

You know who Denis Leary is. Even if you don't think you know him — have faith. You know him.

You know him because for the last several months his Marlboro-smokin', fast talkin', in-your-face jumpin' attitude has been plastered across your TV screen from MTV to David Letterman to Nike commercials to... well, let's just say he's been busy.

And if you want to know why this 35-year-old comedic poet/song writer/actor/father of two is getting all of this attention, we got two words for ya: "Two words."

It's a catch-phrase that has made the native Bostonian one of the most sought after comedy spin doctors in recent years. And with three movies in the making, a book on the market and a CD in the record stores, Denis Leary is showing no signs of slowing down.

"I don't think your career can move too fast once it gets going," says Leary, sitting in an editing room at MTV studios. "You just slow it down to the right pace."

Leary has found that a whirlwind pace suits his career. *No Cure For Cancer* — the book, the show and the CD — are providing a swell for Leary to ride as he attempts to rise above the role as golden child of MTV to the crest of popularity as a pop icon.

"It might be a politically correct backlash," he says. "It may be a stroke of luck that people are finally getting sick of the same shit I've been sick and tired of all along."

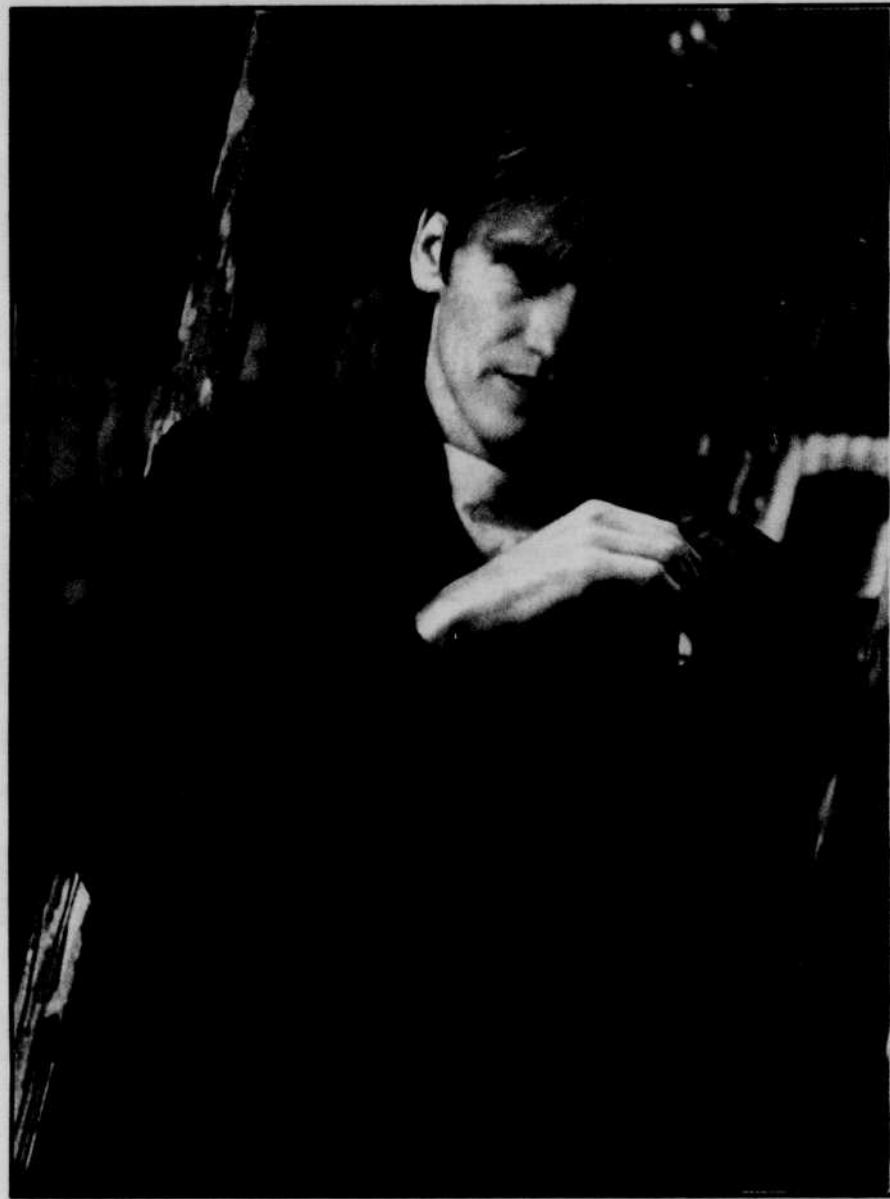
But people aren't sick of Denis Leary — at least not yet. Like most overnight sensations, the gap-toothed, tousled towhead with a Marlboro eternally clenched in his

"All I want is CINDY CRAWFORD, okay? House of Style 24 hours a day. No MTV News unless it's news about CINDY."

left hand has been honing his schtick for more than 15 years. But things didn't get interesting until MTV, the spawning ground of 15-minute celebrities, first aired his anti-political correctness fury. These 60-second monologues, directed by cohort Ted Demme, are filled with attacks on Jerry Lewis and a visceral longing for Cindy Crawford.

But it is not a longing that Leary worries will dampen his career climb. "Being so closely connected to the Cindy thing hasn't been a problem yet," he says. "I think one of the reasons it broke so big was because she liked it.... Soon after that came out, she did a parody of it. One thing kind of fed the other."

These things are all feeding an exceptional career for an intensely private man. Leary, despite his meteoric rise, shows signs of the talent needed to pull off enter-



By Bill Burke, *The Observer*, Northern Essex Community College

tainment triple threat. He's determined not to fall into the Pauly Shore abyss of an MTV nightmare. And though his upcoming movie roles aren't likely to win him an Oscar, they're varied and don't capitalize simply on his cigarette-smoking caustic witticism. The last thing he wants is to become the next Dennis the Menace.

"I didn't do a movie in character," he says. "That can often be a big mistake, doing your first movie in character. I was an actor before doing comedy, so I was aware of that pothole. All that can happen is that you get stuck in that one character,

and that's all people want to see."

As a smarmy Harry Connick, Jr. wannabee in *Loaded Weapon 1*, a DEA agent/ex-marine in *Gunmen*, a former major league pitcher in *The Sandlot* and an irrational police captain in *Who's The Man?*, Leary is launching an assault on American audiences that will force them to stand up and see more than that crazy smoking guy.

"Acting is much more difficult than the comedy," he says. "When you're not playing yourself, it's not your own words; it doesn't come as easily."

Comedy came so easily that while study-

Denis Leary



ing theater at Emerson College in Boston in the mid-'70s, Leary helped found the Comedy Workshop. Clearly, the classroom experiences didn't form Leary's career path.

"What did I do in college to prepare?" he mulls over the question. "A lot of drug abuse.... It was a different time."

And when his high wore off, Leary, along with the rest of his generation, found himself in a time when reality was scarier than any drug-induced trip.

His hazy collegiate years did provide him with a great deal of fodder for his present endeavors. He says he spent a lot of time messing around the city and screwing around in bands. Music is a talent he says served him well during his recent foray into the *MTV Unplugged* arena. "I've always been in bands," he says. "When we taped the *Unplugged* thing, I played with the exact same guys I used to play with."

Of course, with this plethora of projects, there is a danger of Denis overdose, and the restless comic is reconciling that with the potentially fatal concept of overexposure.

"It's difficult; I'll tell you that much," Leary admits. "I think that's why the tour is only two weeks."

"... More drugs... and then just a bit of rock 'n' roll before we pass out and wake up to find Reagan is president."

Soft-spoken and intelligent, Leary in person is little of his caustic Catholic stage persona. He says people often expect him constantly to be pissed off in manic speed-talker mode. "Some people expect it," he says. "But that's because it's easier for them to understand. The irony is that some only concentrate on the smoking aspect, when it's actually only a small part of the character."

Leary admits to manufacturing carefully parts of his on-stage persona. "I've organized it, exaggerated and tweaked it a bit," he says. "It is me, but it's not me."

Still, at his core Leary is the archetype Bostonian: bitter, caustic and critical and bustling with a full schedule. And we got two words for him: physical exhaustion.

"What I need is rest. But I'm not going to get any for about four to five months or so."

