

This week's  
best new  
DVDs: P.105



# TV Sunday

She's waving  
the flag for  
Danny: P.104



By MICHAEL GILTZ

**H**AS anyone ever received so much grief for taking a chance as Andy Richter?

When Richter announced he would be leaving "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" in 2000 after seven years, people got downright nasty.

Howard Stern berated him for leaving a cushy job that paid a reported \$500,000 a year. If Richter owned a dog, there's a good chance it was refusing to play fetch.

"I was sort of amazed at the reaction," laughs the 35-year-old actor. "At first, I got, 'Well, you'll be missed, but mazel.' But then there were a lot of really hostile reactions."

"I thought, isn't that what I'm doing what this country is all about? Taking chances and stepping out from something comfortable to take a risk? This is simply an example of the entrepreneurial spirit!"

"But people said, 'How dare you! You're making a good living and you're throwing it all away! You'll never work again. You're going to be David Caruso!' It was hilarious."

The underlying assumption was that Richter was lucky to get the perfect lazy man's job of sidekick and that he simply wouldn't be successful at anything else. Didn't they remember Richter had made his mark in the theater — on the post-modern satire "The Real Live Brady Show" no less?

And what about his early TV work, such as that character role on "Hard Copy" where Richter played a male prostitute for a crime reenactment video?

Naysayers be damned for his modestly titled sitcom — "Andy Richter Controls the Universe" — is one of the unexpected delights of the season. Airing Tuesdays at 8:30 after "That '70s Show" beginning March 19, it's a droll blend of office comedy and "Ally McBeal"-type fantasy sequences.

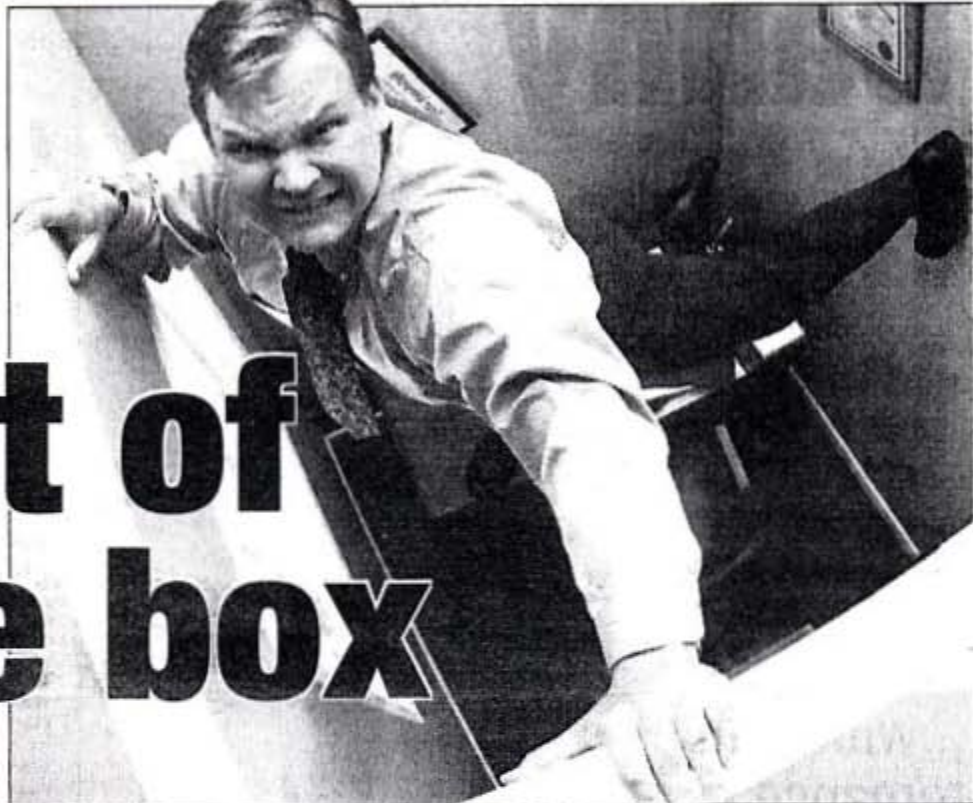
Richter plays an everyman schlub who writes technical manuals and has to share his office with the new guy. His best friend is so good-looking he never has to do any work. And the new receptionist is so cute he can't get up the nerve to ask her out. "I'm shy!" insists Richter. "It's endearing!"

So is the show, which was created by Victor Fresco, a write who broke through on "Alf," worked on "Mad About You" in its heyday and has struggled to make his mark

Conan  
who?  
Andy  
Richter  
breaks...

# Out of the box

Coming in Andy: The new Fox series "Andy Richter Controls the Universe" is one of the unexpected delights of the season.



with his own work ever since.

In one typical episode, Richter dates a girl who turns out to be a bigot. Instead of dumping the "hate-spouting hottie," he simply alleviates his guilt by volunteering at the

arranged marriage," explains Richter, who had a development deal after leaving "Conan" but hadn't produced anything yet. "I was sort of distracted by the birth of my son. Fox called my manager and said, 'Hey, he needs to get

of view. Every show could reinvent itself."

Fresco knew deciding to work with Richter would be a big step for both of them. "It's like dating," he says. "You're trying to see what the relationship is going to be like. Is this somebody I want to be in a relationship with? Are they going to be demanding? Are they going to be respectful?"

"Our first date was in New York. He took me to have Greek food. I tried not to read anything into it. We talked about the idea for the show for maybe 10 minutes. Then we talked about having kids and working on "Conan" and just tried to get to know each other. What made me feel comfortable was that he seemed like a normal guy." Now Richter is back

where he started with "Conan." That show was famously renewed in dribs and drabs. (It seemed like NBC was calling them up day by day to say, "Sure, you can film another episode.") Now Conan has been renewed for another four years at \$8 million a season.

And Richter?

All he can do now is sit back and wait to see the ratings. Richter grew up with "The Carol Burnett Show" and then had his comedy tastes defined by David Letterman. So getting to do "Late Night" for

seven years is already more than he ever imagined. So maybe now, with his own show, he can start to go Hollywood?

"I'm getting a new car," admits Richter, who had to answer another call during the interview. "That was the car guy, so I had to talk to him. The Volvo station wagon comes off lease so I'm trading up. I'm getting an Audi station wagon! I'm getting a faster, sexier station wagon to fit my new status as a TV star. And then I'll hope I can pay for it."

'People said: How dare you! You'll never work again. You're going to be David Caruso!'

local Jewish center. In another, he and the receptionist go to a "Sound of Music Sing-Along" together, giving Richter a chance to sing "So long, farewell" when they say goodnight.

Richter remembers Fox playing matchmaker.

"The network said, 'Let us set you up with a show runner on a blind date and maybe it will become an

on the stick or he's going to miss this season.'

"They suggested Victor Fresco and he flew out to New York and we had dinner at a restaurant in my neighborhood.

"I immediately clicked on his idea, because it was the first one that didn't depend on the who or where, it was the how, the gimmick of seeing everything from the narrator's point