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MEM FERDA

Ruggedly Handsome and impossibly charismatic. This very private Film and Television Star gives us an

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW !**The friendly giant**

It has been a long time coming, but London based Turkish actor Mem Ferda is starting to make a name for himself.

When Madonna walked up to him, brushed her hand against his chest and admired his masculinity, Mem Ferda was simply stunned. But he wasn't just a guy who happened to be in the right place at the right time, the incident took place during the shooting of *Evita* and Ferda was playing a guard. Since then the Turkish Cypriot actor has brushed shoulders with Julia Roberts and John Travolta, starred in a Guy Ritchie film with Ray Liotta and others whose cast included Ralph Fiennes and Donald Sutherland.

Speaking from his home in London, Mem had just got back from his daily workout at the gym, when I called. "I'm up at 5:30 every morning, prepare breakfast for my wife and myself, then hop in the car, take her to work and head for the gym by 6:30," he explained. Given that most of the parts he is handed are roles such as gangsters, killers, psychopaths, rapists, drug dealers and crooked cops, it's no surprise that his 6 ft 2 inch and 19 stone frame combined with blue eyes and dark hair, make the perfect, gorgeous bad guy. "It would be nice to play a romantic and soft-spoken guy for once but I don't think I come across as that sort of person even though people who know me call me 'The friendly giant'," he said laughing.

Mem was born in London in 1963 to Turkish Cypriot parents. At the age of six, his mother took him to Cyprus, where his father was the Minister of Agriculture and Mem lived here until he was

12. "Turkish was my first language and Cyprus was home to me," he said. "I had a good childhood there although a couple of disturbing incidents shocked me and I think that's why my parents decided we should move back to London." Apparently, Mem witnessed an attempt on his father's life that ended with the killing of the assassin by the minister's bodyguard but, if anything, this helped Mem later on in life when he was to portray characters such as this.

Mem's wishes of becoming an actor however were not in line with those of his father. "He wanted me to either become a lawyer or a doctor so I settled for something in between and studied psychology." After he completed his course in psychology, Mem decided to travel around Europe for a few months until he made up his mind of what to do with his life. "After six months of travelling, I came back. By that time my dad owned a dry-cleaning business and suggested I help him out with that." Wanting to buy some time, Mem took another year off doing his Masters in Business and even working as a gym instructor. But it wasn't until he was spotted by a talent scout in Covent Garden that Mem was convinced he had what it took to go into showbiz. "It was modelling for high-profile national campaigns but that's what got me noticed and eventually led into acting." He started off doing ads for TV and eventually auditioned for one of the most renowned drama schools in the world - LAMDA (The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art). He was accepted and graduated with a Postgraduate Diploma in acting.

Then came the agent. "I've been with the same agent ever since I started out. I'm actually expecting a call from him in a while because it's what we do every day. He calls me around 11:30 informing me on possible castings for the week. If there's one that day, my driver will pick me up and take me there. If not, then by 12:30 I prepare lunch, feed my fish, make a few phone calls and from two 'til four in the afternoon, I read scripts, do some vocal exercises, work on some memory quizzes and work out in my home gym."

Mem does have an impressive CV. He shared the screen with Ray Liotta in Guy Ritchie's film, *Revolver* ("he's a serious actor; no messing about") and Donald Sutherland in *Land of the Blind* ("I thought I was tall but this guy is huge"). No stranger to TV either, he has just finished filming an episode for ITV's drama series *Heartbeat* in the UK. "I play a Russian fisherman who, although at first glance seems like bad news, turns out to be a really nice guy. It was a great experience and I got some good reviews." He's also currently filming *Saddam's Tribe* for Channel 4, a film about Saddam Hussein and his life and family up until his capture. "The director loved me and wanted me to play one of Saddam's sons or brothers-in-law but eventually went for a brown-eyed actor and created a role for me as a Ukrainian arms dealer called Tarras Rabinovich."

Only this week Mem has just come off set having finished filming yet another powerful role in ITV's new drama *Whistleblowers*.

Mem is quick to say that being an actor isn't easy and can in fact be extremely hard work. This is exactly why he enjoys a quiet meal with his wife at around 7:30 in the evening, followed by a movie. "Although my wife is in bed by 10:30, I like surfing the internet, paying bills and doing a bit of web design during this time. But by 11:30, I'm also tucked in with a book before nodding off."

interview by Eleni Antoniou

