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THE PHOENIX NEST

Edited by Martin Levin

A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

LAST week on the street, I passed a man who was playing the theme from "Exodus." This somewhat startled me because he was playing it with a full orchestra. I was about to take him to Ed Sullivan when I noticed that he carried a tiny transistor radio.

In the next few days, I passed several more lyrical strollers. Some had radios cupped to their ears, while others wore them like shoulder holsters. But I didn't scoff because Thoreau had said to be tolerant of the man who steps to the sound of a different drummer, even if that drummer is a disc jockey.

Just this morning, I saw one lady pedestrian whose drummer almost killed her. He sent her through traffic to the beat of Tito Puente. Luckily, a cop saved her life by quickly tuning her to the news. Like millions of other audio junkies, those sound-soaked sponges who so dread silence, she'd been moving through life with disconnected eyes. The world can't get through to someone who has the Top Twenty on his back.

As I watched her rescue, another woman two-stepped toward me and said, "When we are dancing and you're dangerously near me, I get ideas, I get ideas."

"I beg your pardon," I said, playing hard to get.

However, as she continued chanting in rhyme, I began to suspect that she wasn't making a pass but was merely another protoplasmic loudspeaker. I was sure of it when she said, "I want to hold you so much closer than I dare to," for it definitely wasn't one of my fetching days.

Unless an air raid switches them to CONELRAD, nothing spontaneous ever happens to these addicts, many of whom are literally part of a closed circuit: they wear earplugs from their radios, for they want no unrehearsed sound to jar their swinging brains. I'd always thought that my druggist was hard of hearing, but yesterday I discovered that he takes orders only from his local announcer.

"I'd like some demerol," I told him. "Sklibba-de-sklabba-de-doop-banh!" he explained.

"Can you hear me?" I cried. "Man," he mumbled, "I'm being jammed."

Plugs

The next time I see an elderly lady turning up her hearing aid, I'll be wondering if she isn't just tuning out the commercials, or perhaps the public service. It's a problem Newton Minow hasn't begun to consider.

—RALPH SCHOENSTEIN.

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MOVIES

THERE is nothing a bikini can do that begins to compare with the effect a yard or two of gauzy veils had on me in an old movie titled "She." I have the idea that I was eight or ten years old at the time, and I may have had a lot of respect for the female form even then, but whatever the situation, there's nothing in modern movies, local or foreign, that today gives me the same old winsome zip.



In the silent film that my older brother, my sister, and I saw back at the Ideal Theatre in our Wisconsin town, Betty Blythe, wearing some thin white veils and, as far as I could determine at my age, little else, stepped into a pillar of fire which was supposed to make her young; instead she shriveled up into a monkey and died. Movies were tricky even then. The fellow who was going to step into the flame with her and live forever had his hair turn white as snow on the spot and he never did get into it. He was too scared.

There is nothing in the world that will give you more of a turn when you are eight or ten or younger than seeing a pretty lady turn into a monkey. The upshot was that my sister, three years my junior, threw up, and everybody in our section of the seats moved out, including my brother. It was embarrassing, but neither my sister nor I ever let minor problems stand in our way. We stayed through the rest of the

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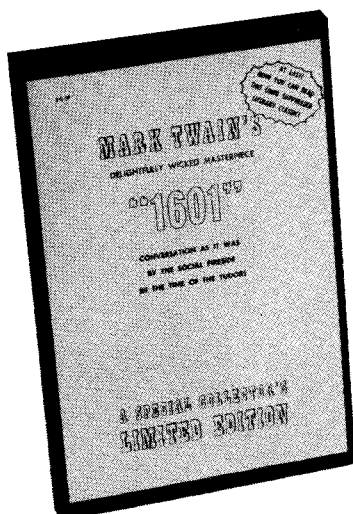
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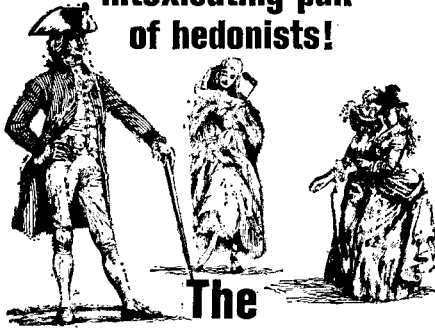
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feature and the serial that followed.

I see that American films are considered in a bad way. Maybe they lack imagination. I can't think of any movie I have seen in years that had anybody nearly naked shrivel up before your eyes. Or anybody look so wild as Houdini did when they roped him and put him in a trunk and threw the locked trunk in the East River, which was covered with ice at the time. I could see that he might get out of the trunk, but how would he ever break through the ice that covered him as he was swept along by the current?

—ROBERT LABOUR.

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THE SEA HORSE

IF you've never seen a sea horse I don't bother reading the rest of this because you won't believe it. It has the head of a horse, the tail of a monkey, a pouch like a kangaroo, an outside skeleton like an insect, and two eyes which can look in different directions at the same time, like a lizard or a guy in the black market. And the males bear the young. I don't believe it myself.

You'd be surprised at what a finicky eater the sea horse is. His food has to be live (not taped). And he eats all the time, provided that it's not in a dim light. The water has to be in motion and a string trio wouldn't hurt either.

One endearing aspect of this fish, you heard me, fish, is that it can change color like a chameleon. It does this in response to the time of day, sex, food possibilities, and the latest news.

The mating habits of the sea horse are true, if interesting. When the time comes for parenthood (and this is pretty often) the male, who is really going to be the mother, starts a kind of water dance around the female (Dad). They indulge in a little small talk about the temperature of the tank and what not and then, tail in tail, they float around showing off the ring to the neighbors. After a bit Mother (Pop) makes definite overtures to Pop (Moms). She hands him the eggs and fins away, leaving whatsisname to bear the colts (and that's what they're called, too). There are some technical details that go with this but they're a little too reminiscent of "Tropic of Cancer" for the egghead trade. A lot of it you won't even find scribbled on walls.

Even with all this loose talk sea horses don't breed well in captivity. Confronted with this fact a noted aquarist said, "That's true. But it's really no problem. We just replace them." Giddyap! —HENRY MORGAN.

Offhand

THE TRUE CONFORMIST: He only stays with people who do not share his views. Those who do are not rich enough to entertain him properly. Besides, they all agree with him, and he is a modern missionary who adds comfort to faith. With this he thinks he does not share the views of his patrons and friends, but he shares them in secret even more than in public: he alone is excluded from this knowledge. Still, it keeps knocking on his heart and making him uneasy. He concludes (feeling very oversensitive, almost a martyr) that one cannot be one thing in secret and another one in public, writes a good article which makes him lose some of the favor of the people he is staying with (they call him an anarchist) while he finds consolation in the company of those he is not staying with, who praise him for his courage. But it is not quite clear to him whether it takes more courage to attack those he is staying with or to stay with them after what he has written. In doubt, he writes a second article: on Doubt.

✓ ✓ ✓

IT IS NOT TRUE that a crowd is a conglomeration of individuals in a state of confusion due to what lessens their identity: the crowd itself. The very opposite is true: an individual is a conglomeration of confused individuals who have lost their identity because they have been crowded in such a narrow space and have so little time that they stand not a chance of expressing themselves.

✓ ✓ ✓

MODERN MAN with a crowd under his coat cannot live through a whole day with a single opinion of his own. And not even with two: one for the morning, one for the afternoon. Or three: one also for the evening, to go with dinner jackets and with black or white tie. For that is when he meets all the most trite opinions in his heart and they respond from the inside to the twitter outside like birds in a cage when they sing to free birds of their own feather, the moment they are sung to.

✓ ✓ ✓

THE COURAGE OF FEAR: You don't learn courage, you learn fear; life is an exercise in fear, courage is the abandonment of the salutary fear that makes us live. You learn courage when you are afraid that fear no longer serves a purpose, and what good is it, if we fear death?

—NICCOLO TUCCI.