

Society



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Cause

Your Own
Travel
Guide to
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Flashback:

Best of Two Years Of Toil and Trouble

By Nadine Fares

rebel with a cause

Michel Elefteriades

Nightclub owner Michel Elefteriades admits he is complex, unstable even, and that some people think he should be institutionalised. But he says he is true to his philosophy on life - that 'everything should be allowed'. Society's Nadine Fares explores the mind of the man in the wacky clothes .

“People do not realise my value and I suffer from that. For example Ziad Rahbani does not have to dress differently to show everyone he hates the world he lives in... If you hate the world you want people to know it...my clothes, my rings show the hatred I have towards life - especially towards priests and checkpoints. I make it a point to irritate them.”

His face is familiar to many, but are his ideas familiar? You see him at the Amor Y Libertad nightclub, fixing the lights or preparing the stage. He joins in with the band, all bubbly and happy. He feels the music within him, sometimes even performing, but always joining in the party going on at his nightclub. Michel Elefteriades, 28, is the eldest son of a family known for many generations as a production house for talent. This is the family that brought the Paris Lido Dancers to Lebanon, for example. Besides being a night-

club owner, Michel sings, paints, produces and composes.

“People just do not appreciate me. But I am sure that one day soon, hopefully at the beginning of the new millennium, everyone will know me and respect the way I think.” He says he is a good businessman. He loves organising things and making money, but hates the world he lives in, and the only thing that makes him happy is to be reminded of his adolescence before he was exposed to the real world.

There is a struggle going on within him. “Sometimes I feel I am about to collapse. I need time alone, to think and give myself some space to return and continue my life,” he said. “Maybe something I eat makes me feel good...something pure. I am divided - between the good businessman and the communist who hates money,” he explained. “But it tires me sometimes.”

The way Michel thinks has nothing to do with his family. They brought him up well. He does not drink. “I have natural adrenaline. After years of disciplining myself, people still think I am on drugs. But I am not.”

He says he is an artist, not a technician. “An art technician may paint beautifully but is not an artist. An artist can express himself fully, no matter what he is doing. If I do not have paint and a brush, then I can write. I can still create art and release my feelings.”

Michel studied fine arts in France. “I love literature and philosophy and read over eight

books a week.” He enjoys reading philosophy. “It has helped me shape my way of thinking today. It was funny that a Catholic school would have books by Karl Marx lying around.”

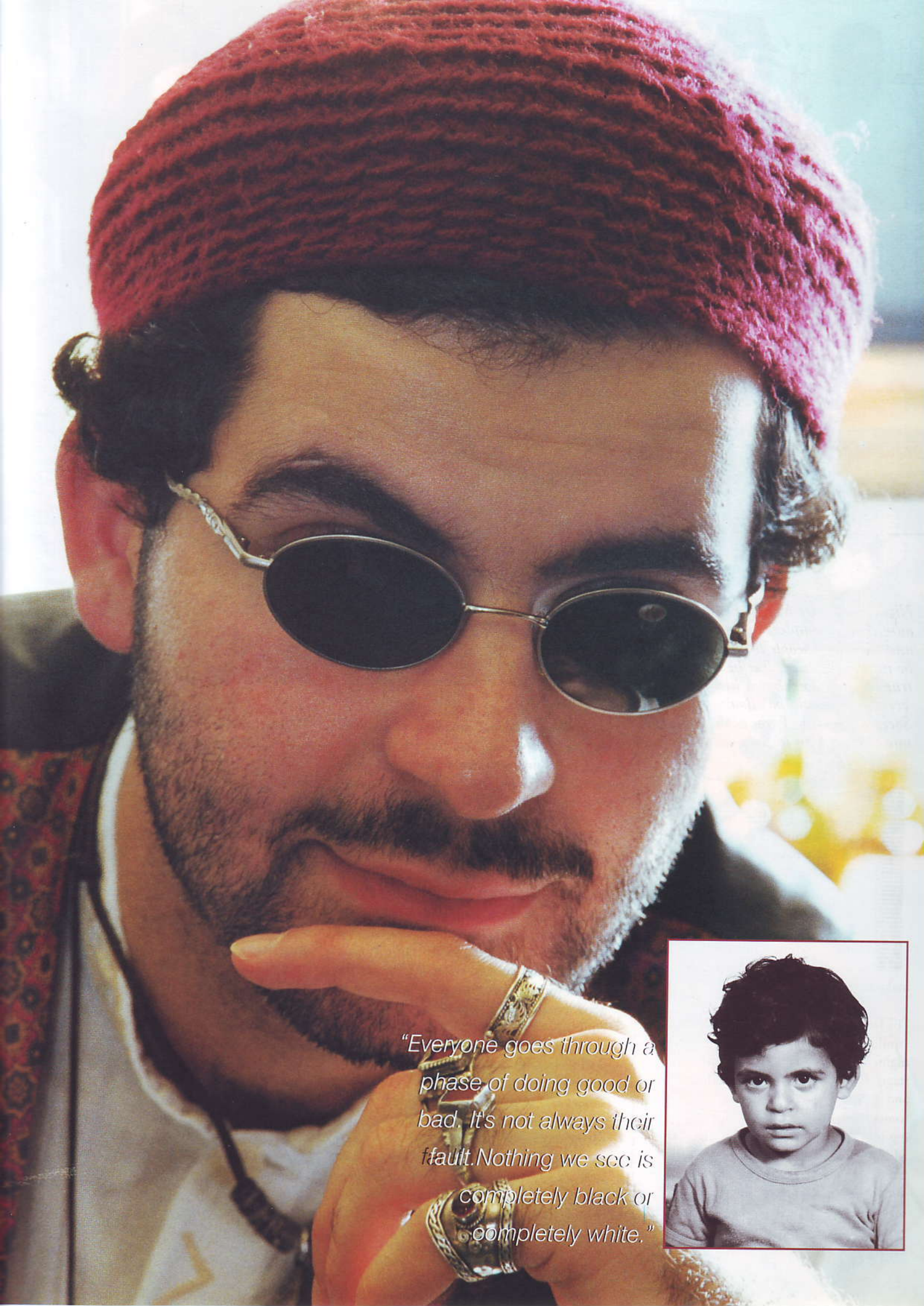
He feels nothing for religion. “I have no sense of religion, except for the one I have created from reading about morals and metaphysics. What I believe in is here on earth...and from other religions which exist such as Buddhism or animism.” He used to break any religious icons he found. “They get on my nerves. I hate religion, it gives me an allergy,” he said bluntly.

Ironically, he wanted to become a priest when he was 14, “But before taking any further steps I had to find out if God really existed. I went through a major period of reading all about Catholic saints and related subjects, but nothing made any sense. If God does exist, I hate him...He sits there and watches all the bad things that happen. I'd rather say he does not exist.

“Religious people only care about the power they hold and the money they make. History speaks for itself here.”

According to Michel, people give themselves more worth than they deserve. “Who and what are we...or even more, what were we? Who remembers? We were born from nothing and we will be nothing after death. We tend to give ourselves value depending to the position we have reached in our society.”

He hates people in uniform. “I was beaten up



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many times because I provoked them. They had a role in making me feel the way I do now, about my rage towards them. Some people have said I need to be put in an institution."

In 1989, Michel was asked to join an exhibition organised by French artists in Beirut's Central District. He created a surrealist artwork on a huge wall. "I wanted to make a home for the Jews killed in the Second World War by the Nazis. As long as we do not admit to our wrongs, only means we are saying that what the Jews are doing now is right.

"We have to admit to the wrong to get the right. Everyone goes through a phase of doing good or bad. It is not always their fault. Nothing we see is completely black or completely white. Maybe Jews have the right to find themselves a place to call home, but the way they did it was wrong.

"This was the message I wanted to get across...sarcastically. It caught the attention of the international media, the police here wanted to destroy it especially since I used really shocking pictures of a woman's genitalia - expressing the idea of the doors to paradise." It is obvious Michel is a rebel. "I believe nothing should be labeled 'not allowed'."

As long as it does not hurt others, they can simply look away. "I like to tease people, but I do not intend to change the way they think."

He likes to shock, especially in the way he dresses. "Anyone can understand my character through my clothes. I would not be representing myself if I did not dress like this. A fashion addict has no self-identity."

What of Michel's views on women? "Women complain about things but it is their fault - they fight for independence but still want men to play the same role, like opening doors. It is like a young girl who wants to live her life the way she wants under her parents' roof. Why doesn't she move out, work and pay for her rent, and then act the way she wants?"

"As you can see, I am not an easy person to be around," he grinned. "I think it will be difficult for me to marry. Living with me is hard and it does get tiring."

Although he admits to being unstable, Michel is content with himself. "I have my share of egocentricity. People get attached to me for being different, but I do have negative characteristics."

He thinks most people are weak. "I am a natural leader," he declared.