

Michael Nouri goes through 'Changes'

Danielle Steel movie mirrors professionals

By Amy Schmidt

It's raining in L.A., and the war has come to an end. "It's a great day," says actor Michael Nouri. Nouri, who co-starred with Jennifer Beals in "Flashdance," has just finished the NBC film Danielle Steel's "Changes" and has found some time to talk about it. He shuts the door to keep his golden retriever from escaping into the wet outdoors. "It's like a whole new day," he says pensively.

"The thing that really grabbed me about the part in 'Changes' is that there's an art to the character," begins Nouri, whose smooth, tranquil voice almost entrances you. "And you see that he goes from being insular to being more involved and going through the painful process of having to admit he's been neglecting his own emotions and also the emotional needs of those closest to him."

In "Changes," airing Monday, April 1, on NBC, Nouri plays a handsome, celebrated heart surgeon whose wife has died, ironically, of a heart ailment. Enter Nouri's "Changes" co-star Cheryl Ladd. Ladd plays a beautiful and famous New York TV correspondent who falls for Nouri. She's a single mother, he's a single father. Together they have everything going for them. However, when they marry, the crises that follow do not make for a happy "Yours, Mine and Ours" ending.

"I think, especially, professional people will relate to this," says Nouri. "Maybe we can all relate to it on the level of how we will turn to something else rather than face our feelings about something. Have a drink. Have a cigarette. Have a meal, whatever it takes to not deal with the real thing coming up. We're part of a culture that's learned to anesthetize its feelings, kind of numb it until the feeling goes away. But the feeling never goes away. It usually comes back harder and bigger..."

The glamour, wealth and power exhibited in Steel's miniseries are sure to be enticing elements of "Changes." But in real life, it's evident they aren't what the real Michael Nouri is about. The actor says it's been necessary for him to divorce his success from fame and money - the penchants of Hollywood. "My professional life is unpredictable. It's a real roller coaster

ride. Sometimes I'm high, sometimes I'm low, and there are the attendant emotions that go with both. I'm still having to remind myself that I am not what I do. I do what I do. But I am what I am."

Nouri, who meditates daily, takes this philosophy so seriously that in the early '70s he quit acting and traveled across Europe and the U.S., living out of a VW van. To earn money he'd open his guitar case, "Prime it with a few bucks," and strum on street corners.

The actor eventually settled down in 1975, going to work on the CBS daytime drama "Search for Tomorrow," for which he won an Emmy. His current projects include two feature films, "Total Exposure" and "Psychic," scheduled for release this year. But it is his work with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society about which Nouri seems most earnest. He was recently named the organization's official ambassador.

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Midge Sinclair (left) plays Empress Josephine, a restaurant owner and a friend to Gabriel Bird (James Earl Jones) on *Gabriel's Fire*, Thursdays on ABC.