

# PLAYBOY

ENTERTAINMENT FOR MEN

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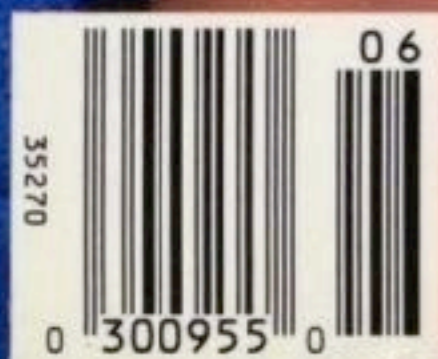
MICHAEL J. FOX

BADDEST COMIC

WHOOPI GOLDBERG

HOTTEST TOPIC

CONDOM ETIQUETTE



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM ZIMBEROFF



# 20 QUESTIONS: MICHAEL J. FOX

*The biggest smallest actor reveals the movie role he'll never play, tells his favorite short joke, and discusses why he can't break family ties.*

As if the high ratings of his TV show, *Family Ties*, and the box-office haul of his movies, *Back To The Future* and *Teen Wolf*, didn't create enough pandemonium in the life of actor Michael J. Fox, now the 26-year-old Canadian transplant must wake up each morning to the jarring symphony of a construction team erecting a wall around his Los Angeles home.

Says Fox, who also added rooms and a new driveway, "It's a little something to keep the fans at bay. Sometimes, I've come home to find them sitting in my backyard waiting for me." We asked **David Rensin** to get a hard hat and pick his way through the plaster and paint. Says Rensin: "At 9.30am, Fox was unkempt and unshaven — and completely unpretentious about it. He drank fruit juice. It was too early for beer."

1.

**PLAYBOY:** John Travolta was the last TV superstar whose debut film was a mega-hit. But after he left his TV show, it was all downhill at the box-office. What do you have to look forward to?

**FOX:** Well, one's good looking and the other's not. You figure it out. [laughs] Somebody told me that once you have a big hit, you have four chances to better it. If you don't hit on the fourth, that's it. Pack your bags. I do feel some pressure from that; maybe that's another reason why I stay with my show. It's safe, it's home and I enjoy it, and I still feel there are things to do creatively. *Family Ties* creator Gary Goldberg is generous and supportive and he was under no obligation to let me do anything outside the show, let alone a film. Everyone said to him, "If he does it and it's a big hit, you've lost him." Gary said, "I don't think so." He was right.

2.

**PLAYBOY:** What role do you see yourself as never playing?

**FOX:** Le Petomaine. He was a flatulist. He was a big hit in Paris at the turn of the century. An amazing man. Somebody gave me a book about him and wanted me to develop it. Want to really freak out Hollywood? "Michael J. Fox is Le Petomaine. He laughs, he sings, he farts. Flatulist extraordinaire." I hope it was tongue-in-cheek.

3.

**PLAYBOY:** You're such a nice boy. What

guilty secrets have you got to hide?

**FOX:** From the very beginning, I'd figured that if I was ever lucky enough to be in a position where anyone gave a shit about what I did, then I just had to be myself. I'd do what I had to do from day one, and not worry about running around and hiding things. I'll never forget the first person who ever interviewed me was some syndicated columnist. I sat down and popped a cigarette in my mouth and ordered a beer and he said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute!"

4.

**PLAYBOY:** You obviously like beer. What's the most you've consumed in one day?

**FOX:** Oh, when I was a kid, if I had a good base of two hot dogs and a hamburger and a bunch of potato chips, I think about 11. And then you start to get a little queasy. But I was so much older then. I'm younger than that now.

5.

**PLAYBOY:** Alex Keaton, your character in *Family Ties*, launched a million neo-conservative yuppies. Any second thoughts? Any changes you'd like to make?

**FOX:** We didn't so much launch as we just grabbed the wave as it was starting to swell. I was talking to Budd Schulberg, who wrote *What Makes Sammy Run*, and he said that people come up to him and say, "I love Sammy. I patterned my life after Sammy." And he was horrified, because he feels he created an evil character. But the pre-occupation with upper mobility has made people such as Sammy and Alex into the heroes now. Frankly, I have no idea why. But it's great that everyone's reacted so positively.

Now, I want to make Alex a little tougher. I don't want there to be any confusion when he's wrong. I want it pretty clear, if not to him, at least to other people. It's our responsibility to the viewers, especially the four and five-year-olds who watch, because we discovered Alex could do anything and people would forgive him for it. Sort of like a teflon TV character; a Ronald Reagan of the air. Our first reaction was to pump up his sympathetic side, so what people would see there is actually a warm person. But it wasn't enough. For instance, he's a blatant sexist and I love to see him get stomped. We did an episode where he goes to work in a bank and his immediate superior is a woman. And he can't believe it. He's shocked. And when he has to turn in one of his reports, it's complete with a couple of recipes and a couple of swatches of cloth.

He's such a jerk. And he gets nailed. And the audience love it. His boss just says, "Sit down. You're gonna work. You're gonna shut up. I don't want to hear from you." And there's Alex, like, terrified.

6.

**PLAYBOY:** Does Alex have a shameful liberal secret?

**FOX:** Yes. He really respects the women in his life, he really needs them and he's dependent on them. He's just a nice guy. But he bought into an ideology which in a lot of cases works for him. He's probably not as conservative as he styles himself. But he builds this wall around himself. Only it's made out of rice paper and it's so easy to poke your fingers through and watch everything ooze out. Alex is learning that he can control that and so I think eventually he's going to come around and be a little less outrageous.

7.

**PLAYBOY:** You've had Meredith Baxter Birney, Lea Thompson and Gena Rowlands as your mum. Anybody else you'd like to audition?

**FOX:** Maureen Stapleton would be a great mum. She's so tough. Whitney Houston could be my mum any old time, too. And I'm not making any jokes about breast feeding here, either.

8.

**PLAYBOY:** Got a favorite joke about being short?

**FOX:** Do you know the one about the guy who goes into the bar and he orders a drink and takes a little miniature piano out, and the bartender says, "What's that?" The guy takes out a little tiny piano player about 20 centimetres high. Sits him on a little bench; he starts to play. And the bartender says, "Where'd you get that?" So the guy says, "Well, I was on a desert island and I rubbed a lamp and the guy asked me what I wanted and I said, 'A 20 centimetre penis'."

9.

**PLAYBOY:** You met James Cagney before he died. What was his parting shot?

**FOX:** The last time I saw him he was in his chair and I was shaking his hand and he squeezed my hand so hard it was as if he was trying to say, "If I could get up, I could still kick your arse around the block and don't you forget it."

10.

**PLAYBOY:** Which of your family ties taught you the facts of life? Did anything surprise

you the first time you heard it?

**FOX:** Probably my older brother. My parents never sat down and said this is the way things are. We figured it all out though. My mother probably didn't mention it because she was afraid that she would say, "We're gonna talk to you about sex," and I'd say, "Sex? Fornication? What? You know, too?" The first time, I had no expectations. I don't want to get graphic because there's a girl out there who'll read this and be embarrassed by it. I was as dumb and awkward as anyone else.

11.

**PLAYBOY:** Describe your morning routine.

**FOX:** Three times a week I wake up around seven and this masseur comes over and thrashes the hell out of me before I know what's hit me. I wander in to *Family Ties* around 10 o'clock. Mondays and Wednesdays we have script-reading around a table. Then I mostly just hang out and talk football and hockey with the crew and get a little rehearsing in. The other two mornings that I don't go in, the first thing I do is turn on *The Today Show* and gaze at Jane Pauley. After that, my favorite thing is to catch the *Twenty-Five Thousand Dollar Pyramid*. It's the perfect game show because dumb people don't win. But they've put *Family Ties* opposite *Pyramid* in the morning here in Los Angeles. I don't know who's winning in the ratings but a lot of people seem to watch *Family Ties*. Frankly, I'm hoping I don't unwittingly cause the removal of my favorite game show.

12.

**PLAYBOY:** Didn't you once ask for etiquette lessons before meeting the Royal Family at a command performance of *Back To The Future*?

**FOX:** I met the Prince and Princess of Wales and it was an amazing experience. What really blew me away was that Charles knows everything. And his wife was gorgeous. She had these pearls on. Then we went in to see the movie. Now, the things I knew were you never speak until you're spoken to, never rise until they rise. In the theatre, Diana is at my immediate left. Right here. [pats seat] I'm like on a date with the Princess. Unbelievable. I'm thinking maybe I should move my hand or put my arm around her. A grope in the dark, who's gonna tell? I don't think she would. I really don't think she would. I think she would just kind of look at me knowingly and that would be it. And that would be our little shared moment. But I didn't have the guts to try that out. [laughs] Anyway, the movie starts and I have to go to the john. And I know I can't because I can't stand up until she speaks to me. So, what can I do? I've got to somehow hope that she says, "You don't have to go to the loo, do you? Because if you do, you can go ahead." I mean, it was very bizarre. I ended up waiting it out. Afterwards, Charles and Diana said, "That was a very

lovely movie." I said, [very rushed] "Thank you very much. Great. Good. Gotta go." Good thing I didn't meet the Queen. I imagine it's a lot more formal with her.

13.

**PLAYBOY:** Describe your strangest groupie encounter.

**FOX:** I was in Florida, doing something for a children's hospital. I was staying in this old hotel that had a balcony that ran the length of the building. I could open these French doors and share the common balcony. As I was walking around in the lobby, I heard some people giggling. I figured a couple of people knew me. I went up to my room, and I got into my sweats, and all of a sudden I hear this [knocks twice on table] at my window on the balcony. I opened it expecting a couple of 15-year-old girls whom I could tell I had. . . to go to sleep. But it was 10 accountants in town for a convention. That is something weird.



Starring with ex-rocker Joan Jett as brother and sister in *Light Of Day*.

14.

**PLAYBOY:** At this point you could probably get a date with just about anyone. Who is still beyond your reach?

**FOX:** Well, Lady Diana is obviously gone. And Jackie Bisset probably wouldn't have anything to do with me. This is funny because I was in Japan once and I went to this nightclub and it was full of American models. They hadn't seen that many American guys for some time — in my case, Canadian — and they knew me. There were, for some reason, *Back To The Future* posters in this place. And there were 15 beautiful models kicking each other out of seats. I just sat there and I looked over at this guy from the film company and winked. It was nuts, it was great, it was like Dean Martin surrounded by the Gold-diggers.

15.

**PLAYBOY:** What kind of advice would you want from Warren Beatty?

**FOX:** How did you do it, Warren? Where are they? Anything you don't want, send over. I admire him a lot. I think Warren's got it figured out and I'd like to talk to him about directing oneself. I directed a short film and was in it. I hated being in it. I just wanted to put someone in there who looked like me

because I was so fascinated at being behind the camera. Warren handles both directing and acting impeccably.

16.

**PLAYBOY:** Ever take a girlfriend on a tour of your hockey scars?

**FOX:** Oh, yeah. But they're all facial which is really a drag.

17.

**PLAYBOY:** Picture this. It's midnight. You're lying in bed. The house is empty. Can't sleep. The radio is on. It's a call-in shrink program. You get the sudden urge to phone. What do you talk about?

**FOX:** I was talking to Jane Fonda about a thing called the impostor syndrome. People attain a certain degree of success and are convinced they faked their way into it and they don't deserve it. I've felt so fortunate and so lucky and people can tell me till they're blue in the face that I deserve it, that I'm so talented, but having success and being able to have things I know a lot of people don't have and will never achieve. . . it is kind of weird. What price is there to pay later? When the party's over and nobody cares about what Michael Fox does anymore I'll be very much at peace. But I hope it goes on for a few more years.

18.

**PLAYBOY:** How will Alex Keaton's politics change in the next 10 years?

**FOX:** I think he's a rock. It would be funny for him to convert to the Democrats but that would demand a catastrophe of epic proportions. My image of Alex is always that one day he would run for some sort of office. You could make up a really terrific story, for example, when the show's over, and write about what happened to Alex. I see him getting busted for graft.

19.

**PLAYBOY:** What have you done for the Fox family since you've made it big?

**FOX:** My parents had always wanted to travel overseas because my mother's family lives in Belfast and my father's family is from England. So, the first year that I had enough to do something for them, I sent them on a tour of Ireland and England. But first I called my brothers and my sisters — hard-working, very proud people — and made it clear to them that I was in a surreal situation. I suppose I didn't really have to because they're intelligent. But anyway I asked them, "Is this cool? Does anybody mind this?" And they said, "No, look, you can do it, do it! Please do it!"

20.

**PLAYBOY:** To what Trivial Pursuit question are you the answer?

**FOX:** Who was the only person Paul Simon could beat in one-on-one basketball?

