

MEL BROOKS

continued from page

There are, of course, critics who might not think to use the words "Mel Brooks" and "nuance" in the same paragraph. But Brooks points out that subtleties are there for those who want to find them.

"Sometimes you get lucky. The camera work in *High Anxiety* for example. They got it! Like shooting through a glass table. That was for the Tynan in me, but Mrs. Cohen enjoyed it."

The most "obvious" subtlety, if that's a reasonable concept, in Brooks' films is his allegiance to and satire of often schlocky show-biz conventions. The breathtaking, deadly funny opening of the "Springtime for Hitler" Broadway show in *The Producers* for example; or, the presentation of the Frankenstein monster at a scientific lecture that quickly turns into a bad vaudeville act, during which the gathered intellectuals throw seat stuffing at the stage; or Brooks grabbing the microphone in a cocktail lounge in *High Anxiety* a la Sinatra ("Hey, zzzziety...")

Or, what is perhaps the weirdest marriage of social commentary and musical tradition, the "Inquisition" production num-

ber from *History of the World, Part I*. The theme is thousands of years of anti-Semitism. The approach is pure 42nd Street.

"Getting Torquemada into a production number was rare. He would never travel. For thirteen years, he only worked Toledo. Couldn't even get him to Madrid. Turned out to be quite a song and dance man..."

Tweaking entertainment clichés might require that an audience understand them in the first place. But Brooks never worries about going over the public's head, and he believes that the audience understands it all, if only subconsciously.

"The audience doesn't necessarily get the showbiz cliché. They don't know why they love Count Basie in the middle of the desert

[in *Blazing Saddles*], but they know that it is absolutely right. I thought Basie was just for me. I had no idea the scene would make such an uproar. It's like the bean scene."

Ah, yes, the notorious, gloriously excessive bean scene in the same movie.

"I wrote that for all of us. I figure I'd watched 130 Westerns as a kid, and the cowboys were always shoveling beans into their mouths and drinking gallons of black coffee, without so much as one burp."

After *Blazing Saddles*, a burp would seem the essence of propriety.

As with many comedians, Brooks also admits that a touch of hostility motivates his work.

"I was born angry. I was born short. I was born funny looking. I said what's going on here? I must have transferred to the wrong bus. I said there's no way I'm gonna be Clark Gable, and I was angry at God, my mother, the world."

"But naked anger, undisguised protest would only get me in trouble. Cops would arrest me."

"My job is to make people laugh. You can't just play to the dumbest person in the house, the lowest common denominator, and I like to make people think. But more than that, I like to make people laugh." ★



PETER SOREL

Director and actress on *Spaceballs* set: "I trusted that Mel wouldn't let me give a bad performance."

her performance."

"Mel dealt just with the image of what he had written. He said 'I want you to be true, to be natural, but trust me enough to draw you out and make it BIG.' I trusted him completely. I trusted that he wouldn't let me give a bad performance."

"Trust" is an important word for Zuniga. She describes herself as still something of the misfit, a rebel, but instead of being swept up in some sort of movement, she is learning to put more faith in her own judgments.

"The rebellious qualities that I had as a kid have changed to more of a... listening to my instincts, beating my own drum. I'm not out on the street with a Mohawk; it's

more tame."

It's a little odd to hear that kind of reflective talk from someone who doesn't seem old enough to have weathered any serious social battles, but Zuniga *did* start young. And she has retained a sense of concern about the state of the world that colors the more personal decisions she makes.

"Acting has always been my one focus, my one drive. I've never thought, 'By 25 I'll start a family,' or anything. And even though I love kids, I've always been afraid about bringing one into this world."

Nuclear fears? Her voice gets a little soft and distant.

"Yeah, I have dreams about it. Sometimes it really scares me."

As if to shake off this most unpleasant of thoughts, Zuniga adds "I've thought about adoption, but it's so far down the line. Actually, I can see having kids." Then, laughing at what is perhaps a familiar private theme, she says "I just can't imagine getting married." ★

Richard Levinson is best known for writing the quasi-country semi-hit songs, "Don't Drop the Bomb on My Boyfriend" and "Let's Do Something Cheap and Superficial."

DAPHNE ZUNIGA

continued from page

Stone Pillow. (She also played Michael J. Fox's girlfriend on *Family Ties*). Her most visible role to date was as a college student traveling cross-country with John Cusack in Rob Reiner's *The Sure Thing*.

"My agent said 'There's this cute little script, it's kind of funny, and Rob Reiner is going to direct it.' I read it and just loved it. I really wanted to do it. When I read for the part I was so nervous. We did some improvisation at the audition, and Rob is so perceptive, I just sort of let loose. He called me back."

Zuniga's work in *The Sure Thing* caught the attention of friend-of-the-Reiner-family Mel Brooks, who called her when he began casting *Spaceballs*.

"Mel kept saying, 'I want you, you know that?' I said 'Mel, not here!' (Zuniga doing schtick? It's a little out of character, but sort of charming. Besides, working for months with Mel Brooks has to leave its mark.)

Since Brooks had directed some of the best-known comedy actresses, including Madeline Kahn and Cloris Leachman, did Zuniga feel any particular pressure about