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# denis leary

## Comedian hears success knocking, & it's coming in

NEW YORK (AP) — Denis Leary hears success knocking, and he thinks it's coming in.

The actor-comedian, best known for his Uzi-mouthed MTV commentaries and Nike commercials with Bo Jackson and Deion Sanders, recently reprised his critically praised off-Broadway show "No Cure for Cancer." A book adapted from it was published in November.

An album came out last week, and Showtime will air the one-man performance Feb. 20. This year, he'll star as a DEA agent gone wrong in the film "Gunmen" and as a lounge lizard in "Loaded Weapon 1," a sendup of cop movies. Plus, he's writing a screenplay and another off-Broadway show.

But the 34-year-old Leary would be the first to tell you that it was a slow road to big-time exposure. "Back in the '80s, when everybody was making money, I wasn't making a dime. I was living hand to mouth," said Leary, who decided to quit his job teaching drama at his alma mater, Emerson College in Boston, to make a go of his acting career.

"Not that I'm that cocky ... I knew that I could act. I just need to get into the right room at the right time under right circumstances."

He first did his one-man show in England in the summer of 1990, and after a year of tinkering, brought it to off-Broadway, where it got good reviews. Then he got the offer from MTV.

While his act is souped-up, Leary is subdued and thoughtful in one-on-one conversation. "Some people think, 'Jesus, are you like that all the time?' If I was like that all the time, I'd be dead now," he said. "You'd blow up."

Leary prefers not to think about his MTV bits or his show as social or political jeremiads. "I don't like to analyze it too much, because it becomes what I don't want it to be in the first place," he said.

He inveighs against racism ("I think Rodney King said it best when he said, 'Ow, ow, ow'"); pious rock stars ("Don Henley's going to tell me how to feel about the environment? I don't think so. OK. I got two words for Don Henley: Joe Walsh."); and cocaine ("I'd like a drug that makes my penis small, makes my heart explode, makes my nose bleed and sucks all my money out of the bank. Is that possible, please?").

He loves smoking cigarettes and eating red meat, and all he wants to see on MTV is model Cindy Crawford. ("I want Cindy unplugged. I want acoustic Cindy ... I want Cindy eating an Eskimo Pie naked on top of the Empire State Building.")

Some bits firmly reflect what he believes in; others amount to comical exaggerations. "There's always some people who don't get it," he said. "Those are the kind of guys, you just

say: 'Jump on the train, and we'll pass out some pamphlets and you'll figure it out later.'"

Some stuff might seem liberal; other parts make fun of a liberal agenda. "Liberals can be very pretentious, if not more pretentious than the right wing, and have some fairly ridiculous things to say themselves, probably not as many as the right wing, but a few, quite a few," he said. "Liberals tend to think: 'We're right; they're wrong. ... They're going to rot in hell; we'll be in heaven with the AIDS quilt.'"

For those who feel the need to be happy all the time, Leary offers a meditation on baseball. "I thought from Day One — maybe it's because I'm a Red Sox fan — there were going to be days that would be great and

there were going to be whole weeks that just sucked.

And you're not going to win,"

said Leary,

who grew up in a

working-

class, Irish

Catholic family

in Worcester,

Mass. "I think if

Vince Lombardi

had been a

baseball guy and

he had coached the

Red Sox (who

haven't won a World

Series since 1918) I

think the 'winning

isn't everything, it's the

only thing' quote would

have changed

drastically, or he would

have died a lot sooner

from, like, a heart attack."

Leary got his trademark

line — "I think you hear me

knockin' and I think I'm

coming in" — back in college

when he and some friends

were at a club one night. They

heard "I Hear You Knocking"

by Dave Edmunds and

"Knockin' On Heaven's Door"

and other songs in the house

music mix with a "knockin'"

theme. "I think you hear my

knocking" became a catch phrase.

When he was doing the Nike commercials last year, director Ted Demme wanted something catchy to close the spots. Demme had been hanging around with Leary and his friends and said, "Why don't we use that 'hear-me-knockin' thing?" Leary didn't think it was that funny, but Demme told him he felt that way because he had been doing it for 20 years.

In that span, it got ridiculous, Leary said. "Sometimes you got five guys watching the game together, five guys out in the club together, five guys just having dinner, and somebody's cutting somebody down, we'd been doing it for so long we'd go, 'I think you hear me knockin.' ... And there'd be like seven different answers: 'Yeah, he's already in the house.' 'I'm upstairs, man.' 'I'm having a cup of coffee.' 'Hey, man, I'm in the basement, I'm stealing all your old clothes.'"



by Douglas J. Rowe  
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