

# JOEY LAWRENCE

## MAN OF THE HOUSE

With a new hit series, *Melissa & Joey*, taking off, movies underway and a new record — Joey is taking charge

Words by Vanessa Pascale

### WHOA!

One word — just one — when said aloud in a certain tone, instantaneously summons one actor's name to mind. **Joey Lawrence.**

In the '90s, Joey set this catchword on fire when he played Joey Russo, the crush worthy and slightly air-headed brother on popular TV hit *Blossom*. "There wasn't anybody more famous, I think, in the world than me at 16. It was a great time period in my life," said Joey when we revisited the phenomenon that put him on the map forever. "I did it as joke one night... Today it probably would've been even bigger, because there was very little Internet to support something like that, so it had to grow normally: by word of mouth, by people watching.... It wasn't instant gratification on fifteen different multi-media platforms."

To this day, people still remember Joey for that. "I look back on it fondly — it got me here today. To look back and say, 'Oh, forget that.' It's like those *American Idol* winners, they win and then they don't want to go back to the show. It's like, 'Are you crazy? You were literally just serving French fries. Don't shy away from that. That's the DNA that got you to where you are today,'" the 34-year-old actor prudently stated. Next year, marks Joey's 30-year anniversary in show business, and with a new show and several other projects in the wings, he's pretty excited.

I visited Joey on the set of his new sitcom, *Melissa & Joey* (co-starring **Melissa Joan Hart** as Mel. Both actors starred in the TV movie *My Fake Fiancé*, filmed for ABC Family, and because of the movie's success looked into working together on a series.), to get the scoop on his show [that debuted this fall] and what's coming up for the handsome actor.

*Melissa & Joey* is brilliantly entertaining. With a premise reminiscent of *Who's the Boss?* — with a twist — the well-written series has drawn the masses, including myself. Joey's character, Joe Longo, becomes Mel's "manny" when his successful career ends unexpectedly due to a Ponzi scheme implemented by Mel's brother-in-law (Joe's former boss). Joey personally created Joe Longo's persona, which he described as a cross between **Bruce Willis** and **Gordon Gekko**. "Really smart guy, ruthless, brutally honest, but has some sort of charm and wit about him like Bruce Willis does when he says things that he shouldn't be able to get away with. He can say, 'You don't really look that good in that dress.' Most guys you'd smack, but for some reason, *that* guy, you're like, 'That was kind of charming, in a weird way,' Joey said with a laugh.



### THE METRO-MALE

Joey confessed that fans might be surprised to find out...

"I'm a neat freak. I love things nice and tidy and neat. I've had to let a lot of that go with kids running around and stuff. I like things in order — sort of like a hotel. I love to shop. I love clothes. It's unfair for us to expect women to smell good and be all nice and smooth and all that stuff and guys can be nasty... smelling good and keeping yourself nice and tidy is important. Trying to be in good shape is important."

Though the show is featured on a network with the word family in its title, the series is geared toward a more mature audience. "It's not the typical cheesy sitcom. It's pretty edgy. The fans of the shows clearer aren't 12-year-olds, 25-year-olds, really — that's their audience: 18-34." The sarcastic and relatable interactions between the characters make for hilarious and amusing television. In the first episode, Joe addressed his shaved head. "*THIS* is a choice!" said to Mel, pointing to his head. I suspect that this joke was injected to put inquiring minds to rest, as Joey was known for having really great hair. "It is kind of a choice [laughs], sort of," Joey laughed. "Yeah, people are always like, 'What is it? Are you losing your hair or what?' It's not as thick as it used to be, so. I never liked a lot of hair and I always had too much." I assure him that it's a good look. Many ladies would concur. "It's alright. It works. It's easier to take care of," he modestly replied.

Known for working with his family in the past (*Brotherly Love*), Joey informed me that his brother **Matthew** will be appearing on an episode, slated to air right before Thanksgiving, as his not-so-close brother Tony Longo. Performing seems to run in the Lawrence family (his brothers Matthew and Andrew are actors). "I had a great mother, she's gotta lot of the arts and creativity that run through her veins too. But in her generation, and her parents, it was more, *Stay away from the arts, be a teacher, or something that is tangible*. When she saw that I had that in my veins, she said, 'I'm going to help facilitate it and see where it goes,'" said Joey, in regard to how his mother supported his decision to pursue acting as a child.

Joey, a bona fide family guy, and his wife **Chandie** (They met during Spring Break '93 at Disney World. "We were together for awhile, broke up for awhile. Got back together and ended up getting married there in 2005.") have two adorable daughters, **Charleston** (4) and **Liberty Grace** (8 months). Will the girls be following in the family business? "Uh, [pauses] I can't deny them that if that's really what they feel. In a weird way, I hope they don't. Ya know? Just cause I — but if they do, I'm going to make it as easy as possible. I'm going to protect them as much as I can," said Joey.

Joey is working on various other projects additionally. "I just finished a show for FOX. I can't talk about, but it's awesome. It'll premiere early next year. It's not a scripted thing, but it's going to be hilarious — kind of like *Punk'd*. I'm going to be in one of the first two episodes." There are some movies in the mix as well. He just sold a "hilarious, R-rated" rom-com to Disney titled, *Mr. Everything*. And next year, he begins filming *Havana Heat* in Columbia, alongside **Wesley Snipes** and **Ving Rhames**. "It's a big action, like *The Expendables*, type-thing. They're bringing back all these older guys and there's one young guy in it and that's my part. I play a cop. It's really cool," he exuberantly shared.

This multi-talented performer also carries a tune melliflously. At 16, he came out with his first album.

"I remember that album. It was part of my Easter gift one year," I confessed.

"No! No! OHMIGOD. That's crazy," Joey laughed.

"Nothing My Love Can't Fix."

"That's right. That's right. *Nothing my love can't fix for you ba-by*," he impressively belted out.

"I think it premiered after *Blossom*," I recollected.

"That's right. That's exactly right. Good memory. Woo! *Oh-oh-oh, nothing my love can't fix for you baby*," he sang once more.

Oh, I remember that video, what female who was around during that time, doesn't? Joey was *the* heartthrob then. [Trust me, he has maintained his hotness.] To be witness to a sampling of his musical talent, in his dressing room, was definitely a treat.

His brand-new album, which he worked on with **Matthew Gerrard**, comes out next year. "He's a great producer," Joey raved about Matthew. "He's had like 15 #1 hits written for everybody from **Jesse McCartney**, **Usher**, **Miley Cyrus**. He just believed in me so much that we made it ourselves. We're shopping the record (as a finished product) around labels right now. The music speaks for itself. It's a really good pop record, but it's tight. I'm excited about it."

In the company of significant talent and industry names, who hasn't Joey worked with, but hopes to one day? "I'd love to work with **Martin Scorsese**. He's Italian, I'm Italian, I think it would be so much fun. I always see him going, 'I need to find Italian guys,'" said in a Scorsese accent. "But, he always takes these actors and tries to make them Italian. Just tap into the energy of a real Italian guy, because it wouldn't have to go so far. I have to fight that when I play characters. Fight the urge to be like, 'Are you fucking kidding me? What are you doing?'" Also on his wish list: **J.J. Abrams**, **Natalie Portman**, **George Clooney**, **Matt Damon**, **Bruce Willis**, ["People say that we're similar. I'd love to be able to work with him in a movie."] and **Nancy Meyers** (*The Holiday*, *Something's Gotta Give*) — to name a few.

With a bunch of promising projects on the brink of blowing up, Joey is all set. "I think you're lucky if you know what you want to do, and then being able to do what you feel like you were put down here to do is the blessing... I don't always love my job. There are elements that I don't like at all. For the most part, I can't imagine myself doing anything else." Grateful for the advantages his career provides, especially the generous downtime it allows for him to spend with his kids, his ability to inspire is another upside. "I don't mind the part that puts you in a public arena. You can set an example, sorta be somebody out there that people go, 'Ok, that guy made it through — that's pretty cool.' You don't have to be a complete screw up to be a successful entertainer."

Don't miss Joey on *Melissa & Joey* on ABC Family Tuesdays at 8 PM. ML

### BEAUTY, BRAWN & BRAINS

Though, Joey is known for playing the not-so-bright Joey Russo, in reality, **HE** is an intellectual. "Education was paramount in my childhood. My mother was an educator. I think that education is important," said Joey, who was accepted to **Yale**, but because he was working turned it down for **U.S.C.** "Even having a good vocabulary is important, so that when people say, things like, 'Postulate this....' You're not like, 'What the hell does that mean?' It's kind of fun to be able to talk that way. Our language actually has some amazing words. It's kind of neat to be able to use them. It just takes a lot of work to have that kind of knowledge and to work hard in school. For some people it comes easy, for me it didn't. I had to work my rear-end off, but I did really well."

A predilection for law and politics would have driven Joey toward a career in either had he not become an actor. "Law is something that I really like. It's like fighting for something that's cool. The court room is kind of like the stage. And I love politics — I think it's like entertainment, in a way, but you can actually make a little bit of a difference. Maybe that's naïve of me to believe that, but I think you can get in there and shake some things up at least or at least stand for the right stuff — American values." What office is he interested in? He goes over the ladder of succession, "and then the White House or something." He has already envisioned himself as President? "Sure. Well, ya know. It's really funny. I mean, clearly, if that guy can. I mean, he came out of nowhere. That happened in 12 seconds," he joked. Joey Lawrence for President. Why not?