

# Let Them Entertain U.

At a meeting of college concert bookers, everybody wants to see or be signed

**A**ttention, music fans: Otis Day and the Knights are available for hire at your next school concert. OK, so the originals were only lip-syncing in the movie "Animal House," and the backup musicians aren't even the same guys who played those cinematic Knights. But Otis, my man, is still one and the same—and what more do you want for a \$10,000 fee? Of course, for half that, you can get Larry (Bud) Melman, the cackling regular on "Late Night with David Letterman," or for \$2,000 (plus expenses) you can book George (Spanky) McFarland, the chub in the "Our Gang" series. True, "Spanky" is now a 57-year-old grandfather who likes his afternoon naps, but he can still spin tales of what it was like to be one of the great child stars of the '30s in his one-man, two-hour show, "A Little Bit of Yesterday."

How do acts like these ever get to college campuses? Well, the process very often begins at the annual convention of the National Association of Campus Activities. This year in Washington about 2,000 program honchos from 600 schools mingled with 200 performers—as well as assorted agents and T-shirt, poster, beer and soda salesmen—all pitching for a piece of the lucrative college market. Entertainment on campus can add up to big bucks: many of the student programmers, who pay \$150 to register, come to the convention with budgets as high as \$60,000.

**Scouting talent:** For six days student-activities chiefs scouted hot comedians, such as Emo Philips, checked out rent-a-beach-party operations, and saw 25 flicks, ranging from "Down and Out in Beverly Hills" to cult classics like "Eraserhead." But for every true headliner, there were several unknowns doing Cat Stevens and Harry Chapin imitations in The Club 750—a showcase so named because that's the most its performers charge per campus appearance. In one corner of the exhibition hall, Mark Wenzel, who bills himself as "the official mime of the 1986 World's Fair," passed out fliers to everyone within arm's length of his booth. His manager, never more than an earshot away, revealed to anyone who cared to listen that his client boasted an even greater distinction as The Man Who Started Mime in Theme Parks: "Mark was at Sea World in 1972!"

Struggling singers Kiki Ebsen and Timo-

thy Drury hope NACA might launch them into the bigger time. They're familiar with the vicissitudes of show business: she's the daughter of Buddy Ebsen of "The Beverly Hillbillies," and he's the son of James Drury of "The Virginian." "Appearing here," said Ebsen, "gives us the opportunity to be seen by a whole part of the country that we normally wouldn't be exposed to."

The clout exerted by school representatives varied almost as much as the talent. Some, like Bill Ostroff who has spent \$110,000 this academic year as director of concerts at Northwestern, came more to see and be seen than to sign: "I'm here to have a good time and to establish a better working relationship with the people I'm on the phone with five or six hours a day." Other bookers, with slimmer resources, also had modest aims. Susan Haynie, one of a five-

## Hip hope: Comic Philips



PHOTOS BY JOHN TROHA—BLACK STAR

Just add water: Rentable, portable beach party

member delegation that drove up from East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., said, "I'm here to generate ideas, to get resource material, to make contacts."

While most of the convention's exhibitors pushed entertainment, some focused on more serious matters. Independent agent George Greenfield urged student organizers to participate in Hungerthon—a nationwide fund-raising day in May—by scheduling benefits for the hungry and homeless here and abroad. (The project will be jointly sponsored by USA for Africa, Hands Across America and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger). MTV, the rock-video cable channel, offered to sponsor a free concert this fall on the campus that raised the most money for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Miller Beer added a sobering note by passing out "Don't Drive When Drunk" literature along with free glasses of brew.

**No 'Rosebud':** The performers, though, dominated the show, and the leading light was clearly Emo Philips, the cable-and-club comedian who seems an amalgam of Pee Wee Herman, Woody Allen and a court jester. Asked why he sought college audiences, Philips responded, "I do a lot of college dates. College audiences are the hippest, most intelligent audience for their age group." Then, in curious Emo-esque fashion, he added, "I think it's important to influence people while they're very young, so when they're on their deathbed they'll be saying 'Emo' instead of 'Rosebud'." When you're trying to entice student bookers, it seems, it helps to carry a big shtick.

DODY TSIANTAR with DAVID TISCHMAN  
in Washington