



A NOVEL BY  
**MICHAEL  
IMPERIOLI**

**THE  
PERFUME  
BURNED  
HIS  
EYES**

*"Vividly imagined."*  
—Joyce Carol Oates

Available from Akashic Books April 3, 2018

**PRESS KIT**



# THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES

BY MICHAEL IMPERIOLI



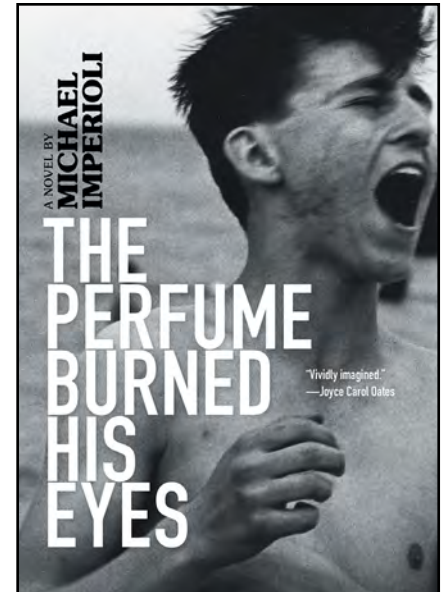
A teenager develops an unlikely friendship with Lou Reed in 1970s NYC, in a standout debut from TV/film star Michael Imperioli (*The Sopranos*, etc.)

## PRAISE FOR THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES

“Screenwriter and Emmy-winning actor Imperioli’s first novel is the atmospheric coming-of-age story of 17-year-old Matthew, whose mother moves them from Queens to a posh apartment in Manhattan in 1976 . . . Matt is a not an atypical teenager—think Holden Caulfield without the cynicism—but, often afraid and awkward, he is a reactor, not an actor, until the end of the novel, which, without foreshadowing, comes as a harrowing surprise . . . Imperioli can definitely write, and he gets high marks for the verisimilitude and empathy that he evokes in this fine crossover novel.” —**Booklist, Starred review**

“Imperioli’s lived-in details about the city help make the world feel realistic . . . [The novel] is an immersive trip into its narrator’s memories of a turbulent time. Some fictional trips into 1970s New York abound with nostalgia; this novel memorably opts for grit and heartbreak.” —**Kirkus Reviews**

“Vividly imagined, compelling, and sympathetic, *The Perfume Burned His Eyes* convinces with the force of its emotional intensity.” —**Joyce Carol Oates**



## ABOUT THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES

Matthew is a sixteen-year-old boy living in Jackson Heights, Queens, in 1976. After he loses his two most important male role models, his father and grandfather, his mother uses her inheritance to uproot Matthew and herself to a posh apartment building in Manhattan. Although only three miles away from his boyhood home, “the city” is a completely new and strange world to Matthew.

Matthew soon befriends (and becomes a factotum of sorts to) Lou Reed, who lives with his transgender girlfriend Rachel in the same building. The artistic-shamanic rocker eventually becomes an unorthodox father figure to Matthew, who finds himself head over heels for the mysterious Veronica, a wise-beyond-her-years girl he meets at his new school.

The novel is written from the point of view of Matthew at age eighteen, two years after the story begins, and concludes with an epilogue in the year 2013, three days after Lou Reed’s death, with Matthew in his fifties.

## ABOUT MICHAEL IMPERIOLI



**MICHAEL IMPERIOLI** is best known for his starring role as Christopher Moltisanti in the acclaimed TV series *The Sopranos*, which earned him a Best Supporting Actor Emmy Award. He also wrote five episodes of the show and was co-screenwriter of the film *Summer of Sam*, directed by Spike Lee. Imperioli has appeared in six of Lee’s films and has also acted in films by Martin Scorsese, Abel Ferrara, Walter Hill, Peter Jackson, and the Hughes Brothers. Upcoming projects include Bruno de Almeida’s *Cabaret Maxime*, *The Last Full Measure* alongside Peter Fonda, Christopher Plummer, and William Hurt, and ABC’s *Alex, Inc.*

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## PRAISE FOR **THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES**

### Booklist

★ STARRED Review | February 1, 2018

**Screenwriter and Emmy-winning actor** (he played Christopher Moltisanti on *The Sopranos*) **Imperioli's first novel is the atmospheric coming-of-age story of 17-year-old Matthew, whose mother moves them from Queens to a posh apartment in Manhattan in 1976.** It's a new world for Matthew, who is enrolled in a tony private school where he meets and falls for the inscrutable Veronica, a loner who claims to be a witch. She is not the only one with whom he is smitten, however, for he soon meets the celebrated musician Lou Reed, who lives in his building along with his transgender girlfriend. Reed is welcoming in a distracted sort of way, and Matt is soon a fixture in his apartment, running errands and accompanying Reed on adventures. Meanwhile, he has learned that, to earn money, Veronica turns tricks, and, indeed, he will be awkwardly involved in one of her encounters. It is Reed, however, who commands center stage; drug-addled and solipsistic, he is a combination musical genius (though we never see him perform) and offbeat father figure to Matt, who, now 18, tells his first-person story in retrospect. **Matt is not an atypical teenager—think Holden Caulfield without the cynicism—but, often afraid and awkward, he is a reactor, not an actor, until the end of the novel, which, without foreshadowing, comes as a harrowing surprise.** Several plot points remain unresolved, but **Imperioli can definitely write, and he gets high marks for the verisimilitude and empathy that he evokes in this fine crossover novel.**

### KIRKUS

February 1, 2018

The protagonist of this coming-of-age novel set in late-1970s New York City falls under the wing of an unlikely mentor: Lou Reed.

The *Sopranos* actor Imperioli's first novel begins with a family sundered. Narrator Matthew details the death of his estranged father, his mother's growing dependence on pills, and an inheritance that prompts the two of them to leave the confines of their Queens neighborhood for an upscale apartment in Manhattan. Among their neighbors is Lou Reed, at a point in his life when he rapidly veered from grandiose to paranoid, from generous to menacing. As Matthew comes to terms with his feelings for his classmate Veronica, he becomes increasingly aware of perspectives other than his own, along with a growing restlessness. Early on, Matthew recalls a dinner with a boorish friend of his that quickly turns violent, as he lashes out after his friend makes a number of grotesque and sexist comments. At the beginning of the next chapter, he pauses and then recants his earlier words: "I'm a liar. A liar and a coward." Imperioli plays with this kind of narrative tension throughout. The arc of the novel—a young man forming a tense, unpredictable bond with a mercurial mentor—is familiar, but **Imperioli's lived-in details about the city help make the world feel realistic.** And while some of the novel's characters, Veronica in particular, call out for more time on the page, the end result is **an immersive trip into its narrator's memories of a turbulent time.**

**Some fictional trips into 1970s New York abound with nostalgia; this novel memorably opts for grit and heartbreak.**

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## PRAISE FOR **THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES**



February 26, 2018

**A restless Queens teenager becomes the protégé of music legend Lou Reed in Imperioli's energetic debut novel.** When Matthew is in high school, his father abandons the family a few months before dying. Matthew's grandfather also dies suddenly, and not long after; his mother scoops up her inheritance and moves them to a new apartment on East 52nd Street in Manhattan. Matthew gets a job as a delivery boy for a neighborhood diner, and a delivery to an apartment in his own building thrusts him into the vibrant and erratic artistic world of singer Lou Reed. It's 1976, and 34-year-old Reed is a legend in the making. Imperioli's depiction of Reed's milieu may remind readers of Andy Warhol's factory, with an ever-changing entourage and an impulsive, charismatic artist at its center. Lou takes Matthew to a bar for the first time, and renames him Tim (as a joke, after the falsetto singer Tiny Tim). This becomes his new identity, just as Lou becomes his surrogate father. Along the way, there's first love, experimentation with drugs, and other standard elements of a bildungsroman. If Imperioli's Lou Reed is a bit generic, he nevertheless comes across as a charismatic rocker. **Matthew's first-person narrative is full of endearing vulnerability, immediacy, and authenticity. This is a sweet and nostalgic coming-of-age novel.**

April 1, 2018



**Actor Imperioli (*The Sopranos*) delivers a spot-on coming-of-age novel.** It's 1976, and 16-year-old Matthew is uprooted from the relative quiet of Jackson Heights, Queens, to midtown Manhattan after his mother scores a windfall. A keen observer and relatively reliable narrator, he experiences a busload of "firsts." Like a girlfriend: the brilliant and beautiful Veronica, who is also a witch (literally) who turns tricks. Their first sexual experience is one of the creepiest in modern fiction. And he is befriended by an ultra-odd father figure (wait for it, unless the title gave it away): Lou Reed. Lou is in that drugged-out period between the benign "Rock and Roll Heart" and the darkest-of-dark "Street Hassle." There are many strange set pieces, and here's one. Lou takes Matt to a dive for Matt's first gin and tonic and gives him quarters to play the jukebox. Trying hard to find something Lou might like, he chooses "Duke of Earl" but hits the wrong buttons and gets Tiny Tim, causing Lou to call him Tim for the rest of the way. It's not all fun: there's a suicide, a stay in a psych ward, and Lou disappears. But it's a trip. **VERDICT A winner**, though the strange cover art may discourage some readers.

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PRAISE FOR THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES

# NEW YORK POST

April 2, 2018

## Show's creator shaped my new book: Imperioli

By MAX JAEGER

There's a secret connection between HBO's "The Sopranos" and former star Michael Imperioli's new novel about Lou Reed — and it's all in the details.

Imperioli, who played Christopher Moltisanti in the classic Mafia series, told *The Post* on Sunday that "Sopranos" creator and long-time writer David Chase taught him that details are the heartbeat of good fiction.

"He was a very big influence on me as a writer — particularly in terms of details being of utmost importance," Imperioli said before sitting down to an Easter dinner of stuffed artichokes and prosciutto at his parents' home in Mount Vernon.

"How that really anchors and fleshes out the work — I never read anybody who was as committed to details as he is," said the Emmy-winning actor, whose debut novel, "The Perfume Burned His Eyes," comes out Tuesday.

Imperioli's book follows a Queens teen named Matthew as his shattered family moves from Jackson Heights to Manhattan, where he finds an unlikely mentor in a drug-addled Lou Reed.

Early reviews have praised Imperioli for bringing mid-1970s New York to life, with celebrated novelist Joyce Carol Oates hailing his work as "visibly imagined."

Imperioli, who is used to writing for the screen, said he had to dive deep into Queens to ensure his novel rang true.

"I wasn't familiar with Jackson Heights. I had to take some trips," he said. "I had to do some research to find locations that were there at the time — what high school the kid would go to or a diner that was open."

Imperioli said videos posted to YouTube gave him a firsthand look at life in the area circa 1978.

"What was really cool was, I found somebody's home movies in Jackson Heights — kids playing touch football in the neighborhood," he said. "It was like getting a little time capsule of what this kid's life was like."

When it came to portraying the



# SOPRANO WRITES A LOU REED

**VELVET TOUCH:** "Sopranos" alum Michael Imperioli (left) says his debut novel, which features late rocker Lou Reed (inset) as a character, was influenced by show creator David Chase's attention to detail

said he never thought to use Reed as a character until after the musician and East Village mainstay died of liver disease in 2013.

"Initially, it was just about the boy, and then after [Reed] died, it just hit me," Imperioli recalled. "It was a moment of inspiration — what if this kid and Lou's paths crossed?"

Imperioli sees his novel as an homage to Reed, who "could be a pretty prickly character" but who also showed "compassion, kindness and generosity" to those closest to him.

"I knew I was going to portray him in a way that was a tribute. Of course, as a writer, you have doubts that the book's gonna be any good, but now that this is done and going out into the world, I feel like I did what I was trying to," Imperioli said.

[nypost.com](http://nypost.com)

legendary rocker, Imperioli had some of the best source material possible: The pair became friends in 2000.

They had exchanged letters and did philanthropic work together.

Imperioli, who also sings and plays guitar, even hung out with the former Velvet Underground front man in the music studio.

The actor knew he wanted to write a coming-of-age novel but

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# MICHAEL IMPERIOLI ON THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES

# People

Chatter  
April 2, 2018



**Q&A**

**Michael Imperioli**  
The *Sopranos* alum, 51, stars in the new ABC comedy *Alex, Inc.*

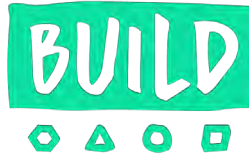
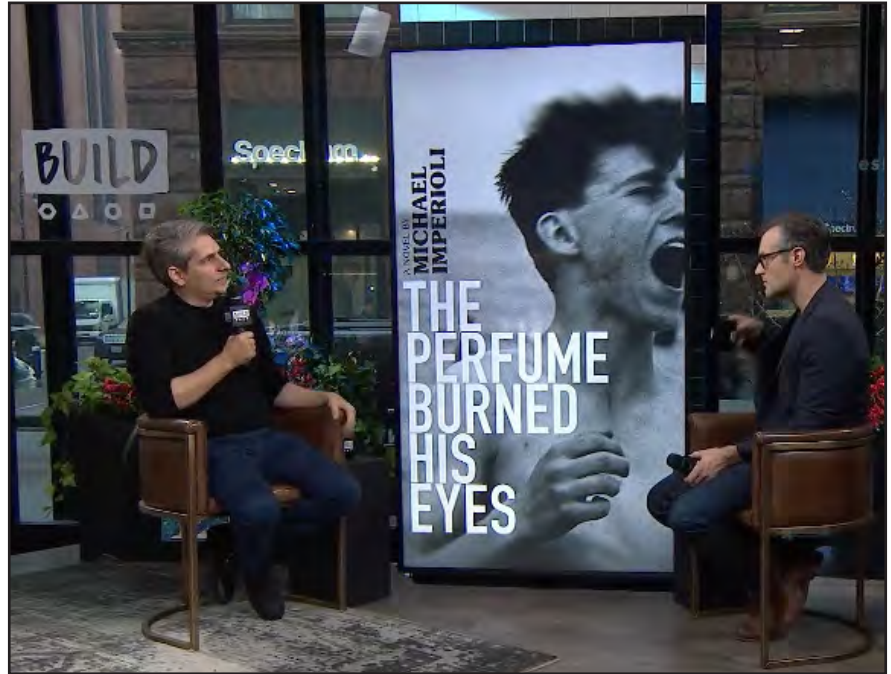
**Why did you want to do this series?**  
I liked the idea of doing a comedy. And a steady job is a really good thing when you're raising kids and sending them to college.

**How was the production?**  
We shot in L.A. at Sony, which is the old MGM, where they shot *The Wizard of Oz*. It was cool being on a real Hollywood lot.

**You're about to release your first novel, *The Perfume Burned His Eyes*. What inspired you to write it?**  
I'm raising teenage boys, so I started thinking that it might be a good subject to explore. And Lou Reed, who is a mentor in the book, was a hero of mine. I started writing, and this story came out.

**What does a perfect day off entail for you?**  
Hanging out at home with the family, cooking, reading. I'm not out dancing till 5 in the morning anymore.

—JULIE JORDAN



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March 27, 2018



**New York Live**  
**NBC 4 New York**  
March 28, 2018

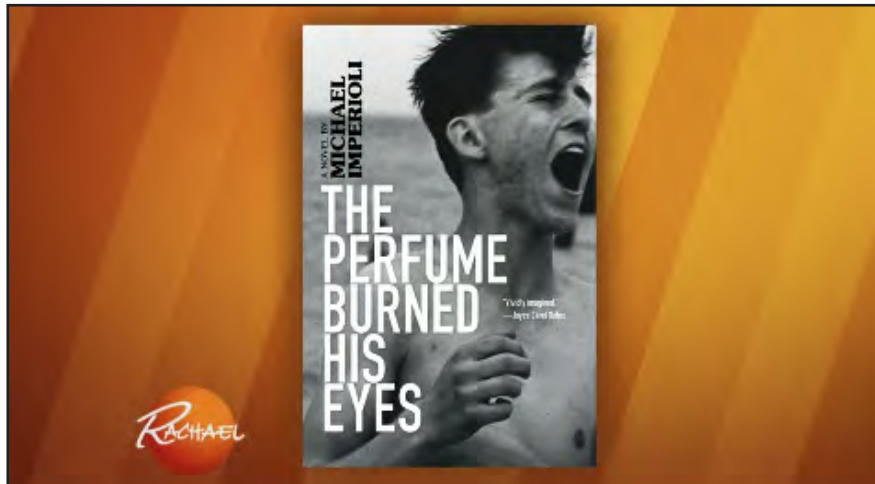
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# MICHAEL IMPERIOLI ON THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES



**Rachael**  
April 5, 2018

**I**n Emmy-award winning **Sopranos** actor **Michael Imperioli's** first novel, *The Perfume Burned His Eyes* (Akashic Books), a 16-year-old boy (think Holden Caulfield in edgier circumstances) comes of age in New York City with a little help from rocker **Lou Reed**. Here are three all-time favorites from Imperioli, who says he reads fiction non-stop.



*(David Imperioli)*

**Parade**

**Parade Magazine**  
April 1, 2018

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If you watched *The Sopranos*—and who didn't? You know Michael Imperioli, the Emmy-award winning actor who brilliantly played the part of Tony Soprano's nephew, Christopher Moltisanti. This Renaissance man has written for TV—he wrote five *Sopranos* episodes and he co-wrote the screenplay for Spike Lee's film, *Summer of Sam*, among his many other projects. Imperioli recently took a break from filming the sci-fi History TV drama *Blue Book*, which is based on real-life Project Blue Book (implemented by the U.S. Army to investigate UFOs around the time of nuclear testing in the 1960s), to talk with *Parade* about writing his first novel, *The Perfume Burned His Eyes* (Akashic Books), which is an edgy coming-of-age romp set in New York City prominently featuring the "character" of rocker Lou Reed.

### **Is it true you started writing the book—which features a teenage boy—as a way to relate to your teenage son?**

Yes. One of my children was going through what every teenager goes through, facing their own challenges. I wanted to relate to that frame of mind and just started thinking about this character. It's not based on anybody real, it's all something out of the imagination. And around the same time, Lou died. I was lucky enough to become friends with him in the last dozen or so years of his life.

He was my hero. So his death impacted me in a lot of ways. Both on a personal level and thinking of him as a representation of the artistic later part of the 20th century and not having him around anymore and what that meant to the world. Somehow those two things turned into a story.

### **Did you start the story before you even knew it would be a published novel? What was the goal?**

The goal was to write it as a fiction, as prose and as a novel. I love fiction and read novels constantly. It's a love for me. I have a background writing screenplays and teleplays. I've tried to write prose and fiction but never really completed anything I thought worthy of publication or worthy of anyone else to even look at. And then once I found the voice of the character it really carried me through.

### **Writing novels is much different than writing for television. Did you find that to be true?**

I did find that to be true. [Novel writing] is a much more solitary thing. Where TV and screenplays are often, well for me at least, it's been collaborative for the most part. With screenplays and teleplays they are mapped really in the blueprint of a finished product which is something you're going to watch on a screen. But a book is an end to itself really. And there was something about that, that I really wanted to pursue. Not have to write something and then wait to get it produced or have somebody approve it or have somebody decide they want to do it as this or that and maybe if you change it we can produce it. It's like the book, it is what it is and that's it.

### **Were you able to work on it in a block of time, uninterrupted time? Or did you have to do it for a bit and then come back to it?**

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I only did it when I was at home, not on the road and not on location. It's something that when I wouldn't be shooting a project I could devote a lot of time to. I needed to devote regular time and uninterrupted time. It wasn't something I could do while I was doing something else. I found it a lot more meditative than anything else I had done. I really had to kind of close the door and be alone and no phones or anything and just have that quiet space.

**Did you ever feel like, okay that's it, I've got to stop fixing this book? It really is done, it is the best that it can be?**

Well, two years after I started I got to the end of the story and I realized I think this is done and then I got it to my publisher, Johnny Temple at Akashic Books, an incredible independent publisher. They are just marvelous. Their list of books is tremendous and they're just great people. He gave me some notes that were not about changing anything, but about adding something in some certain sections. And it helped me a lot. I thought about, okay I saw some spaces where some more material could work and went after it. And that was it after that.

**Is it fun for you to talk about the book when it's finished? At signings and for interviews? Or is that a drudge?**

No it's fun. This project was very, very, very personal to me. So I'm really happy that it's going out into the world. It's something that I'm very happy to talk about.

**You've had some impressive reviews. One from Joyce Carol Oates. Not bad for a first-time novelist!**

She was one of the early readers. She's one of my favorites. I love her writing. I met her a long time ago. I remember having the greatest conversation with her. She's a wonderful human being. I actually just contacted her for advice about publishing and she said if you send [the book], maybe I'll read it. And she did. So I got some early notes from her, which were very helpful.

**Besides the great comments from Joyce Carole Oates, the blurb from (*Orange Is the New Black* actor) Nick Sandow said the book allowed him to be a teen without judgment.**

Yeah and we can survive that and you can plant the seeds for a good adulthood and make us good human beings.

**Did writing about Lou Reed around the time of his death make you sad or was it a chance to celebrate his life? Or maybe a little bit of both?**

It made me celebrate him and it really was nice. I didn't know Lou at that time of his life. I met him around 1999 or 2000 so he wasn't the crazy druggie that he was in the 70s, but it was fun spending time with him in that imaginary sense. It did bring me some kind of comfort. What I tried to do in the book, despite his living this pretty crazy life and consuming a lot of chemicals, there was still the artist and there was still a human being. A kindness beneath all that stuff. Despite the volatility that there was a compassion and the kindness and I think as he got older and he slayed some of those demons, compassion and kindness became much more dominant in his personality. That's the Lou that I knew.

**The novel definitely seems visual to me. Do you think it might be a film someday?**

Maybe. I think it does have some potential. I mean it wasn't written with that in mind at all, but let's see. Why not?

**Do you think you have another novel in you? Any plans?**

I have a bunch of notes on something that I haven't really sat down and started writing it. I just started compiling some notes and ideas for it. So yeah, I think so. Hope so.

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## PRAISE FOR **THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES**

“Even though Reed looms large throughout—the novel even takes its title from Reed’s ‘Romeo Had Juliette,’ from his 1989 solo album *New York*—the book is much less about him and more about Matthew’s own journey through adolescence in the seedier corners of 1970s New York.”

—**Stereogum**

“Compelling . . . Lou Reed appears as a major character; he’s an unlikely father figure to the teenage protagonist, Matthew, who’s trying to find himself in 1976 Manhattan. The iconoclastic—and at the time, troubled—rocker inspires Matthew artistically, even as he coaxes him to walk on the wild side.”

—**Maclean’s**

“Imperioli makes his literary debut with *The Perfume Burned His Eyes*, a novel in which 16-year-old narrator Matthew becomes enmeshed with the late rock legend Lou Reed and his trans muse Rachel.”

—**Bay Area Reporter**

“Yes. It’s That Guy From *The Sopranos*. If that’s what makes you pick it up, fine. Just do it. Matthew, a 16 year old living in Queens loses both his father and his grandfather. His mother uproots the now family of two to Manhattan. He starts an unlikely friendship with two tenants in his building: Lou Reed and his trans girlfriend Rachel. Lou becomes a quasi-shamanic father figure to the boy as he navigates his lonely path to becoming a man. Heartbreaking. Pure. If you walk away from having read this book without feeling the deepest of empathy for teenagers and your own teenage self, you’re just a stone, man. You can’t be reached.”

—**Fountain Bookstore**, staff pick (Kelly)

“A fast-paced story with likable characters.”

—**Wanna Be Omnilegent**

“[Imperioli] captured the setting, the times, and the coming of age beautifully. It was a compelling read.”

—**The Cyberlibrarian**

“Part nod to the fractiousness of the teenage years, part nod to a talented and complicated musician for whom the author had great admiration, *The Perfume Burned His Eyes* is a short but powerful read that imprints Imperioli as a master of this genre.”

—**Books Is Wonderful**

“It has been a long time since I have regarded the prospect of taking up a new first novel other than with dull dread and a sardonic snort of rightfully prejudicial dismissal. Then I happened on this one: the kind of bird you don’t see anymore in the kind of sky you don’t see anymore. Mr. Imperioli can write, and he has given us a book—that most outmoded of handheld devices, devoid of all apps—that brings a rare and welcome breeze of imagination and wit.”

—**Nick Tosches**, author of *Under Tiberius*

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# PRAISE FOR **THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES**

“This coming-of-age narrative is a fearless, towering inferno burning with raw truthfulness, stunning surprises, thrills, poetic writing, and an odyssey not just to be read, but reckoned with.”

—**Richard Lewis**, comedian, author of ***The Other Great Depression***

“Michael Imperioli discovers a whole new demimonde in his journey from Queens to the hideaways and hell-a-ways of Manhattan. It’s a streetwise romp through an underworld of bizarre characters desperate to find their own transcendence, written with affection, wit, and telepathic understanding.”

—**Lenny Kaye**, musician and author

“Touching, hilarious, heartfelt, and poetic, with an ending that is crushing, bruising, beautiful . . . Unpredictable and sweet as well, this is a unique accomplishment.”

—**Lydia Lunch**, author of ***Will Work for Drugs***

“*The Perfume Burned His Eyes* shook me up in a way a book hasn’t since my twenties. I found myself questioning the narrative I have built for myself in order to survive as an artist and a parent. It threw me back to being an awkward teenager in love, and destroyed some of the scaffolding of false memories I had built. This book allowed me to be with myself as a young, innocent teen without judgment, and opened my eyes and heart to the hurdles my teenager is now about to face. Mike’s book is gentle, pure, perverse, and devastating. It delves intimately into the psyche of what all great artists are made of.”

—**Nick Sandow**, actor (*Orange Is the New Black*), filmmaker

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## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT ON WRITING THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES

A few years ago one of my sons was in the midst of a rather difficult stage of teenager. In hindsight it was perhaps no more or less tumultuous than any adolescent, yet it proved to be a serious challenge to navigate for my son, my wife, and myself. In an effort to relate with and understand the mind of a sixteen-year-old boy, I began to play around with some ideas for the central character of this book.

Around the same time musician Lou Reed passed away. Lou was my hero and in the later years of his life we became friendly. His death hit me pretty hard and the emotions it brought began to infuse themselves into the story I was concocting. The end result being *The Perfume Burned His Eyes*; the title is a lyric borrowed from Lou.

This story is not about my son, any more than it is about me or anybody else, nor is it meant to be taken as a real account of Lou or events in his life. Whatever it may be, for better or worse, it was written with love, tenderness, and respect both for Lou and for anyone who has found themselves at the very strange age of sixteen at one point or another in their life.

—*Michael Imperioli*

# NATIONAL EVENTS FEATURING MICHAEL IMPERIOLI

Thursday, May 17, 2018 | 5:30 PM

## **SANTA BARBARA, CA**

Santa Barbara Museum of Art  
1130 State Street

*Join Michael Imperoli, in conversation with Colin Gardner, for his hometown launch.*

Monday, May 21, 2018 | 7:00 PM

## **SANTA BARBARA, CA**

Chaucer's Books  
3321 State Street

*Book signing only.*

Friday, June 1 — Sunday June 3, 2018 | TBA

## **TREASURE BEACH, JAMAICA**

Calabash Literary Festival

*Full details TBA.*

**THE PERFUME BURNED HIS EYES | by Michael Imperoli | Pub. date: April 3, 2018 | 270 pages | Fiction/Literature**

Hardcover, \$25.95, ISBN: 978-1-61775-620-7 | E-ISBN: 978-1-61775-642-9

Review copies upon request | Digital review copies via Edelweiss

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