’s brightest young actors. In 2012, he starred in 20th Century Fox’s box office hit Chronicle, a supernatural thriller that follows three Portland teens as they develop incredible powers after exposure to a mysterious substance. He also had a supporting role in George Lucas’ film “Red Tails” a World War II saga recounting the story of the legendary Tuskegee Army.

Michael recently completed shooting “Are We Officially Dating?” opposite Zac Efron, Imogen Poots and Miles Teller. Before embarking on his film career, he was best known for his work in two of the most significant television dramas of the past decade.

First, he received critical acclaim for his portrayal of the hard-shelled, soft-hearted, young urbanite Wallace in the HBO hit dramatic series The Wire. He then went on to star as quarterback Vince Howard on the NBC’s Emmy-winning Friday Night Lights.

He also portrayed recovering alcoholic Alex on the third season of the NBC series Parenthood. Blessed with the opportunity to begin a professional acting career early in his life, Michael caught the eye of Bill Cosby and was cast in the recurring role of Michael on the series Cosby in 1999. Almost simultaneously, he appeared on the HBO series The Sopranos opposite the late James Gandolfini.

In 2001, he was selected from hundreds of hopefuls to play Jamal in the feature film Hardball starring Keanu Reeves. A couple years later, he became the youngest African-American actor contracted with ABC’s daytime drama series All My Children where he played Reggie, Susan Lucci’s character’s adopted son.

Michael later moved to Los Angeles where he soon landed a lead in the independent film Blackout, co-starring Melvin Van Peebles, Jeffrey Wright, and Zoe Saldana. In the fall of 2007, he was cast in the faith-based feature film Pastor Brown.

He has enjoyed guest appearances on CSI,



CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

by Kam Williams

Cold Case, Lie To Me, Without a Trace, and Law & Order, and garnered NAACP Image Award Nominations for Outstanding Male Actor in a Television Daytime Drama Series in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Here, he talks about starring as the late Oscar Grant in Fruitvale Station, a critically-acclaimed picture which has wowed audiences at both the Cannes and Sundance Film Festivals earlier this year. The movie recounts the shooting of the 22 year-old Grant in the back by a police officer on a train station platform on New Year’s Day 2009.

Kam Williams: Hi Michael, thanks for the interview.
Michael B. Jordan: What’s up, buddy? Thank you for taking the time.

KW: That’s quite a powerful performance you delivered as Oscar.
MBJ: Thanks so much, Kam.

‘I knew that Oscar’s daughter was going to see this film someday, and that was the only pressure I needed to do her father justice’

KW: Congratulations on this picture’s winning at Sundance in January and then again at Cannes in June. Did you attend both film festivals?
MBJ: Yes sir, I did.

KW: Where did it get the longer standing ovation?
MBJ: At Cannes. It went on for about 7 or 8 minutes. It was overwhelming. I got chills all over. It was very intense.

KW: What interested you in Fruitvale Station?
MBJ: Honestly, I remember hearing about the incident when it happened, and feeling very angry, upset and frustrated about not being able to do anything about it. I felt very helpless. I was coming off a project at the time, and I really wanted to do an independent film that was more of an intimate, character-driven piece. And it just so happened that what I wanted to do, Ryan’s vision [director Ryan Coogler] and the timing of his project worked out in my favor, man. All of the pieces seemed to fall right into place.

KW: Did you feel any pressure to deliver a great performance given that it’s the biopic of a person who has passed away and who left behind family, including a young daughter who barely got to know him?
MBJ: Of course, and I put a lot of that pressure on myself. I knew that Oscar’s daughter was going to see this film someday, and that was the only pressure I needed to do her father justice. But I felt a huge responsibility not only to his family, but to the whole Bay community, since the story is so important to them, too.

KW: Did you meet with his mother or any of Oscar’s friends and family members in preparing for this role?
MBJ: Yes, I spent time with his mother, his daughter, his girlfriend, Sophina, and his best friends. So, I got a chance to get to know Oscar a little bit better and to understand each of their relationships with him. It was very beneficial to the film.

KW: Is there anything the family wanted people to know about Oscar?
MBJ: That he was a person, a flawed human being who made some mistakes just



Michael B. Jordan and Ariana Neal in ‘Fruitvale Station’

like anybody else. That was about it. They really trusted Ryan’s vision and what he wanted to do.

KW: Did you identify with this character at all, given how often young black males are subjected to profile stops and police brutality?
MBJ: Yeah, I’m from Newark, NJ, so I’ve been in that sort of situation before. I could relate, since I used to catch the train back and forth between Newark and Manhattan all the time. You’d see transit cops interacting with intoxicated passengers during the holiday season in response to distress calls. It could just as easily have been me, or somebody else with a group of friends going to the city who might have gotten a little rowdy. Oscar was a product of his community. The problem is that people from outside of that community can be quick to judge us based on the way we look, talk and dress.

KW: How was it being directed by Ryan Coogler?
MBJ: He’s an incredible director, extremely talented and a natural born leader. And he was the ideal coach for me, because we’re so close in age. We speak the same language, being from the same gener-

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Sausages

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- 3/4 pound pre-cooked smoked sausage links: use chicken, turkey, Polish or kielbasa sausage
- 1 can (15 ounces) Potato Salad
- 1/4 teaspoon cracked black pepper
- Chopped parsley, optional

Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat until hot. Add onion and bell pepper. Cook and stir 1 minute. Add sausages; continue cooking 5 minutes until browned and heated through, turning occasionally. Remove sausages from skillet.

Add potato salad and black pepper to skillet. Stir to combine with onion mixture. Return sausages to skillet. Cook 2 to 3 minutes to heat through. Sprinkle with parsley if desired



Blue

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it well. That’s called pimping the system. Use it to your advantage.”

Besides refusing to compromise her vision, she gives three basic pieces of advice. Don’t ask anyone for help twice because there are too many opportunities and entities that want to help you to continue knocking on doors that don’t. Also, get paid for everything and read.

“In order to use the system to your advantage, you’ve got to know it,” says Blue. “In order to know it, you’ve got to read. The library is your best friend. Everything you need to know is in books.

“I’m a learning person and I’m the type of person, when I see a new piece of information, I try to think of all the ways I can exploit that new piece of information.

“If you are making art just for the sake of making art and your friends and family love it and you like doing shows, then do that. But if you want to make money, you have to treat it like a business.”

For more information on Blue, go to her website Bluefolktronica.com and check out her blog.



Blue