

Assante Reflects On Career Driven By Challenges

The Gasparilla
Movie Festival
2009

The Career
Achievement
Award



Armand Assante gave an interview to TBO (Tampa Bay Online) right before he received his Career Award

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Actor Armand Assante in Tampa to collect a life achievement award at the **Gasparilla International Film Festival** calls himself a 'journeyman'

(Last year Armand Assante received a Life Achievement Award this year a Career Achievement Award...!)

Resume:

Armand Assante says that he is at a point in his life where the creative challenge is what drives him.

"I get joy out of working with other talented people and the work is the only thing that matters," he says.

"An actor wants to be evoked by material that triggers creativity."

The 59-year-old actor is in Tampa this weekend to receive the **Career Achievement Award** for Excellence in Film at the Gasparilla International Film Festival.

It will be presented at a reception at 5 p.m. Sunday at the Dolce Vita Lounge, 615 Channelside Drive.

Festival officials said Assante is being honored for his wide range of work, including dozens of films such as "The Mambo Kings," "American Gangster" and "Rage of Angels" as well as numerous TV series. He has had recurring roles on "NCIS," "October Road" and "ER."

"I am shocked and I am gratified and very appreciative," said Assante during an interview at his hotel Thursday. "I have not had what you call a stellar career. I've been a journeyman actor most of my life so I'm terrified of taking this award too seriously."

Nominated for four Golden Globe awards, Assante won an Emmy in 1997 for best actor in a miniseries or special for HBO's "Gotti." He played crime boss John Gotti in the made-for television film.

Assante, who has been in more than 70 films, co-stars with Val Kilmer and Eric Roberts in "The Steam Experiment" which will be screened at 7:10 p.m. Sunday at the Channelside Cinemas.

"It was a trip to do," he said. "Literally a year ago, it was just a concept."

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"Steam" was directed by filmmaker Philippe Martinez, who directed "Citizen Verdict" with Assante and Jerry Springer and "Wake of Death" starring Jean-Claude Van. Martinez, who has offices in Largo, has produced more than 14 films.

The story involves six people locked inside a steam room by a madman (Val Kilmer) seeking attention for global warming. If he doesn't get results, his victims will boil. Assante co-stars as a detective who interrogates Kilmer's character.

"These are the kinds of films I make now," says Assante. "I so rarely work with a major studio anymore. I've been doing independent films for years.

I did 'American Gangster' with a studio but its like living under a government being run by committee and you don't know if you will be executed.

"I like the intimacy of working on small films where everyone is involved in the process," he adds. "Unfortunately, sometimes you are working for nothing or very little but on the studio films so much money is at stake that people are walking around in a panic.

In 2007, Assante received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Westchester Film Festival, in New York State, having spent the previous three years working almost entirely in Eastern Europe. Among the films he made there was "When Nietzsche Wept" in the role of the German philosopher Frederich Nietzsche and "California Dreamin" set in the Bosnian war which has won awards several film festivals including Cannes The Brussels International Film Festival.

A native of New York City, he is the son of an Italian American artist and Irish American musician and poet. Born on Manhattan's upper west side in Washington Heights he is still close to his family in Naples and Rome, Italy. He lives on a farm in the Hudson Valley where he has bred horses and dogs.

"I started out as a drummer in a rock band," he said. "But I was always more into the performance than the music." By age 17, he was attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and he made his professional stage debut in 1969.

"I spent 10 years in the theater. I thought I wanted to be a Shakespearian actor," he said. "But it wasn't rewarding creatively to me. I found that films." His movie debut was in the 1977 film "Lords of Flatbush."

Since then he's played everything from cops and detectives to gangsters and mythical heroes (Odysseus in NBC's "The Odyssey" miniseries).

Divorced with two grown daughters, Assante also travels the globe campaigning for the removal of land mines. "It's a serious, deadly problem and it's getting worse in counties like Iraq and Afghanistan," he said.