



(Our sincere thanks to the Las Vegas Sun and its distinguished executive editor, Bryn Armstrong, for permission to reprint the following commentary that appeared under Bryn's name in Hank Greenspun's "Where I Stand" column recently. We are constrained to remark that anyone who can "stand" in Hank's shoes--er, that is, space--most certainly can fill our own.)

The quality of the output is getting mighty strained.

The thought for this column results from a long conversation with Hank Henry, Las Vegas' "Top Banana," Red Marshall, who before his unfortunate illness was considered one of the greatest skit men on the burlesque and vaudeville circuits, and a Minsky veteran, Mort Marshall and Irv Harmon, both currently appearing in the hilarious show at the Riviera Hotel.

In his own milieu, Hank Henry has no master, as is acknowledged by most people who go for the broad type of humor in which he specializes.

After the merits, or lack of them, of the present-day crop of prizefighters were disposed of, the conversation naturally turned to comedians and entertainment in general.

Perhaps it should be explained that the conversation took place following the weekly Strip fight card, so the subject was fresh in their minds.

But comedy and entertainment is close to their hearts and the subject of serious study.

After listening, the uninitiated had to come to the conclusion that the key word... the difference between a great comedian, or entertainer, one who goes on forever as differentiated from the flash in the pan who enjoys momentary success and then is forgotten... is LOVE.

It seems that all of the really great entertainers, no matter what their skill, and all the great comics, had a lifelong love affair going on with an elusive damsel which is called the audience, or the public, or whatever, the ones who come to listen and watch, and cry some and laugh a lot, which seems to be what happens in most love affairs that amount to anything anyway.

It seems that laughter is allied--even closely wedded--to sorrow, and the funniest bits have in them an element of pathos that sometimes reaches out and grips the knowing, and if there weren't laughter, there would be tears.

Red Skelton is an example. If you can't laugh with him, you must cry for all of humanity and feel that terrible pain in the heart that comes with the phrase... "It might have been..."

Marcel Marceau... a wisp... a flash of white across the human consciousness... a great feeling of emptiness while he pantomimes the man and the bumblebee... one of the few who has approached Charles Chaplin on those great plateaus he attained while writing show business history.

"The Anniversary Waltz" as sung by Al Jolson has to be a milestone in the memory of everyone who heard him do it.

Rarely has a human being told in a song such a true story of the relationship between man and woman... a relationship filled with some joy, some soul-tearing sorrow... some of the problems that arise when two people speak the same language but are deaf to each other's hearts... an eloquent argument with the flat assertion that "no man is an island..." because most of us are and the landing beaches aren't easy when one human being attempts to enlarge his existence to encompass another life.

Jolson, the greatest entertainer of modern times, when the hearts of others was the instrument... what a love affair that was!

A little man with a slouch hat and a huge nose... Jimmy Durante. An elfin visitor almost from another planet he seems, yet he is closely attuned to those with whom he shares this world.

There are many others.

The veterans of show business decry the disappearance of the smaller clubs and the vaudeville circuits which provided the basic training courses for most of the great talents which are around today.

But most of all, they decry the state of the world which produces comics and other entertainers who lack the affinity with the other members of the human family.

There are dozens of these and the proper word for their humor is "sick."

They place major reliance upon the four-letter word and their particular brand of comedy is inhuman, acid and biting, emphasizing and enlarging human foibles and turning them into something far less than the warm weaknesses they are.

Their comedy is fashionable now, because at the moment we live in an uneasy, unhappy world.

But their problems, and those of the world, can be cured if all viewed their fellows with love as do the great entertainers who have graced and are gracing our stages.

(Postscript: This bearded one was the sixth person who sat in at the above-mentioned table and we would like to add one word to Bryn's observations--"Amen!" Anon.)

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