

IN PERSON

JAZZ OFF-BROADWAY

Not long ago, New York's off-Broadway theater district received something of a jolt. Jean Shepherd and *rabble* brought an unprecedented and disturbing show to the Orpheum Theater. The show, titled *Look, Charlie*, ran for three consecutive Monday nights.

Shepherd, a noted jazz personality, iconoclast and satiric monologist, has a four-hour Sunday night program on radio station WOR. The stage show was somewhat in the manner of his radio programs, but with important differences. His narratives, for one thing, had greater inner unity and his satire was proportionately more pointed and effective.

Subtitled *A History of the Pratzfall*, *Look, Charlie* seemed, more than anything else, to be a protest against conformity. It strongly reaffirmed the necessity for in-



Jean Shepherd: unofficial people

dividual men to persist in being simply what they are, to speak freely what they believe. Invectives were hurled, in lavish quantities, at the world's official people — those who measure success in terms of the length of their automobiles, the cut of their gray flannel suits and the resonance of their official-sounding names.

In this respect, Shepherd's role was very much like that of the jazz musician — who, in Shepherd-ese, is a *night people*, separated by his art from the day-to-day, nine-to-five world that official people inhabit.

Shepherd was both hilarious and provocative in developing his man-against-officialdom theme. Combining the memory of a Marcel Proust with the improvisational abilities of a skilled jazz soloist, his narratives were similar to those of Mort Sahl, another comedian-philosopher who has been recognized as a jazz personality.

Any comparison between Shepherd and Sahl, however, must take into account the ways in which they differ. Shepherd, for instance, is neither as quick-on-the-draw nor

as sophisticated as Sahl, but he is basically more honest and penetrating than Sahl. Often, Sahl will attack people and ideas because they are especially vulnerable, or because it is fashionable to do so. By contrast, Shepherd is more selective in choosing his villains, and is more subtle and devastating in vanquishing them.

Included in Shepherd's *rabble* were Shel Silverstein, the *Playboy* cartoonist; Herb Gardner, creator of *The Nebbishes*; and The Red Onion Jazz Band, consisting of Bob Thompson (washboard), Frank Laidlaw (cornet), Carl Lunceford (amplified banjo) and Steve Knight (tuba). They augmented Shepherd's monologues perfectly.

Although space limitations do not permit the use of extensive quotations from any of Shepherd's narratives, perhaps an example will serve to illustrate the style of many of them. In speaking of the way many people today have been cowed into organizing and belonging and conforming, he told of his youth as a White Sox fan, back on the South Side of Chicago, where people had *guts*, and were involved with *real* reality.

"The White Sox," said Shepherd, "were a *real* ball-club. Mike Tresh went for two years without a hit. That took guts! And one year, Zeke Bonura, the first baseman, led the league in fielding with .997 — and never once laid his glove on a ball! Guts!"

Characteristically, the show ended on an up-tempo, in a thoroughly unpredictable way. Walking down from the stage and up the aisle, Shepherd announced that he was "going across the street for a cup of coffee." It seemed like a good idea, and a fitting end to a singularly memorable evening.—ROBERT A. PERLONZO

JAZZ IN CLUBS

Jimmy Giuffre and Jim Hall came to the Village Vanguard recently with a curious and, in some cases, apprehensive thought on the part of the listener. This was a trio that had no rhythm support whatever: trombone, guitar and reed, with no thought to bass or drums.

As the night evolved, it became evident that nothing really very startling had happened inside the Giuffre attempts, except that the bass had been replaced by trombone. The feeling of the group is identical with what it had been — getting that strange bayou quality, no, not really that, but something that's got a (you should excuse the expression) western flavor to it. Brookmeyer fits admirably.

There is, as Jim points out elsewhere in this issue, a distinct relationship between the way the two of them play: an inter-relationship, actually, that provides them with a variety of tonal and inherently rhythmic material that changes shape as it comes up. Jim Hall creates the rhythmic excitement or intensifies what the others begin.

Most admirable of their material are the compositions and outlines that Giuffre has done as special material. Things like *The Train and the River*, *Pickin' 'em Up and Layin' 'em Down*.—JACK MAHER

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