



DANA CARVEY PARTIES ON

The comic – and friends – keep it fresh with politics, wry commentary and some stardust

BY ELIZABETH RAHE

dana Carvey is talking about his *Saturday Night Live* characters metal-head Garth of *Wayne's World* and the sanctimonious Church Lady. "They're both here right now, by the way," he says by phone from Marin County, Calif.

"Did you ever see Alfred Hitchcock's movie *Psycho*? I'm wearing the Church Lady dress right now," he says. Well, isn't that special? Whatever would possess the comedian – scheduled to perform at the Boca Raton Concours d'Elegance Feb. 25 – to don women's clothing for a conversation with *City & Shore*?

Hmmm...Let me think...I don't know...could it be...SATAN?

It's a tribute to Carvey that his religious talk show maven and her reverberating condemnations, launched on *SNL* some 25 years ago, still resonate today. When the comic appeared as a guest host on the show last year, Church Lady found ready victims in the Kardashian sisters and *Jersey Shore*'s Snooki, portrayed by cast members eager to be on *Church Chat*.

"Bobby Moynihan, who played Snooki, said it was the highlight of his life. He trick-or-treated as the Church Lady," Carvey says.

Keeping the holier-than-thou character relevant is just too easy these days, Carvey adds. "There are so many reality shows and freaks out there to make fun of. She could have Charlie Sheen on her show. It's a better time for her."

During Carvey's standup act audience members often shout out requests for his *Saturday Night Live* alter egos and impressions, and that's fine with him. He likens the clamor for his familiar characters to requests for hit songs from popular musicians. "I always say the only thing worse about a band having a lot of hit songs is a band with no hits...With standup, I just filter it through and layer them in there...For me it's great to have those hits because I get to sell out theaters," he says, laughing.

His standup is no nostalgia act, however. He keeps it interesting and up-to-date with political satire, slice-of-life observations and rapid-fire impressions. "I can make it as sophisticated as I want. I have nothing to lose anymore," he

For more on
Dana Carvey's
performance
at the Boca
Raton Concours
d'Elegance Gala
Feb. 25, see pg. 31.

says, explaining that it's more fun for him now. "Back then, people were so stressed out on *Saturday Night Live*. It's a high-pressure job."

The glare of celebrity was tough for Carvey, who also hit it big with the film *Wayne's World* in '92. "I didn't take to fame very well...I was exhausted. I'm such a people pleaser, that when I eventually started getting famous in New York, by the time I got to my apartment I'd have to take a nap for an hour or two because everyone I met wanted to have this long conversation with me...So I was just wiped out by fame."

After *SNL* – for which he won an Emmy in 1993 – and the short-lived *Dana Carvey Show* in '96, he pulled back from the grind of regular TV production. He retreated to Northern California with his wife, Paula Zwagerman, to raise their sons, Dex, now 20 and in college, and Thomas, 18, a high school senior. He continued to work on his own terms, however, including starring in the film *The Master of Disguise* in 2002 and playing about 50 standup dates a year.

Carvey, 56, is still generous with his conversation, talking with *City & Shore* on a diverse assortment of topics. Some for laughs, some surprisingly reflective. As you might expect from the man of myriad characters and impersonations, the conversation is crowded with other voices: Barack Obama, Jimmy Stewart, Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich among them.

Here, with apologies to the entire cast for the limitations of print, are excerpts from the conversation.

What can the audience expect from your Boca Raton Concours d'Elegance show?

Always my goal – and I'm not ever saying I'm going to achieve it – my goal is to do the greatest comedy show in history. My comedy...is all about anxiety as filtered through a political spectrum, a health and aging and spiritual spectrum and then...as a father and a husband...And I'll improvise a lot...I'll dissect the whole political situation. I'll do Obama and juxtapose him with different political figures in American history.

I'll do Reagan vs. Barack Obama. [In pitch-perfect Ronald Reagan] *Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.* Barack Obama would have said [in spot-on Obama voice], *We believe that barriers of any kind act as an obstruction to people's good relationships...*

I take people from the past and update them – Jimmy Stewart talking to Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley. [Enter Mr. Stewart] *You're worse than Mr. Potter, aren't ya? Yeah. Ya got the three-star rating on the bad mortgage securities, didn't ya. Then you sold 'em to your clients. But ya knew they were no good so you shorted 'em. You bet against 'em, didn't ya?*



Dana Carvey reprised the Church Lady for his turn hosting *Saturday Night Live* in 2011.

Any thoughts on the political climate and the presidential hopefuls?

It is always a freak show...They kind of eat their own these primary seasons...When I get up every morning, I read *The New York Times* editorial page and then *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page. I feel like then I get kind of a nice balance...

There are certain concepts that are very tricky, especially in the political arena...To give each side a punch in the solar plexus and give them a cookie at the same time – that's really tricky, and very, very interesting...The main goal is to make it really frickin' funny the whole time, of course. If I see someone laughing their a-- off and dabbing tears, that makes me happy.

Are you pulling for any particular candidate, as a potential impression?

I hadn't really thought of it...They reveal themselves over time...I did Gingrich once [shades of Ed Sullivan]...And then of course there's Ron Paul [Carol Channing-ish]. If they give it to Romney, he'll be the toughest one. But for sure, there will be stuff there to do, rhythms. You just have to kind of keep watching...Obama was really hard for everybody...I do a lot about Professor Obama. His press conferences turn into [Obama voice] *teachable moments*.

What's your plan for health care? [Obama voice] *Well, let's go back to the beginning of health care, when the tribesman would fall down the ravine and hurt his leg...and he had to tend to his own wounds. But now the shaman would bring bark and mud or whatever means he could...and tend to the injured leg of the tribesman and begin what we call health care.*

Well, do you have a plan? [Obama voice] *First, let's define what a plan is: an organized activity to achieve a particular goal...*

If you could raid the minds of three comedians living or dead, who would they be?

I'd say Stan Laurel, Groucho Marx and Lou Costello. I'll start with them...Peter Sellers. Don Rickles and Charlie Chaplin – I'd love to do a half-hour sitcom with them. We've got the beginning of a new television show.

If you could relive one point in your professional career, what would it be?

Maybe staying in the Lincoln Bedroom and having dinner with [President George H.W. Bush]. Boy, I don't think I would want to relive all of it. It was too intense. I'd say my first show on *SNL* where a few things I did worked really well was a high point. I was like, wow, maybe I can really do this.

Have you ever regretted passing up David Letterman's late-night TV spot in '93?

My kids go, 'Dad you could have done whatever you wanted. We didn't really care.'...But my emotional makeup and who I am...I would not be able to do that and just be present to my family...There's so much life force that goes into doing an hour of television a day...I have no regrets about that. Because it all just passes in the night anyway...Oprah was bigger than U.S. Steel and Jupiter combined, and now at 4 o'clock, there's no...it just moves quickly. I noticed that with Johnny Carson. I remember my kids going, 'Who's Johnny Carson?'

So you have to enjoy your time on the planet. A legacy, ego, power. If you really, really, really want to have a power base and a lot of, lot of, lot of money, a talk show is a good idea. But how much do you need? Who am I, Donald Trump?...I shop at The

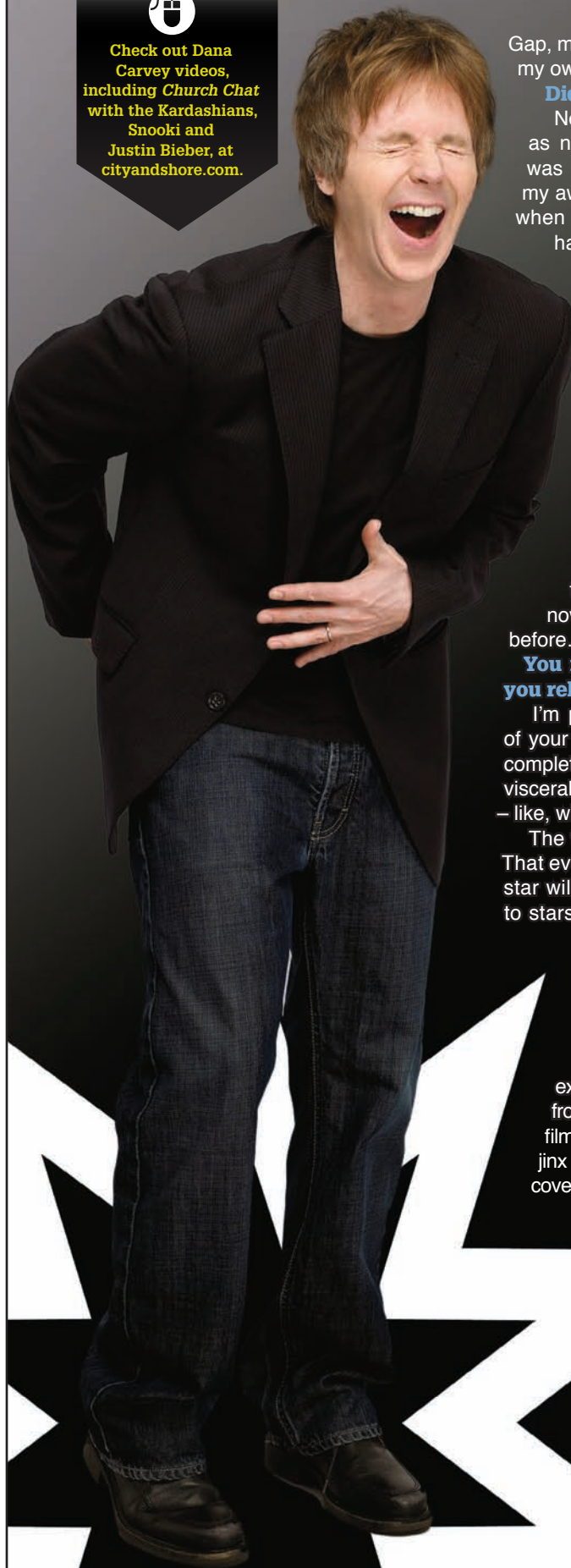
“Always my goal – and I'm not ever saying I'm going to achieve it – my goal is to do the greatest comedy show in history.”



Mike Myers and Dana Carvey in *Wayne's World*



Check out Dana Carvey videos, including *Church Chat* with the Kardashians, Snooki and Justin Bieber, at cityandshore.com.



Gap, mostly, and Banana Republic. I don't really like fancy things. It's just my own personality. You can only take one road...

Did you ever do characters for your kids to make them laugh?

No, not really. They would make me laugh, mostly. We raised them as normal as possible...There was nothing around that indicated I was in show business...They did, actually, at one time find some of my awards in a box in the basement...when they were, like, 12. And when I came home they had them all out...Eventually, their friends had seen *Wayne's World*, and they kind of put it all together. And now both of them may want to be...in show business. I may be moving back to LA at this late day and age. Then I can work without conflict. When [I was] on the road, I never would go for more than a few days. It will be different when they're both out of high school, and they're both in LA...We did everything to keep them away from [show business], but it pulled them back in.

What advice would you give your kids about the business?

I would tell this to anyone: Don't do it for the money or the fame. The odds are against you. There *is* luck involved...Focus on doing the assigned task well...If you want to do standup, see how good you can get at it. That's still the way I think. I'm just trying to get better or do it more interesting... I'm doing some stuff now that's just in a different wheelhouse than what I would have done before...It's like trying to catch the wind...It's forever interesting.

You mentioned spirituality as a topic in your show. How do you relate to it?

I'm probably fairly agnostic. The emotionality you get with the love of your children is what kind of connects me to religiosity. Because it's completely irrational why I would care about these people the way I do. It's visceral, and it's not intellectual...I'm totally open-minded [about religion] – like, whatever gets you through the night.

The thing that fascinates me is where science and religion coexist... That everything that makes [us] up came from stars. And eventually our star will blow up and everything that makes up you and I will go back to stars...If that's not a, hey, what the f---, I don't know what is...Kids don't philosophize as much; as you get older, you do. I think there's a lot of funniness in how much we try to philosophize and sort of figure out what the hell we're doing here and what's the meaning of it all.

Anything in the works for you?

A bunch of little different things. Now that I can stay in LA for an extended period of time, starting next summer [after Thomas graduates from high school]. That would be my first opportunity to develop a TV or film project. I have a few things I'm working on now, but of course, I would jinx them. But I am considering doing [something] about a reporter who covers entertainment in Southern Florida.

I appreciate your time. It's been really fun.

I've enjoyed it very much. Thanks for having me. I'm going to podcast our conversation.

[Nervous laughter] Tell me you're not.

I'm not, but I just thought of it. That actually'd be funny. Just call it *Interview* and put it on iTunes for free and go on a talk show and just promote it. Here are some of my interviews...

And that's how Dana Carvey turns the tables on an interviewer.