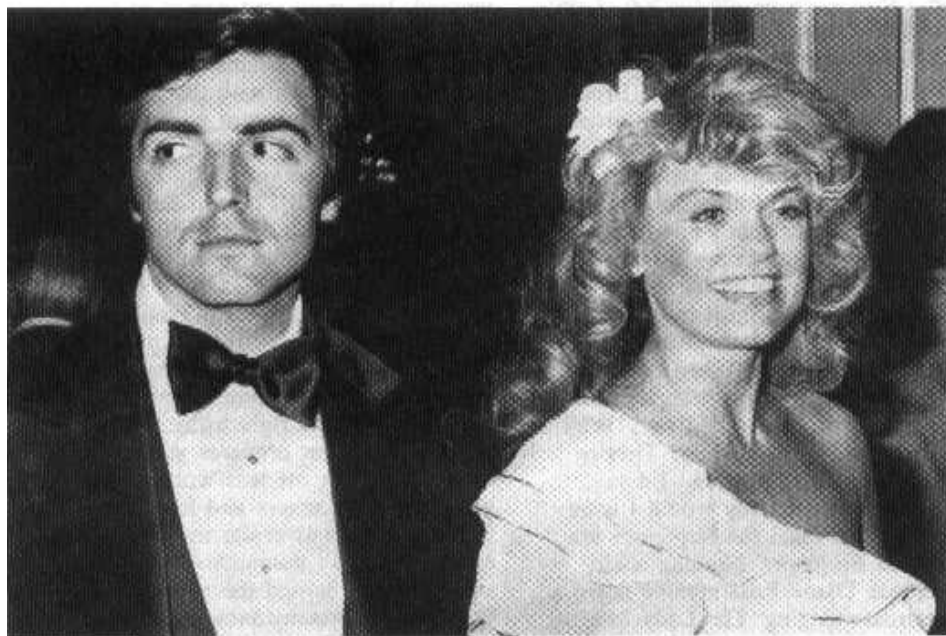


UNFAITHFULLY YOURS

How a good woman housebroke
lover boy Armand Assante



Edward F. Jones International/Pictorial Parade

The most dangerous of Assante's women may have been Dyan Cannon, with whom he had a well-publicized romance while they co-starred in the 1978 NBC-TV movie *Lady of the House*. With other leading ladies such as Barbara Carrera, Tatum O'Neal, Goldie Hawn and Sophia Loren, the "playboy" tag he picked up may have been deserved.

But all that has changed. "Before I met Karen, I was alone a long time—happily! Being alone doesn't mean being lonely. There was no desperation. With Karen, it wasn't infatuation. And if there was any pain involved, it was in the fact that I felt, 'I might have to let this

Playing around with Dyan Cannon (l) is in his roguish past. Playing with Dudley Moore (below) is in his present.

By Dan Yakir

He's played a Latin revolutionary (*Love and Money*), an American Indian (*Prophecy*), a French gynecologist (*Private Benjamin*) and a hard-fisted New York detective (*I, The Jury*). In the upcoming *Unfaithfully Yours*, Armand Assante simply plays a ladies' man.

"I play a violinist who is totally in command of his life, on top of his career, has a hell of a time as a playboy, but unfortunately ends up in the arms of the wrong woman," says Assante, 34. (Nastassia Kinski co-stars as the wife whom jealous conductor Dudley Moore suspects of adultery.)

Unlike his film character, Assante has ended up with very much the right woman—his wife, actress Karen McArn. "I married Karen because I need her in my life and she needs me," he says. "We spend our time with each other. We don't run around town or socialize too much. I never thought I would live so quietly. When I was younger, I sought the most dangerous women I could be with—I welcomed the challenge of women."



Twentieth Century-Fox

ARMAND ASSANTE MAY FIDDLE WITH JACKIE SMITH IN RAGE, BUT HE'S A FAMILY MAN AT HEART

Tube

His heartthrob good looks have helped Armand Assante land such wide-ranging roles as Goldie Hawn's caddish French lover in *Private Benjamin*, Tatum O'Neal's camp counselor crush in *Little Darlings* and Sylvester Stallone's limping, embittered brother in *Paradise Alley*. "It's a great advantage to have looks in this business," Assante freely admits. "Nothing disgusts me more than to see some blond bombshell with 62 porcelain teeth, 39-inch breasts and hair down to her waist saying, 'I did it all with my talent.' " It's talent, though, that has enabled Assante, 33, to tackle a seemingly endless variety of roles. "I don't like to repeat myself," he says. The ruthless Mafia-linked lawyer he plays this week in NBC's four-hour saga of Sidney Sheldon's *Rage of Angels* is yet another first for Assante. "What's on the surface of the character is not what is going on inside," he says. "I find that duality very interesting."

Assante also found his *Rage of Angels* co-star, Jaclyn Smith, appealing. "I think she's gifted and quite serious about her work," he observes. But there was not much mingling after hours. Smith was preoccupied with her husband, Tony Richmond, and baby Gaston, while Assante was rushing home each night to see budding actress Karen McArn, 23, whom he married a year ago. From the moment he first saw McArn at an L.A. restaurant in October 1981, Assante says, he knew "There's my wife." McArn recalls noticing "this person all evening, standing at the door, appearing in different corners, and then across the street—but it didn't dawn on me that he was interested in me." Not until Assante, unshaven and clad in a leather jacket, handed her a note with his telephone number, suggesting dinner. "I'd never heard of Armand," recalls Karen, who has since earned a B.A. degree in drama from the University of Southern California. "I wasn't impressed at all. I thought he was a Hell's Angel."

But something must have intrigued her—maybe the same thing that appeals to casting agents—because a few days later Karen called. "His whole manner was very, very serious," she recalls. "I was a little scared by that. Here I'd met men who weren't serious about anything but life in the fast lane. He was just honest and romantic, and I grew to trust him." They dated for six months and then separated for four months while Armand worked in New York on the movie *I, the Jury*. The separation was the needed catalyst. "I wanted to give her the opportunity to decide," says Assante. "She certainly needed more time than I did. After the separation, we both came to the conclusion it was time to be together again." Karen then accompanied him to New York for the play *Kingdoms*, in which he played Napoleon. It closed two weeks after opening on Broadway. Two months later they wed. They are expecting a child in May. "I've always known I belong with a woman in a marriage," says Armand, "because I come from a family with deep and long-lasting relationships."

Armand's Italian-American father is a painter who once earned a living as a New York ad agency executive; his Irish-American mother is a music teacher. Raised first in Manhattan and then in rural Cornwall, N.Y., Assante skipped college and instead studied acting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City. Since then he has consistently had work, including stage roles in classics such as *Romeo and Juliet* and parts in a string of mostly forgettable films. His best-known movie role was as the French doctor in *Private Benjamin*, but the successful picture nearly pigeonholed the New Yorker as a Frenchman in Hollywood. "The film closed as many doors to me as it opened," he cracks. A great personal disappointment was last year's *I, the Jury*, in which Assante played private eye Mike Hammer in a blood-soaked thriller that

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Since *Rage of Angels*, Armand has taken up the "enormous task" of fiddle lessons for his next role, as a violinist.



A. Berman

flower go to see if it will grow back to me.' And I wanted to be able to let go. I had to give up any possessiveness I had."

This is precisely what *Unfaithfully Yours* explores. Says Assante, who plays straight man to Dudley Moore, "It has to do with infantile male fantasy—jealousy, possession," all of which Assante assails. "For my part, I make commitments—and I demand them from other people," he says. "I got married because I wanted to make that commitment."

Raised in rural Cornwall, N.Y., by an Irish mother and Italian father, he made his first commitment—to his career—at age 17. He auditioned for and was accepted by New York's American Academy of Dramatic Arts. His stage debut came in 1969, starring opposite Imogene Coca in Joshua Logan's *Why I Went Crazy*. After traveling with regional theater groups, he appeared on and off Broadway until he landed on daytime soaps, including *The Doctors* in 1975.

In 1977, he went to Hollywood. At that time, Sylvester Stallone, fresh from his *Rocky* success, was casting *Paradise Alley*. Stallone chose Assante, whom he had known as an extra on the set of his 1974 film, *The Lords of Flatbush*, to play Lenny, the part that launched Assante's film career.

Although often cast as the handsome charmer, Assante has resisted such stereotyping with the same natural, independent spirit with which he junked his playboy past. After two years of marriage, Assante still speaks in valentines about his wife, now the mother of his 9-month-old daughter, Anya. "I saw Karen and I knew I'd marry her," he says of their first meeting. "I used to feel defensive about the word 'relationship'—when I started using that word, it told me I had to get out. With Karen, I have no awareness of time."

How does he balance his rakish screen persona with his homebody self? "What interests me about acting are the conditions that shape our lives," he says. "I don't care if a guy is good or evil—I'm interested in the conditions that made him what he is. It's my responsibility to make even the villains accessible to the audience." **US**

bombed at the box office. "I didn't regret anything I did, but I disputed from the outset all that violence," he says. "I requested that it be edited out—it didn't belong. I was very upset about it."

Assante is now studying the violin for 90 minutes a day (on top of two daily hours of stretching exercises) to prepare for his next role, a remake of the classic 1948 comedy *Unfaithfully Yours*. Assante plays the first violinist in an orchestra whose conductor (Dudley Moore) suspects that Armand is having an affair with his wife (Nastassia Kinski). "I'm very musically inclined but I never went near a violin," says Assante, an accomplished guitarist who writes ballads and is working on a musical. "I had to work very hard just to mime the instrument." A dedicated actor who carefully researches his characters, Assante these days has doffed his usual "bummy" attire in favor of the tailored suits of a natty aesthete. He loves the discipline of acting. "It's what makes the day work for me, to do what I've set out to do," he says.

"I have great faith in our marriage," says Armand, with his pregnant wife, Karen McArm. "It's my first and my last."

"I'm a much happier person at the end of the day. It's my nature."

At one time Armand's nature led him to troubled self-questioning, inspiring him to read Eastern philosophy, undergo Jungian dream analysis, and suffer "confusion and pain" about his acting career. Now he seems more earth-



bound. He has little time these days to read anything but scripts, and one of his major concerns is whether to supplement his two-bedroom Manhattan condo and L.A. bachelor pad with a 146-acre, two-pond, 200-year-old New York farm that "from a distance looks like a Currier and Ives print." The farm, only an hour's drive from New York City, provides "a place for togetherness," says Karen, who still studies acting with Armand's mentor, Mira Rostova. It's a far cry from Armand's bachelor days, when his romance with Dyan Cannon put him in the gossip columns. "She got more publicity off me," he quips. "We just dated for about a year, but it was blown out of proportion." During that period he was working on so many movies, he recalls, "I was never around. There was no way a woman could have gotten to me." Until Karen, he insists, he never met a woman he considered marrying. "Then I was not at peace with myself, I was in turbulence," he explains. "I feel like a different person now."

LOIS ARMSTRONG

For *Rage*, Assante worked up some torrid love scenes with ex-Angel Jaclyn Smith (left) on location in France.

