

# Howard Marks: An Audience with Senor Nice

Friday 20th October 2006  
Wulfrun Hall  
Wolverhampton

*Howard Marks is back with a new show and a new book, 'Senor Nice - Straight Life from Wales to South America'. Howard's first book, MR NICE, has now sold an incredible 800,000 copies in the UK alone.*

*SENOR NICE the follow up book to MR NICE was released on October 5th and Howard's new show, based on the new book, deals with his newly found celebrity stardom following his release from prison in 1996, and reflects on his past, upbringing and Welsh ancestry.*

*I was lucky enough to go and see the man himself and I felt I wanted to share my experience with the world!*

## **"Marley is Welsh" states Howard'**

We arrive at the Wulfrun Hall, Wolverhampton with some time to spare before the doors open. Looking around at the types of people in the queue – there isn't anyone particularly unexpected. Mostly student looking types. No surprise there then!

As we all shuffle in past the security – yes they searched people but nothing to my knowledge was confiscated – later on you will realise how I know this. The stage is set up with a projection screen (back projection), table, chair and mic. There is a brilliant soundtrack as we all enter and find our seats. Feels like a school assembly hall but with the music and the images on the projector, doesn't feel like it did AT school.

Slowly the hall fills up and people start to smoke. There are large signs all over the doors into the hall stating no smoking – so for now I decline the opportunity and happily sip my JD and coke. A guy, who looks like he could be Marks or could be his Dad comes on stage and places an ash tray, ornate wine goblet, bottle of red and a pint onto the table on stage. After a short time he comes back on and places a bottle of water next to the other essentials. Possibly an after thought once he had gone back off stage and saw the state of Howard even before he's started his performance!

## **ACT 1**

We are shown a short film to start with. Showing news and documentary footage of Howard and newspaper front pages etc to set the scene. Finally we hear Howard Marks announced and he comes on stage to energetic applause. Marks is dressed in grey combats, a scruffy white shirt and a contrastingly smart black tux jacket. Only he could pull this off. He covers his back for latter silliness by stating now "I would like to say I wouldn't offend any of you by coming on here straight – in fact I am completely wankered!". His comments about always getting a great welcome and hospitality in

Wolverhampton goes down well but his sincerity leaves a few question marks hanging in my mind. Sounds like the usual bullshit said by performers when they come on stage. "Wolverhampton, it is great to be here, this is my favourite city in England. Thank you, you have been the best audience ever." That kind of thing. But we all lap it up and so far are putty in his hands. Right now, we want to believe anything he has to say.

He starts his show with a brief overview of his life to date and generally settles himself in and tests what type of audience he has this evening. Few comments here and there to see if they get laughs or tumbleweed moments. There's laughs and increasing weed moments, minus the tumble. He knows we are on his side and relaxes into the night ahead. Throughout this intro stage there is one prat shouting out to him "Why didn't you turn up today?!" Howard: "I'm sorry err.....where was that.....what?" Prat: "You were invited!" Howard: "Oh right well I'm very sorry I couldn't have made it anyway." I was surprised by his politeness to this prat, but I guess he has dealt with worse before.

Fields of herb were projected and a track by Elvis – apparently his last ever one - was played. Howard, smoking a spliff by this time, wanders over to the projection scene and hugs it. An image that will not leave my mind for many years I'm sure. Yet again the shouts from the audience start up again. This time regarding his knowledge of growing the herb himself. The (Sad? Shocking?) truth is, he has no knowledge of this subject whatsoever.

He doesn't appear to be afraid, ashamed or embarrassed about discussing his time in prison. And why should he be, really. He speaks of the peaks and the troughs. He doesn't over glamorise it and admits to getting pretty down at times. But doesn't dwell on the troughs. Highlighting the peaks. The plans he made for when he got out. His plans to "stick it right up 'em!". The establishment. However he talks about the fact he hasn't really been able to do that to the full extent he wished to. Book offers, chances to be on TV and so on have all been establishment driven and forms of acceptance. This is a man who doesn't necessarily want to be accepted. He likes to feel his being deviant and living covertly. Needs must, he suggests, as the books and tours give him money he can no longer make doing what he did best for years - £100,000 for a book deal (pissed up the wall in 3 months - 7 years writing the book). Suggestions that deviant goings on still feature in his life reassure his admiring audience that he hasn't changed that much. But of course these aren't discussed in much detail – for obvious reasons.

Instead he chooses to tell us about his attempts at dealings and business still in the herbal sector but the legal type and finding loop holes. This leads him to talk about his time in Switzerland where he sold pillow cases stuffed with weed that people could put their head into and smell it. This of course was legal as it was not consumption. However, overnight this all became illegal and was shut down as was his seed producing business. So he goes back to Wales – his place of birth – as he hasn't visited for years. He expects a heroes welcome. Goes to his old local pub and no one says a word to him. He feels pretty crap about this. This leads him to say that both Elvis and Bob Marley are both actually in fact Welsh! Howard: "Check it up on the internet if you want! Its true!"

His talk goes onto his experiences in Jamaica with a friend of his called Leroy. He is fascinated with pirates and samples some lovely herb. Leroy and the people of Jamaica as a whole believe in ghosts – or duppies and Howard has a hard time trying to understand this. He goes to Bob Marley's grave and rolls the strongest spliff he can in

honour of this great man. He reminisces about marijuana, reggae and life.

## **INTERVAL**

Hardly any time to get to the bar let alone drink your drink and have a smoke. When I got up to walk out I felt really light headed and stoned all of a sudden. Having not smoked, normal or otherwise during the first half I was a bit surprised at this. But seeing the haze of spliff smoke in the hall I realised why.

## **ACT 2**

We sneak back into the hall, walk down the middle and back to our seats which are on the end of row four. Good position. A certain someone I went to this with decides yes people are smoking the herb in here and it would be wrong not to. Howard begins the second half with more stories from his new book. Throughout the night wonderful visual projection aids and music are used to punctuate the show. However some of the PowerPoint didn't work too well – I think the guy operating it is new to IT. But hey – it added to the relaxed atmos.

While on his travels, Howard comes across a guy who apparently looks the spit of Che Guevara. He reviles himself to be something of a medicine man – of the natural variety. Howard goes with him to treat a girl with shingles. Her rash is all over her tummy. It is said that once the two parts of the rash meet, you die. This young girl only has a tiny stripe of bare skin left. The Che lookalike proceeds to take a toad and cuddles and kisses it. Then rubs it all over this girls tummy. Her rash starts to recede in front of their eyes and her fever subsides almost immediately. Howard learns this toad has DMT in its skin and experiences first hand its positive medicinal uses. This leads the ever experimental Marks to inquire if he could try some of this DMT off the toad. As he is aware it can have hallucinogenic effects also. The old wives tale of witches licking their toads and believing they were flying on their broom stick and so on.

Howard does indeed try DMT toad style. He chooses not to try and explain the trip he enjoyed (or not) via words and instead opts for an animation instead, produced by an animator who had also tried DMT and therefore could understand Howard's description more so than most of us. This was probably the highlight of the show somehow. Like nothing I have ever seen before. Animation is surely the best way to encapsulate a trip to others. I felt like I didn't need to try (not that I would!) DMT and don't think I'd want to. Howard's trip wasn't what I would call 'good'. From here on I'm not sure how he then gets to talking about being on a boat and seeing an eagle. But he does. And he describes thinking the eagle is god talking to him. Most amusing if a little worrying.

At this point he lets us into a secret. That he is now too fucked to stand up any longer. And promptly removes the mic from its stand and takes a seat. And that's it really, of the planned show at least. Time for the question and answer session. The informal bit. The bit we have all probably been looking forward to as well as dreading. Howard: "Can we have the house lights up please?!.....hide ya spliffs!!!"

The questions aren't that forthcoming and the ones answered weren't of any real quality. However, being able to see Howard unplanned, unscripted and rambling on about nothing much at all was still enjoyable. After he left the stage there was mention of him

coming out to sign books and posters and so on but we didn't stay around for all that. Maybe we should have. But we felt we had seen and heard enough. We had our memories.

And that sums up – maybe too quickly – my experience of Howard Marks. A great man to my mind with much humour and enough life experience for about a hundred men. I would definitely go and see him again. It may not come across in this review but he is a very funny guy and easy to warm to, aside from his herbal relations, he is well worth going to see. It's not all about the marijuana.....man.