

# the last word *with*

## Michael Imperioli

by Iris Wiener

**M**ichael Imperioli is best known for his role on the HBO series “The Sopranos,” but he is also a writer and producer with lengthy film credits. Film-going audiences first spotted him in the role of Spider in “Goodfellas.” He went on to star in more than thirty films, including “Malcolm X,” “Clockers,” “Summer of Sam,” “Dead Presidents,” and “Sweet Nothing.” Before taking on “The Sopranos” he also graced the small screen in “NYPD Blue,” “Law and Order,” and “New York Undercover.” His work on “The Sopranos” has been nominated for two Best Supporting Actor Emmy Awards, and he has written five episodes. In addition to the friendships that have developed with the program’s success, it has opened up another arena for castmembers. In October he and Sopranos co-stars Steven Schirripa, John Ventimiglia, and Vincent Curatola performed “Comedy You Can’t Refuse” at the North Fork Theatre at Westbury.

**IM:** How did “Comedy You Can’t Refuse” start?

**Imperioli:** Besides being co-workers on “The Sopranos,” we’re very good friends. Since the show got successful we’ve been hired by casinos to do appearances for their high rollers and guests. Somehow casino audiences love “The Sopranos” so we’re kind of a draw. Schirripa used to be an entertainment director in Vegas, and he’s still involved in comedy and developing a television show. So all these things converged, and we kind of developed this evening of Italian-American music and comedy. It’s kind of a Rat Pack fantasy we live out for ourselves. [We] get on stage and perform and have a good time. And the audiences have a good time with us.

**IM:** You’ve worked on so many different films and television shows throughout your

career. Which ones are the most memorable?

**Imperioli:** “The Sopranos” has probably been the best experience I’ve had in show business just because it’s something that has developed over time — both the character, and the show. They started somewhere and evolved... In a movie you play a character in two hours. This has been thirteen hours over seven years, so we’re talking ninety hours of film. So it’s like forty-five movies with the same character. So you really get to explore the guy. I’d rather be with these people than anybody else in the business. I just love every minute of it, so this has been the best.

**IM:** Where do you see Christopher going in future episodes?

**Imperioli:** What’s going to be interesting to me is to see how he’s going to go on with what happened to Adriana. What are the feelings and how do they manifest, and how do they fester and how do they grow. That’s a big thing to have to go through. Feeling the betrayal from her and then doing what he had to do to make that decision to have her murdered and go on with that; Silvio killed her and what that means. I think that’s going to be interesting to see how that plays out in his psyche. All I know is that it’s not going to end pretty! However it ends is going to be ugly, I have that feeling.

**IM:** You’re really into New York theater. Tell me about your latest project.

**Imperioli:** I directed a play at an Off-Broadway theatre on 29<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan

called Studio Dante. My wife and I own it. My wife built it actually; she’s a designer. It’s a sixty-five seat theatre, we did it all from scratch, but it looks like a theatre from one-hundred years ago. It’s very beautiful, lots of antique architectural details. We develop and produce new plays. The show was our fourth play, called *Late Fragment*, about a man who survived the collapse of the Twin Towers, and his life in the aftermath of that. I was very proud of it.

**IM:** Having grown up in New York, do you have any Long Island experiences that stick out in your mind?

**Imperioli:** The very first rock concert I went to see was at Nassau Coliseum. It was Jethro Tull, and it was around 1981.

