



Michael Hurst.

Height 175 cm

MC/Entertainer Biography
JOHNSON&LAIRD

If you ever meet with Michael Hurst, try to arrange a stair-free meeting place. The award-winning actor and director finds it impossible to just walk up or down stairs; instead he's compelled to run. He's also incredibly fit, meaning he won't be the one puffing at the top or bottom from exertion.

Michael was once on track to be an English or History teacher, but was spotted in a community theatre production and went on to become one of the country's leading actors, and an authority on Shakespeare. He's played everything from Hamlet and Macbeth to Mozart and a talking postbox that licked people to death, but prides himself on his version of English pantomime favourite the Widow Twanky (where he channels his mother, complete with broad Lancashire accent).

A witty and entertaining speaker, Michael has been MC and host of numerous events, including the New Zealand Leadership Forum dinner and business event Thrive Waikato. Expect the unexpected though, because he's not averse to a little dress-up, once donning purple tights and sparkly gold underpants for a celebrity debate, and a scarlet jumpsuit with stilts for the Schwarzkopf Professional Awards Gala (feel free to Google the images). He's also liable to break into song at any moment - a good thing, because he's got an excellent set of pipes. Each year he and wife, fellow thespian and singer Jennifer Ward-Lealand, fly to the US to entertain the crowds with a cabaret at the annual Xena convention. Fans of swords and sandals TV will remember Michael's role, as Iolaus, sidekick and best friend to legendary Greek hero Hercules, in the popular TV series Hercules: The Legendary Journeys, and his appearance in Xena, Warrior Princess.

There's more than a touch of the romantic in Michael. He once trekked around Greece's Peloponnese with little more than some clothes, some poetry and copies of the Iliad and the Odyssey in his rucksack. As a boy he chose the dashing sport of fencing over rugby, going on to become a high school champion, and later, to choreograph duels and fights for stage and screen.

If he ever finds himself sitting still, he'll read. He's been in the same book club for eight years, and also has a collection of what he reckons are slightly valuable first edition sci-fi novels from the 1950s and 1960s that he bought as a teenager (but read in secret because it wasn't yet cool to read sci-fi). He's also well-versed in ancient religion and civilisation, philosophy, new reason and of course, everything Shakespearean.

Michael is a driving force behind a lot of the country's theatre and arts. He was a co-founder of the Watershed Theatre and co-founder and Artistic Director of The Large Group, and also co-founded the movie production company Screen Adventures. He whips up enthusiasm for Shakespeare at schools and universities across the country, and he and Jennifer are patrons of the Auckland Performing Arts Centre (TAPAC), and champions of Auckland's New Theatre Initiative.

Although still young at heart, Michael reckons his chances of playing the young king Hamlet are slowly decreasing (even with makeup and lights). He looks forward instead, to one day taking on the juicy role of old King Lear, and dreams of having his own theatre company.

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