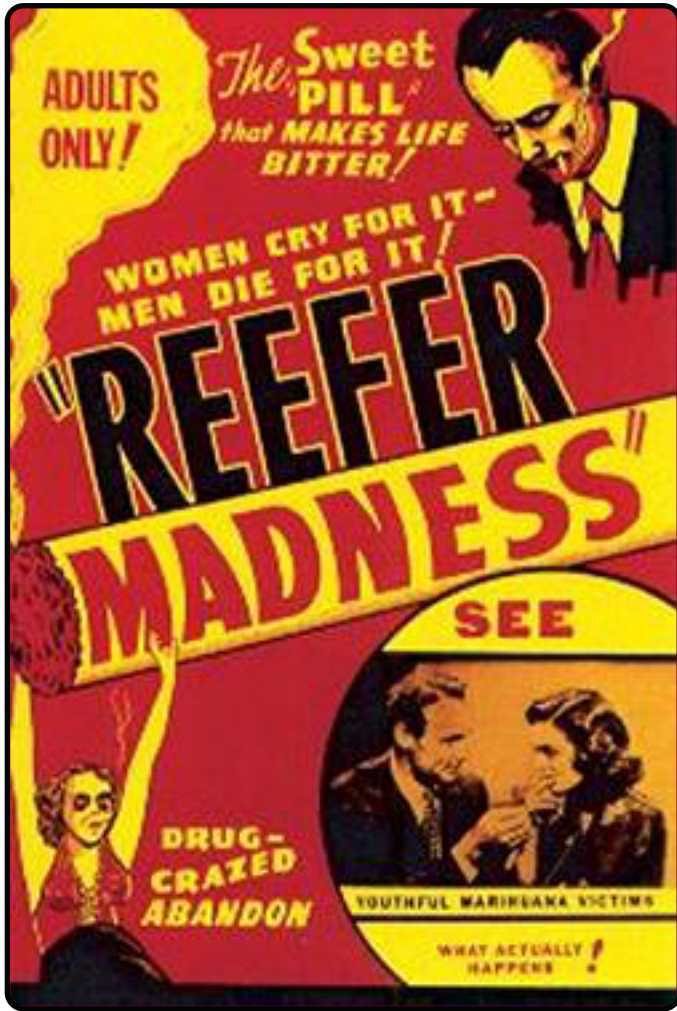


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Reefer Madness! is an important cautionary tale concerning the most insidious moral threat in America today – no, not the Marx Brothers, nor even that new fangled jazz music [Note #1: Reefer obscures your sense of time and place] – but rather the herbal cigarette, the Devil’s Parsley: I’m speaking, of course, of ‘Marihuana’

It’s no exaggeration to say that there has been no greater imperilment to the hearts and minds of our fragile youth in one hundred billion years [Note #2: Reefer makes you underestimate the extent of your own hyperbole, and turns you into a Darwinist].

Based on the 1936 exploitation film of the same name (a.k.a. Tell Your Children), it’s the story of Jimmy (Brad Facey) and Mary (Jessica Burns), two fresh-faced all-American teenagers who are lured into a world of decadence and depravity, cannabis, kinkiness and cannibalism [Note #3: Reefer makes you overly alliterative] by the hosts of their local Reefer Den, Jack and Mae (Richard Lovegrove and Belinda Morris).

All manner of terrible calamities ensue, a smorgasbord of death and (gasp!) sex, this modern tragedy playing out through a series of appropriately addictive song-and-dance numbers, accompanied by psychedelic lighting and the superb music of Chris King and band, no doubt under the influence themselves.

Barry Crocker serves as our moral compass, effortlessly shape-shifting between the Lecturer, Jimmy’s elderly mother, the Devil and Franklin Roosevelt, while Emily Cascarino smoulders as the temptress Sally De Banis, and Katie Headrick is as bubbly as bong-water in her role as the Placard Girl (she would enliven this review no end).

All the leads, and the ensemble, are magnificent, though special mention must be made of Jay James-Moody, whose inspired performance as the reefer-deranged Ralph is matched only by his direction of the play as a whole. Pam Schultz’s papier maché props, used to great comic effect throughout, also got the joint rolling, as it were (Note #4: Reefer causes you to commit bad puns to writing with no thought to the consequences).

I was outraged, of course, and certainly didn’t inhale, but only because I found the whole experience quite breathtaking. If you see this production and don’t have a good time, you clearly need to burn a little straw yourself.

To my weed-addled mind, it gives The Rocky Horror Picture Show a run for its money as the best subversive musical around. To paraphrase a line from the show itself [Note #5: Reefer makes you a rampant plagiarist]: if Reefer Madness! doesn’t turn you on, you ain’t got no switches.