



Michael Alban

Coastal Disturbances

FPCT Spotlight – February 14, 2012

Michael Alban

How did you get involved with *Coastal Disturbances*?

Michael: Kate McKenna who works with FPCT contacted me about auditioning for the part of Leo Hart. She's tried to get me involved on a few other productions as well, but I just didn't want to take the time off of my film and television work to accommodate the demanding rehearsal schedule of a theater production. In the case of *Coastal Disturbances*, the timing was just right. I needed a change from what I had been doing and wanted to stretch my acting muscles in a different setting. I read the play, loved it, and immediately realized that I HAD to play Leo. So thanks to Kate's persistence, I'm aboard and loving it.

What makes *Coastal Disturbances* special?

Michael: I think you can't talk about *Coastal Disturbances* and not discuss the setting. First of all, who doesn't like the warm sun and the beach? The juxtaposition of the summer getaway setting against troubled relationships that pervade the script, creates a powerful contrast that can't be ignored. In the script itself, the music of repetition is king: in the relationships of each generation, what they say, the situations they find themselves in, and their behavior. Like the the endless crashing of the tide, the people in this play are repeating an age old rhythm that has existed between men and women since the dawn of our history.

Why should people come see this play?

Michael: Because they will laugh. They will recognize themselves or someone they know in the characters, albeit in a frequently distorted fun-house mirror version. Plus, it's a fun and talented cast. And hey, since we can't have the beach in February, the good folks at FPCT have brought it to us. A fun night of playing in the sand and sun is just what the doctor ordered for the winter blues.

What is fun or challenging about your role, and are you anything like your character?

Michael: I'm enjoying discovering Leo as I work the role. Each day I'm finding new nuances, a process that is exciting to me from a human standpoint. Leo and I have a lot in common, in our buoyant vision for what the world could be – and in the irony that such a vision is the very thing that repeatedly brings about our downfall – probably something a lot of people can relate to. I'd say I've lived a little more than Leo, so he's a little more naive and idealistic than I am, but it's fun to jump into his skin each night because he's a pretty cool guy in spite of his "Frankenstein moments" as I think of them. One of the biggest challenges has been proper diet and daily gym intensity to look like Leo. It's been incredibly time-consuming and downright taxing at times. I'm happy to be in better shape, but I'm sure looking forward to a big greasy cheeseburger and slice of pie when the run is over.

What has it been like working with the director, Jay?

Michael: Jay has been super to work with. I knew I was going to like working with him from the first second of meeting him at the audition. He's easy-going, fun to be around and patient, yet disciplined and committed. For such a young guy, he's incredibly perceptive to the subtle complexities of human behavior and interaction. I've learned a lot from being a part of his process and am grateful to have had the opportunity. I look forward to watching his career grow. I suspect that in time, he will be a director who is in very high demand.

When you aren't acting, what else do you do?

Michael: I've been a musician longer than I've been an actor. Music remains my first love. I love to listen to it, study it and of course write and perform it. I've had so many adventures with music, from touring with Hootie in my old band Jonasay, to singing with opera choruses in Baltimore, to touring with Grammy-nominated children's artist, *Ralph's World*. Music is my religion.

What are the challenges of balancing acting with your regular life?

Michael: Balance? What's that?

What keeps you coming back to the stage?

Michael: The terror of the challenge and the challenge of the terror. I love adventure in my life, and the stage is a great place to find it. I think in having the opportunity to study someone else as closely as an actor must do, I learn so much about myself. And there's nothing like finding something new about a character you're playing, yourself, or the world you live in. It's the inevitable discovery and learning that is so attractive to me.

What are your favorite past roles?

Michael: I played a rampaging murderer from Texas in the film, *Gathering Souls*, that was a lot of fun to work up. Not only was the accent good fun, it was interesting to see how the voice and accent informed the physicality and overall behavior. He was likable, despite his murderous ways. Loved the cowboy hat and the big belt buckle. For me, it's enjoyable to find the likeable qualities in the bad guy as in this case, or the flaws in the good guy. Ian, a reveling cad and womanizer, in the soon to be released feature film, *The Maladjusted*, was also fun. He was quite different from me, and I enjoyed finding how he justified his behavior and what made him tick. I heard somewhere recently that Laurence Olivier said an actor is a "great understander." I don't know if the quote is accurate, but it stuck with me – and geez, what fun it is to find a way to empathize with those who appear undeserving of it.

What is your dream role?

Michael: I don't know that I have a dream role. Every role is a dream role for me if it teaches me something. I do have to say though that for a long time I have really wanted to play Captain Von Trapp, if only for the opportunity to sing "Edelweiss" for an audience. Yep, I'm a nerd. I figure I have some time before I'm too old to play him, so hopefully it will happen eventually.

Who is your inspiration?

Michael: Besides my family, friends and the people who love me, there would be far too many to mention in the arts. I will say that as a musician growing up, I was most taken with the music and career of Sting and especially his work with The Police. Hemingway was my favorite writer, and I am in awe of the career that Clint Eastwood has sustained in film. A common theme I find in the three is an appreciation for minimalism. I'm not sure if I've achieved minimalism in my work artistically, but it clearly appeals to me as a consumer of art. I like the idea of less is more – but getting there as an artist takes patience and discipline for sure. Specifically in acting, I love the classics and have a fantasy of developing a swagger as an actor found in the leading men of that time, Cary Grant, Spencer Tracy, Gregory Peck, James Stewart, Clark Gable, John Wayne. I really like the work of the lesser-known Walter Pidgeon as well. And don't get me started on Claude Rains. I could gush on about this, but I'm now stepping away from the question....

If you could be stuck on an island with one person, who would it be?

Michael: If I was going for someone to be an island advisor and mentor, Clint Eastwood without a doubt, so I could pick his brain. Otherwise, Rita Hayworth circa 1946 perhaps? If she could look that sexy every day, I might be able to forget I was trapped on the island.

What is the craziest thing you've ever had to do on stage?

Michael: Oh I don't know. For *Ralph's World* I had to be a rock star who's a cave man singing opera and doing the can-can. On camera – well – maybe just go

see *The Maladjusted* when it comes out. Enough said.

What advice would you give aspiring actors?

Michael: It's a marathon, not a sprint. Take the work seriously, but not yourself. If you take your work seriously, others will be happy to take YOU seriously. Plus we ain't curing cancer as actors, so have fun. Be cool. Be a mensch. Learn the power of saying no. Skills are king, marketing is queen

What is on the horizon?

Michael: Prior to taking this show, I was strongly considering spending pilot season in LA and exploring the move to that market. I think taking the time to work on this show has given me an opportunity to evaluate that next step. Will it be a move to the bigger markets, LA, NYC? I certainly see a move away from a schedule so overloaded with commercial, spokes and industrials into one that is more focused on craft and quality film and television opportunities. In any event, I have lead roles in several feature films due out this year, including the aforementioned, *The Maladjusted*. For anyone interested in keeping up with my career, I suggest checking out my website, www.michaelalban.net. It's a pretty cool site and worth a few minutes of your time.

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