

Married To The Mob: Q & A with Michele Santopietro

Spending Time with The Soprano

By Kevin R. Kosar

She cuts a striking figure- five-foot nine, thick red hair, green eyes. And she's not one for modest or bland dress. When I first encountered her, she was poured into a fitted, red cocktail dress. The next time, it was two-inch high, pink clogs and a leopard print dress. Walking through the East Village is a treat- guys stare and rubberneck, trying to see who this glam girl is and why I, a chronically poor dresser, am at her side.

Born in Pittsburgh, Michele Santopietro is a young woman of many talents. Trained in opera as a youth, a former long distance runner, and once tomboy, Santopietro took to acting in high school. Upon graduation she was offered numerous college scholarships- for science. She had excelled in the area and had seriously considered being a microbiologist. Instead, much to the horror of her parents, she turned down the free rides and enrolled in the acting program at the frightfully expensive NYU and earned her BFA. She's lived on the Lower East Side the last couple of years. Most recently, she played Jojo Palmice, wife of Mikey on the critically acclaimed *Sopranos* series on HBO. We met at the bar 2A.

KK: How are ya?

MS: (lifting her glass, she croons) "Here's to those who drink their dinner, here's to the loooooosers!" I love that song.

KK: Feeling a little down today?

MS: No, just fried- worn out. It has been an exhausting week. Audition after audition. It's a crazy business. You never know from one day to the next what your schedule is going to be...

[a call comes on her cell phone, she blushes]

KK: Oh no! You've become one of those people, the beautiful people!

MS: No, no, it's not true! I'm not one of those people. I hate having a cell phone. But my agent told me I HAVE TO carry a cell phone. Too often he would try to call me

with an audition the same day and he'd get my answering machine at home. Meanwhile, I'd be at The Crunch working out or whatever...I'm so embarrassed. My electronic leash.

KK: You say you weren't popular in high school. I have a hard time believing you.

MS: Please! I had no friends. I was the tall dorky girl with the buck-teeth who ran cross-country and studied biology. They were always picking on me- calling me "Little

Orphan Ugly," saying I had "wiffle-ball bat legs," calling me "bucky beaver."

KK: Unbelievable. If they could see you now...So they picked on you mercilessly and you still got up and did school plays?

MS: Yeah. I think that's part of the reason I decided to act. Maybe it was a matter of me wanting to prove them wrong. (She waves her fist and her



voice climbs self-deprecatingly high) I'LL SHOW YOU, I'LL SHOW ALL OF YOU!

KK: Everyone knows this is a harsh business. Why do you keep at it? It'd be so much easier to go do something else...and the pay would be steadier, right?

MS: Being an actor is the worst thing a person can do. It goes against all logic. And you find that people attempt to progressively strip you of your dignity. You want to work, as much as you can, so you find yourself jumping at parts. But you have to be wary, because there are all sorts of creeps and complete frauds out there, people with no script or money just looking to get you to take your clothes off.

KK: Sounds hellish.

MS: It usually is hell when you get started.

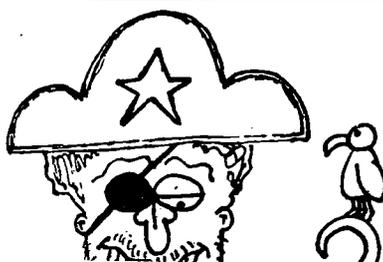
KK: So why bother?

MS: You do it because you have to. It's like you just know that you have to do this, and you can't really let yourself do something else. I wouldn't be happy doing something else. It's the most painful road to making it, and there are days when you want to put your head in the oven. But, when you know that you can make it, you just have to do it. So I am.

KK: So far your career

TOWER CLEARANCE OUTLET

20 East 4th Street • New York • New York • 10012



10/99

10/1999

seems to be on the soar. From NYU to doing a classic like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at Lee Strasberg, then Steve Brantley's *Distortion Taco* at PS 122, *The Snow Queen* at The Public Theater...Hobnobbing with Matthew Broderick and Mary Tyler Moore...Then film and television.

MS: Yeah, I'm really pumped. Working on *The Sopranos* was so great. These people are professionals. I had such a good time doing that and they were just great to work with.

KK: But at the same time you still decided to take the time to make a kooky B-movie.

MS: YES. *Summon the Ant Woman*- it was just screened at the Blue Room. It's a black and white film by Anthony Saladino. It's a murder story only it involves this Ant Woman from space. It was such a blast. Anthony allowed [the actors] to basically do whatever we wanted. So we all got to REALLY overact, in a hilarious, *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* sort of way.

KK: So what's next?

MS: Well, I just filmed some more scenes for this season's episodes of *The Sopranos*. And I've been auditioning for some commercials...And I'm costarring with Katherine Narducci and Michael Rispoli in an upcoming feature, *Two Family House*.

KK: Yeah?

MS: Yeah...and get this- Today I was walking down the street to an audition off-Broadway, and I went past this construction site, and these guys start hooting at me.

KK: Oh no.

MS: Yeah, and then one of the guys says, "Oh shit, that's that chick on *The Sopranos*." So one of them goes, "Hey, are you on *The Sopranos*?" So I said, "Yeah," and he goes, "Yeah, I recognized you from behind." DOH! Normally I would have been horrified, but this time I just kinda laughed and said, "Cool."



"First Date"