

Jean Shepherd Amuses Large Audience in FDU Appearance

Recalls First Meeting with Castro, Knew He Was Man Who Liked Conflict

By Walter A. Koening
Herald-News Staff Writer

RUTHERFORD—The irrepressible Jean Shepherd talked in the gymnasium of Fairleigh Dickinson University's campus Friday night, and in the process amused, belittled and otherwise mentally stimulated a crowd of between 400 and 500 persons.

A man of many interests in the entertainment field, (including his own television show last year and a new one being planned, night club appearances and a book he is writing, "What Time Does the Balloon Go Up?"), Shepherd is well-known in the metropolitan area for his radio shows. He is presently broadcasting (on WOR) from 11:15 p.m. to midnight every weekday.

By his own estimation, many persons seem to listen to his radio show to find something wrong with what he says, but judging from the local audience his fans are numerous. The start of the program, scheduled for 7:30 p.m., had to be delayed while additional chairs were set up. Eventually, the chairs ran out with the gym about two-thirds full, and the overflow had to sit on the bleachers along the gym's walls.

The program was sponsored jointly by the student newspaper, "The Bulletin," and the campus Student Council. It was the first in a planned series "by persons of interest to the student body."

AFTER walking to the podium on the otherwise-bare stage, Shepherd greeted the audience with the loud and indignant words, "Twenty five cents!" This was a reference to the price of admission charged. "It just

gives a man an idea of what he's worth," he added dejectedly.

For the rest of the evening, Shepherd did what he does on his radio program: he talked. He stood alone on the stage and talked for nearly two hours, and then stood in the middle of the stage after the program, surrounded by a group of about 30 intellectually curious and autograph-seeking persons, and talked for another half-hour.

He finally extricated himself from the group well after 10 p.m., but in time to make his 11:15 radio show (which he does "live") and talk some more.

As he remarked on a radio program earlier last week, some persons who like humor dislike philosophy, and vice versa. He obviously prefers not to label himself as either a philosopher or a humorist.

Is he a philosopher? "Nothing disturbs a crusader for peace as much as an outbreak of peace," and, similarly, "What would all you sensitive people (meaning the audience) do if there was a sudden outbreak of sensitivity? You wouldn't be able to find a single slob (to feel superior to)."

Is he a humorist? "Have you ever noticed how New Jerseyans think New Yorkers are terrible drivers, and vice versa?" He added that residents of neighboring states in the Midwest (where he grew up) think the same way about each other.

Is he a "sick" comedian? "When you fly over New York City in an airplane, you see a building with electric signs flashing, 'TIME,' and 'LIFE' (a reference to the building housing the magazines of those names) over and over. Perhaps someday

there will be a building with signs flashing, 'DEATH,' and 'TAXES.'"

SHEPHERD displayed a phenomenal ability for remembering the past events in his life, which he used as the basis of his monologue. However, contrary to the impression one might get over the radio of a disembodied "memory" talking, Mr. Shepherd is a real person. He was born in Chicago, attended public elementary school in East Chicago, Ind., and Hammond (Ind.) High School.

After a stint of about four years in the U.S. Army Signal Corps during World War II, part of which he spent in North Africa and from which he emerged a corporal, he attended Indiana University and the University of Maryland, first majoring in physics, then dentistry and finally getting his degree in psychology.

He is about 40 years old, of medium build with a very close crewcut. He wore a green plaid sport jacket, white shirt and tie and grey, unpressed pants. While belittling the audience (and often himself), he flashed a disarming smile and frequently broke into his patented, mischievous chuckle.

Many of the subjects he touched upon were obviously familiar ones to his radio listeners, such as his childhood, the army, the best-selling author J. D. Salinger and various show business personalities and comedians.

A high point of amusement for the audience was his description of the first time he saw Fidel Castro, which was immediately following Castro's successful Cuban revolution. Shepherd, acting out the scene himself, said Castro walked into a press conference in a New York hotel preceded by two bodyguards armed with sub-machine guns, and wearing a chrome-plated canteen, an entrenching tool and two revolvers.

"Although Castro began his speech by shouting, 'I am a man of peace,' I suddenly knew that

this was a man who loves war," Shepherd stated.

He admitted that previously he, like many others, had been sympathetic with Castro's efforts to overthrow the former Cuban dictator, Fulgencio Batista. "We Americans are very often 'for' someone because of what he is against. We forget that there are many varieties of rottenness," he explained.

Shepherd is a serious student of the nose flute, although he did not perform on the instrument. He did, however, play a tune by rounding his open mouth and knocking on the top of his head with his knuckles. "Head Thumping," as he called this performance, was a legitimate art form in 18th Century Germany under the name of "Kopf Spielen," he solemnly informed the audience.

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