



Mad About Max!

» Maxwell Caulfield has been a heartthrob since 1982's *Grease 2*. Married to actress Juliet Mills (who is 18 years his senior), he recently appeared alongside his wife and her sister Hayley in *Legends*. He tells **Matthew Myers** about his days on *Dynasty*, bluffing his way into Studio 54, and how he incurred the wrath of a Hollywood icon...

DNA: *Legends* is a show about legends! What's it like to tour and act with your family?

Maxwell Caulfield: We all share a great camaraderie, but it's certainly an interesting time. My character tricks these two ageing and feuding movie stars, who Hollywood has long forgotten, into coming together for a big production, except it's bogus. He's actually exploiting them and it turns into a real ding-dong between the two divas. In reality, Juliet and Hayley have a fabulous off-stage relationship, yet by the end of the first act it's very tumultuous and gets quite physical. During rehearsals they would look distressed from going at each other tooth and nail, but they'd shake it off and bury the hatchet.

Sounds like *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* There has to be some elements of that, particularly with Hayley having been a child star [*Pollyanna*, *The Parent Trap*], although she's not playing herself. It's certainly an acting challenge and they're more than up to it, but that sort of thing also comes at a cost. Faking negative emotion as an actor conjures up bile, in order to convince the audience that the hatred is real!

Some believe method acting is too emotionally challenging and unnecessary. Could that be the case? You're not just raising your voice and pulling angry faces, and sometimes you can get lost in the moment, all while applying your technique. The concept of method acting is basically drawing up

emotional responses to implement in a given scene. Some people do go deeper with their sense memory, and therefore you could say it's more profound and also more indulgent. **Tony Curtis said in his autobiography that method acting was the downfall of people like Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando and James Dean.** Marilyn was definitely getting her head messed with from the Strasberg technique, but I think Dean had started to walk away from it. Dean is my favourite film actor and he actually recoiled from the Actors Studio. He felt it was like exposing film negative to the light, which would blow out and destroy it. My favourite James Dean quote is, "How can I lose? I've got Monty Clift in this hand saying help me, and I've got Marlon Brando in this hand saying fuck you!"

You met your wife Juliet Mills on the set of *The Elephant Man* and married in 1980. Yes, that turned out to be the pivotal moment of my life. I was dating a beautiful young model at the time, my first real girlfriend in New York, and then Juliet came into my life and just blew her out of the water. Here we are thirty-five years later. It certainly seems fated.

What is the secret to such a long and successful marriage? We're still very close and committed, and frankly still admiring and respectful of one another. And we are best friends, too. I also think having a sense of humour is important. I often parody myself on my Twitter account and Juliet has a fabulous sense of humour. I think it's important not to take yourself too seriously in this game. In fact, the tone of my site is pretty camp.

Speaking of camp, and you've been in *Dynasty*, *The Love Boat*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, even *The Nanny*. Any stand out memories? Guest starring on *The Nanny* was ironic because my wife Juliet made her name in the early '70s in a fabulous show called *Nanny And The Professor*. She was absolutely luminous and it was old-style programming with real heart and a lightness of touch. The humour wasn't risqué, in fact, it was almost too sanitised but she and co-star Richard Long looked fabulous and it was understood that there were sparks between them. The male lead in *The Nanny* is Maxwell Sheffield and Juliet always felt that on some level that show had spawned from hers. Right at the end I think Fran Drescher copped to it, and brought me in to play Maxwell's ne'er do well brother. >>



Maxwell Caulfield (centre) with wife Juliet (right) and sister-in-law Hayley Mills (left) in *Legends*.

>> **As a child, did you watch *Nanny And The Professor*?** Yes, and I was also watching Juliet's black-and-white British comedies, like *Twice Round The Daffodils* and *Nurse On Wheels*, which aired on British television when I was young. She must have been making a deep impression on me even back then!

You jumped to fame playing opposite Michelle Pfeiffer in *Grease 2*. Were you on cloud nine? Oh yeah, I definitely believed my own press. It was certainly a fantasy to be not long out of English public school and suddenly find myself in rock'n'roll high school circa 1962! And cast opposite one of the screen's great beauties, Michelle Pfeiffer!

Do you keep in touch with any of the cast? Unfortunately Michelle and I don't run in the same circles and she lives in Northern California, so I don't see her these days. But some of the lads who played the T-Birds such as Chris McDonald, Adrian Zmed and Leif Green

"I would bullshit my way past the velvet rope at Studio 54. One time I claimed to be delivering pizzas to Liza Minnelli!"

have all remained life-long friends.

***Grease 2* bombed critically, but it did become something of a cult classic. How did you feel about it?** The first *Grease* was grittier and the cast was older. We were closer in age to the high school kids we were playing. I must say Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta were absolutely fabulous together. He was electrifying with his dance moves and zany sense of humour.

You did get to ride a motorbike, though! I did! Would you believe they were originally going to cast Andy Gibb in my part? He was a fabulous looking lad with a great voice, but his acting chops weren't there. I don't know why they didn't coach him because film acting is not that hard. The longer you're at it, you realise the less you have to do!

As Miles Colby in *The Colbys* and *Dynasty*, you became a household name. Apart from that world of big hair and shoulder pads, what do you remember most? [Laughs] Well, I didn't wear the shoulder pads! I remember it was the height of "Reaganomics", which was a period of great excess in America and not unlike the overindulgence we're going through now. In spite of all the austerity measures, people are still living large with more cars than they need, bigger homes, even second homes. We're all far too spoiled and we can't stomach the idea of throttling back.

Yes, nowadays there's a feeling that Australia is losing its innocence. That's interesting as I've always said that retaining an air of innocence is what makes movie stars. But one of the joys of coming to Australia is the sense that you are uncorrupted and life moves at a slower pace. People take time to genuinely relate to one another. There are still those basic core values, but the more we move into this materialised and digitised world, we are

letting so much go and I don't know what we are replacing those values with.

You've worked with Joan Collins, Charlton Heston, Barbra Stanwyck... were you ever star struck? Certainly by Heston, and the same with Stanwyck. She was actually intimidating, but such a pro. She was the kind of woman who didn't tolerate fools gladly, and I was at the top of her fools list! If the lunch break was from one to two o'clock, she'd be back in the make-up chair by 1:45 and camera-ready by two. And boy, for the young actors only just dragging their butts into the make-up trailer, she would sit there fuming!

Barbara Stanwyck had a bone to pick with you, right? I got off on the wrong foot with her. But I was actually in awe of her. I mean, she was amazing in *Double Indemnity*. The bottom line is that on the very first day of working together, I inadvertently made her wait. It was a big Colby family scene and also my entrance into the show. I wasn't being a diva in my trailer, but I was asking for a certain flower for my lapel. On a show that had a massive flower budget, they didn't have a red flower. I was wearing a white suit with a blue shirt and I needed a red carnation, a rose, anything! They finally came up with some bizarre tropical waxy red thing and it looked more like I was coming from Vegas! Anyway, Barbara was like, "Why are we waiting?" Well, Maxwell wants a flower! So that was it, and I didn't get to work with her until the second season for that!

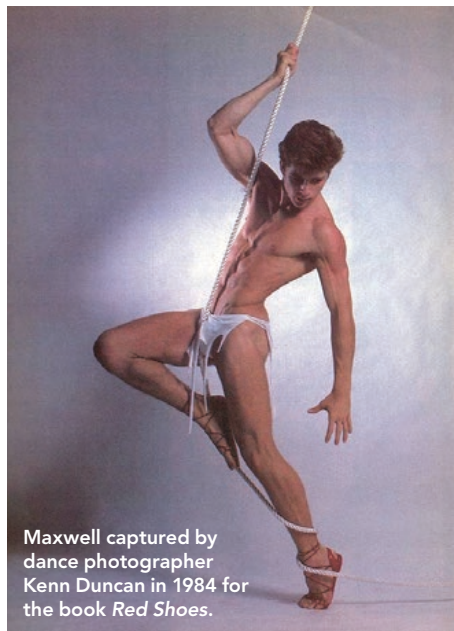
What about Joan Collins? Joan is formidable, but the thing about her is that she's so funny, so imperious and so camp! I'm not awed by Joan, but I marvel at her staying power, the way she has sustained her look and her zest for work. She's a decade older than Juliet and Hayley, but they are all really stoic individuals. They have a great lust for life and relish the work. I'll be really surprised if 20 years from now I'm still up for this acting game. But it's the only thing I can do, so I may not have a choice!

When you first went to New York you were in a play called *Hot Rock Hotel*, wearing some very tight white shorts! Yes, I had just arrived in New York and the play was a gay farce. All they needed to complete the show was a strapping young man who saunters onto the stage in his white swim trunks and sort of brings the curtain down, with a cheeky wink. So there was not a lot of talent involved! Just a well-toned body [laughs]. But the gayest role I've played was in an Off-Broadway show called *My Night With Reg*. It was myself and seven guys who had supposedly slept with Reg. It's a clever premise for a play and it does touch on AIDS. Well [set in the 1980s], it had to.

In those early days you had many gay friends. You must have been right at the centre of all that? Yes, and it struck me how a lot of the guys who died were, and I'm trying to think of the right word here, not very robust. I don't know if



Maxwell in action in *Legends*.



Maxwell captured by dance photographer Kenn Duncan in 1984 for the book *Red Shoes*.

that made them more vulnerable to infection or not, but either way it was merciless. AIDS was indiscriminate in how it went after the gay male population. But looking back, how great that the gay movement solidified and became what it is today, overturning laws and such.

There must have also been some great times partying at the clubs and on Fire Island? A couple of times I went out with the company and it was such a hedonistic time, but there was also a great air of celebration. The gay movement had really burst onto the scene. Everyone was jumping out of the closet and it all tied-in with the Disco scene. They were kind of interwoven and there was a return to drug-taking. So everyone was getting pretty damn high, and as a result sometimes not thinking, and doing things that were excessive.

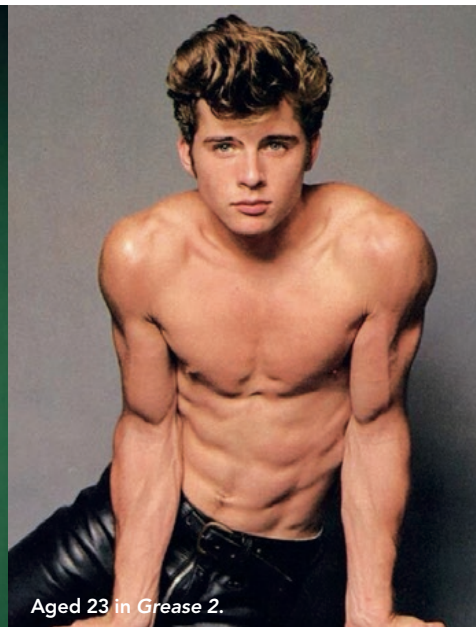
Did you ever go to the infamous Studio 54? Yes, I used to bluff my way in. I would bullshit my way past the velvet rope. It was so the place to go and I remember one time I resorted to claiming to be delivering pizzas to Liza Minnelli! I made out I had a special order, and even carried the boxes on my shoulder. They were like, "Alright, come on in."

Back in those days, did you get hit on by men a lot? No, I really didn't. This is the thing. It was easy to be in that world because people gave signals to one another if they were interested. It came down to whatever vibe you gave off. And nobody likes to be rejected, so as a result it wasn't a case of having to fend people off. When you think about it, everyone is at their cutest in their early twenties, but I didn't have enormous self-esteem and I wasn't walking around like a magnet. I did become more self-confident once I started getting roles and good reviews. Until then it was all bluster!
So if you were gay, who'd do it for you? Now there's a question! The first name that comes to mind is James Franco, and not because I fancy him, but because he is such a wild cat! He seems to behave in a way that James Dean would in 2015. Dean would be making films and morphing and shape-shifting into different personalities and, of course, Franco played James Dean to perfection in a TV movie. He absolutely nailed it.
Of all the theatre roles you've had, which has been your favourite? Billy Flynn in *Chicago* was just a gift. To saunter around in a tuxedo, surrounded by women in feather boas and black lingerie while crooning jazz tunes was fantastic. I also had a lot of fun recently playing Felix Unger in *The Odd Couple* and I loved playing Milo in *Sleuth* opposite Stacy Keach. But back in 1981, I also played a terrific role in *Entertaining Mr Sloane*.

You must have beaten out quite a few other young stars for that role? The only guy I know who would have liked that role was Kevin Bacon. But boy he got the last laugh because we shared the same agent, and the bottom line is I wished the agent had spent as much time



Maxwell in *Dynasty* in the 1980s.



Aged 23 in *Grease 2*.

"The bulge looked like Rudolf Nureyev at the Royal Ballet! He had a beach ball going on down there!"

cultivating my career as she did his. As you know, he's a very good actor and his career has been fantastic.

So six degrees of Kevin Bacon could have been six degrees of Maxwell Caulfield! [Laughs] Well, there's a similar thing going on in relation to me with Rex Manning Day, which is the day my character in *Empire Records* appeared at the struggling record store. April 8, it even trends on Twitter!

Have you ever suffered a wardrobe malfunction on stage? Yes, while I was doing *Mr Sloane*! The theatre was in New York's West Village, the heart of the gay scene, and my black leather jeans got stolen! Wardrobe had to run out and find a new pair. The thing is, when you first put on black leather jeans they are very tight and rather emasculating. I jammed them on and suddenly said, "Oh my god! I look like a girl in these jeans!" So I grabbed a pair of tube socks, shoved them down the front and positioned myself on the sofa, reclining and sprawled out in front of my raunchy landlady. I looked down and the bulge was so absurd – it looked like Rudolf Nureyev at the Royal Ballet! He had a beach ball going on down there! I wasn't getting off that sofa for the next ten minutes so I angled my ass towards the audience to avoid any more embarrassment! At the next chance I had to exit, I took out one sock, but I had to keep one of them in [laughs].
The audience would have thought you were suddenly less – excited! [Laughs] Indeed. This brings us to 1985 when you played

opposite Jessica Tandy in *Salonika* – naked! Oh, I loved that! The first act ended with me naked. During dress rehearsal, when I took my kit off for the first time, I remember getting up and Jessica Tandy covered her eyes, saying, "Oh, I don't want to mess with the fantasy". She didn't want to see me without clothes! I thought, well, this woman acted opposite Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Her fantasies must be pretty vivid!
A pretty vivid shot of you in a white loincloth appeared in 1980s gay magazines. What do you remember of that shoot? Did people automatically assume you were gay? That's from a book, *Red Shoes*, by the great American dance photographer Kenn Duncan, who soon thereafter was felled by AIDS. A lot of fabulous folk were involved in that shoot, including Mikhail Baryshnikov, Eartha Kitt, Greg Hines and Carol Channing, who incidentally created the role Juliet is now playing in *Legends*. I was honoured to be asked by Kenn. We all chose a pair of red shoes and Kenn selected the setting, which had me at the end of a Tarzan-style rope! He had previously taken the cover picture for *After Dark* magazine, which probably fanned the whole appreciation thing. Without my loyal gay fan base I might have dropped off the charts long ago! As to the gay speculation, it's a bit of a cliché, but isn't every British actor considered a bit suspect?! ★

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