

# Top Spin

Actor Michael Boatman navigates the gay subplots in ABC's hit sitcom.

*SPIN CITY*—the Michael J. Fox sitcom Tuesday nights on ABC that is the TV season's one unqualified new hit—is in the midst of taping its gay marriage episode on a Manhattan soundstage. Fittingly, it's National Coming Out Day. "Do you know what that is?" asks the stand-up comic who keeps the audience entertained between scenes, looking at an elderly visitor from Canada. The man shakes his head no. Well, by the end of the taping, he knows.

The plot unfolds: Gay activist and mayoral adviser Carter Heywood, played by Michael Boatman, decides to protest his boss' stand against same-sex marriage by wedding Nikki, a female co-worker and friend, during a carefully coordinated media circus. Shocking? Not to this studio audience of New Yorkers and tourists (including Fox's elementary school teacher), which laughs at all the right places.

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says Boatman later. "I was standing up there doing that [marriage] scene and I was thinking, 'Wait a minute. Hello? We're not even dealing with the fact that this is a white woman marrying a black man. Not once is it mentioned

in the episode, and no one has even mentioned it during the production of it.' And I thought that was great."

Boatman—a 10-year acting vet best known for his role on ABC's *China Beach*, as well as the lead in the feature film *The Glass Shield*—says he jumped at the chance to play Carter. A new father with his wife of four years, the actor bases his portrayal on a close friend who attended an Ivy League school and joined a fraternity before realizing he was gay.

Unlike Boatman, Carter is single, but that will change. "They said he'll be in a relationship," reveals the actor. "In one scene I had with Michael J. Fox, I talked about how I had been too busy at one point to have a live-in boyfriend. I liked that idea because it painted a picture of Carter and his drive and passion for what he does. But another part of me said, 'OK, but that can't last forever.'"—MICHAEL GILTZ

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