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here are some people with veritable choirboy blood — affable, nonmenacing, moral sorts, whose internal

compass needles point consistently toward the "right" thing to do.

Michael J. Fox could be their patron saint.

"In my film work, I've tried to do things that stray from the boy-next-door image," he complained, lightly, in *US* magazine. "But I'd have to get up in a clock tower at the University of Texas with an M-16 to destroy it."

Sure, as Alex P. Keaton, boy Reaganite on the hit TV series *Family Ties*, he managed to put up a pretty good facade of callous, money-grubbing '80s materialism. But as Fox noted in a *New York Times* interview, "on the big issues Alex was right on. He had black friends, he came out against book banning. The rest was just a gag."

The Fox moral centre has tended to spill over into his film roles. His was the face of the ordinary kid who refused to cave in to the barbarity in Brian De Palma's *Casualties of War*. And he was probably one of the only actors who



When a young plastic surgeon (Michael J. Fox, above with Julie Warner and right) gets stranded in a small southern town, his outlook on life gets a down-home twist.



# DOC HOLLYWOOD

## MICHAEL J. FOX OPERATES WITH A CONSCIENCE

could have given a sympathetic reading of the coke-sniffing wastrel "hero" of Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*.

So when Fox shows up in a movie called *Doc Hollywood* — about a recent med-school grad, a young plastic surgeon mentally counting his nip-and-tuck dollars — we don't really worry about his immortal soul. Kind of an Alex Keaton with skin calipers, Fox's character sets out on a cross-country trip to Beverly Hills, Calif., home of aging starlets and an "eternal youth" fixation — a place where a guy can make a decadent living.

But like a lodestone somewhere off the beaten path, there sits a

small Southern town filled with simple people of folksy ways. And as sure as swallows find Capistrano, this doctor with the face of *Back to the Future*'s Marty McFly accidentally finds his way to his destiny.

That he looks so at home in Smalltown, U.S.A., comes as no surprise, even though he's Canadian. Fox, who's now a father himself (he and wife Tracy Pollan have a baby boy named Sam), describes his own family back in Burnaby, B.C., as "very family. You look after your friends. There's a playfulness."

And no small amount of understanding, considering that his late father — a career army man — not

only gave his blessing to his son's decision to head to Hollywood, but even drove him 1,000 miles there.

"When I came down to L.A., I wanted to be Dustin Hoffman and Al Pacino," says Fox. Unfortunately, beyond modest height, there wasn't much he shared with these dark, brooding method actors. "When I found no one would take me seriously, I said, 'Well, maybe comedy's my thing.' All I really did is do what Jackie Gleason did, which was look at everything else, see what was funny, and then just filter it through myself. I'm just an actor who doesn't take himself too seriously."

Fox is not a particular fan of

method actors (he's said not to have gotten along with bad-boy Sean Penn during the making of *Casualties of War*, for example). Acting, Fox feels, "is pretending you're that guy and I'll be this guy, which is something we all do when we're four years old. Once you start to think it's any more than that, and that it's worth making other people suffer or imposing your vanities on people, or manipulating them, the trouble starts."

*Doc Hollywood*'s down-home utopia aside, some people, it seems, do manage to find their values in the big city.

— Jim Slotek

