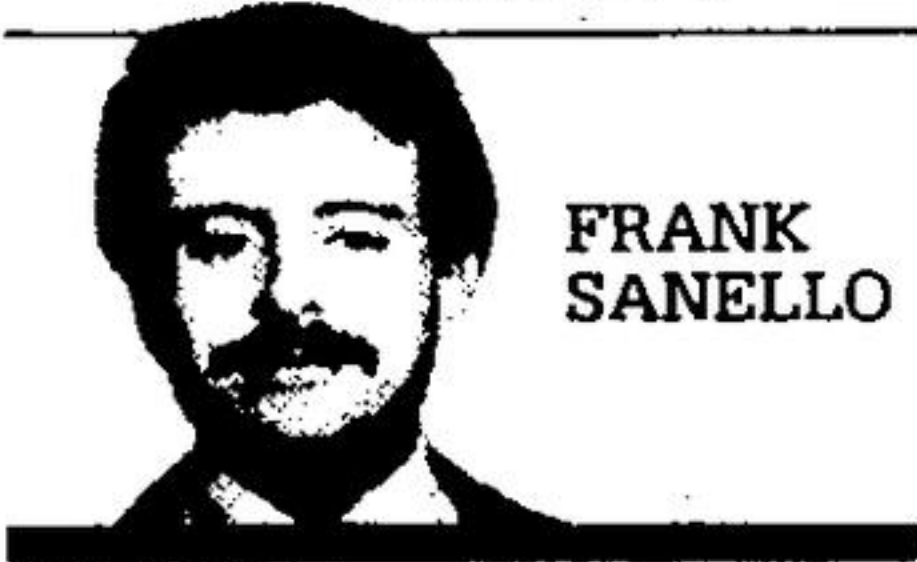


Cheech joins fight against drugs

STAR SPEAK



FRANK SANELLO

How times have changed! Cheech Marin, half the comedy team of Cheech and Chong, who celebrated drugs in a series of film comedies during the 1970s, has come out against drugs.

In his new film, "Rude Awakening," he plays a '60s hippie who has spent the past 20 years in the jungles of Central America. When he returns to New York in the present, he finds his lifestyle and drug use out-of-date.

The comic film could be a post-script to Marin's own career. In the early '70s, Marin and his partner Tommy Chong teamed up as zonked out hippies in a nightclub act. They duplicated their success first in a series of comedy albums and then films. Their first feature film, "Up in Smoke," was the highest grossing comedy of 1978.

As the public's attitude toward drug abuse grew more serious, Cheech and Chong weaned themselves from drug-oriented humor. Marin's last film, "Born in East L.A.," avoided the issue altogether, as it chronicled the misadventures of an American-born citizen of Latino origin who is mistakenly deported to Mexico.

A native of Los Angeles, Marin, unlike his screen persona, had a conventional middle-class upbringing, growing up in the conservative San Fernando Valley. The son of a police officer, he was a straight-A student in high school and graduated from college with a degree in English.

Q. Did you have any qualms about playing a hippie who does a lot of drugs in "Rude Awakening"?

A. Yeah, the director had been after me for years to be in this, but I didn't want to play a hippie again. Finally, he made some changes that gave the movie an important message, so I agreed to do it.

Q. I couldn't discern a message in "Rude Awakening." What is the message?

A. Yesterday's hippies have turned into today's yuppies. The passion has been lost, even though the important causes are still there, even more so now than in the '60s: acid rain, the homeless, nuclear proliferation. ... The list goes on and on.

Q. Have you become a yuppie?
A. I have some yuppie characteristics. I have a phone and an answering machine in my car. No fax, yet. I'm resisting that.

'The point of the movie is that drugs are passe.'

— Cheech Marin

Q. Have you found that you've become less committed to social causes as you grow older?

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A. I have other concerns now — my wife, kids, career pressures. I haven't lost my commitment to social issues I just don't have time for all of it now. Which doesn't mean I'm completely detached. I still get involved. I talk at high schools and warn kids about the danger of drug abuse.

Q. What do you say to high-school students?

A. I tell kids that drugs can get in the way of what you want to do. That's why I stopped doing them, because they prevented me from (doing) all I wanted to accomplish. I try to teach kids to have control over their lives.



Cheech Marin

Q. I'm surprised you're against drugs, because in "Rude Awakening," your character spends most of his time high on marijuana and acid.

A. My character is an anachronism. He's a '60s hippie who's spent 20 years in the jungle. Little has changed for him. The point of the movie is that drugs are passe. We made them a funny anachronism, as out-of-date as the funny hippie clothes I wear.

Q. Have you ever met Nancy Reagan?

A. No.
Q. If you did, what would you say to her?

A. "Nice red dress."
Q. What was the toughest audience you ever performed before as a stand-up comic?

A. Jackson, Miss., in the mid '70s. Before we went onstage, a redneck sheriff came up and said, "You better not say anything that's going to offend my 14-year-old daughter. The first dirty word out of your mouth, and I'm gonna bust you." That was the shortest show we ever did!

Q. Your films with Tommy Chong were huge commercial hits. Why did you break up?

A. The split was entirely amicable. We just decided we both wanted to do different things. So, instead of killing each other, we decided to go off and make our own movies and be happy. Actually, I'm thinking of teaming up with Dean Martin. ... That was a joke.

Q. What's next for Cheech Marin?

A. I'm going to be in a film in New Zealand called "Shrimp on the Barbie." Emma Samms (of "Dynasty") hires me to be her boyfriend, because her father doesn't approve of her real boyfriend. She hopes I will make her boyfriend look better by comparison. Then there's "Angel of Oxnard," which I'm going to write, direct and star in. It's about tortillas, miracles and the Home Shopping Network.

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Taper off gradually

Taper off becomes smaller or decreases gradually. If you tend to over-use this verb phrase, it's time to taper off.

A heavy or sustained attack is a barrage ("buh-RAHJ"). Its spelling ends with rage, but rage is often what starts a barrage.

Q. My teacher said not to use decimate to mean "destroy most of." Why not?

A. Decimate ("DES-ih-mate") is now often used to mean "destroy a large part of," but many people dislike this usage. Originally, decimate meant "choose by lot and kill every 10th person." Now that decimate is applied to larger amounts of destruction, some feel the verb's original sense has been decimated.

Use hiatus (pronounced hy-ATE-us) for an interruption or a break. Sorry, kids, but I'm afraid your summer hiatus will soon be over.

Something made up of many inter-related parts is a complex. This noun begins like complete, which should make the spelling of complex simple.

Q. In a novel I'm reading, a character is described as waiting "with bated breath." What does that mean?

A. That means the novel's publisher needs a new proofreader. The expression is "with bated breath," in which "bated" means "reduced, restrained"; when you wait with bated breath, you hold your breath in excitement or suspense. (I suppose you could wait with baited breath if you'd been eating sushi.)

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