

Records



Lenny Bruce

25 YEARS OF RECORDED COMEDY

(Warner Brothers)

Gary Owens (a veteran comedian in his own right) writes in the album's notes for *25 Years of Recorded Comedy* that it reflects "the changing trends in comedy...from slapstick to socially relevant to political lampoon to good old bizarre." Maybe so. But the impression left on this reviewer is that American comedy has changed only superficially in a quarter of a century, that it is now, as it has been since the beginning, socially relevant satire.

Perhaps it is the function of comedy anywhere and anytime to sink its teeth into the hind leg of some sacred cow and hold on till the laughter hurts. Certainly that has been true of American comedy from the time of the Revolution when the leg belonged to King George.

In *25 Years of Recorded Comedy* the victims of the satirical assault include:

- Presidents (Kennedy and Nixon)
- organized religion and its executives (from Billy Graham to the late Pope)
- bureaucracies (governmental and commercial)
- monopolies (chiefly the telephone company which gets it on both legs, once by Lily Tomlin; once by Mike Nichols and Elaine May)
- racists (in high and low places)
- advertising
- educational establishments (public and parochial)
- and the prevailing moral (sic) climate.

The tone of the assault becomes more uninhibited as we move from Eddie Lawrence's Old Philosopher to Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor. But the difference is less a reflection of a change in the comedian's objective than a measure of what audiences are able to absorb. (We are clearly getting over the effects of the Hayes code.)

Gary Owens also notes that the collection is a "pastiche," and

there is not arguing with that judgment.

The six sides contain samples of an impressive list of artists, beginning with Stan Freberg and company and finishing with the National Lampoon. There are some interesting omissions from the roster, including both Steve and Woody Allen, George Carlin, Bill Cosby, Dick Gregory and Mort Sahl. (Owens' notes imply that there were contractual problems with most of them.)

Included, besides those already named, are David Frye, Vaughn Meader, Shelley Berman, Johnathan Winters, Bill Dana, Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks, the Fire-sign Theatre and the unwilling participants in "Pardon My Bloopers"—a culling of "classic flubs from the great days of radio."

The trouble with the pastiche is not that the chosen don't represent the best comedy of the last 25 years, but that the samples don't always represent the comedians' best. The most obvious case in point is Stan Freberg, who was the first of this generation of satirists to go after really big game.

His "Green Christmas" is so mordant an analysis of the merchandizers and became a collectors' item because of its rarity. His "Incident at Los Voraces" is an almost unbearably caustic parable about the arms race, brilliantly conceived and produced—and unobtainable today. And there are plenty of other Freberg classics, any one of which would have been a better choice than "St. George and the Dragonet," a good-humored parody of a television series long since retired from the tube.

Other performers fare better. Shelly Berman's anguished attempt to cut through the red tape of a large department store to rescue a woman hanging from a ledge outside the lingerie department is one of his best. And Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks' improvisation of the "L.M.N.O.P. Ad Agency" is super.

But the last cut of all is the most significant. "Deteriorata" is the National Lampoon's rewrite of "Desiderata," a sententious document allegedly found on the wall of an old Maryland church and reproduced for framing almost as often as the "Praying Hands."

It comes on with ominous organ chords over which a group of sopranos (on echo mike) inform the listener that "You are a fluke of the universe..." At an appropriate moment Norman Rose's baritone begins to drop pearls of wisdom, among which are—

*Go placidly amid the noise and
waste and remember what
comfort there may be in
owning a piece of the same....
Know what to kiss and when.
Consider that two wrongs never
make a right, but three do.
Whenever possible, put people
on hold....
Try at all times to bend, forward,
spindle or mutilate....
With all its hopes, dreams and
urban renewal, the world con-
tinues to deteriorate.
Give up!*

But the existence of such persistent and penetrating self-criticism is one good reason for not doing that. —Janet Stevenson

TERENCE BOYLAN

Terence Boylan (Asylum)

If you have begun to think that the Eagles have abandoned their soaring harmonies for "life in the fast lane" of less melodic, harder rock, and that Jackson Browne's *Running on Empty* shows him finally sputtering to a halt, then look again. Here comes Terence Boylan, latest heir to the Southern California laid-back sound. Boylan is the most recent in Asylum Record's string of Los Angeles soft rockers (the list includes Browne, Eagles, Ronstadt, Southern, etc.). But he is also a compelling artist on his own.

Terence Boylan is his new solo album, although not technically his first effort. In the mid-'60s,



Terence Boylan

Verve/Forecast released his *Alias Boona*, an interesting yet undistinguished album. But that was long ago, and went nowhere; this release is really a debut. And it is a fine debut indeed.

On every front, Boylan proves himself a master of the style. His own production has utilized sparse electric instrumentation while he strums his acoustic. Some of L.A.'s most prestigious studio musicians (like Jim Gordon on drums, Russ Kunkel and Leland Sklar) provide the backup, while Poco's Timothy Schmit adds harmony vocals on almost every tune.

Interestingly, Boylan's lyrics often hint at repressed sexuality in the same way that the music hints at the power of the electric instruments. "Shake It" is an ode to high schools girls, cast as sexual teasers who "give the boys something to dream on later." And "Shame" remembers fantasies of shopkeepers and little girls in its innuendoes of guilt without sex. In "Rain King" a pleasantly rolling tune, Boylan trades his double-knits for primitive African sensuality under Victoria Falls. Finally, in an upbeat way, "Where Are You Hiding?" in-

ferentially connects witchcraft and unrepressed sexuality.

But Boylan is at his best when he leaves his sexual politics at the recording studio door. "Sundown of Fools" is soft and light while "Hey Papa" playfully invites Hemingway to return to the South Seas, forgetting "what they done to your daughters and sons." And "Trains" which closes the album is a light, largely acoustic ballad with compelling lyrics and fine piano runs by David Paich.

Like the best of its genre, Boylan's strengths rest on soothing melodies and polished harmonies coupled with gentle upbeat rhythms. But such strengths can also weaken the music. The sweetness can often become saccharine, the polished sheen can outshine the underlying structure. It can get so laid back, you can fall asleep.

Fortunately, Boylan does not succumb to these trappings often; they lurk on the periphery of each cut. This album is very good, and shows even greater promise.

Michael S. Kimmel is a graduate student in Berkeley.

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'Gonna getcha every time'

By Barry Codell

OF COURSE THERE'S NO REAL prejudice existing against short people," says Randy Newman in response to the furor his satiric hit, "Short People," has generated.

Six feet and under basketball midgets can testify differently though. The National Basketball Association has only recently begun to perceive that their ilk may be able to compete safely in the "Land of the Giants."

This season the select group of Liliputs, led by Houston's Calvin Murphy, Cleveland's Fouts Walker, and Chicago's Wilbur Holland, have added the *piece de resistance* to their cause—a 29-year-old rookie from the Atlanta Hawks, Charlie Criss.

The darts and dashes of this 5'7" late bloomer have taken the little man's skills out of the hardwood closet and into the softening hearts of NBA coaches. As Newman's song says, Criss will "get you every time!"

Averaging a healthy 11 points and four assists per game as a backup guard, while pacing the league in unbridled enthusiasm and gum-chewing, Criss has helped boost average Hawk attendance by almost 4,000 fans per contest. Atlanta fans go wild as he enters the game to the organist's "Theme from Rocky," and magically ignites the Hawk fast break.

Criss' story does have the proper Hol-

lywood improbability. One of 11 children growing up in Yonkers, N.Y., his court sense led him to New Mexico State University where, a playmaker, he directed the Aztecs to the 1970 NCAA semi-finals.

Half a foot too short.

Upon graduation, neither the NBA or ABA gave Criss a second thought. "At least a half a foot too short" was the immediate and seemingly final consensus. He watched his backcourt running mate, Jimmy Collins, sign an instant-riches contract as the first round draft pick of the NBA Bulls. Collins, 6'2" All American guard, lasted two uneventful years on the Chicago bench.

Charlie Criss, meanwhile, took to the playgrounds and the semi-professional trail.

He joined the Hartford Capitals of the Eastern League in 1972, a league specializing in "race horse basketball," i.e., running and shooting. Composed of NBA hopefuls and rejects, the league had little use for Criss, labeled as purely a passer. He practiced with the Capitals all season, but performed in only four of their 28 games.

In the succeeding campaigns Criss, renowned solely for his lack of physical stature, began to grow on the Eastern Leaguers. He averaged 20 points per contest as a sixth man.

Needing only playing time, he paced the Eastern League the following three

years, averaging 30, 39, and 34 points per encounter.

On the sidewalks of New York his name was turning mythic. In the famous inner city Rucker League he became known as the Mosquito, as stories spread of Criss besting NBA hot shots such as Nate Archibald and Lloyd Free on the city's blacktops.

Still, Criss was eminently aware, this was not the NBA. The Eastern League salary was \$60 a game. The Mosquito paid his own expenses and split gas money with teammates as they drove long hours to their games. He switched jobs constantly—the last as a data processor—to support himself and two daughters.

Criss received his first NBA training camp invitation in 1976, but the New York Knickerbockers released him before the first exhibition game. The invitation was seen mainly as a favor to his agent, an attorney who doubled as Eastern League Commissioner.

An Atlanta chance.

Disappointed, Criss had decided before the '77-78 season that he would not return to the Eastern League. He tried out for the Harlem Globetrotters, joining their stooge team, the New Jersey Reds, during the Trotters' summer European trip. At the tour's finale Atlanta coach Hubie Brown called Criss to report to the Hawks' training grounds.

Brown, himself an Eastern Leaguer for four years during the '50s, had re-

called the quickness and intensity Criss had displayed during a black charities All Star game in Madison Square Garden.

To Criss' utter amazement his ship had finally docked in NBA waters. His willingness to accept the League minimum salary had meshed well with owner Ted Turner's economy drive, and Coach Brown wagered his lumbering team could find room for the speedy Mosquito.

The Hawks leapt from the starting gate with an eight out of nine skein, and Criss wowed their afficianados with inspired play, including two 20-point fourth quarter splurges. The penultimate moment of his seven-year exodus to the basketball Ritz may have occurred in an early season game with Kansas City.

Charlie hypnotized 7'3" Tom Burleson with a patented Mosquito move and then, one-on-one, arched a bank shot over the King center. The NBA's tallest player had paid the price of shortsightedness against Charlie Criss.

While the Hawks have settled from their lofty standing, the oldest rookie in NBA history has shown he can withstand the punishing pro schedule. His calm reaction: "I'm not bitter about the seven year wait. I feel I have a lot to prove."

Holland and Murphy.

Criss' ascendancy to Hawk stardom was ironic, since they had released 6' Wilbur Holland the previous year. Holland was

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