

Letterman lights up

By JOSEF ADAMIAN

DESPITE the critics, David Letterman is still smokin' — cigars, that is.

After staying smoke-free for several months, the king of late night has resumed his habit of puffing away on a stogie while taping his CBS "Late Show."

"I stopped for six, eight months," Letterman told CNN's Larry King earlier this month.

"[But] I missed it desperately. I missed everything about it. I like the feel. I like the smell. I like the taste. I like everything about it. ... I'll quit again and then I'll go back to it."

Letterman doesn't actually keep a cigar in his hand during the show, but he can often be seen stealing a puff just as he's coming back from a commercial break.

That has some anti-smoking forces all fired up.

"It sends the wrong message for him to be seen smoking on-air," says Chris Moyer of the New York Public Interest Research Group, which lobbied on behalf of the city's tough new anti-smoking ordinance.

"Letterman is seen as cool by millions of people, including the kids who stay up to watch him. We have to cut the connection between 'cool' and smoking."

The American Heart Association also wants Dave to snuff out his stogies.

"Smoking any tobacco substance is harmful and I would advise any person to stop smoking," says Dr. Edgar Lieberman, chairman of the public policy board of the AHA's New York chapter.

"If he doesn't want to take that advice ... he needs to set a good example and not smoke on-camera. He's a very important national figure and people look to him as a role model."

But Dave also has some high-profile defenders, including fellow late-night talk show host Rush Limbaugh, a three-cigar-

Cigar-smoking late-night king burns up some, delights others

per-day man.

"Welcome back to the ranks, Dave," Limbaugh said yesterday in an interview with The Post. "The anti-smoking govt gets all worked up about this. But there are far more important things in this country to worry about."

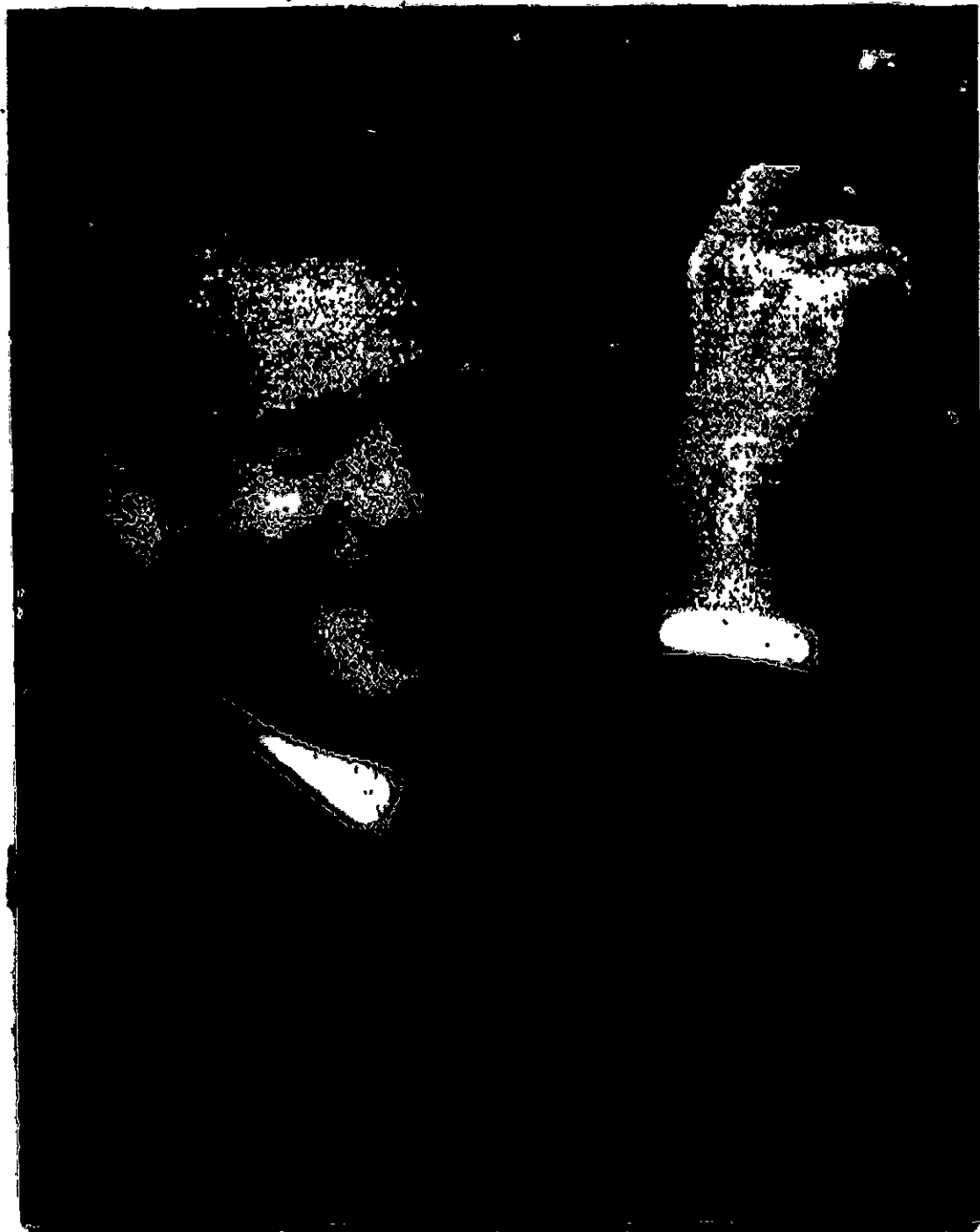
Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of Cigar Aficionado magazine, agrees.

"It's nonsense!" he thunders. "It's a late-night program, not something for kids. ['Late Show'] is a program that represents the good life, and I don't know what represents the good life better than cigar smoking."

Letterman told a reporter for a Washington newspaper this week that he had a desire to be on the cover of Cigar Aficionado, an idea Shanken says he "looks forward to with great interest."

But first, Shanken hopes Letterman will stop worrying about the health effects of cigar smoking — and just enjoy his one small pleasure.

"In moderation, there's nothing wrong with smoking cigars," says Shanken. "There are a lot of ignorant people who assume that cigars are the same as cigarettes, but they're not. You don't inhale cigars ... and the research that suggests cigars are dan-



ACTING UP Following in the footsteps of other comedy greats such as Groucho Marx and George Burns, David Letterman enjoys smoking a cigar.

gerous is minimal."

Meanwhile, Dave can take comfort in the fact that the City of New York can't be coming between him and his cigars. While

the new smoking law bans most public places from enclosed spaces such as the Ed Sullivan Theater, Letterman is exempt.

"There's an exception in the

law that says smoking is OK when it's part of a theatrical production," a health department spokesman said. "And I think everything Dave does is a production."

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