



'Sopranos' Actor Michael Imperioli Visits Buffalo State Poetry Class

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By **Sabrina Kahwaty**



Buffalo State University is committed to providing students with memorable learning experiences. Liz Mariani, lecturer in Buffalo State's **College Writing Program**, facilitated one such experience when she invited acclaimed actor **Michael Imperioli** to speak to 30 students enrolled in ENG 151: Introduction to Poetry.

"I ask for big things," said Mariani, an **established written and spoken word poet**. "I realized I had a friend who's super famous and loves poetry, so I said, 'Would you want to share a poem that you wrote for discussion in the course?' and he said yes."

Imperioli is an Emmy Award-winning actor known for the roles of Christopher Moltisanti in the HBO crime drama *The Sopranos*, Spider in Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas*, and Dominic Di Grasso in the second season of HBO Max's *The White Lotus*. He is also a writer, singer, and meditation instructor and maintains an active social media presence, which led to his connection with Mariani.

"Being Italian American, I have a relationship with how media portrays Italian Americans," Mariani said. "I appreciate a lot about the *Sopranos*, and Michael Imperioli was always one of my favorite actors. I started to follow him on Instagram during the pandemic and we messaged back and forth. He demonstrated a level of humanity on his page that not a lot of celebrities did. He was very kind."

After having conversations and sharing poetry, Imperioli and Mariani met in person when Imperioli's band visited San Francisco, where Mariani was completing an M.F.A. in poetry at Mills College. The two have since maintained a friendship. When Mariani asked Imperioli if he would come and speak to her class, he was happy to oblige.

"Liz is as inspiring as a teacher as she is as an artist," Imperioli said. "The art of poetry taught by a poet...what a gift for the students of Buffalo State."

The class follows a read-and-discuss structure; after students experience the poetry, Mariani facilitates discussion and encourages sharing of interpretations, feelings, and even philosophical debate.

"The pandemic did a number on our personalities and spirits," Mariani said. "Students are a lot shyer. I wanted to create a safe space for discourse."

During his visit in April, Imperioli shared a poem he'd written based on a personal experience.

"We were talking to a poet about a poem he wrote for an actual, real-life human thing," Mariani said. "That's the purpose of poetry."

"It was meaningful to see how poetry is a subjective experience for the reader and how each unique reader interprets the text," Imperioli said.

Bryan Harris, a junior theater major and returning student, admitted he had to "fight down some excitement." He's been an Imperioli fan for years, he said, but didn't know the actor was also a poet.

"Seeing this person that I hold in such high regard, having him share his poetry, and listening to our takes on it was really awesome," Harris said. "It reminded me that you can't put people in boxes. There's more to all of us than meets the eye."

Harris said the experience not only reaffirmed his theatrical career goals but also gave him courage to share his poetry.

"I write some poetry, but I never thought that I'd put it out there," he said. Being in that class opened me up to more avenues to express my artistic endeavors."

"It was such a gift to be able to teach poetry this semester," Mariani said. "Education is not just students paying for a service; it's a human experience and an opportunity to do things like build peace. That's why I pull out all the stops for my students—so they feel respected and appreciated."

Buffalo State lecturer Liz Mariani and actor Michael Imperioli.

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