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FEATURES



Aly Michalka's All About the Art

BY JON STEELY, PHOTOGRAPHY PATRICK FRASER, STYLING STEPHANIE STRATE, MAKEUP AMY STROZZI, HAIR MICHAEL SPARKS FOR SOLOARTISTS.COM/REDKEN

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At 21, Aly Michalka suddenly seems to be everywhere. She is starring opposite Ashley Tisdale and promising newcomer Robbie Jones in the CW's high energy, competitive cheerleading series, "Hellcats," where she plays a pre-law college student who reluctantly joins her school's cheerleading team as a way to avoid losing her endangered scholarship. She is also featured alongside the talented Emma Stone and Amanda Bynes in the Screen Gems release, *Easy A*, a comedy that, paralleling *The Scarlet Letter*, follows the events that unfold in a straight-laced high school girl's life as rumors run wild about the sexual escapades she never actually has. Aly is also enjoying success as a musician and singer/songwriter with 78violet, a platinum selling pop/rock group (formerly known as "Aly & AJ") that she formed in 2004 with her younger sister, AJ Michalka. The duo, whose 2007 hit single, "Potential Breakup Song," sold over one million copies and led to two sold-out arena tours and a wildly successful merchandising empire, is currently writing songs for their fourth studio album, the self-titled *78violet*.

But Miss Michalka's current success is really not so sudden. In fact, she's been paying dues to the creative disciplines of music and acting for the past sixteen years — practicing, studying, auditioning, and performing since she was five years old, when she began taking piano lessons (at 13, she started playing guitar) and acting in church plays. After a blaze of auditioning, pavement pounding, and door knocking, Aly made her Hollywood acting debut on the Disney Channel Original Series, "Phil of the Future" (2004-2006). She then starred in the Disney Channel Original Movies, "Now You See It" (2005), playing a manic TV producer, and "Cow Belles" (2006), co-starring sister AJ. In 2009, she fused her passion for acting and music by taking a lead role in *Bandslam* (also starring Vanessa Hudgens), a feature film about a group of teenaged misfits who form an unlikely rock band. Along the way, Aly has become off-camera friends with young Hollywood powerhouses Ashley Tisdale, Zac Efron, Vanessa Hudgens, and Miley Cyrus.

With her “Hellcats” premiere on The CW and “Easy A” set for a wide theatrical release, Aly Michalka is a burning hot property right now. She definitely knows it, yet she is impressively cool about all of it. Just a nice, refreshingly articulate, stunningly beautiful, California girl, radiating with a humble self-assuredness (a by-product of her loving family support system), and a confidence earned from a considerable collection of outstanding show business achievements. There are no big ego issues. No bitchy attitude problems. No diva behavior. No carousing at clubs or cavorting on red carpets. Aly Michalka would rather focus on her art.

Venice Magazine:

When did you know that you wanted to make a living as a performer?

Aly Michalka:

I had been acting in plays when I was very young and also doing a lot of role-playing stuff with my sister just for fun. When I was about nine years old, I got the idea that I wanted to do all this on a big level. Be in movies. Play concerts. When you are nine, you’re not old enough to take any of the realities into consideration, to think that maybe you can’t or won’t be able to do something. So you just think big and go for something big! *[laughs]*

As you got older and saw more of the realities involved, what made you want to stick it out and endure the rigors of show business?

As I got older, I just became more passionate about the art. Writing songs. Performing. Doing good quality work as an actor. I’m not interested in artistic pursuits for money or fame or accolades. I just want to make art that will hopefully make people feel inspired.

Did you follow the somewhat standard strategy of doing modeling and commercial work before getting your big break on The Disney Channel series?

I did do some modeling for a while, but I actually never booked a commercial. I didn’t get my SAG card until I booked my first TV show, which was “Phil of the Future.” That show, and the level of responsibility one has to carry when doing a television series, really helped me grow both as an actor and a person. It helped me gain a lot of confidence.

As you and your sister AJ got a little older, you changed the name of your band from “Aly & AJ” to 78violet. And the music changed a little, too. Describe the sound of 78violet.

Well, though the melodies are pop melodies, the songs are very heavily influenced by rock and definitely have a rock

sound, not just a pop sound. And, yes, our music has changed a bit over the years as we’ve gotten a little older and started to have more freedom and more to say. My sister and I are both singer-songwriters. We do not want to be pop stars.

Who are your musical influences?

A lot of classic rock. The Police, Heart, The Beach Boys, Van Halen, Led Zeppelin. I also love Radiohead, and U2 is one of my favorite bands.

You two have worked with some real heavy hitters in the music industry: Nancy Wilson from Heart, Rivers Cuomo from Weezer, and super producer and session player Mike Elizondo. What is your affiliation with them?

We’ve done a lot of songwriting with Nancy Wilson and we are definitely going to have some of those collaborations on our next album. As for Rivers Cuomo, we are just great fans of his and we called him up and asked him if he’d like to write with us. He was very apprehensive at first, because he had kind of given up on the idea of writing with other people. But after we worked together, he thanked us because he said the experience opened him up to writing with other people and collaborating creatively with other artists again. The idea of artists inspiring each other to do good work is really important to me. It’s what it’s all about.

What is the difference between music and acting for you in terms of artistic satisfaction?

With music, everything is more personal because you are in the creative process of songwriting essentially by yourself. You get to feel a personal satisfaction from having created everything. With acting, it's much more of a collaborative effort with many other people — a director, a whole cast and crew. So when you see the finished product, you are looking at your own work, but it is your work through the vision of many other people. I love both music and film. They both keep me very balanced. Doing music alone would make me crazy. And, if all I did was act, I think I would get bored between projects, when I wasn't working. With music, between the writing, recording, and the touring, you are always working! I definitely need them both.

What would you do if you couldn't have them as a career anymore? If the work dried up and the phone stopped ringing?

I'd still make music. I'd sell it out of my car. If I had to pick something outside the entertainment business, I think I'd be an interior designer. There would still be creativity involved.

In *Easy A*, which revolves around humorous high school drama, you play the part of Rhiannon, a girl who turns on her best friend. How would you describe Rhiannon, and who did you draw from to play her?

Rhiannon is abrasive, blunt, and fun. Yes, she does turn on her friend, but she does it because she is hurt and needs to lash out. I think everyone goes through these kinds of things in relationships with friends at some point. I know I have. Rhiannon is a crazier, louder version of who I am. Her openness and frailness are things that I drew from myself and the way that I behave. I'm just not as rash as she is. Her rashness is something I had to pull from some other people that I know. *[laughs]*

You worked with such a great cast in *Easy A*. Emma Stone, Amanda Bynes, Lisa Kudrow. What was the best part of that experience?

Watching all of the improvisation, especially by Lisa Kudrow! And getting to watch great actors like Stanley Tucci playing these weird, quirky roles. Such a switch from the other roles we've seen them play. It was just fun watching them all bring something new and fresh to the set!

Your circle of friends includes Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Tisdale, Zac Efron, and Dan Byrd. Young Hollywood has a reputation for getting into trouble with substance abuse and the law, and they tend to blame the pressures of show business and falling prey to the temptations of Hollywood, yet you and your friends manage to be in the same environment and avoid all of the pitfalls. What keeps you guys out of courtrooms and jail cells?

Well, I can't really judge anything that Lindsay or any of those girls do because I really don't know anything about their situations. I've been fortunate enough to be blessed with a great family life and I do think that, in general, the choices you make do have something to do with the way you were raised and the friends that you have around you. We all surround ourselves with good friends that we really trust and we all have a focus that we don't lose sight of. Personally, I really don't like the club scene. All the loud noise and people yelling. I'd rather be in a more intimate setting, in my pajamas having a nice dinner.

As an intelligent go-getter from the wrong side of the tracks, Marti, your character on "Hellcats," has a lot of drama going on in her life. What got you interested in the role?

Her fearlessness, her passion, her love for life. All of that really resonated with me. Also, her relationships. She's really great with her friends, but involved in such a toxic relationship with her mom. I just found her to be an interesting and layered character. Constantly changing and growing.

Marti did not have any direct cheerleading experience before she tried out for the Hellcats' squad. Did you have any cheerleading experience before you got cast as Marti?

No, but I do have a dance background. Hip Hop. Freestyling. Competitive dancing when I was a teenager. I definitely took all of that background with me, but I didn't learn any actual cheerleading moves until the first few weeks on the set.

Did you know Ashley Tisdale before “Hellcats”?

Yes. We’ve known each other for years. We were in the same acting class together when I was eleven years old.

Do you find that having that level of familiarity with Ashley helps add to the believability of the work you do together? Does it help make it easier to do scenes with her?

Yes. There is a level of comfort that we share with each other that definitely helps. And, coming from similar backgrounds in the industry, we both have the same work ethic and approach the work in the same way. I love that we have a friendship on the set and off. It’s nice to work with people you still want to hang out with after we wrap.

Marti has different relationships with different characters on the show, so you are certainly playing a lot of different notes as an actor. Which of Marti’s relationships provide the most enjoyment for you?

My favorite scenes are my scenes with Gail O’Grady, who plays my mom. The heart-to-hearts that Marti has with her, where there is a role reversal and Marti is the one taking care of her mom instead of its being the other way around. You just feel so sorry for both of them. Those are my favorite scenes.

In an industry where a lot of very talented actors and musicians can’t get any work, your career continues to flourish and expand. What’s the best part of all of it? What do you enjoy the most?

The end result of a project is my favorite part. Seeing a finished product on the screen or an album produced or the audience reaction to a live concert. And, if I can inspire people with my work, that’s always something that makes me very happy.

What’s the downside?

Not being able to spend as much time with my family as I’d like. That’s the biggest sacrifice. There’s also a lack of privacy issue and, with the long hours, things can get a bit lonely at times. I realized recently that I never have a chance to have a proper dinner anymore. Things get so busy that I find myself only having something like a bowl of chicken soup for dinner. I miss having normal dinners.

You’ve been very successful at getting work. What advice would you give to an actor going out for a part? Any audition techniques you want to share?

Well, the usual things...make sure to memorize your lines and create a backstory for your character. Directors really like when you come in prepared like that. Do not get competitive with other actors. Remember that you are your own competition. And don’t worry about any of it! If you don’t get a job, don’t obsess over it and over why you didn’t get it. Sometimes they pick or don’t pick someone based on the color of their eyes or how tall they are or other things you have no way of knowing or controlling. Just trust that everything really does happen for a reason. At the end of the day, we as humans should really be worried about much bigger things. [laughs] □

“Hellcats” premieres Wednesday, September 8th, at 9pm on The CW. Easy A opens in theaters everywhere on September 17th.