



Rico and co-star Jessica Alba in the upcoming film, Dear Eleanor.

Who Says You Can't Have It All?

The Charmed Life of Dr. Rico Simonini

NO doubt you've seen his face in big dollar action films and TV shows (Max Payne, A Good Day To Die Hard, My Sister's Keeper) and long-running theatrical productions from New York to LA including, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, and Brooklyn USA, among many others. He recently wrapped Dear Eleanor, a film directed by Kevin Conolly (Entourage), in which he appeared along side Jessica Alba. Currently and through the end of September, he is starring as Frank Sinatra in the hit stage production, Frank and Ava; a role that is garnering him a wide range of acclaim playing one of the most iconic stars of all time.

With a leg-long list of acting, directing writing and producing credits under his belt, it's hard to imagine Rico Simonini has time for much else. Not so. Most people struggle through life hoping to find one great passion to enrich their life. But Simonini isn't just anyone. His talent along with a pushing drive to live life to the fullest puts him in a category that few can accomplish. Simonini —Dr. Simonini to us—is a top cardiologist at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Beverly Hills, California. Hum... entertaining and saving lives? To some, it might seem an unlikely combination, but not to Simonini who says his professions are very connected. And how does all this play out in real life-real time? With a workaholic mind set, he manages a tighter than tight schedule with incredible ease. His strategy for success: He doesn't take what most of us think of as a "vacation" because he says he truly loves his medical profession and doesn't feel a need to get away from it. Instead, if cast in film, television or stage role, he takes "free" time to indulge in his other passion—acting; citing thespian/physician Anton Chekhov who said he was married to medicine but the theatre was his mistress.

"For me, being a cardiologist and actor come down to the same thing: it's about the heart. Care for a heart or give your heart and have passion for what you do. There are a lot of hearts to save. My father was in his 50s when he had his first heart attack.

He was lucky that at the time his son was in medical school and could do something about it. For most who survive a first heart attack, adherence to medical therapy, risk factor awareness, modification and lifestyle changes remain a challenge."

During medical school and post-graduate training, his research focused on cardiology and inflammation (what really causes damage to the heart muscle and leads to heart failure; damages blood vessels leading to the growth of plaque that can block arteries, rupture and cause heart attacks). So it wasn't unlikely that he would end up on staff at the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute as well as UCLA Medical Center. Simonini's approach to preventing heart disease revolves around lifestyle management. His popular lectures, seminars, and workshops, radio interviews and numerous medical and health articles in which he appears, center on the importance of moderation in everyday life.

And, Rico doesn't just play a tough guy on film. In real life, he is a no-nonsense health advocate who lobbies for the cause of cardiovascular care, and who doesn't think twice about taking on the drug companies that he feels contribute to the excessive penetration and extreme dependence of certain prescription medications in our society. At his Beverly Hills medical practice, an office he has shared for over 10-years with cardiologist, Dr. Jay Schapira and Dr. John Harold, who is President of the American College of Cardiology, Simonini advocates a preventative heart care program.

"Heart disease is still the number one killer in America. For some, the first attack is more likely to be their last. Each year some 325,000 people in the U.S. die from sudden cardiac death (usually 40-65 age group). It is especially

important that we find ways to predict and prevent that first heart attack. Early intervention can be life-saving."

Through combined efforts with his colleagues in the College of Cardiology, the Heart Institute, and non-profit organizations such as GUARDaHEART, Simonini is working on ways to more accurately predict who is at risk. He cautions that cholesterol numbers are not enough as over 40% of heart attack victims have NORMAL levels. **"Other factors such as inflammation in a person's arteries may pose the biggest risk for heart attack."**

Simonini's current research examines the ability using a blood test that measures seven biomarkers of inflammation to predict heart attacks. Still, having people know and understand their risk and adhere to interventions are the key.

"I tell patients that diet and exercise still play a major role in the quest for longevity."

Just as he owes his need to mend hearts to his father's health, Simonini attributes his love for Hollywood and film to the many late nights watching movies with his mother when he was very young. It was the great performances by the likes of Gable, Bogart, and Brando he never forgot.

"I never thought I would perform myself. In acting one takes big risks hoping people appreciate what you do. Medicine is about minimizing risks. While medicine helps people in real life, film takes people out of their real lives if only for a couple of hours. Sometimes that means everything." ●

Frank & Ava
Three Clubs Lounge on Vine Street
www.hollywoodfringe.org
Sundays at 5:00 PM

