



# TOPHER GRACE

by Sylvia Karcz  
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Topher Grace has long shed the boyish innocence and charmingly gawky next-door fragility of his days as Eric Forman on *That 70's Show*, and at 33, is barreling full force into uncharted territory like never before. Currently on stage for the first time in his professional career in the much raved-about Broadway production, *Lonely, I'm Not*, and having racked up an impressive list of films from every genre and budget level in just a few short years, it's fair to say that Grace has escaped the time capsule curse of syndicated-television-sitcoms fully unscathed. Instead, he has proven himself a chameleon of all trades. And he's just started getting to the good stuff.

With a roster that boasts noteworthies such as *In Good Company*, *Spider-Man 3*, and *Traffic* – as well as big upcoming releases like *The Wedding* – and roles ranging from drug-addicted teens and serial killers to motivational speakers and FBI agents, Grace's career is void of the all too common Hollywood penchants toward one-track caricatures. "I love that I didn't expect to be in a play, and now I'm on stage in New York. It's exhilarating," Grace says about his affinity toward jumping into new experiences and projects. In the inventive Paul Weintz-directed play, he plays a young financial "ninja" who reevaluates his life after a mental breakdown in the corporate world, and finds solace in a hard-working blind businesswoman, played by Olivia Thirby. "It's like going to the gym and working some new muscle system. You're sore, but you can also feel the growth. And that's what so great about this business, is that everything is a little "gypsy" as an actor. Everything is a new thing all the time, and I dig that."

And while the Hollywood bubble and audiences alike could easily have kept Grace in a comfortable state of giddy young-adulthood forever, playing loveable, witty, self-deprecating cutie-pies with mushroom haircuts, Grace is impervious to the ensnarement. He's treading in as many waters as opportunity allows, with an admirable reluctance to swim ashore for roles that show predictability. "I like big-budget and I like indie, and I like playing good guys and bad guys. And sometimes I wonder if I'm doing something

wrong, and if that's not the smartest thing. But at least for right now, I feel that the right thing is to have new experiences," he says. "I think I would make a lot more money and my agents would be a lot happier if I did one thing specifically and there was a way to commoditize it. But I feel really strongly, in my bones, that I want a passport to everywhere in terms of acting."

The Topher Grace equation, then, is quite simple: it's substance over paycheck, every time. "To me, the real name of the game is working with great directors and great, creative people. What I'm obsessed with, is who I work with more than what exactly I'm doing. Of course I love if it's a great role, but above all, I feel really lucky to be able to have these experiences with brilliant people. You get this this feeling that it might rub off on you."

And even though Grace doesn't seem like the type who would ever acknowledge it, to say that it has rubbed off would be an understatement. Though, for someone who was catapulted from college freshman to television stardom in a matter of months, in many ways the talent was always there from the start. Raised in Darien, Connecticut, Topher had never intended to become an actor, but rather stumbled upon a terrific "life surprise" when the right people saw him perform in a high school play production. "Bonnie and Terry Turner [creators of *That 70s Show*], who I knew were *Holiday* producers, came up to me. But the play was so bad that I didn't know why they would even be talking to me. But they said, Hey, we know you're going to college in LA next year, but can we call you? I thought it was to be their assistant or something. But then they actually did call me," he says. And so months later, as a first-year college student full of uncertainty of what career path to head down, the choice seemed fairly simple. He auditioned for the *That 70s Show*, was offered the role of Eric Forman, and would spend the coming years "playing catch-up" and learning the acting craft, all while growing into adulthood in front of millions of television viewers.

"It's a hard thing to get used to, the idea of being in media. I didn't plan on acting, so I wasn't one of those kids who was preparing their Academy Award speech in the shower," he says of the transitional years of his career. "There is no greater chasm between someone who is on TV and someone who is a freshman in college." He recalls a moment during promotional filming for *That 70s Show*, in which the camera zoomed for what describes as a Molder-and-Scully-camera-close-up. "I said to myself, I was just watching FOX, and now I'm on FOX. It was kind of hard. When you've been a part of media on one side of the wall, watching it, and then you cross over and you're on the other side...it's very bizarre. It's still weird to me."

It's this humble nature and disconnect from the fame attached to his career that continues to separate Grace from the strange gyre of young Hollywood. Despite being in a business that has, essentially, governed all of his 20s, Grace has been free of the fevers of tabloid success – "I have tabloid failure," he jokes – and is reluctant to become associated with any Hollywood histrionics by parading his personal life and beliefs off the screen. It's no surprise then, when asked about his supposed support for President Obama during the 2008 election and his thoughts on the upcoming presidential hopefuls, that Grace respectfully declined any commentary. But even though the topic of politics is off-limits – "You know what they say, never talk politics at a party" – he has no qualms about stressing his view that the last place media audiences should be turning to for advice, to begin with, is Hollywood. "Anyone who cares what a celebrity thinks is shopping in the wrong store. I firmly believe that people shouldn't be listening to any celebrities about important issues, especially politics," he says. "A lot of actors think that they're part of something like The Knights of the Roundtable, fighting for what they think is right and just. But I think we're a bit more of the jesters."

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But this stern belief has not been an excuse for Grace to not get involved. He embraces his charitable involvement with FINCA, a micro-finance organization that provides financial support to low-income entrepreneurs so they can create jobs and build assets as a long-withstanding solution to poverty, and Art of Elysium, a charity that works in pairing artists to devote time and share knowledge with sick and disabled children in their communities.

With so much variety on his plate, what does the future hold for Topher Grace? From the looks of it, he plans to keep audiences guessing. "The most important thing I've learned is to dive into things. I love that I've checked things off of my list, but I don't want to have a checklist of "I have to do this, or I have to do that," he says. "I really want to be able to sample everything."

And for keeping us happily entertained, smiling and on our feet, we praise you, Topher.

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stylist Michael Fisher @ starworks artists  
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Frye boots  
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[these pages]  
Frye boots  
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