

# TV MAGAZIN ? 1975

by Mikki Dorsey



Armand Assante plans to leave daytime drama because he has found that something else is more important—and more exciting . . .

**“I  
WANT  
MY  
FREEDOM!”**

by Mikki Dorsey

"I'm sorry," the voice at the other end of the phone replied, "but we have no information at all on Armand Assante in our files. It appears that he's not too fond of publicity and isn't at all cooperative with the press."

This was the good news that greeted me when I called the press department of NBC-TV searching for a biography on Armand Assante (Michael Powers, *The Doctors*) in order

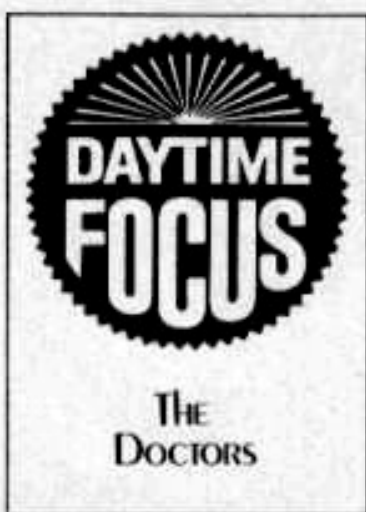
to prepare for my meeting with this elusive young actor the following day. With visions of a press-hating ogre in mind, I imagined that interviewing Mr. Assante would be no easy task!

But nothing could be further from the truth! Armand and I met for lunch in a quiet restaurant nestled in New York's theatre district and he proved to be a thoroughly charming, easy-going and articulate person—not the publicity-shy recluse he was painted as. Armand insists that he has no specific personal policy concerning either interviews or publicity, rather he is cautious, as learned from previous experiences "where they really

turned me into an object or something. I don't take myself very seriously anymore, but I do take my work seriously. They [other magazines] more or less turned me into some kind of a..." Armand searches for the correct word, "sex object—which I'm not too keen about."

Quite truthfully, Armand wants to be recognized as an actor first and foremost even though his handsome good looks, charming personality and melodious voice lend themselves to perpetration of the sexy-male image. As a result, Armand now uses discretion in accepting interviews and (Continued on page 78)

Armand Assante is a versatile man. He can look at life and smile, but he takes his acting very seriously. Armand has a fine singing voice and plays the guitar. He keeps physically fit sparring with a punching bag at home.



## ARMAND ASSANTE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

has already politely turned several of them down. Respectful of TVM, however, Armand was glad to acquiesce when we called for an interview. "After all, I think publicity is the key, it's the business, right?" he asks.

On this particular day when we talked, Armand had a theatrical audition to do, but was not in the least bit disturbed or nervous about it. As luck would have it, Armand at this time was free of any *Doctors'* commitments and so was able to pursue work in his first love, the theatre. Now he admits that he is ready to spread his wings and look for work elsewhere, the restrictions of his *Doctors'* contract being the only thing preventing him from doing so. As a result, Armand will not renew his contract with *The*

*Doctors* when it expires in April, 1977 (something that NBC is not too pleased about). When opportunity knocks, Armand wants to be free to respond. "The way it is with film is that they will sometimes call you one day and say be somewhere else the next day. I'm frightened, because with some of the good things that have finally been happening, I'm afraid I'll get a call and won't be able to go (due to contract restrictions). Now I want my freedom.

"Acting has always been in my past," Armand continues, "and I feel it's always been my destiny to be an actor. My past is littered with being in the entertainment industry in one way or another. I actually started out as a rock drummer—making money too! My parents were both in the arts [they are accomplished modern artists] and I got encouragement that way." California will probably be the next stop for Armand, a native New Yorker who will certainly miss the Big City but believes that opportunity probably lies out west. "I have a very strong agent in Los Angeles and she wants me to go out there and stay. Not that I want to go there, but I find that to do the kind of work that I want to in the theatre, you really need to have a name. Some kind of commercial success behind you is necessary because producers won't risk the draw."

As for some of the good things that Armand mentioned have been happening to him lately, he's had some of the country's top film directors express interest in him. People like Bob Fosse (of *Cabaret* fame), Francis Ford Coppola and Terrence Malick (*Badlands*) have met with Armand to discuss possible roles in their upcoming films. "I've been up for Coppola's films three times now and this is the first time I think he's really warmed to me. I'm told I'm the contender in the east for Malick's new film," relates Armand with all sincerity. Certainly the future does indeed look bright.

Despite Armand's urge to try his hand at other aspects of the entertainment industry, he still holds the deepest respect for the medium that gave him his first big break—the soap opera. "Television serials are a very good example of how to use your instincts, because you don't have time to prepare on TV," he explains. "You may have one of two nights at the most with a script so you can learn your lines. TV teaches you to remain viable and open to everything around you. You really have to rely on your instincts. For me, it was like ten years of therapy. It changed my personality in three years and opened me up so totally. I was a tremendously introspective person when I first went into soap opera. The show made tremendous demands on me everyday. I had to go on and put it all out—because you can't lie in front of a camera."

What's the best thing about doing a soap? "The money!" Armand responds with a sly grin spreading across his face and a muffled chuckle in his voice. Surprisingly, this wonderful smile of Armand's is suppressed on television when he is in the role of Mike Powers. Kicked off the

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hospital staff for fighting. Powers represents your typical rebellious youth. "Oh, yeah," agrees Armand with a devilish smile. "This is what they love, love me to do on television! My anger, my introspection, my crudeness and my vulgarity! This is what they love! Very rarely do I crack a smile on TV. When I do, I think the letters come pouring in from everywhere: 'Mike Powers smiled!'" This is really a shame for perhaps the nicest thing about Armand is his pleasant, warm smile and how easily it comes across his face to light up a conversation. It is quite obvious Armand is a very together and happy person. Even though he gets letters saying, "I hope Alan Stewart (another *Doctors* character) beats the ---- out of you," and many people recognize him as the fictitious Mike Powers rather than the real Armand Assante, he takes it all in stride. This is the true test of an actor's ability!

How much does Armand relate to Mike Powers? "Inevitably, you have to. You are the character on the soap. The character can be one thing one day and something else the next. You have to be open to changes in the writing all the time."

A dilemma lies behind all this, for although Armand has had his differences with the scripts, his everyday working relations with fellow *Doctors* cast members is a joyous experience. "I did the soap *How to Survive a Marriage* before this. When I came to *The Doctors* I was surprised—I mean the atmosphere is so relaxed its like walking into a living room and having a good time all day. You could make it that way because the people are so wonderful and such a good group of talented people. The morale is really so high, it's really a joy to do *The Doctors*. There's no conflict at all—and it wouldn't be tolerated if there was any."

If Armand's professional life appears to be hectic, his personal life is even worse. "It's a wreck," he glumly states. "Can you expound, please, on the term 'wreck,'" I replied. "Well," he continues, "I see several women, to tell the truth—and it's scary. I've never been through this before in my life where I've been involved with more than one person at a time. It's really strange and emotionally, it's very hard."

Independence is Armand's favorite quality in the opposite sex. "Everything that Women's Lib puts forward, I love. I really like strong, independent women. Someone with a purpose." Whether or not she is an actress doesn't matter to Armand, but he explains, "Usually that's unfortunately the case: most of the relationships I've had were with actresses because they're the only women I'm around. I would prefer to meet someone who is not in the theatre, for a change. I would prefer to meet a woman who is totally divorced from the industry—just to get a different perspective."

Although Armand's taste in women is very progressive, when it comes to marriage he is more old-fashioned, believing wholeheartedly in the sanctity of this institution. "I do want to marry and I want to have kids. Right now, though, I do not feel

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that I could be responsible to either a marriage or a family. I'm so wrapped up with what I'm doing that I almost become oblivious to what the hell is going on in my life. It's quite clear in my relationships with people that I'm just *not there* sometimes. Yet I understand that that works in a marriage too. I'm sure there are days when you wake up and just don't want to look at your husband's face because your head is somewhere else. That's life, right?

"But at this point, I would say that my life is very much filled up with what I do. I'm twenty-six—I'm not afraid of taking a little more time, but not too much more because I want to enjoy my kids." Without hesitation Armand admits that this all could change if Ms. Right should come along. "If I found that one right person," he proclaims, "I would be married in a flash. I'll just go out and do it."

"In the beginning, marriage must have been fantastic because it was a spiritual statement. Today, it often does not hold because of the questioning of values that has gone on in our society now. Years ago it was the first spiritual statement that two people made on their union. That's why I believe marriage is often an abused institution today.

"I hope that if I get married, it will hold the spiritual aspect and that it will be the controlling element within it. I'd hate to marry for any other reason. I do look forward to it when it comes," concludes Armand on the subject of marriage.

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So for the time being, Armand's time is occupied with his profession, and trying to live each day to its fullest. Aside from his lady friends, Armand's interests include the arts, especially literature. He loves to read, poetry and biographies being his favorite subjects. Of late Armand has tried his hand at writing, but admits that "it doesn't come easily." He also has quite a good voice (he has appeared in the musical *Boccaccio* on Broadway) but unfortunately doesn't have the time to practice this or any of his other pursuits fully. Someday he would like to write for the theatre and perhaps establish his own theatre or film company.

But that's in the remote future. Armand prefers to content himself with his today's: days that could be spent roaming the theatres or packing a suitcase for some exotic destination. More than anything, Armand loves to travel. "I travel on a whim, I just pick up and go. I spend more money that way, but I'm happier. I just love the adventure of it all."

Sadly for *Doctors* fans, Armand's next travels will take him in search of film adventure way out west. Happily, Armand has an indomitable spirit and great talent to match—two prime ingredients for success. No matter where he roams, he'll still be close to us either in movies, theatre or television. That, everyone can be certain of!

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