

The arts

Is it possible to take a joke?

Ever since hard rock revolutionized the record charts, comedy albums have been hard pressed to find a niche. Bob Hope and Black Sabbath mix about as well as oil and water, and rock fans, the bulk of the record buyers, have been content to stand and dance rather than sit and laugh. Until Cheech & Chong came along.

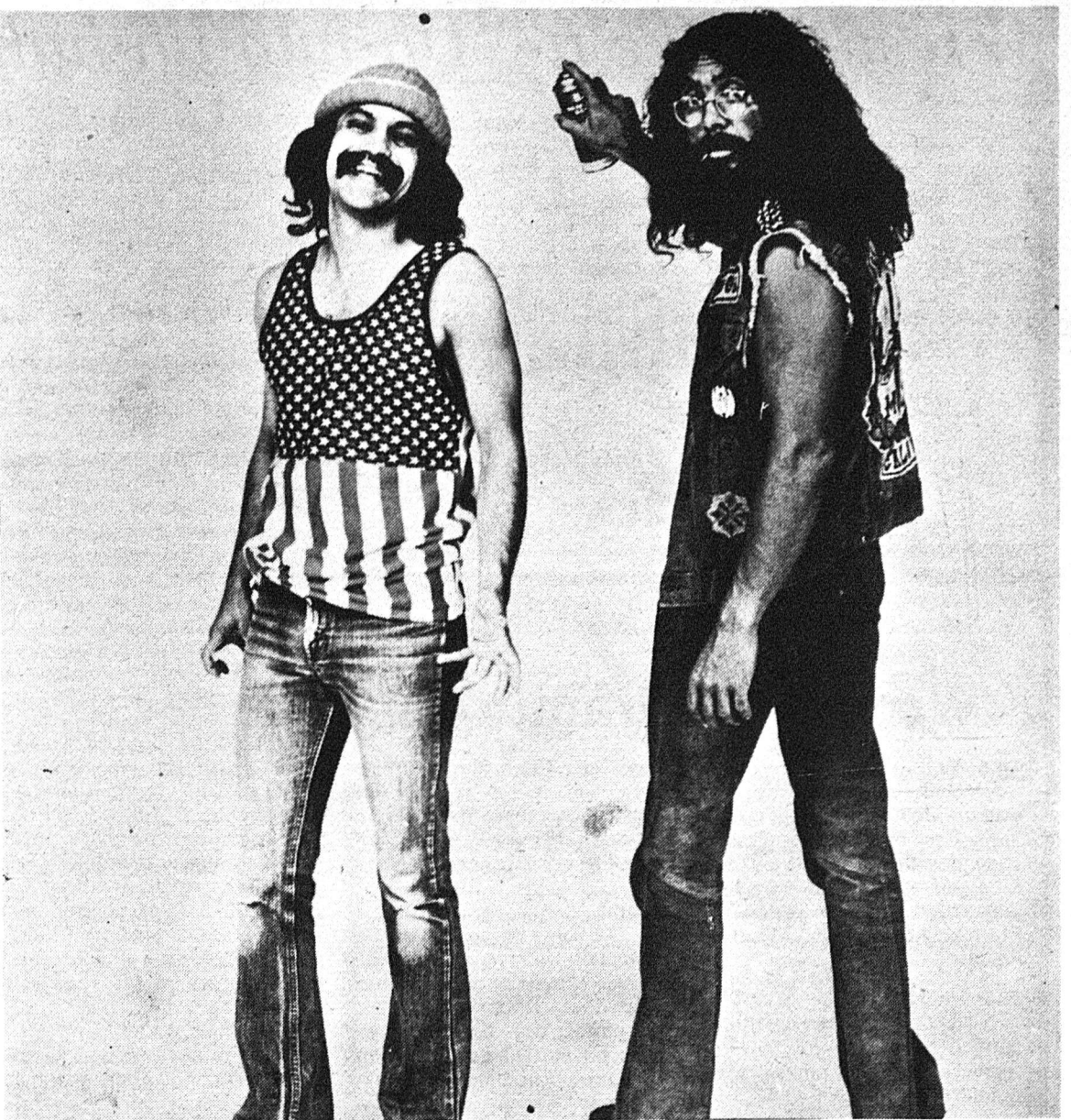
Cheech & Chong are members in good standing of the hard rock society and their first album, subtitled "hard rock comedy", was a hit on the record charts and earned them a Grammy nomination. They play to SRO audiences at clubs and in concert everywhere they go. Like Laurel & Hardy, Lenny Bruce and other comedians before them, Cheech & Chong reflect and poke fun at the values and beliefs of their audience and their humor is expressed in terms their listeners understand: from the point of view of a long-haired hippie dope freak.

"We found something new that people could relate to," explains Tommy Chong. "For oldtime comics like Red Skelton, Jackie Gleason and Johnny Carson, the common denominator is booze. For our audiences, young people, it's marijuana, reds, wine and hassles with the cops."

Chong was born in Edmonton, and began show business as a guitar player in R & B bands around western Canada. His group Bobby Taylor and the Vancouvers, was discovered by Berry Gordy and signed to

Motown. They had a hit with a song written by Chong, *Does Your Mama Know 'Bout Me*, the label's first protest tune. When the group broke up, Chong settled in Vancouver to direct the stage show for a family-owned topless night club. He had seen various improvisation groups such as the Committee in San Francisco and Second City in Chicago and began experimenting with that form at the club. Eventually he became one of the actors as well as the director in a troupe that consisted of three hippie freaks, a mime artist and four topless dancers. The show was well-received and played to packed houses for nine months until they broke up.

One of the actors was Rich Marin, better known as "Cheech." His uncle nicknamed him "Cheecharrone" after a delicacy made of deep-fried pork skins because he was "all prune looking" when he was a kid. Nicknames were common in his family, others being called "Chata," "Chema," "Chug," "Chango" and "Seco." Cheech was born in "scenic" Watts, California. He sang in various folk and rock groups such as Mother Fletcher's Blues Brothers and Rompin' Ritchie and his Rocking Ruebens. He got a degree in English from San Fernando Valley State College and then left for Canada to escape the draft and work for Eli Drahanchuk, Canada's famous potter. Among other things, he played in a dine and dance trio that worked hotel dining rooms, delivered carpets



Cheech & Chong.

and was a ski bum, before he met Tommy Chong.

While directing and appearing with his improvisational team, called the City Lights, Chong also managed the club in Vancouver and took note of the clientele.

"The average patron was a drunk or a pervert," he remembers. "But the dancers were expensive, so we replaced them with topless actresses. That way the club retained its image and its audience."

When the City Lights parted company, Cheech and Chong stayed together as a duo. They gradually built a following in

western Canada and climaxed their stay there by winning over an audience of 5,000 at the Gardens Auditorium in Vancouver. By then, Cheech had broken his leg and earned a 4-F status, which meant he could go back to the States. They decided to come to Los Angeles, the Big Time.

To begin with, they found little call for heads doing a standup comedy routine. So the act began to evolve. They played at many of the small clubs around town before every kind of audience. It was at one of their many appearances for free

on "hoot" night at the Troubadour Club that Lou Adler heard them, and shortly after signed them to a contract. Within six months (one album later) they headlined at the Troubadour for five sold-out nights.

Bob Hope and George Burns they're not... Cheech and Chong poke fun at everyone and everything, including themselves. Leave your sacred cows at home before seeing the duo, who appear Feb. 17 at the Jubilee. Tickets at Students Union Box Office and International Stereo.

Barry Lyndon brings more kudos for Kubrick

by Steven J. Adams

Stanley Kubrick stands unique in the history of cinema; he is the only director whose every major picture has been a success. He is unique in yet another way: he has not divorced Art from Profit. And his pictures are at the same time commercial smashes and aesthetically pleasing. But he has violated that Hollywood maxim that the old movie czars used to growl at uppity directors and writers in the Golden Age of Tinsel Town: "If you want to give the audience a message, use Western Union!"

It is that atmosphere of assembly-line art that kept Kubrick away from the supposed capital of movieland - luckily for us. Producing almost all his movies independently, he is able to go his own way and provide us with shocking, original and vital motion pictures. In *Paths of Glory* we see a blistering antiwar commentary. In *Lolita* he was able to transfer Vladimir Nabokov's controversial portrait of eroticism to the screen without having war declared by the censors. *Dr. Strangelove* shows the black humor and horror of our nuclear balance-of-terror. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the potential of the long-suffering



Ryan O'Neal & Marisa Berenson as Barry and Lady Lyndon.

science fiction movie was finally realized. And so on.

Suffice it to say that out of six 'A' pictures, six have been hits. And now we must add a seventh: *Barry Lyndon*.

Barry Lyndon began as a novel by William Thackeray, written before *Vanity Fair*. It is serious and less melodramatic than the serialized epics that Thackeray was turning out for the mod nineteenth-century English audience. It is different because the hero is not so much a hero. In fact, is pretty much a rogue, and the story does not have hunky-dory ending, either.

The story might well be subtitled *The Rise and Fall of Redmond Barry*. In the tradition of *Tom Jones* and *Moll Flanders*, it is the life of a young

man who sets out to seek his Fortune, and who pursues his life to its inevitable end and downfall.

Redmond Barry (Ryan O'Neal) begins very low on the social scale. Then after numerous escapades of flight, fight, and might (which include some fine duel scenes) he meets Lady Lyndon (Marisa Berenson), and begins the Rise. Through the Lady's influence he changes from Redmond Barry, conniving gambler and soldier of fortune, to Barry Lyndon, a gentleman of property.

He appears to have it made. But, having reached a peak, he begins the Fall: squandering his money, loves and life.

Barry Lyndon is first of all a beautiful movie. It is beautiful

because everything is shown with that attention to detail that made the special effects in *2001* a never-to-be-surpassed feat.

The characters are costumed and made-up in a way that is not romanticized. The soldier's uniforms are rough, dirty and uncomfortable. The nobility are made-up in the heavy white pancake of the time - and are not twentieth-century actors masquerading in eighteenth-century clothing. The lighting is realistic: Kubrick had special lenses made so he could photograph in candlelight. These things combine with many others to make *Barry Lyndon* the best period movie I've ever seen.

But that is only the technical side of it. Kubrick is above all a director who makes images work for him. He uses *motion pictures* instead of pictures with words. There are no long, protracted dialogues between characters. Conversations are limited to a few sentences. He doesn't take the easy way out, using scads of words to set a mood and to explain. The audience has a job too; they can't sit back and relax, they must watch and think.

Ryan O'Neal comes through with a fine, serious performance as Barry Lyndon; with his superb portrayal of a radically-changing man. In-

credible also is Marisa Berenson (who was the Jewish countess in *Cabaret*). She has virtually no speaking parts, but manages to characterize a woman who is spellbound by Barry and suffers much because of it. (But then Kubrick could make a wooden Indian come to life on the screen; in *2001* the most human character and star of the movie was a psycho computer named HAL.)

In *Barry Lyndon*, no morals are proclaimed, no comments are made, and no sides are taken. We are presented with the man's life, we are observers and we are forced to make our own judgement, if any, of him.

Do not get the idea that this is a dry, intellectual film. Far from it. Kubrick realizes that whatever his statement is, he must present it in a way that is interesting and entertaining. And that he does.

There is some fine humor in the film as well. There is one scene in which Barry deserts the British Army that goes something like a Monty Python skit. It's so priceless that I can't begin to describe it. Instead, go and see the movie. (An awesome thought, isn't it, that before he came up with this, Kubrick was working on a biography of Napoleon. What next?)

Barry Lyndon opens this Friday at the Westmount.