

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

THEATER



"Their good-humored determination... their wry sense of what the world's about make you laugh and leave you feeling hopeful."

Lily Tomlin's comedy celebrates survivors

"They have no sense of humor and they're against sex."

That was a frequently expressed criticism of the women's liberation movement in its early days. Anyone who still believes it ought to see Lily Tomlin's one woman show.

At a recent Chicago performance, the audience—male and female—laughed uproariously all the way through what is basically

a feminist routine. And as for sex, it comes up again and again: sex for the elderly, sex for the handicapped—even quadriplegic; the mixture of sexual feelings, awe and love of a seven-year-old girl for her teacher.

Some of the material was written for this production (which is on its way to New York and may tour other cities if it is as successful as its try-out promises). Some

of the sketches—or at least the characters—are already familiar to TV audiences ("Laugh In," "Saturday Night," et al.).

A remarkable proportion of Tomlin's comedy deals directly with feminist issues. Battered wives aren't usually the stuff of humor, unless it's the kind that treats women's suffering as a joke. But Tomlin has a ten-minute sketch that's very funny, and

also leaves you with respect for the two characters, the organist who left her husband and Linda who should.

The respect you're left with for the essential humanity of all Tomlin's characters is the real basis of feminism in her comedy. She makes fun without making fun of. Her humor nurtures, rather than puts down. Her characters, in real life, would seem pathetic. Yet their good-humored determination in the face of enormous obstacles, their wry sense of what the world's about make you laugh and leave you feeling hopeful.

A woman who's just been released from a mental hospital says that *they* say she's well, but then, *they're* still in there. A quadriplegic drives her wheelchair across the U.S., steering and accelerating by special breath-operated controls, chattering into her CB radio. Sex for the handicapped, she says, everyone says it's disgusting. "That's what Danny's mother said when she found us together in his iron lung."

Then there's Boogie Lady. At 77 she has a sort of gospel-rock advice-to-the-elderly radio show. Sample advice: To a woman who writes from a nursing home that they serve Jello almost every night: "Start a riot." (It turns out the woman can't, because everyone there likes Jello.) Tomlin manages to play Boogie Lady without putting down the elderly or listeners to such radio shows. Boogie Lady is, in her own way, a kind of heroine. She's saying, you can keep going even if you are old, even if they say you can't. "Boogie can't sit still long enough to have its picture took," she cries.

She creates wise comedy out of how we feel about stars, the figures who we make larger than our own lives. A middle-aged organist's eyes sparkle and her voice grows husky and dramatic as she describes seeing Frank Sinatra. A seven-year-old fantasizes about having her teacher for a friend. "I mean, I just didn't have a lot in common with a bunch of seven-year-old semi-illiterates."

Tomlin knows that her fans adore her, too, and she demystifies the magic she creates as much as possible. At one point she steps out of character to comment on how a sketch is put together and reads one-liners from her notebook, as illustrations of the building blocks that go into routines.

Her superb timing, her various voices and accents, her ability to create many atmospheres with a minimum of props all contribute to keeping her audience with her every step of the way. But above all, it's her affirmation of humanity that counts.

In the 1950s, male "sick" comedians used scorn to expose problems a complacent society was trying to ignore. The audience could draw strength from being able to face the problems although the performer's scorn occasionally spilled over onto it. In the '70s, Tomlin creates old, discarded, sick lonely and just plain odd characters who keep laughing, and keep us laughing as they struggle not just to survive, but to prevail. Her feminist humor reaches into us, where we feel most vulnerable, and we leave her performance with some of the wacky, life-affirming strength she projects.

—Judy MacLean

No superstar—Phil Ochs was one of us

The old Leona Theater in Homestead, Pa., shook under the pounding, clapping, and whistling of 1,500 steelworkers last month. Pete Seeger was playing a benefit for Ed Sadlowski's insurgent campaign. Sadlowski jumped onto the stage to embrace Seeger in front of a massive tapestry of the bloody 1892 Homestead-Carnegie Strike, a lot of good union men talked class struggle, and not a few people had the time of their lives.

"The one sad note in the whole evening," the organizer of the concert telegraphed Michael Ochs in California, "was that Phil wasn't there to play and to savor the night."

In 1965 Bob Dylan recorded "Like a Rolling Stone" and folk-rock crashed the pop barrier. Phil Ochs, like Tim Hardin and Eric Anderson, thought he had a chance to go all the way with Dylan. But Dylan understood the limits of the media. "Maybe you think you're gonna do what I did. Nobody's gonna do it."

Dylan's move to rock enraged the moles of the New York folk scene, but it increased his audience ten-fold. Rock had become

the folk music of the '50s and '60s. Ochs understood what was happening. He admired Dylan's first electric album, *Bringing it All Back Home*, but he could not follow. The sardonic writer of "Draft Dodger Rag," "Ringing of Revolution," and "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore" continued to record "topical music," as he called it.

When Ochs finally made the move to rock in 1970 with his Elvis Presley/Buddy Holly influenced *Greatest Hits* album and tour, it was much too late. The territory had been claimed, settled, and plowed under.

But to hundreds of thousands in the civil rights and anti-war movements, Phil's presence counted as much as his music. So what if he didn't write like Bob Dylan? It was Phil Ochs, more than Dylan or Joan Baez or any other performer, who could be called up to play benefits or to roust a demonstration with a few bars of "The War Is Over." After his motorcycle accident, Dylan punked out. He retreated to royalties and country pie in Wood-

stock, N.Y., while Ochs stayed in the streets with the rest of us.

Ochs was a pacifist in the beginning, but he was too American to remain non-violent. A socialist, he never developed much of an analysis. He fought with his heart. Later he ran with the Yippies, with Jerry Rubin and Stew Alpert, partly because elements of the hyperserious left could not understand his move away from pure folk music, partly because he was a media freak like the Yips. Ochs finally broke with Rubin's politics on a month-long speed run across South America in the fall of 1971. Ochs told Rubin he was an ass to flaunt dope-smoking in Allende's Chile.

But a year later, Phil's good times had become too crazy for most of his friends. On a 1972 African trip he would down his first beer at 9 a.m. In Johannesburg he fell off the stage, drunk, to the joy of the apartheid press.

But he kept playing. He had no illusions about George McGovern's liberal politics, but he felt that the quickest way to end the war was to de-

feat Nixon. He toured for the McGovern campaign. He set up the 1974 "Evening with Salvador Allende" in Madison Square Garden, standing with Arlo Guthrie, Allende's widow, and, yes, Dylan.

I hoped Ochs could make the transition from performer to organizer. The left needed a person to put together benefits, and Ochs was respected by both performers and the movement. But to Ochs, setting up concerts was conceding failure as a musician.

"I'll never kick the habit of writing songs," he wrote on the back of his second album. That was in 1965. When he died he hadn't written a song for six years.

Phil went dry partly for personal reasons. Partly he quit writing for lack of support. The folk fans dropped away when he reached out for a broader audience. The music industry hardly welcomed a political folksinger who recorded tunes like "Love Me, I'm a Liberal"—especially when they didn't sell like Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*.

MUSIC

But most of all Phil could not handle the breakup of the '60s civil rights and anti-war movement. In that, he was like thousands of others. With the battles won, the movement—always soft on organization and long-range analysis—fell apart.

In the past few years veterans of the '60s have begun to regroup. Grassroots fights in communities and factories are popping out across the country.

The possibility of a new movement came too late for Phil. "I'm dying," he was already telling friends in the winter of 1974. He alternated between obesity and gauntness. When he lost 60 pounds, friends forced him to see doctors. The diagnosis each time: "nothing physical."

Phil killed himself one year ago this month. He used a rope.

When Dylan dies, it will be like the death of a Hollywood film star. People will be fascinated, but they won't cry. Ochs was not a superstar. He was one of us. Maybe that's why so many cried when he died.

—Steve Chapple

Steve Chapple writes regularly for *In These Times*.

FILM

Dirty Harry, lawless defender of order

THE ENFORCER

Starring Clint Eastwood
Directed by James Fargo for Malpas
Productions

The Enforcer is a very, very popular film. On the basis of current *Variety* figures, it should gross between \$35 and \$40 million worldwide. Its impact on its public? Sitting in a local bar after I had watched the film, I heard a comment from a woman graduate student that summed it up.

"It makes me want to go out and shoot someone," she said.

This is the third film constructed around Clint Eastwood's characterization of Harry Callahan, the ultra-reactionary anti-hero of the San Francisco police department. Like its two predecessors (*Dirty Harry* and *Magnum Force*), it is a well-paced melodrama that gives plenty of room for Eastwood to showcase his persona: the tall, cool, soft-spoken man of action, the 20th century cowboy, dealing out frontier justice with his huge .44 Magnum.

The role of the savage hero fits Eastwood's stony visage as perfectly as it fit the male stars in whose tradition he belongs: William S. Hart, Gary Cooper, John Wayne, et al. The character type,

as much as his own charisma, is responsible for Eastwood's fabulous success, which started with his role as the "man with no name" in the Sergio Leone spaghetti westerns of the '60s.

Popularity breeds formula, and *The Enforcer* is an example of giving the audience more of what they seem to want. In all three of the Dirty Harry films, the mythic structure is the same: the hero's town is besieged by forces so violent that only matching violence—the ability and will to kill ruthlessly—can eliminate them and restore "law and order." The citizens need the hero's ruthless skill, but they also fear him for it. He is forced to live a life of solitude, balancing precariously between civilization and savagery.

There is nothing wrong with Harry Callahan. But there is something seriously wrong with the world in which he lives and acts. That is the city of the reactionary imagination, populated by thugs, cops and liberal (weak) government officials. In this world it is right and just to be brutal in order to eliminate the most uncomplicated stereotypical villains seen on the screen since the Apaches of John Ford's *Stagecoach*.



The villains of *The Enforcer* kill purely for pleasure and profit. No other motives are asked for or supplied. They are ripped out of the pages of an urban daily like the *Chicago Tribune*, that is running scared.

Citizens in this nightmare world have no function except the passive one of victim. They are there to be kidnapped, shot, stabbed or blown to jelly. People who live in a state of perpetual fear identify with the objects of this senseless violence and give emotional support to a hero acting within that elemental moral context. They cheer for Dirty Harry as he blows

all the bad men up and away.

It does not seem important that his violence offers no real solution to the problem. He has fulfilled the audience's need for reassurance that there is somewhere—if not a solution to the problems of their daily lives—at least a champion who will defend and protect them. That is what makes Dirty Harry films so popular.

And dangerous.

While the audience is caught up in slick production values, it has no time to question the moral values of the film or their validity in the real world. We watch

the gun battles, the chases, the hero fighting for respect in a world that doesn't understand his ethic, or we get caught up in the relationship between Harry and his female partner, whose allegiance to his philosophy gives her stature as it leads her toward martyrdom—and forget the contradictions and complexities of real life.

What we don't stop to question inside the theater, we may end up dismissing when we step outside.

—Joe Heumann

Joe Heumann teaches media-related subjects at Eastern Illinois University.

Portuguese defection poisonous propaganda

MALKO: Spymaster, Number 14—The Portuguese Defection
By Gerard de Villiers
Pinnacle Books, 166 pp, \$1.25

At the height of the recent turmoil in Portugal, I was a dinner guest of the Chief of Staff to Mario Soares, now Prime Minister. While we were eating our main course, my socialist host told me about his contacts with the CIA.

Perhaps he was so loose about it because he assumed that all Americans share the same perspective. What he most admired about the CIA was their analysis of the Portuguese situation. He had no interest in the gadgetry of espionage, feats of physical daring, or the beauty of female spies.

The reality of CIA covert activity is often too prosaic for the writers of pulp fiction, who prefer to present agents as omnipotent, karate-chop killers, rather than mild-mannered Ivy League graduates who impress foreign politicians by their perspicacity. (Or by bribes.)

The Malko series is the most widely-read fictionalization of CIA activities. Its author, who writes under a pseudonym, is reputed to be a French journalist working on a conservative Paris daily. His hero, Prince Malko, is of Austrian royal lineage and a CIA special agent.

In *The Portuguese Defection*, Malko discovers that the Soviet KGB controls every move of the Portuguese Communist Party and groups to its left. The wife of a high-ranking KGB operative wants to defect because her husband is a boor and because she likes the luxuries of the West. (She is, incidentally, a nymphomaniac.)

As the story unfolds, there are numerous soft-core sexual esca-

pades and several grisly deaths. The murders committed by the CIA's heavies are particularly affecting because they are so bizarre, because the Agency's hired hands always find their work humorous. In the end, Malko rescues the distressed KGB wife and proves once again that good guys—in the CIA—always triumph.

The "analysis" of the Portuguese political scene would not have impressed my socialist host. Virtually everything in *The Portuguese Defection* is either confused or mistaken, although some of this misinformation resembles actual American reportage on Portugal. General readers, of course, have no way of knowing that, along with their usual dose of sex and violence they are being fed explicit (pro-CIA) propaganda.

In earlier Malko books, the CIA's prince has, among other things, saved Henry Kissinger from assassination and has dispatched American guerillas to oblivion. Economically written, the books are intended for an international mass audience. It is not surprising to hear that a film version of this one is in the works.

The flavor of the books is decidedly European. The stress on the virtues of aristocrats and the cult of blood practiced by Malko's CIA thugs seem more in tune with European fascism than with anything American. American pulp fans desire violence, but they have usually preferred a less ideological brand.

Nevertheless, Malko does sell well in this country, which proves that there is an audience willing to accept politics with its pornography.

—Sidney Blumenthal

Sidney Blumenthal is the editor of *Government by Gunplay* (New American Library).

Without you we're not all that we all can be

You've read about us in *In These Times*.

We're the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. The feisty (we don't always agree with each other on everything), young (just three years old), and fast-growing (from 200 members in 1973 to more than 2,000 today) democratic socialist organization that concluded its national convention in Chicago last month with a call to build a mass movement for full employment. But that really doesn't tell you much.

We're out-of-the-closet socialists, active in the labor, feminist, liberal, and human rights movements. And we're struggling to bring our socialism into the mainstream of American life.

Sure, DSOC members include people like Michael Harrington, Victor Gotbaum, Gloria Steinem, Julian Bond, James Farmer, Lillian Roberts, Victor Reuther and Irving Howe.

But, we're just as proud of some DSOC'ers you haven't heard about. A steelworker in Bridgeport who worked another 40-hour week for Ed Sadlowski. An AFSCME local president who organized clerical workers in Illinois when the experts said it couldn't be done. And tenant organizers, Democratic Party activists, socialist feminists and other people who have tried to meld the day-to-day struggles with their dreams for society. In short, the kind of people who read *In These Times*.

We don't have all the answers for achieving socialism in the center of world capitalism. But we think a first step is bringing together some of the people who elected Jimmy Carter, the trade unionists, the women, the blacks, and the poor. And then demanding that his administration live up to its pledge of full employment. We try to push social progress as far as it will go—from tax reform to income redistribution, from national health insurance to socialized medicine, from economic tinkering to democratic planning.

It will take hard work in the communities, offices, factories, and schools of the '70s and '80s. And, without you, we won't be able to do as much as we could do with you. To flatter ourselves, we've got one thing in common with *In These Times*—we're a beginning. And—like *In These Times*—we could be much more.

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