

Exclusive Interview with Armand Assante

at the Fourth Annual Gasparilla
International Film Festival
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A lot was packed into the **2010 Gasparilla International Film Festival** during its four day run in Tampa.

Tons of flicks, appearances by celebs, and a variety of interesting panels featuring people in the industry dominated the weekend.

Choosing where to be was an adventure for this writer. My driving talents along with training the body to operate on very little sleep has definitely improved.

One thing I chose to do during GIFF is to interview **Armand Assante**. And I'm glad I did.

For the second year in a row, Armand decided to attend and be apart of Tampa's annual film festival.

He attended the films, spoke on panels, and made himself available at events throughout the festival's run. During the opening night after party, Armand agreed to have a word with me and entertain a few of my questions.

We met up the next day after he already spoke on a panel about the trials and tribulations of being an actor. Doing an interview immediately after already taking questions from the above mentioned panel, just solidifies his reputation of being a class act.

Unless your apart of the industry, one may not fully understand the purpose of a film festival. The art of the film festival has evolved as years have passed. I ask Armand an array of questions relating to the current state of film festivals and what do they mean to him.

"I'm not sure we need anymore film festivals at this time. If there is a need, film festivals such as this one will start to spring up. All the talented people you see here, most of them from Tampa, all had a part in bringing this festival to fruition. Film festivals are here to cultivate talent. Robert Redford created Sundance way back to and he de-mythologized Hollywood. Sundance at that time was all about encouraging young talent and having a place for them to show their work. Now, especially the big ones, are all about business."

Staying on that point, I asked his thoughts on how many festivals refuse to feature a film in their line-up if it has already played in another.

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"It's a rivalry. Films that win an award in a certain festival category will automatically be disqualified from another festival. That's just the way it is, the big ones want to create a rivalry and standout. From a business prospective it makes sense. As an actor it doesn't help."

We then discussed the role of studios as it relates to the business today.

When Armand was speaking on the panel, he made mention on how many writers, who were on the movie side, are switching to television.

He went on to say that instead of receiving completed scripts, he is now just getting a partial idea and the studio wants him to produce the rest.

"Studios are not producing projects anymore. They're strictly buying and distributing them.

That wasn't the case years ago.

Studios used to develop writers. Technology has changed their way of thinking due to rising costs.

Studios don't want to spend anymore on development.

So, the writers go to television producers who are still willing to spend the extra dollar.

But even that is changing.

I have a project I've been working on for awhile and I met with one of the biggest producers in television.

She told me to come back when I have the pilot and 26 episodes and they'll consider it.

Not many actors have that kind of bread to fund that sort of thing.

Especially in the current economic climate of the industry."

So what do you do and does the model need to go back to the way it was?

"Unless I could pay 5 writers, which is very steep, you really can't do much about it.

Right now, people have to adapt to what is happening.

Until everyone is willing to work together again, it's tough to tell how it will play out. Writers who have the chops can take advantage of the current state."

Hearing Armand speak on the panel in addition to his conversation with me, it's very clear that he is a passionate person. He was telling aspiring actors that, "story is the muscle of what you do."

In other words, if one can't be attached to the story, they more than likely will not be any good in the role that accompanies that story.

I asked Armand how that thinking plays into the projects he chooses to become apart of.

"I've had to roll the dice my whole career.

I never had full autonomy to decide what projects I choose. Never been in the driver's seat. I'm a working-persons actor and that is how its always been for me.

I don't regret any projects I've done, but there are some I look at and wish it could have been different.

The reality of it is that I have to provide for my family and the people who work with me."

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After hearing that, I told him how I was curious to know if performers really care about awards. This is the first time I ever asked an actor who has been nominated for awards in the past. Armand is a four-time Golden Globe Nominee and won an Emmy in 1997.

"When your are nominated, it feels great to be recognized by your peers. Some people get emotionally distraught if they don't win. It's like you said, icing on the cake. I will say that the reason someone wins an award is because of the driving force of everyone behind the project. One person never wins the award."

So what does a guy like Armand Assante do when he's not performing?

"I live on a ranch and had a bunch of horses years ago. Did a lot of riding. Now I only have one horse and after years of doing many of my own stunts, physically I don't ride that much anymore. I like to have physical outlets to help feed my adrenaline rush. Similar to when I'm performing. However, I need to do something completely different to wash out my brain. I enjoy being outdoors and having a nice escape."

As the line of people waiting to meet Armand started to grow around us, it was time to wrap this up. Armand is hard at work on other projects...

"I shot a film in Chicago which should be debuting soon. Looking to get into producing and directing but things on that end are moving slow due to the economy. I have a beautiful idea for a film and hopefully that will get going as well."

After speaking on a panel, then yapping with me, Armand also took the time to speak with the ever-growing line of people waiting for me to shut-up.

A very special thanks to him for chatting with me about a variety of issues.

Mr. Assante is one of the more sincere and passionate people out there. One things for sure, you'll always get a straight and intelligent answer out of this guy.