

» On crime drama *The Blacklist*, Ryan Eggold plays a man with questionable motives. **Matt Myers** finds the actor anything but duplicitous as he gushes about divas, dining with Pacino and TV's new flavour...

Master Manipulator

DNA: Your character on *The Blacklist*, Tom Keen, is mysterious and multi-layered. Is he a challenge to play?

Ryan Eggold: On one hand he's very familiar. He's the husband who is sweet and well-mannered, but then we learn that he's putting up a front. It's actually a mask and we find out he's lethal and capable of all this violence. It's a great role because even when you're playing the nice guy it's not real, because the character himself is putting on an act! Tom is a great character because you never know when he's being genuine or manipulating you. It's great playing with those blurred lines.

Do you ever film alternate scenes, so that even the actors are unsure of what happens in the final cut? Not in the way that we, as the actors, don't know, but we do add scenes, delete scenes and reshoot them differently. Sometimes even just days before it airs, so it can still change right up until that last moment.

We seem to be in a new golden age of television with more and more quality shows on the air. I think people are turning to TV more than they used to. There are some great sitcoms on, as there always have been, but now we have shows like *Breaking Bad*, *Game Of Thrones* and *The Blacklist*, which push the envelope and allow for a little more cinematic influence. Television is pulling in that movie flavour.

Are you hooked on any of those shows? Yes. I just watched *Game Of Thrones* for the first time and it's great! The Red Wedding episode destroyed me! It was crazy! What's really interesting about *Game Of Thrones* is that you have all these different parties and characters vying for power and trust. That's similar in *The Blacklist*, where you have people searching for truth and vying for trust.

Your first regular series role was on *Dirt* with Courtney Cox. What was that experience like? Man, that was great! Unfortunately that show went down in the second season as a result of the writer's strike in LA, which was a shame as Courtney is a super-fantastic woman to work for. She was really running that show and was top-notch. My character was Farber Kauffman, a sort of a half-nerd, slash half-arrogant and pretentious kind of guy. He was always on his high-horse about journalism. It was a great role to play.

You also played the teacher Ryan Matthews in the reboot of *Beverly Hills 90210* and yet you were actually younger than some of the students! Did that feel odd? [Laughs] It's not something that I really notice. I've always sort of had a maturity about me, and I'm attracted to those sorts of roles. They wanted this teacher to be young enough that he could blend into the world of the students, but also old enough that it was questionable.

Playing a drag queen in the short film *Queen* must have been interesting. How did you prepare? We went to a number of clubs and

hung out with some drag queens. We tried to make it as real as we could, and I tried to pick up some of their characteristics. I also watched some documentaries and a lot of RuPaul, too! I really immersed myself in that world.

Did your gay friends give you any feedback on that role? Sure, quite a number. Thankfully, I only had positive feedback! We also had a number of GLBT folk working on the film, so we tried to keep it honest without becoming sensational.

On *Brothers And Sisters* you played a gay character. Do you think the stigma once associated with playing gay has finally disappeared? I hope so. I think it has, but it also depends on the actor and people's personal politics that goes with it all. I just saw Mark Ruffalo in *The Normal Heart*, which is a HBO film about AIDS in the 1980s, and he's fantastic in it. I think that's a great example.

You were also very supportive toward gay people in California's Prop 8 debate. We tried to help out wherever we could with fundraisers and with different events, posters, awareness and

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that sort of thing. In terms of gaining equality and civil rights, I think it's just a matter of time. **You worked with Toni Collette in *The United States Of Tara*, and more recently completed a movie with her, *Lucky Them*. How did you find working with her?** She's a blast! She's a phenomenal actress and a very fun person.

She's able to do great work and then have a laugh afterwards, which I appreciate. We shot that film in Seattle and it was largely about music, so we would go to bars afterwards to see bands and have a drink. It was a really great time. But I still haven't seen *Muriel's Wedding!* **Who is Ryan Eggold's diva?** I want to say Aretha Franklin. She's terrific. I love her singing *You're All I Need To Get By*. I also love Etta James singing *I'd Rather Go Blind*.

If you were gay, who would you have a bromance with? I'd say Brad Pitt circa *Fight Club*. Who could say no to that!? But it's a little stereotypical so I'll also say Michael Fassbender. He's a hip dude!

Who has been the biggest influence on you, career-wise? There are so many, like Al Pacino who is phenomenal. Then there's Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman and Gene Hackman – that whole generation of guys in the 1970s were fantastic. I was born in 1984, but, for me, the 1970s was the golden age of cinema. I once got to have dinner with Pacino and it was fascinating to hear him talk about his work.

Do you wear briefs, boxer briefs or commando? Boxer briefs always, and that's for comfort... and a bit of style, too!

MORE: *The Blacklist* screens on Channel Seven. Follow Matt Myers on Twitter @MattMyers1964



An almost unrecognisable Ryan Eggold in *The Blacklist*.