

"EUGENE 2050"

Story writers! Sharpen your pencils! It's time for another **WHAT'S HAPPENING** Story Contest.

The theme this time is "Eugene in 2050." Stories should be no longer than 2000 words, typed, and in our hands by 5 pm on Thursday, March 6 (no exceptions!).

The winning story will be published in the March 20 edition of **WHAT'S HAPPENING**. The winning writer will also receive a special prize—which we'll announce next week.

Watch for more information in subsequent issues of **WHAT'S HAPPENING**!

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & THE CONTINUATION CENTER presents MEN & MASCULINITY SYMPOSIUM January 22-24, 1986 Eugene Conference Center

Panel discussions, general session presentations, information workshops and experiential workshops will define, discuss, question and challenge old notions of masculinity. One University of Oregon graduate or undergraduate credit is available for attending the Symposium.

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San Francisco Mime Troupe Crossing Borders, A Domestic Farce

In 1963, R.G. Davis, founder of the present day San Francisco Mime Troupe, wrote, "When the idea of a theatre group independent of institutions, organizations, funds, and colleges, first came into my head, I proposed that a company be formed to go for three years and then disband. The limit of three years was chosen to avoid all the pitfalls of overhanging organizations that run solely to survive."

Celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1984, the San Francisco Mime Troupe has successfully surpassed its three-year life expectancy with successes and failures, hardships, arrests, controversy, and yes, survival. For their politics and art to stay viable, the Troupe has had to change in ways never dreamed of in 1959, the first year the R.G. Davis Mime Studio and Troupe brought *Mime and Words* to the San Francisco Art Institute.

Davis' original intent for his theatre company was to present an answer to boring theatre in the U.S. His theory was to use theatre as a means to teach, direct toward change, and be an example of change. This goal was accomplished with performances sometimes considered shocking, vulgar, and revolutionary, but never boring.

Commedia Dell'arte

After training with Etienne Decroux in Paris, Davis rejected the French form of Mime (pantomime) for the music and speech necessary to awaken American audiences. Davis filled the stage with poets, lecturers, locally made movies, as well as the Troupe's performances. After experimenting with a variety of forms indoors, the Troupe moved outdoors employing Commedia Dell'arte, a type of 16th century vaudeville. They brought theatre to all people by performing free in the parks of San Francisco.

Commedia Dell'arte proved to be a solid choice for the Mime Troupe's messages. Broad gestures fit well in the open settings of the parks and the themes of the Mime Troupe were easily adapted to the exaggerated characters of Commedia.

Italian Commedia was bawdy and street-wise, and, keeping true-to-form led to the Troupe's first of many arrests. The San Francisco Park Commission, acting as censor, revoked the Troupe's park

permit in 1965, arresting Davis on charges of obscenity.

Benefit performances by the Jefferson Airplane, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the Grateful Dead and others helped cover the legal fees and focused public attention on the rights of citizens to use the parks. This opened the way for love-ins, be-ins, a new era of rock concerts as money-making enterprises, and a continuing tradition of free summer performances by the Mime Troupe.

Street Activism

Arrests and revolution were soon-to-be inexorably entwined with the Mime Troupe's image. Their tour of *A Minstrel Show or Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel* rode the crest of anti-war demonstrations across the country.

With touring came changes within the Troupe itself. Its street activism had attracted people who were inexperienced in theatre or political history. The Troupe grew in size to unmanageable proportions. In 1967, Davis cut 35 people from the company, leaving a core of 15 performers ready to employ the best of the experimental techniques developed over the past seven years. The Troupe produced its most successful Commedia, *L'Amante Militaire*, a satire on the Vietnam War, winning its first Village Voice Off-Broadway Award (Obie) for "revolution and grooving in the parks."

With this re-organization it became clear that Troupe members needed to be both political and artistic. Salaried at \$25 a week, the company needed to develop a consistent flow of new material and a marketplace for their performances.

Becomes Collective

In 1970, while researching and adapting Brecht's *Congress of the Whitewashers*, the Troupe studied Marx's theory of common ownership of the means of production. Davis' era ended as members of the Troupe elected to become a collective.

This change-over brought about an expansion of styles. Faithful to comic form, the Troupe used melodrama, sci-fi, mystery, western, and TV sit-com to tell its stories. Still, the basis of every play remained its political intention. With this broadening of styles came an expansion of

themes. Troupe members looked around and saw that they were trying to portray the world with an all-white company and in 1973 a hiring freeze was placed on white actors.

Becoming a multiracial company, the Mime Troupe began branching out into concerns of minorities and the Third World with such plays as *Frijoles*, *False Promises/Nos Enganaron*, *Last Tango in Huahuateno*, and one of their most successful characters to date featuring a black actor, *Factwino*.

Crossing Borders

Their current play, *Crossing Borders, A Domestic Farce*, which will be performed Wednesday, Jan. 22 in the Condon School Auditorium, concerns the sanctuary movement. It has been called "a pithy, funny, fast-paced, knock-down, drag-out domestic and international farce" that's got "something for everyone." Opening the show will be music by the Troupe's Salsa band. Tickets are \$5 advance, \$6 day of show, and can be obtained at the EMU Main Desk, Everybody's, Mother Kali's and the CISCAP/CALC office.

With the rise of oppression and the need for real-life villains to be de-throned, the Mime Troupe eagerly wages war against a cloud of excuses that terrorizes us into submission. Their "liberation by comedy" makes us hopeful, and at the same time renews our strengths. Davis' worst fears of survival-equating-mediocrity need not ever find a home here.

What's HAPPENING

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