

BOOKS

Michael Thomas Ford: Behind the Musings

There's a lot you don't know
about the award-winning humorist

By MARC ACITO

Funnyman Michael Thomas Ford is even funnier in real life than he is on the page. That's what a crowd of his devoted fans discovered recently when we ventured out on a bitter cold Sunday night to Powell's on Hawthorne to hear him read from his latest book, *It's Not Mean If It's True*.

"I love you all," Ford begins. "You are all beautiful, and I love you much more than the seven people who came to hear me in Seattle last night, although I told them I loved them, too."

Ford then proceeds to read from his book, but he doesn't get far. He can't help but interrupt himself with asides and tangents, telling us, for instance, about his education at a small Bible college in upstate New York.

"It no longer exists," he says. "I'd like to think it was my fault."

He goes on to tell us about signing "The Pledge," a document stating that he promised not to do things like dance or have a picture of someone of the opposite sex on his wall. "So I had this big bare-chested photo of Kevin Costner on the wall and never got in trouble," he explains.

Ford's books also offer unexpected extras. His three books, the Lambda Award-winning *Alec Baldwin Doesn't Love Me*, *That's Mr. Faggot to You* and *It's Not Mean if It's True*, are collections of his popular humor column "My Queer Life," but he expands each of the included columns to almost double the length of what appears in more than 20 queer papers nationwide.

In the sense that queer also means "unusual," "My Queer Life" is aptly named. Ford's idiosyncratic take on gay life, his refreshingly honest admissions that he cannot seem to dress himself well or gain muscle mass, have endeared him to readers who think the circuit queen scene doesn't speak for them.

"So you all know the sadness that is my life," he sighs as he finishes. And because his writing is so personal, we feel as if we do.

Audience members, including some strangely overzealous straight folks ("Bitter middle-aged het women love my stuff," Ford admits) ask him questions about his ex-boyfriend Dave, his dog Roger and his musicals-loving nephew as if they knew

these people. I ask him how he differs from the person we know from the page.

"I don't always write about myself at my best, but I do write about myself in sort of a charmingly neurotic way," he says. "I think a lot of people think, oh, Michael Thomas Ford is always funny, or he's always understanding, or he's always charming or whatever because they don't see you when you do something really horrible. Your friends are the people who, when they still see you do something horrible, they still like you."

Ford's friend Kenny from California, who's along for the trip, rolls his eyes. "Don't even ask," he says.

But anyone familiar with Ford's obsession with Alec Baldwin knows he's just as guilty of idealizing public figures. "Oh, sure, I'd like to think that George Clooney would always be great in bed and he'd always smell nice," he says, citing the celeb currently topping his "Stalker List," "but I'm sure if I were his lover I'd be like, 'Well, you've never been with him after tacos.'"

Ford is on hiatus from "My Queer Life" because of the demands of his "other job," that of award-winning writer of young adult fiction and nonfiction. He has spent the past seven months knocking out a 220-page book a month. "That's why I look so tired," he says.

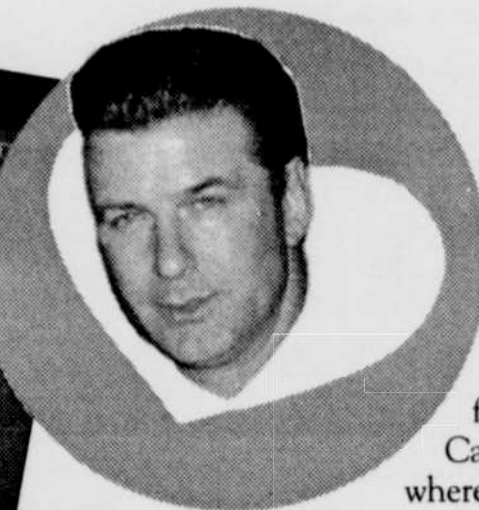
He publishes mostly under his full name—"Mike Ford" sounding too much like a porn star and Michael T. Ford being too reminiscent of "Model T Ford." And although he never has published under the name M.T. Ford, he

did author a series of children's horror books under the name M.T. Coffin. (Get it?)

His professional writing career began with the intensely literary task of writing a biography of Paula Abdul, which, as always with Ford, makes for a great story. "Her manager found out about it," he recalls, "and he called all of her friends and said, 'Don't talk to this guy.' The big joke of this was that it was for a children's book series of biographies, so I kept calling these people saying, 'It's for 9-year-olds, for God's sake!' It's not like I was asking her whether Emilio Estevez took it up the ass or something."

But it was a serious nonfiction book about the AIDS crisis and being gay that made Ford's reputation in the world of children's publishing, winning him numerous awards, including the American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults. "I'm the big fag in children's books," he says. "I like writing for young people because it's one of the only things you can write that actually could make a difference...it really does change their lives. I get letters from kids saying, 'I didn't know there were other gay people.'" (Incidentally, Ford does answer all of his fan mail, about 100 e-mails a week.)

The future of "My Queer Life" is still in



question as Ford makes the move from his Boston home base of the past five years to California,

where he plans to start writing for television and film. And he is also at work on his first novel for adults. When asked what it's about, Ford explains, "Well, there's this little wizard in it, and he goes to school...no, really it's about the extended families that gay people create for themselves."

He also recently collaborated with Jay Kawarsky, director of the Lehigh Valley Gay Men's Chorus in Pennsylvania, on a six-song choral piece based on his book *Alec Baldwin Doesn't Love Me*. It's available on CD, and Ford is working on turning the piece into a cabaret-style show. He also is working on a one-man show based on his writings that he might or might not perform himself.

Who would play him, then? "Maybe Alec Baldwin," says Ford, imagining the possibilities. Sounds like a plan. **JM**

MARC ACITO wouldn't kick George Clooney or Alec Baldwin out of bed either, particularly if they were both there.

EXCERPT:

Michael Thomas Ford on personal ads, from *It's Not Mean if It's True*:

"In shape does not necessarily mean the shape is pleasing. Other words to avoid include, but are not limited to, *codependent*, *parole*, *unemployed* and *fun-gal infection*."

"Ads containing words such as *vinyl pants*, *enema* and *catcher's mask* will not escape the notice of those with similar interests."

"*Boy next door* is to be avoided at all costs unless the person claiming it has a loft beside Ben Affleck's."

"Under no circumstances should you use an image in which you are posing with an animal character at a theme park, being arrested at a demonstration or dressed as Carol Channing. Other nos include photos in which your ex-lover appears with his face scratched out, and shots that include friends more attractive than yourself."



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It's Not Over Yet

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