

Richard Pryor, Summit, Houston, TX

Richard Pryor has had more than his share of show business's ups and downs. In the past two years, he has become a box office star, a boob tube flop, and a personality as celebrated for his onstage excesses as his onstage success. Pryor's embattled personal life has left no public scars; they just add mystique to his already considerable charisma.

Pryor is one of a kind. While today's most popular comics rely more on their own insanity than society's ills for material, Pryor stands alone as the leading social satirist. His principal targets are ethnic stereotypes, his weapons four-letter words and back alley slurs. And when Richard Pryor takes aim, his accuracy is pinpoint.

Such was the case for Pryor's Houston performance. To a predominantly black audience, Pryor immediately noted that niggers is waaay back." So it went, with Pryor disarming whites and charming blacks. Thus, where there had been a perceptible tension in the crowd, laughter drowned out racial differences.

All of Pryor's material was new. Many of the funniest bits of the set were autobiographical, close to Pryor's recorded form. He told of an eighteen-year-old girl who was having sex with his father when he died, and that, for the next three years, "she couldn't give that stuff away."

Though much of Pryor's repertoire was blue, he seldom resorted to the cheap laugh. More often, jokes were the incidental result of elaborate and well-constructed scenarios, funny not because they were obscene but because they were true. With alacrity and

ON TOUR

Richard Pryor: calling them as he sees them.

precision, Pryor painted a picture of whites uncomfortable because they know they can never really be "cool," and blacks so laid back they sometimes appear to be in between comas.

As a figure of intense public curiosity, Richard Pryor seems to relish living on the fault line of mental health. At any minute he might fall over the edge, lost forever in the abyss of his own lunacy. But he doesn't. He is instead the quintessential umpire, content to span the bridges of sanity and race, calling them as he sees them. He is possibly the only great comic today asking the really important question: Which Way Is Up?

Kevin Phinney



Vincent Price as Oscar Wilde,
University of Southern California,
Los Angeles

Vincent Price—who has for years squandered his generous talents on films which, if

they were averaged, would yield no better than a C+, and on television commercials not only drab but dishonest (does he really prefer Napa Valley to Chateau Magdalene?)—has gone back to his origin, the stage.

I feel he has not done it out of penance, but

Heart; Walter Egan, Civic Coliseum, Knoxville, TN

Heart can dish it out two ways. On stage, like in the studio, the Seattle sextet soothes listeners with a beautifully crafted melodic ballad and then turns around and has audiences stomping feet to an all-out rocker.

Group leader Ann Wilson delivered a vocal performance the likes of which would make Grace Slick blush with envy. The elder Wilson was equally adept at the Linda Ronstadt-type soft stuff ("Magazine," "Mistral Wind") and the aggressive rock most fans expect from Heart. Roger Fisher aided

from a great sense of right, and he has chosen well. John Gay's "Diversions and Delights" is on one hand a brilliant idea for a presentation and on the other, an incomplete presentation of that idea. It is that Oscar Wilde might have given an evening at a concert hall in 1899, the year before he died. Of course he never did.

It is the year of his final descent. He is through with jail, he is recognized in the streets and generally scorned. His reputation is so contagious he feels he might "ruin" a small hotel (even in France) just by taking a room there. He suffers from a disease of the middle ear, a disease which will stay with him and eventually, it is thought, kill him. He has become devoted to absinthe, a narcotic liquid candy.

Though "Diversions and Delights" is not so wise as its purveyor, it is nonetheless an evening rich in feeling and intelligence. Vincent Price manages, while sometimes boring (an unrewarding anecdote about a holy man) and sometimes naive (Wilde's calls backstage for more absinthe), to show the great misunderstanding this strong and even noble man endured.

When Wilde's life suddenly turned, his creative days turned, too, and there was little left of him after the soul-wrenching experience of his trial, conviction and sentence. As Vincent Price shows us, the man had a heart of mint aspic, but had a spine of tempered steel.

Mr. Price carries with him a baroque, 18-foot-high proscenium arch, and he wears a Wildean frock coat designed by Noel Taylor, and a wig of ringlets, parted in the middle.

The show will be touring, mainly college campuses, through the second week in December; and a second leg of major city appearances will begin next January and continue well into the Spring.

Gardner McKay

the latter with searing guitar licks on such hits as "Crazy on You" and "Barracuda," while drummer Michael Derosier and bassist Steve Fossen furnished fine rhythm lines on both.

Nancy Wilson proved as versatile as her sister, contributing to the performance with backing harmonies on all numbers and offering professional, if very restrained, help on electric guitar and mandolin. The often-overlooked Howard Leese was not nearly as subdued, jumping back and forth between his synthesizer keyboards and six-string to take frenzied control of "Magic Man," which proved to be the crowd favorite.

Walter Egan took the packed house by surprise with an opening act which deviated vastly from his pop-oriented, Fleetwood Mac-produced album sound. Egan proved his merit as both a lead vocalist and a hard-rock guitarist; in fact, "Magnet and Steel" seemed a letdown after Egan and Tom Moncrieff, who looks like an escapee from the Sex Pistols, doubled up on lead guitar to blaze through "Tunnel of Love" and "Make It Alone."

Egan, however, was not alone, as Annie McLoone subbed well for Stevie Nicks' female vocals, supplying Egan with an energetic stage foil during Moncrieff's solo interludes.

Bill Guppton

Sea Level; Jan Hammer Group, University of Iowa, Iowa City

Mugging like B.B. King, and duck-walking like Chuck Berry, Jan Hammer played the custom-built keyboard strapped around his neck for most of the set. Not familiar with the material from the group's *The First Seven Days*, *Melodies* and Jeff Beck's *Wired*, I found the tone of Hammer's guitar-riff style a harsh electric fuzz, Hendrix-like, with little of the traditional two-fisted jazz approach.

Second keyboardist Bob Christianson's voice was ineffective against the heavy fusion of an excellent drummer, Greg Carter, ex-Mahavishnu bassist Rick Laird, and Hammer. The lyrics were too-simple love songs.

By Sea Level's encore I hoped Hammer would sit down to play a real piano when he came out to jam on "Statsboro Blues." But he plugged in his strap-on keyboard, and when it came his time to solo, if you'd closed your eyes, you'd have thought you were hearing the most badass slide guitarist. Sea Level guitarist Davis Causey thought so, too. Taking off his axe, he held the neck like he was going to break it over his upraised knee. No doubt about it: Hammer can pick out any guitar technique easy as you or I would ring a bell.

Sea Level also mixes funky jazz and sophisticated rock but with a more natural tone and literate lyrics. When Randall Bramblett took an alto or soprano break, 1800 people heard as close to the pure and natural sax sound as you can expect from a rented sound system run by a man who didn't understand the band. Causey's and Jimmy Nalls' long, intertwining guitar runs were clean, fat tones accented by Chuck Leavell's heavy-fisted piano chords.

Besides playing flowing melody lines on piano, Leavell alternates with Bramblett on funky Hammond organ and the group's two electric keyboards, and sings the set-opening "I'm Ready," party tunes like "Shake a Leg" and the southern rave-up "Country Fool." Leavell can stretch out more on keyboards and Lamar Williams plays a funkier bass in this context than they could with the Allman Brothers Band, with whom they will not be reuniting. Sea Level's new drummer is Joe English, formerly of Wings.

Dave Holland