

ENTERTAINMENT

Danny Trejo shares story of prison and redemption with big Canton Palace crowd

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Key Points

Actor and author Danny Trejo spoke at Canton Palace Theatre on Thursday as part of a joint KSU Stark and Stark Library presentation.

Trejo covered an array of topics, including his time in prison and drug abuse, as well as the importance of education and helping others.

Trejo's motivational message included: "I would rather shoot for the moon and miss than aim for the gutter and make it."

CANTON – People lined up both before and after actor Danny Trejo's appearance Thursday night at the Canton Palace Theatre.

Some fans waited in line beginning as early as 10:30 a.m. to get a front row seat for the 7 p.m. event. Many others had been standing outside the venue since 3 or 4 p.m.

Some attendees said they just love Trejo. Or they have a favorite movie or role. Others were there for his inspirational message of hope, sobriety and overcoming adversity.

And based on boisterous laughter, beaming smiles and sustained applause, Trejo was worth the wait. And he likely satisfied all fans by covering an array of subjects, from prison to drugs to education to movies to restaurants.

Trejo's appearance was part of a joint presentation of the Stark Library and Kent State University at Stark.

Sitting on a stool while sharply dressed in a matching blue sports jacket and pants, he drew in the audience both with poignant anecdotes of his youth and unvarnished stories of drug and alcohol use that led to stints in jail and prison.

Self-deprecating humor, always delivered in his gravelly and distinct voice, also elicited many outbursts of laughter.

"It took me a long time to learn (the value of education)," Trejo said. "... You even need a high school diploma to get a good assignment in the penitentiary."

Trejo's anecdote about doing laundry behind bars drew laughter.

Squinting his eyes and furrowing his brow, he said: "Education is the key to whatever you want to do."

Smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol as a kid, Trejo said he went down the wrong path in life before he finally took responsibility for his actions and quit drugs and booze.

"Drugs and alcohol is the key to failure," he said. "It's that simple." When he became sober, "my life just seemed to get better and better," Trejo added.

Starting a landscaping business, Trejo said he learned that being kind to others, including taking out the trash for an elderly neighbor, led to good things, a pattern that continued when he broke into acting.

An early role was playing a convict, another anecdote that drew a wave of chuckles. Trejo, a former boxer, also fought the leading man in the film, which he recounted in comedic fashion.

Trejo's movies include "Con Air," "Desperado," "Spy Kids," "Anaconda"

Trejo's appearance was made possible through a partnership of the library system's Dr. Audrey Lavin Speaking of Books Author Series and Kent State University at Stark's Featured Speakers Series.

His films include "Desperado," "Heat," "Anaconda," "Con Air," "Spy Kids," "Once Upon a Time in Mexico" and "Machete." Recurring roles on television have included the shows "Breaking Bad," "The Flash" and "Sons of Anarchy."

Author of the memoir "Trejo: My Life of Crime, Redemption and Hollywood," the celebrity also has worked as a voice artist in video games and in the 2022 movie "Minions 2: The Rise of Gru."

Trejo recently expanded his Trejo's Tacos eateries, and released a cookbook, "Trejo's Tacos: Recipes and Stories from LA."

Canton teacher asks Trejo how to help and motivate first graders who curse and fight

During a question and answer session, Trejo said Robert De Niro was one of the actors he admired most. And he answered a Canton school teacher's question about how to motivate and guide youth who struggle in school and life.

"... My little 6-year-old babies are already ... swearing, they're fighting and it's a real nightmare, and I love them and I want so much for them, so how can I help them be the best that they can be?" she asked.

As was his style Thursday, whether speaking on stage or fielding questions, he commented fully and thoughtfully.

"There's a special place in heaven for what you're doing right now," he told the educator. "... And I just know examples of kids that are succeeding always kind of makes other kids want the same thing."

Children are no different than adults who frequently ask him how he went from a criminal to a film star and entrepreneur, Trejo said.

He suggested showing the young students "movies and books and stuff that show kids being successful."

Speaking generally, Trejo said that labeling children as "bad kids" also doesn't help.

"No one wants to work with the bad kids, and for me, those are my kids because I see them in juvenile halls ... and a lot of times the people around them fail them," Trejo said while also noting he's not blaming anyone in particular, including parents, who also face stresses and demands in life.

Trejo says helping troubled youth, not acting, is his main job

Earlier on Thursday, Trejo had hosted private question-and-answer sessions with inmates at the Trumbull Correctional Institution who are working toward a college degree at Kent State University's Trumbull County campus.

Trejo also spoke via video link to youth at the Multi-County Juvenile Attention System in Stark County.

Trejo said he doesn't consider acting to be his main job — helping troubled youth get on the right track and counseling those with drug and alcohol addictions is what he considers to be his calling.

"Drugs and alcohol for me are a disease that are an allergy of the body coupled with an obsession of the mind, if that makes any sense," he said to affirming applause.

Acting, however, gives him a platform, where people and especially youth offenders pay attention, he said.

'I would rather shoot for the moon and miss.'

Following his presentation, Trejo chatted briefly with some fans who waited for him to sign a book and pose for a photo. The line snaked from near the stage up through the theater and into the lobby. Some fans told him what a big difference his motivational story had made in their lives.

When asked about future projects, the pop culture figure took jabs at his own age, noting he'll be turning 80 in about a year.

"Okay ... 80," said Trejo, standing and leaning back against the stool. "Am I going to be a gang leader of (granddads)?" Grinning broadly, he joked about a movie concept called, "Granddaddy Daycare," triggering more laughter.

But "I'm never going to stop what I do as far as teaching and trying to motivate."

Trejo also answered a question about the advice he would give to those who have been overwhelmed by addiction or other woes.

"If you hit rock bottom and you're not dead, thank God," he said. "Cause the only way is up. And I hit rock bottom. That's why I'm here today ... (and) when you have no excuses, when you have no reason, when there's nothing left, it's like, 'OK, now I'm ready,' and I honestly believe that.

"... People can be wealthy and hit rock bottom," Trejo added. "You don't have to be desolate."

He pointed to his own unlikely success story, from a hardscrabble upbringing to prison to drugs to acting and intervention counseling.

"God's given us the ability to like do anything we want to do," Trejo said.

"I started a record label — I even sang on an album, and look, I got a frog voice," he said with laughter. "I would rather shoot for the moon and miss than aim for the gutter and make it."

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