

Interviews: Topher Grace, Demetri Martin on 'Take Me Home Tonight'

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CHICAGO – Reliving the 1980s is what Topher Grace, ironically known for “That ‘70s Show,” set out to do with the story line for his new film, “Take Me Home Tonight.” Comedian Demetri Martin has a supporting role in that film.

Grace developed the original story, about a post-collegiate guy named Matt working in a video store, trying to figure out the next stage of his life. When he encounters a high school crush named Tori (Teresa Palmer), he makes up a scenario where he works for the investment firm Goldman Sachs. He then catches up to an actual Goldman Sachs employee, played by Demetri Martin, to back up his story. The rest of the movie is basically about Matt working through the deception.

HollywoodChicago.com caught up with these two co-stars, and talked about their new film and their rich and interesting careers so far.



Topher Grace, Matt Franklin in 'Take Me Home Tonight'

Topher Grace made his mark in the popular sitcom “That ‘70s Show,” playing the boy-next-door Eric Forman. He left the show after the seventh season to pursue a film career, and has appeared in “Traffic,” “Mona Lisa Smile,” “In Good Company” and “Spider-Man 3.” He developed the story for “Take Me Home Tonight.”



Topher Grace (Matt) and Dan Folger (Barry) in 'Take Me Home Tonight'
Photo credit: Ron Batzdorff for © Relativity Media

HollywoodChicago.com: You are of course known for “That ‘70s Show,” playing someone from another time, and here you are in the 1980s in your new movie. What makes you the guy for playing characters those different eras?

Topher Grace: [Indicating Demetri Martin] We’re two of the biggest movie stars of all time. [laughs] I think it’s a bit more genre traveling than time traveling. It’s great being in Chicago because we talked about John Hughes a lot in the whole production of this film, and you feel closest to him here. We wanted to be the first 1980s movie that wasn’t spoofing the era, once you get enough time away from then, like ‘Dazed and Confused’ or ‘American Graffiti,’ you focus on what you appreciated about the time. We wanted to do a film that looked like we filmed it in the ‘80s.

The character of Matt Franklin is like a modern-day protagonist in the midst of another time. He is the beautiful swan of now, graduating college and going back to live at home, but he's an ugly duckling in the go-go 1980s.

HollywoodChicago.com: What type of roles do you want to be considered for or create for yourself? How do you picture the definition of yourself as an actor after graduating from teenage and younger adult roles?

Grace: Just sex, in whatever form that can come in. [laughs] You're a gypsy as an actor, I think even Brad Pitt feels that way. It's a fool's errand to try and plan out what the next thing will be. I do think in this we looked around and determined there hasn't been a generational movie in awhile. That thing that looks back, which you think is about another time, but is actually about timeless issues. That wasn't coming out of how I was playing a certain role, it was coming out of what kind of movie would I want to see.

HollywoodChicago.com: Given your role in the darker comedy 'In Good Company,' what is your opinion about powerful younger people like Mark Zuckerberg and what they can contribute to overall attitudes in American business?

Grace: I learned a lot on this movie, it forced me to talk to my Dad about business and what he was going through while still working. I usually don't get my parents involved in what I'm doing, but I let my Dad read the script. He'd worked in advertising for a long time, and it used to be after 50 years in a company, they'd give you a gold watch when you retired. He said now they give you a gold watch as a kiss-off, get the f**k out of here. That didn't happen to my Dad, but he observed it happening around him. He told me just because you're younger and have more energy, doesn't necessarily mean you're smarter.

Also a great thing about that movie experience is that my character, while he learned from Dennis Quaid's character, I personally learned a lot from Dennis. It paralleled the movie.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your final appearance on 'That's '70s Show' had an air of poignancy that is rarely felt in television sitcoms today. What legacy from that show, besides the launching of several prominent careers, do you think television history will remember?

Grace: Not a lot. [laughs] There is a weird relationship with the public and a TV show over time. First, they like the idea, then they don't like the execution. Then they start to like it, then they love it, then they hate it, because maybe it is overripe or ready to go off. Now we're in this weird phase where they miss it. I remember the feeling when the show was really cool, and then I knew there was nowhere to go but down. [laughs]



Demetri Martin, Featured in "Take Me Home Tonight"

Demetri Martin has had a stellar career so far, ever since he broke into the New York City stand-up comedy scene in the late 1990s. From there he went on to write for "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" and develop the Comedy Central series "Important Things with Demetri Martin." He had a notable lead performance in Ang Lee's film "Taking Woodstock" (2009), and has a new book coming out aptly titled "This is a Book."



Demetri Martin in 'Take Me Home Tonight'

Photo credit: © Relativity Media

HollywoodChicago.com: You also played a man in another time, in the 1960s, in 'Taking Woodstock.' What do you think makes you and Topher sort of the go-to history boys?

Demetri Martin: I like the history boys, it sounds like a time traveling Hardy Boys. [Announcer Voice] 'Somebody killed somebody else in 1860, and I know who we need. The History Boys!' [laughs]

I loved working with Ang Lee in 'Taking Woodstock,' and I love the 1960s and it's fun doing period pieces, because you get to pick what the era meant to you. I was also around in the 1980s, so it's cool to do 'Take Me Home Tonight.' There is a NWA song in the movie and I'm the right age to remember that my dorky white friends and I would drive around in suburban New Jersey and sing that song.

As someone who was around in the 1980s, it does feel like it takes place in that time for real, around the time of Goldman Sachs, achievement and making money. These are themes that are universal, but I remember the 1980s ethic of being a success, like Michael J. Fox in 'The Secret of My Success.'

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the story of your heroic appearance in the music video for Fountains of Wayne's 'Someone to Love'?

Martin: The story behind that is somebody contacted me while I was living in New York City and asked me if I wanted to be in a Fountains of Wayne video. And I said yeah, definitely, that's cool. It's cool that people that are still making music videos, because if you think of the 1980s that has changed a lot. I showed up one day a couple years ago, there was a green screen, and we shot everything in one day. The couple don't meet in the video, which is kind of sad.



Topher Grace & Demetri Martin in Chicago, February 8th, 2011
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: What were the circumstances on getting the job with the Conan O'Brien's show?

Martin: I started doing stand-up in New York City in 1997. I was doing a lot of 'alternative' rooms, they weren't traditional comedy clubs. Conan had been on the air for a couple of years, and that was a coveted job. Robert Smiegel, Louis C.K., Brian McCann were there, a lot of great writers. The first time I applied, it was as a sketch writer, and I had to write twelve sketches in paragraph form and submit them. They cover the names, there are no politics, it was simply did these make them laugh or not.

I didn't get the job the first time, around 2000. They called me and told me to submit when another opening occurred, and it was actually the third time I applied in 2003 that I didn't hear from them for awhile. I was in Edinburgh, Scotland, doing my stand up show. I had won the top trophy at their Festival, it was a big deal. And the night before, the Conan people called and told me that I'd been hired.

Then the night I'd won the trophy, my rep called to tell me that Woody Allen had seen a tape of a stand-up appearance on David Letterman, and wanted me to audition for the lead in his next movie ["Melinda and Melinda"]. I hadn't had that type of audition ever, I'd never taken an acting class and now he wants me to audition? It got weirder, I had to meet Woody in Paris in his hotel room. That was a crazy three-day period.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is your opinion on the NBC debacle regarding O'Brien and the Tonight Show?

Martin: I was really disappointed and heartbroken for Conan and everyone who worked with him. I think it was a sobering lesson for anybody in show business. Conan, who is an original voice, great with guests, a great writer and is genuinely good to everybody, they take it away from him? At the same time, I'm watching his new show on TBS, and I'm really excited for him.

"Take Me Home Tonight" opens everywhere March 4th. Featuring Topher Grace, Demetri Martin, Dan Folger, Teresa Palmer and Anna Faris. Story by Topher Grace and Gordon Kaywin, screenplay by Jackie Filgo and Jeff Filgo, directed by Michael Dowse.



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