



MUSIC

The Tubes on the tightrope between satire and decadence

It's the night before All Hallows' Eve, a big moment for the young at heart in the Bay Area, and The Tubes are in royal possession of the stage at the University of Santa Clara.

Fee Weighbill, the primping lead singer for the band, is shouting an unanswerable question that must somehow be turning over like a drugged worm in the Catholic minds of the 6,000 young Americans in the soldout gymnasium:

*What do you want from life,
To kidnap an heiress
and threaten her with a knife?
What do you want from life,
To get cable TV
and watch it every night?*

The sound from the 20-foot tall speaker bank has got to be separating ten miles south of the parking lot, and two freshmen women, I swear to god, have fainted beside me. But The Tubes are essentially a stage act. Fee Weighbill is wrapped in a white-on-white tuxedo suit like a Brooks Brothers mummy, and two assistants in sheer pink rayon dresses are bumping and grinding beside him like perverted hostesses on a television gameshow.

Fee Weighbill, you see, is mimicking Monty Hall, the host of TV's "Let's Make a Deal," down to the last dot of pancake make-up. The song is a parody in operatic rock.

"What do you want from life?" Fee sings again. "If you're an American citizen entitled to..." and now he offers a jaded list of

consumer baubles: "real simulated Indian jewelry," "Bob Dylan's new unlisted telephone number," "a beautifully restored Third Reich swizzle-stick," "a Las Vegas wedding, a Mexican divorce, a solid gold Kama Sutra coffee pot — and a BABY, S: ARM HOLDING AN APPLE!"

The Tubes' act can be seen as heavy social satire — but when you see several hundred Catholic school-children raising their fists in salute to "White Punks on Dope," it makes you wonder...

The Monty Hall assistants have stripped down to the slimmest of leather bikinis secured somehow in the cracks of their asses. They pass giant plastic mockups of baby's arms and gold coffee pots to Fee.

It would be easy to dismiss The Tubes (and Frank Zappa and Alice Cooper) as unreservedly decadent. But "decadent" is one of the most confusing rhetorical slaps in the radical lexicon.

Let's make some distinctions. It was decadent for Baron von Krupp, the Nazi munitions manufacturer, to give solid gold necktie clasps in the shape of miniature bombs to his homosexual lovers. But it was not decadent for him to be gay.

It was decadent for the wife of a 19th century Newport robber baron to give a dinner for her dogs costing \$10,000, while textile strikers starved across the bay in Fall River. But is it really decadent (meaning, as the word does, *in a state of decline*), for the good corporate burghers to enjoy their appropriated lucre in the style they've grown accustomed to? Isn't this just what unequal distribution means?

The distinction is between the outrageous and the decaying. It is too tempting to mislabel every

capitalist outrage; it is falsely hopeful to assume each bizarrry symbolizes the end of the empire.

Now don't get me wrong, please. I'm not about the defend the band. Not after 3,000 Catholic college students raised their fists to the ceiling as the first bars of The Tubes anthem, "White Punks on Dope" smashed through the speakers. Not after the Lewdettes, the band's dance review, pranced through the lyrics to "Mondo Bondage."

I'm just saying that The Tubes tread a thin red line between decadence and satire. Perhaps as the material to be satirized—the stuff of advanced capitalist culture—reaches the infinity of the bizarre, the limits of parody must expand as well.

Or, and I'm convinced of this, perhaps The Tubes play out a rock corollary of an old saw: the best satirists become nihilists in the absence of a mass political movement to change the rot the artists parody so well.

At any rate, The Tubes latest single "Don't Touch Me There," a Phil Spector/Richard Wagner wall-of-sound treatment of a perennially perplexing teen theme, made number one in Australia and climbed respectably on the charts of Mother America. Are the several million Americans who buy and listen to The Tubes decadent fools?

"Nah," corrects a sentence from the last album's liner notes, "only tragically hip."

—Steve Chapple

Steve Chapple is co-author of *Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay*, to be published this spring by Nelson-Hall.

TELEVISION

'Visions' threatened by bias in favor of BBC

When PBS premiered its TV-drama "Visions" last October it aroused memories of the golden age of the '50s when Philco-Goodyear, the U.S. Steel Hour and Playhouse 90 discovered and nurtured the talents of artists like Paddy Chayevsky and Arthur Penn.

Thirteen plays were projected for the first season, and 24 more were promised—a total of 36 productions spread over three years. The prospectus for the series stipulated that priority would be given the work of new writers, that drama written especially for the medium would be encouraged (adaptations of all kinds were ruled out), and that artists from non-profit professional theaters would be involved in various aspects of the productions.

Producer Barbara Schultz has honored that commitment. Six of the first 13 plays were written by women or minority group playwrights, which may account for the overall radical tone of the series. Some of the more highly charged plots have been Harvey Perr's play about lesbianism, "The War Widow;" Luis Valdez's "El Corrido," which dealt with farm worker organization; Momoko Iko's "The Gold Watch," depicting the plight of Japanese-Americans before and after their internment in World War II; and Cormac MacCarthy's drama of class hatreds in the new Old South (1870), "The Gardener's Son."

Outstanding successes of the series to date have been Ethel Tyne's "The Great Cherub Knitwear Strike," a funny and genuinely moving account of a Depression love affair between a young Jewish factory worker and her Communist boyfriend; and Jean Sherherd's piece of '40s nostalgia, "The Phantom of the Open Hearth."

As refreshing as the series' subject matter has been the appearance of fine actors like Alan Arkin, Judd Hirsch, and Stephen Elliott in roles that let them break out of the mold of their regular cop/doc dramas. Also there have been many new faces in leading roles. And such important tributary theaters as Maya Angelou's black ensemble have been involved, as the prospectus promised they would be.

The series has been uneven. But the best of "Visions" has been good enough to prove that Americans need not depend on Masterpiece Theater and other BBC products for first rate dramatic entertainment on television.

In this context, it was bad news

for audiences as well as for theater professionals that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (which had supplied most of "Visions'" \$10.2 million budget) found itself "unable" to continue its contribution into the third season. The other underwriters (the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts) were willing to meet their pledges. But unless someone else picked up the tab, "Visions" would have to close down at the end of its second year.

There were angry charges (from the left) that CPB was yielding to political pressure (from the right). And when it became known that CPB was using a million American tax dollars to help the BBC finance the taping of all Shakespeare's plays (with British casts and crews), the entertainment unions joined the chorus of protest.

Some investigative reporting turned up the astonishing fact that out of \$103 million Congress appropriated last year, a mere \$13.3 million was budgeted for productions.

Both CPB and PBS were created by the Broadcasting Act of 1967, which defined the function of each. The former was to give administrative leadership and capital investment, while the latter was to produce programs for the network of public stations. But this division of labor clearly was not working, since the bulk of the budget was going into the salaries of overlapping and probably overstaffed bureaucracies.

Last week, CPB had second thoughts about its decision to renege. The official explanation has been that it is agency policy not to subsidize any program for longer than two years. (After that station-users are supposed to come up with the production money.) But exceptions to that policy have had to be made in the case of such programs as the nightly McNeill-Lehrer news report, and at this time it appears that "Visions" is going to get at least another million out of CPB.

The future of this series is not entirely secure. There is still a missing million to be raised in other quarters, and it is possible that large corporate foundations will shy away from so expensive a hot potato. But there is at least a fighting chance that the vision of good dramatic entertainment by, about, and for the natives of this nation will not be dispelled by bureaucratic shortsightedness.

—Al Auster

Al Auster is a free-lance writer who lives in New York.

THE KID'S CORNER

IN THESE TIMES has received so much comment on our reviews of TV by young viewers that we are considering enlarging the staff of that department. To attract new reviewers, under 15 years of age, we are announcing a contest—without prize—for the best three letters (under 500 words) on the topic "What's Wrong, and What's Right about TV for Kids."

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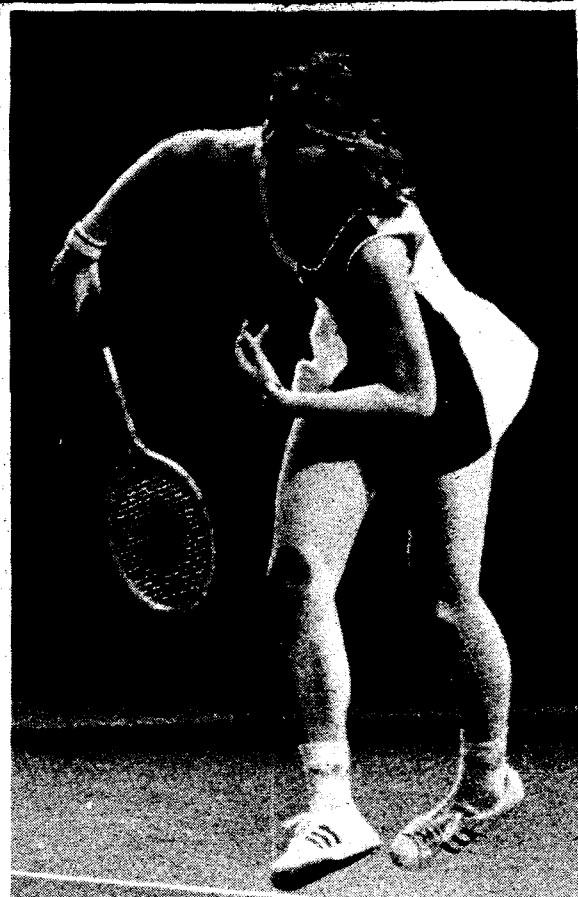
JEWISH CURRENTS March issue: Pete Seeger Music—Ber Green Text—"The Embers of the Martyrs (For Jewish Music Month); "The Jewish Question and the Holocaust-2" by Bruno Frei, Austrian Marxist; For International Women's Day—Stories and Articles by Marcia Epstein, Sonya Michel, Florence Rein, Elsie Suller; "The Daoud Affair"—Editorial; News, Reviews, Editor's Diary by Morris U. Schappes. Single copies 60¢, Subscriptions \$7.50 yearly USA. Jewish Currents, Dept. T, 22 East 17 St., N.Y.C. 10003.—SPECIAL: The Memorandum on Jewish Question to Soviet Leaders, discussed by Max Gordon in No. 7 & I.T.T. is available in full in our Dec. issue—60¢.



Olga Morozova, top Soviet player



Kristien Shaw, who taught Chris Evert to serve harder



Natasha Chmyreva, rising Russian star

Photos by Jane Melnick

They've come a long way, but

Don't call them "baby" anymore

By Janet Stevenson

After all the palaver about women having "come a long way, baby" because there is a cigarette designed especially for them, it's nice to discover that the slogan has been realized in a sense that the ad copywriters could hardly have had in mind.

The traveling tennis tournaments, sponsored by Virginia Slims cigarettes, which began in Houston in 1970 with a piddling \$7,500 in prize money, have expanded into the major sports event of the winter season: week-long tournaments in 11 cities, involving over 100 players from 13 countries, with \$100,000 in prizes (per tournament), climaxing in late March in the Virginia Slims Championship in Madison Square Garden, with \$150,000 in prize money. Crowds for the 1977 season are breaking all attendance records.

What's the attraction?

The sport itself, of course. Tennis is on the way to becoming the great American participatory sport, one that is played by both men and women, together or separately; differently, but equally well. The women on the Slims circuit are the world's best, and the fans who watch the final rounds are seeing tennis as good as that played at Wimbledon or Forest Hills.

The astonishing success of the Slims is also due in part to the personal charisma of the athletes. They are a new breed—or at least a subspecies of a new breed—of woman. It's not easy to pin down the essential quality of this group, which is so diverse in physique, national origin, education, outside interests and economic or social class.

One thing is sure: whatever Ms. Virginia Slims of 1977 is, she is *not* the cartoon flapper of the Slims ads, with her cigarette holder in one hand, and her racket (poorly gripped) in the other. None of the women players, so far as we could observe, smokes—with or without a holder.

The "typical" tour player is a woman between 18 and 32 years old; married and unmarried; with and without children; accompanied and not accompanied by a husband or fiancé; a native of one of the socialist countries, or segregationist South Africa, or France, Italy, England, Australia or the United States. She has achieved her proficiency thanks to a well-to-do family that paid for lessons and equipment; or at the expense of the state; or free, because her father (or mother) was a tennis pro.

►What's womanly?

What is significantly new about these women and what the majority have in common is a set of characteristics that are not traditionally feminine, and would never get a girl elected cheerleader, prom queen

or Miss America, but which win them the admiration of today's sports fans.

First and most obvious is a high level of energy. Successful competitors throw everything they have—whether it's 160 pounds of Betty Stove (6'1"), or 115 pounds of Kristien Shaw (5'6")—into

fortless even when it isn't. Her victories are too much a foregone conclusion to please a public that likes a little suspense. But she is the role model for all young aspirants. To be like Chrissie—unflappable, unbeatable, and unpretentious—is "it" for the Greenies (the young players from

don't know when she's outclassed, so she ends up outclassing them. I'll lay you four-to-one she'll take the Aussie." Rosie didn't take Margaret that night. But she did (with Chris Evert, in doubles) the next.

►Cordial and comradely.

There is also something new about the relationships between these fiercely competitive individuals: they are cordial and comradely, but never sentimental. So long as they are playing a match, the women fight like gladiators, neither giving nor expecting quarter. But once the last point has been played, they discuss their performances in post-game interviews as impersonally as if they had been observing instead of participating.

They obviously like each other; enjoy each other's company in what leisure time the tour permits; help each other professionally when they can. More experienced players sometimes coach the newer ones, but they do not coddle or play down to them. An instance: when the young Rumanian star Virginia Ruzici developed a leg cramp in a match with Casals, Rosie helped her rub it out and then went back, drove the ball first to one corner of the back court, and then dropped a short shot over the net on the other side. Virginia had to run like an antelope. They kidded about it in front of reporters afterwards. "I just wanted to make sure you were all right," Rosie said.

►Who's coaching whom?

Sometimes the lower-seeded players offer advice to their "betters." And it is sometimes taken. Chris Evert gives her friend Kristien Shaw credit for the new and very aggressive Evert service.

Chrissie's service has always been dependable, but it was seldom unreturnable. "I was brought up to believe that the purpose of a serve was to open up the point," she explained to reporters in Chicago last month. "That's clay court tactics. Even now when I go home, my father asks why I want to serve this new way. But Kristien showed me that I wasn't extending my arm quite all the way. I had more power than I was using."

Chrissie used the new serve to cut short Kristien's climb up the ladder when she beat her 6-0, 6-1.

They've come a long way, but don't call them "baby" anymore. ■

LIFE IN THE U.S.

SPORTS



Chrissie, the great.



Rosie, in costume.

Photos by Henrietta Moore

stroke after powerful stroke. There is nothing weak or delicate or dependent about them, and no one seems to feel that they have sacrificed any of their charm by asserting their strength.

No one wins friends in the stands by displays of uncontrolled emotion. On the contrary! When Natasha Chmyreva, the 19-year-old Soviet *wunderkind*, lost her temper in a match in Seattle, she was written off as "unsuited to the game because of her temperament" in a press interview given by another player. And when she developed stomach cramps in a match with Julie Anthony in Chicago, she was accused of "grubby gamesmanship." Not until she was teamed with Olga Morozova, the other Russian player, who is much more even tempered, did Natasha hear another round of applause for her spectacular shots.

►Beauty is no excuse.

Slims audiences tend to cheer for the underdog, or the shorter player, or the hometown girl if there is one. But all else being equal, they react to character in its most solid aspects. Beauty—whether face, figure, or garb—is not its own excuse for being on the court.

If Chris Evert is not the most applauded player, it's probably because she seems to "have it too easy." Her game looks ef-

the local scene who are recruited for ball retrieving and errand running).

►"Rosie is my darling, O!"

The darling of the crowds (at least in Chicago) is Rosie Casals, who is about as glamorous as the Indian on the old buffalo nickel. Tough, gnarled and poker-faced, (with a practical joker's sense of humor off the court), at 5'2" Rosie is too short to be a single's champion, but she is probably the best doubles player in women's tennis. Fans—men especially—react to her with the sort of loyalty once inspired by the Brooklyn Dodgers.

The night Rosie was matched against the great Margaret Court (who has won more tournaments than any other player in the history of the game), we overheard a discussion between the employees of a company that had taken a box for the week. These were typical hockey fans by the sound of things, and when Rosie came out in one of her inexplicably fancy ensembles (silver lamé on blue velvet with plenty of rhinestones and a matching headband tied Tonto-style) the men whistled.

One of the wives made a comment, inaudible but presumably disparaging. "Listen," said her husband, "never mind if her legs are only half an inch long. She covers that court, and I mean all of it! She

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